“You kind of have to keep fighting”: Young Activists Becoming Political and Acting Prefiguratively

Thesis submitted by

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Statement of the Use of Generative AI

Generative AI technology was not used in the preparation of any part of this thesis.

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of young people's responses to the global climate change crisis. World-wide coordinated actions in 'School Strikes 4 Climate' [SS4C] are events where young people take a day away from their expected activities at school, to strike and demand climate action from governments and corporations, and to stand in solidarity for those already affected by the damage of climate change. In Australia, SS4C has become a networked organisation with other environmental and human rights groups as young people become increasingly aware of the intersectional dynamics of injustice. Based on the Perth region of Western Australia, this thesis addresses the question of how young activists respond to the global climate crisis, and how they insert themselves into political spaces.

Traditional narratives about activism understands young people through perspectives such as deviance, incompetence, youthful ignorance and vulnerable to targeted manipulation. In contrast, this thesis operates from the standpoint that young people's capacity and understanding has been consistently demonstrated, and accepts their actions as the expression of valid political voice. Data has been generated by conducting ethnographic observation at young people's activism events, and through semi-structured interviews with individual activists.

Young people today are a generation that is confronted with the multi-faceted concerns of the climate change crisis. The habitus that they have inherited through historical repetition of actions and norms is that they are expected to remain politically silent while they undergo a period of socialisation and training prior to reaching the legal age of adulthood. Throughout this thesis, I argue that young people experience a process of conscientisation through which they develop an understanding of the current realities, and their capacity to act upon those conditions. The global climate crisis has rendered previous generations' habitus no longer suitable, as schooling, submissive socialisation and anticipatory silence, are considered useless in the face of planetary destruction. I argue that this leads them to experience hysteresis because the reality of climate change is misaligned with their inherited habitus. As a malleable factor, habitus is not fixed or pre-determined. Once experiencing hysteresis, conscientisation continues and young people adjust and adapt their habitus to become radical and ecological. This generational radical ecological habitus manifests through prefiguration

or prefigurative practice. Prefiguration is a social movement and activism strategy which involves demonstrating that a new way is possible and making change on the small scale while waiting for large scale changes to occur.

Prefigurative practice is demonstrated in three ways: prefigurative politics, in acting politically prior to being officially recognised as political; prefigurative activism, in the activism strategies undertaking; and prefigurative foreboding. Prefigurative foreboding occurs through the use of temporary autonomous zones, where space is taken up in order to deliver a political message. In the case of young people's climate activism, prefigurative foreboding does not demonstrate that a new way is possible, but rather, it provides a small taste of the disruption and inconvenience that climate change will continue to cause if no action is taken.

This research project is conducted in a critical time where the planet is nearing the tipping point of global warming and where, simultaneously, young people are partaking in collective actions of historical significance. By combining Bourdieu's and Freire's theories this study contributes to understandings of political and social action and adds to debates regarding young people's position in society and their involvement in politics.

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List of Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Slang

ARRCC	Australian Religious Response to Climate Change
Auslan	Australian sign language
Aussie	Slang for 'Australian'
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFMEU	Construction Forestry Maritime Mining Energy Union
COP26	26th Conference of Paris
Covid 19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DIO	Do-it-Ourselves
DIY	Do it yourself
Eco	Ecological
JCU	James Cook University
LGBTQA +	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Asexual and more
MSD	Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NFP	Not For Profit
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OHCRC	The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PM	Prime Minister
QR Code	Quick Response Code
ScoMo	Scott Morrison
SD	Secure digital
SS4C	School Strike for Climate
TAZs	Temporary Autonomous Zone(s)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRC	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
WA	Western Australia
XR	Extinction Rebellion

PRELUDE

SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE

PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

15 OCTOBER 2021

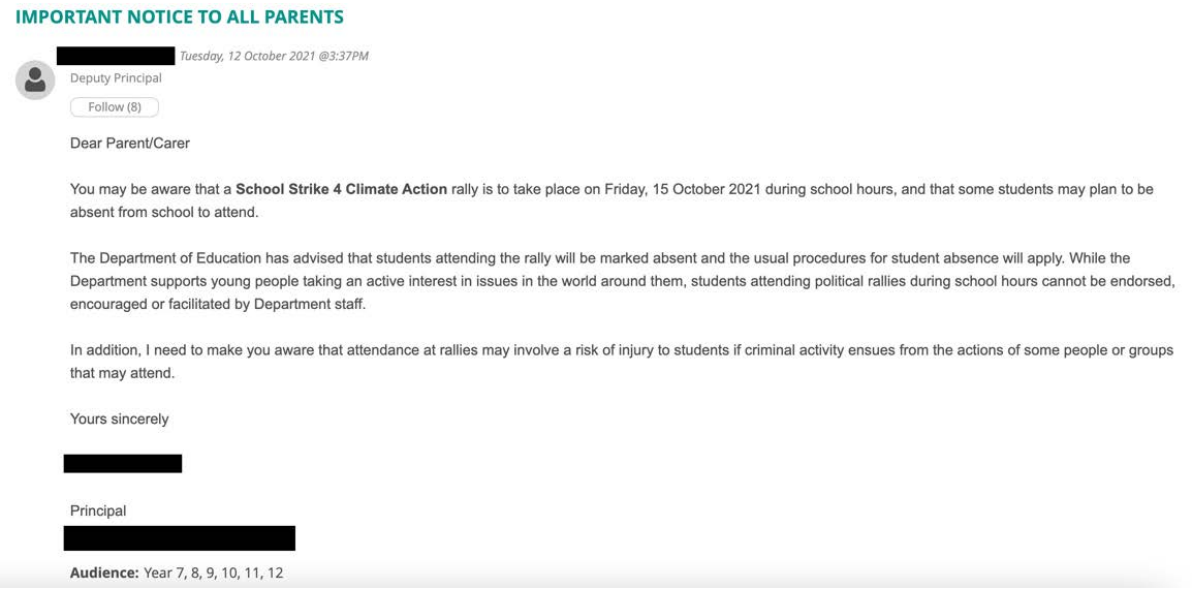
Contextual Vibe of Absence

A lone skeleton sits slouched in a camping chair on the verge of Parliament House in Perth, Western Australia (WA). Propped beside it is a hand-painted sign reading, "Still waiting for meaningful action on climate change". This display of young people's creative irony greets the growing group of activists gathering to protest the government's inaction on climate change and to lobby for the future of the planet. It is the 15th of October 2021, and the fourth year of global actions by young people in a movement called 'School Strike for Climate' (SS4C).

In the days and months leading up to the strike, I had been following the group's Facebook page, School Strike 4Climate Perth, and noted the ubiquitous presence of archaic narratives expressed by online onlookers and hecklers. Familiar claims were made against the students, such as, 'they wouldn't turn up if it was a weekend day', or 'let them give up their technology and see how they like it'. What struck me about all the comments being made was that they failed to actually address the concerns that the young people are raising. Instead, the statements attempt to discredit their voices, without engaging with the ideas, and thereby render their actions petty and worthless.

I have attended this school strike at the WA Parliament House to observe the young activists in action, for the purpose of my research, and equally to be an adult voice of solidarity.

As a parent of school-aged children, it was not my first attendance at a school strike. My children and I have attended SS4C events since 2018 both in Queensland and WA. In the week of this event, the Department of Education sent the following notice (see Figure 1) to all parents of school-aged children:



IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL PARENTS

[redacted] *Tuesday, 12 October 2021 @3:37PM*

Deputy Principal

Follow (8)

Dear Parent/Carer

You may be aware that a **School Strike 4 Climate Action** rally is to take place on Friday, 15 October 2021 during school hours, and that some students may plan to be absent from school to attend.

The Department of Education has advised that students attending the rally will be marked absent and the usual procedures for student absence will apply. While the Department supports young people taking an active interest in issues in the world around them, students attending political rallies during school hours cannot be endorsed, encouraged or facilitated by Department staff.

In addition, I need to make you aware that attendance at rallies may involve a risk of injury to students if criminal activity ensues from the actions of some people or groups that may attend.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Principal

[redacted]

Audience: Year 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Figure 1 Department of Education notice to parents.

(personal communication, 2021)

In doing so, the young people were actively prohibited from attending as their compulsory education applied. Parents were discouraged from allowing their children to attend and the inclusion of words such as 'injury' and 'criminal activity' would likely make many parents take note and be concerned. I considered the general parental nervousness often felt around anything that could be perceived as disobedience or trouble-making. This made me realise that, particularly for parents who may not be engaged in any form of activism and may never have attended a protest themselves, this harsh exaggerated language could cause sufficient concern to convince them to prevent their school-aged children from attending. If I had no protest experience, it would certainly make me think twice about allowing my children to participate!

Nonetheless, as I waited for the SS4C to start on that October day, the crowd grew and the protest rally was to go ahead. A vast array of groups and climate-related causes gathered together. Protesters against Woodside Petroleum's gas expansion wheeled in a large make-shift wind turbine, asking for wind power instead of more gas fields. An over-sized cigarette packet was branded as Woodside + BHP Scarboro, and was complete with a health warning of "Fossil gas creates climate change". I was impressed by the creativity and effort on display. Activists from Extinction Rebellion (XR) Grandparents stood beside members of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), whose banner was raised beside a stall from the Perth Socialist Alliance. University groups, members of religious and political associations, people from

many different backgrounds and causes, all were standing together to support the young people's school strike for climate.

I noticed that many young people were wearing their school uniforms. It appeared to me to be a purposeful act of visually signifying that their attendance at the strike was not in order to skip out on a day of school, but that they were deliberately rejecting their education on this day. As the main event was about to start, a giant inflatable humpback whale arrived and was placed near the entrance to Parliament House. Its voiceless mass screamed in silence to me, representing the silence of creatures unable to plead for environmental protection.

Student speeches were presented as one coordinated whole, where each had a section to perform. They spoke of the absence of the government as had been experienced in the Australian political context of recent years. I noted how this absence included the limited sitting days of the Australian Federal Parliament. Although the Covid-19 pandemic is an international factor, suspending parliament is a uniquely Australian response which saw parliamentary sitting days reduced by almost 30% (The Centre for Public Integrity, 2020). Many argue that this is a time when the country needed an active leading government more than ever, and absence in the face of crisis is seen as a trend in particular for then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison (colloquially referred to as ScoMo). During the severe bushfire season of 2019, the Australian Prime Minister took a family vacation to relax on the beaches of Hawaii. Images of the family holidaying provided a stark visual contrast to the circumstance of countless families in Australia who were forced to the safety of the ocean waters as the country burnt (Australia fires: Thousands flee to beach to escape, 2019). In defence of his absence, the Prime Minister infamously said, "I don't hold a hose, mate" (Prime Minister of Australia, 2019, para. 6).

The Prime Minister was also planning to be absent from the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (more commonly known as COP26), due to not wanting to adhere to Covid-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) quarantine requirements. The student strikers celebrated a small success when, on this date of the strike, he announced that he would in fact attend (Scott Morrison: Australia PM to attend COP26 summit after global pressure, 2021).

More broadly, the student strikers spoke of the government's overall absence from climate action, and their words presented a particularly poignant perspective. I wondered, was the young people's absence from school for a one-day strike action seen as more serious than the government's persistent absence from climate action?

1 Chapter One: “Do not let our planet die” - Introductory Background

The right to protest is under threat in Australia. Over the past years, states and territories have introduced new laws to restrict the right of concerned citizens using protest methods to highlight a political message. Protesters are increasingly being arrested and imprisoned for their activism. Examples of protesters being arrested in Australia in recent years include climate protester, Deanna “Violet” Coco, who was jailed after blocking one lane of traffic on the Sydney Harbour Bridge for 25 minutes in April 2022. In April 2023, approximately 50 protesters were arrested after shovelling coal off a train bound for the Port of Newcastle to demonstrate their stance regarding new coal mine approvals. In June 2023, energy-protester Kristen Morrissey was arrested as she released a harmless foul-odour gas into the building of Woodside in Perth, WA. At this time of writing, she continues to be under house arrest.

Known as the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to protest is based on Articles 21and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 8(1)(a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Australia is a signatory. The Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department (n.d.) summarises as follows:

> The right to peaceful assembly protects the right of individuals and groups to meet for a common purpose or in order to exchange ideas and information, to express their views publicly and to hold a peaceful protest. The right extends to all gatherings for peaceful purposes, regardless of the degree of public support for the purpose of the gathering. (para. 11)

The right to freedom of assembly and association does not incorporate age as a restriction. In fact, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] in 1989 indiscriminately acknowledged children’s universal status as rights bearers (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCRC], 1989). Specifically, the term ‘rights

bearers' includes children's right to form opinions and expression them freely (Article 12), the right to freedom of expression through any means they choose (Article 13), and freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15) (OHCHR, 1989). However, what is one's right does not necessarily translate into their experience.

Regardless of age, all people have the right to hold protest, including young people who are excluded from the formal voting system below the age of 18 years. This is the case in Australia and many democratic countries across the world. Young people are situated in a state of exclusion from formal electoral processes and although free to partake in their right to protest, they are concurrently subject to silencing, particularly via perspectives which render them not sufficiently rational or mature to express political voice or opinion.

Yet, despite their voices being unwelcome in the public and political domain, the mass mobilisation of young people in the fight against climate change continues both locally and internationally. It inspires this research project where I seek to understand how young people operate politically against the backdrop of disempowering narratives, where education and socialisation are the formal institutionalised priorities. 'Real' life matters, such as politics, economics, human rights, environmental policy and practice, are deemed to be matters of adult concern which young people are not yet rational or mature enough to participate in.

In this thesis I examine a diverse range of young people's participation in climate change activism in WA. I listen to their voices in an arena where they are frequently silenced or remain unheard. I highlight their experiences, and contribute to debates relating to young people's position in society and extend current knowledge relating to their need and capacity for political recognition in the present.

1.1 Why Young People's Activism?

My interest in young people's activism emerges from a multi-faceted perspective, both personal, and professional and educational. Childhood experiences shape who we are in the present, and who we become across our lifespan (Ansell, 2005). Being female in a patriarchal society is well documented to provide experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage (Hughes, 1998; Kaplan, 1996; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). This experience was intensely

highlighted in my personal fundamental Calvinist upbringing in a conservative migrant circle. In addition to being female and the youngest child of a large family, my exclusive environment resulted in the strict policing of any and all independent thought, creativity or action. I recall the deep frustration this stirred within me as I sought to be heard and yearned to explore the world beyond the imposed boundaries surrounding my existence. This experience has had significant influence on my standpoint as researcher in this project.

Progressing beyond my conservative schooling, I entered higher education as a mature-aged student and discovered the illuminating world of sociology. By this time of my life, I was a mother of two young children and striving to do everything within my control to provide them a childhood experience vastly different from my own, namely, one of wonder and learning, where they could freely explore themselves and their world. My children became involved in environmental and social justice causes from a young age. Together we have participated, in varying capacities, in anti-racism protests, political lobbying, marches for refugee rights, climate activism and events such as beach clean-ups and tree-planting.

Considering my own childhood and my children's development leads to some thought-provoking and interesting questions: Was I led to activism by my strictly exclusive experience? Were my children led to activism by their open, permitted and accessible experience? Or is it possible that there were not two differing experiences in our lives but one connected pathway? How do we grow to conceive ourselves as worthy of a voice and entitled to contribute to society? Indeed, what *is* the journey to activism?

In November 2018, my children and I participated in the first official 'School strike 4 Climate' in Australia. While school-aged children had been involved in environmental activism previously, these strikes were instigated by the work of (then) teen activist, Greta Thunberg, in Sweden. The Australian movement formed part of a global shift where young people mobilised in a coordinated action to demand real and meaningful action on climate change. At that time, I was also involved in the Stop Adani movement which aimed to stop the construction of a large coal mine in Queensland. This mine would have devastating impacts on the local environment, including irreversible damage to the land and waters of the Wangan and Jagalingou people, and the eradication of a number of native animal and plant species. The greenhouse gas emissions predicted from the mine's construction and operation

would only further add to the climate change crisis facing the world, and thereby disadvanatge young people whose lives depend on a liveable planet.

Global concern increased and was demonstrated in the form of local actions conducted by lobby groups and environmentalists, many of them young people, as well as the everyday voices of concerned citizens. The (then) Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, National party Senator Matthew Canavan, responded to this concern by regularly celebrating any success of the Adani mining project. As the Stop Adani movement grew in strength and numbers, in May 2019, Senator Canavan tweeted the words 'Start Adani!' (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Tweet by (then) Senator M Canavan.

(Canavan, 2019)

I was incensed at the disrespect and ridicule that this one simple statement expressed, and it opened a pathway to simultaneously experience the dynamic interplay of powerlessness and power: collective powerlessness against the forces of government and corporations, and collective 'people' power that emerges with deeper involvement and increased knowledge. Throughout history, people have mobilised under a vast array of circumstances in order to strive towards influences their conditions individually and collectively. Social movement studies have examined activism efforts and established varying markers of success and limitations. The current strikes demanding action against

climate change present a valuable opportunity to add to these perspectives by examining young people's activism.

My education journey continued to evolve, and in 2019, my Bachelor of Arts (Honours) research project examined media representations of the political and social narratives of children's activism in Australia. I argued that many of the traditional narratives surrounding children and childhood still persist today. Through the analysis of media representations in my Honours project, my fascination with activism grew both personally and intellectually. More significantly I became intent on no longer just talking *about* activists but talking *with* them.

Young people are uniquely positioned in the mix of activism, politics and issues of social or environmental concern, all in a time when the right to protest is being eroded. They are excluded from formal politics on the basis of their age. Yet, the decisions made in politics often will not reach their full effects until years later. This places each cohort of young people in the unenviable position of bearing the brunt of errors from the past generations. Young climate activists are pleading to be heard and for this cycle of planetary destruction to end. Climate change has boiled to the point of a global emergency, and young people are not the only activists being ignored. Yet, being ignored is particularly poignant in the context of young people as it is their futures being impacted. They continue to be excluded even though it is them that will suffer the ramifications of continued damaging policy and practice. The powerlessness of their position in society echoes in my memory. I am reminded of the deep frustration I felt as a disempowered young person and now as an adult I want to walk beside young people, to respectfully listen to *their* words, hear *their* concerns and give prominence to *their* voices. By walking beside young people, my role is non-extractive. I identify myself as an activist and a supporter of climate change activism. I chant with the group and march along as one of them, sometimes forgetting to take notes and observe, because the energy of the cause sweeps over me. As a researcher, this project presents an opportunity to examine the dynamics at play in this situation, and will provide a current analysis of young people's contemporary political perspectives.

This project is deeply personal to me, but it is also far more than that. I acknowledge my place in the research: I am an activist, a mother of young activists, and my 'personal' is deeply intertwined with my 'professional'. Indeed, as American radical feminist Carol

Hanisch (1969) wrote, “the personal is political”. At times I write using the first person in order to represent my position as an activist researching activists and activism. The opportunity to become further educated has constantly been a gift to me, and my personal and professional goal is to use my education and experiences as tools for empowerment and positive social change, and to consistently promote human rights and eco-social justice.

1.2 Key Concepts

Academic interest in activism, in particular young people’s participation, has also increased along with the global rise of the climate change movement. Scholars from many international locations have explored young activists’ actions from a range of angles. These include works which advocate the capacity and maturity of young activists, such as Bowman and Germaine (2022), who argue in support of a flow of knowledge from young people, and those which discuss the political and social narratives surrounding their activism (see Alexanderet al., 2021; Mayes & Hartup, 2022).

Others examine the emotions involved relating to both climate change and climate change activism (see Bright & Eames, 2022; Verlie et al., 2021), in particular, hope (see Bowman & Pickard, 2021; Martiskainen et al., 2020; Pickard, 2021), joy (see Pickard, Bowman & Arya, 2020) and humour (see Curnow et al., 2021). In addition, academic research has recently begun to focus on the inclusion of young voices in research, with young activists being invited to be co-researchers and, in some cases, co-authors (see Godden et al., 2021; Tattersall et al., 2022; White et al., 2022).

My interest in this project lies in understanding the journey of activism. I sought to better understand how young people view their own participation in political discussions, and how they come to hold these positions. How does one become an activist? What is the process and experience of this journey? And how does it play out in reality? I utilise Bourdieu’s theory of practice, which includes the concept of habitus, in providing a way to understand people’s actions. I also apply Freire’s concept of conscientisation as a way of uncovering how young people develop into activists through the building of conscious awareness and the understanding that they have the capacity to act upon their awareness and

reality. To understand young activists' action, I use the theory of prefigurative practice, including Pickard's do-it-ourselves politics and Bey's temporary autonomous zones.

In my discussions throughout this thesis, I will use the term 'young people' and 'young activists'. When utilising specific literature, the words child(ren) and youth will appear, following the author's usage in the article being referred to, however, for all new discussion and data generated here, the term 'young people' is most appropriate, as it does not rely on constructed legal boundaries around adulthood (see Chapter Two). Participant's age, capacity and understanding is not at question here in this project. Instead, I move beyond what others (researchers, media, politicians and society) are saying about young activists and to listen to what the young people are saying about themselves.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

Recognising the vast differences in young people's lived experiences worldwide, the research project examines the experiences of diverse young people within and around Perth, Western Australia. The overall aim is to represent young people's voices in the Australian context of Perth, Western Australia, by highlighting their experiences of activism and to inform debates relating to children's position in society and their responses to climate change.

My research is guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

How do young activists in Perth WA respond to the global climate crisis?

- How do young activists experience their age-based political exclusion?
- How can young activists' response to the climate crisis be understood using sociological perspectives on youth and activism theory?
- How do young activists navigate their status as future beings and insert themselves into the present?

Perth is the capital city of the state of Western Australia, with a population of approximately two million, and is located on the opposite side of the country and some 3000 kilometres away from Canberra, the federal capital. Western Australia itself is a large state,

its size comprising of 32.9% of the total Australian land mass, and sharing in 10.8% of the national population (Geoscience Australia, 2023; The Government of Western Australia, 2024). It incorporates many varying environments, from tourist towns in the south-west, to remote communities, mining towns, and larger metro-centres. Farrugia (2014) discusses the spatialised dimensions of youth sociological research and explains that the rural-urban binary is more nuanced that a generalised examination of geographical disadvantage. Perth provides a unique angle to spatialisation due to being an urban environment that in many ways is also remote.

Grassroots climate organisation *350 Boorloo:Perth* released a report naming WA as a 'Captured State' due to the gripping influence that the resource sector has on government and policy. While the WA Labour government prides itself on being a strong resources-based economy, 350 Boorloo:Perth (n.d.) finds that mining companies are the biggest donors to government which, in turn, makes them also a significant driver of policy.

As an activist in Perth myself, I have anecdotally heard protest participants wonder how far our voices can reach. Does Canberra even care what we, over in the West[1], think? On the occasion when 'important' people, powerholders and/or decision-makers, do travel to the West it is often seized upon as an opportunity not to be missed. A chance to *really* be heard, perhaps. But are we, or is anyone, ever really heard? What does this mean for the experience of people geographically closer to power? If adult activists question the West's importance in the eyes of Canberra, how much more must this be the case for young people?

Through qualitative interviews with 10 young activists, and ethnographic observations of four activism events in Perth, a distant and somewhat politically isolated area of Australia, this project presents an opportunity to contribute to discussions about young people and to shape sociological understandings and debates. My process of ethnography and interviewing is intertwined, with the interviews being informed by observations and interactions at the

[1] The term 'the West' has numerous meanings. Frequently it is used in an Ameri-centric manner referring to the frontier of settlers in Western America, and is colloquially called 'the wild west' due to its harshness and history of violence and shootouts. 'The West' can also refer to western civilisations, in general, being an abbreviation for term the 'western world'. In the context of Australia, 'the West' refers to the state of Western Australia. The distance between East and West in Australia refers to more than kilometres. WA is often viewed as separate from the rest of Australia and some people are of the opinion that it should become a separate country.

activism events. The interviews represent a set of engaged activists who self-selected to participate through the recruitment process. In listening to these 10 young activists' voices, I share their insights and experiences to make their voices heard and central. I argue that young activists have formed a generational radical ecological habitus that developed through the experience of hysteresis (Chapter Four) and a process of conscientisation (Chapter Five). Their activism practice then manifests as prefigurative practice (Chapter Six).

The timeliness of these questions and aims cannot be understated. Although young people have long been at the forefront of social movements, their activism and political participation is increasing in prominence and discussion. Major media attention is given to individual 'heroes', such as Greta Thunberg[2], Malala Yousafzai [3], or X González[4], and others like them, as well as the mass crowds crying out for change and to be heard (Mayes & Hartup, 2022). Environmentally the planet is on the cusp of dramatic change, with scientists predicting the earth is reaching global warming tipping points (NASA, 2022). These tipping points refer to points of no return which occur when sufficient change has happened that can no longer be reversed and may simultaneously increase the rate of that change.

Will it be a cusp of collapse or the cusp of positive change? Will the earth be tipped into increasing catastrophe or into damage-reversal? Young people desire and demand to be a part of those conversations. Perhaps the cusp of change will be one forced by young people's voices. Perhaps this change will incorporate the inclusion of their voices into critical dialogue. Voices, not just to be spoken, but to be heard.

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[2] The contemporary uprising of school aged children demanding action on climate change has been largely attributed to the actions of Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg. Thunberg was 15 years of age in 2018 when she first sat on the steps of the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm instead of attending school. Every day for three weeks leading up to the Swedish election she sat on the steps demanding that the government act seriously and urgently on climate change. After the election she returned to school for four days per week, spending each Friday sitting on the steps of Parliament. Her actions instigated the global movement that became known as #SchoolStrike4Climate (SS4C) and #FridaysforFuture.

[3] Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani activist who spoke out against the Pakistani Taliban's ban on female education. At the age of 15, in 2012, she survived an assassination attempt after being shot in the face. In 2014 she won a Nobel Peace Prize and she continues to use her public profile for activism, in particular to support female education world-wide.

[4] X Gonźalez is an American activist for gun control. They survived the 2018 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida which killed 17 students and seriously injured many more. Best known for their impassioned speech after the shooting, they led the longest known moment of silence, being a full six minutes to mark the length of the shooting. They continued their activism by co-founding the organisation Never Again MSD, which is a student-led action group calling for tighter gun control laws.

In order to contribute to contemporary discussions and add to the growing body of knowledge regarding young people's political participation, this research aims to focus on their voices and document the narratives of their experience in this place and moment of time.

1.4 Thesis Structure

In Chapter One, I have provided a background for the research project. I have spoken of the right that young people have to protest, through their freedom of assembly and association. I have explained the development of my interest in hearing marginalised voices, and how young people's activism has developed as a personal, professional and educational passion for me, and introduced the project's aim and research questions.

Chapter Two provides the theoretical foundation for this research. Initially, I will conceptualise young people with common definitions and how they apply to the participants in this study. I then discuss literature relating to children and youth in order to demonstrate the persistence of traditional perspectives towards them in most Western democratic systems.

Anticipatory and protectionist narratives continue to pervade discourse regarding young people's actions. The intention of the thesis, however, is to move on from these traditional perspectives to, instead, focus on young people beyond the rigid categorisation of age. However, I am including these in the theoretical chapter because many political and social narratives continue to imply a deep-seated underlying prejudice towards young people on the basis of their age. Young people's rationality and capacity is not at question in this project; it is the foundation from which I build a strengths-based perspective of young activists.

The main focus of the theoretical framework thereafter is to discuss perspectives from the sociology of youth as a field of study. In particular, I will discuss the core meanings and differences of youth from a life-course perspective and a generational perspective.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach employed in the project. This is a qualitative interpretive ethnographic research project, that strives to consistently be participant - centred and reflexive. I will describe the ethics process, issues of consent, and

the recruitment process. At this point, I also introduce the interview participants. The method of data generation is via individual semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation. Researcher standpoint is crucial in data generation as the data exists as a result of my presence and involvement. The young people speak their truth, but the context in which these words are spoken is in the setting of an interview or through my observing eyes. This chapter concludes with a discussion of data analysis and planned research outputs.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are primarily data and discussion chapters, and they all begin with a theoretical section. As described above, the theoretical chapter relates to sociological understandings of youth and their position in society. The theory presented in these data and discussion chapters moves away from the sociology of youth, and instead focuses on theory required to answer the research questions, namely, habitus and hysteresis (Chapter Four), conscientisation, radical habitus and ecological habitus (Chapter Five) and prefigurative practice (Chapter Six). Finally, in Chapter Seven, I provide a synthesis of the research project as a whole.

I have included six interludes at various points throughout this thesis. As with the prelude, these are primarily ethnographic reflections which relate to each of the four activism events that I attended for observation research. I have chosen to write these reflections in a narrative style (represented by a different font selection) in order to convey a story of an event as it occurs and my thoughts, as researcher, as I observe the young people in action and progress through this project. The purpose for this decision is that as a researcher, I am a part of the story and I am present in the project. Rather than remove myself in a clinical style and attempt to observe purely objectively, these reflective interludes are in recognition of my position as researcher, but also as a climate activist. These are the young people's actions, the young activists' stories, and these are also my story.

INTERLUDE: ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION ONE

SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE

PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

15 OCTOBER 2021

Still Waiting for Meaningful Action

In preparation the night before, I worked through a to-do list I had prepared in the days prior: Charge camera battery, check SD card, water bottle, pen, back-up pens and more. Having attended many rallies before I was familiar with the slight tension between feeling simultaneous apprehension and determination. Overall, I was really hoping the rally would be a great success. I hoped it would be buzzing with the passion of lots of people and that the crowd would be full of energy and responsive to the speakers.

I was excited for the rally which would be the first ethnographic observation activity in my research project. I wondered how many young activists across the country were doing the same; packing, ticking off a list and making sure they were prepared with nothing left behind. For some activists, this was likely to be their first strike. Perhaps for some, it was their first time speaking or performing, and others may have participated many times before. I wondered, how were they all feeling about the strike? Were they prepared, determined and excited? Nervous? Or maybe terrified?

Arriving at Perth Parliament House well on time, I smiled at the patient verge skeleton that was 'still waiting for meaningful action on climate change'. It made me feel somewhat more at ease in acknowledging the creativity of activists who never seem to run out of innovative and even humorous ways of spreading their message. As I rounded the corner of Parliament House, I saw a small group of people standing in a circle and as I came closer, I knew I was at the right place; they were the organisers. A convenient park bench was located in the shade off to the side so I settled there to observe how they would progress from a small group into a full protest rally.

Three police officers were already present for the initial group of twelve young people who were preparing themselves. No adults were assisting them; no 'conspiring adults manipulating the young as pawns', to use the language of some adult non-supporters. The organisers practiced

their chants and were pointing around the area making sure everyone knew their positions and roles. Marshals had Covid-19 check-in QR codes, to allow participants to check in for contact tracing purposes if Covid-19 cases were linked to the event, taped to their backs and again I was impressed with the ingenuity of this idea in making Covid-19 check-ins mobile and roaming. There seemed to be no hesitation or questioning about complying with this government health directive, even though attending was contrary to the government education directive. I overheard one young person encouraging everyone to wear sunscreen. They said, "Be sun-smart everyone, sun protection is really important". Inwardly embarrassed, I realised that despite all my organisation, this was the one thing that I, an adult, had forgotten and was likely to regret.

With the vast array of causes and groups, I noted how activism is intertwined with fashion. Many people wore garish earrings with slogans, t-shirts were emblazoned with printed demands, and bags and hats matched the activists' intent. Fashion was being used as an activist tool. I marvelled at the dual purposes of dressing as activist for the occasion. Doing so simultaneously demonstrated their lifestyle choices, while also encouraging others to do so by advertising ethical messages supporting the cause.

I watched as the group numbers increased and, while feeling an uneasy tension within, I noted the following into my field notebook:

"Organisers = mostly female, non-binary/trans

Marshals = more of an even gender-balance, but more male.

Speakers = female, except for Union rep and the First Nations voices"

Then, I wrestled with this way of thinking. Who was I to assume their gender? I did not want to judge them by their dress, their hair, voice, or mannerism. Despite this it seemed clear that many who presented as young men were in the protective, and somewhat authoritative, role of marshals to execute crowd control, whereas those who presented as women, non-binary or transgender, were more likely to, either be taking care of the finer details, or to put themselves out there as the voices of the movement. I was reminded of scholars such as Dr Benjamin Bowman who, when discussing how the climate change movement is led by young women, questions how will we, as wider society, answer to this generation of young women (Bowman, 2019)?

Also noticeable to me was the inclusion of people with mobility impairments, those in wheelchairs, using walking sticks or crutches. It seemed to me that the crowd as a whole was so

adept at adjusting to their needs that their inclusion was seamless and easy. One young person had a sticker on their wheelchair which read, "Disabled and proud". They were part of the organising team and acting as a marshal on the protest march. The other marshals and the crowd appeared unfazed by their presence, with a noticeable ease and respect for their capacity in the role, that I could not help but wonder why older generations sometimes appear to struggle to adapt practices and structures to incorporate disabled people more freely. Inclusivity seemed so seamless and easy for this group of young activists.

Many other activist groups joined in to promote their own cause while supporting the school students strike. I scrawled down the names of organisations present to capture the broad range of support being given to the school strikers, including Stop Adani, WA Forest Alliance, Doctors for Climate, political parties, land councils and many more.

At about 10:30am, half an hour before the scheduled start time, media began to arrive. The organising group approached the media with no hesitation. It appeared that relationships had already been formed and the young people were comfortable in their interactions with the media. A few seemed prepared to have a formal interview and this occurred smoothly and without incident. Five mounted police officers come from behind the main group, effectively cordoning off the allowable area for the protest. A band of young people began to perform just as a group of police on bicycles also arrived. Ironically a large group of younger primary school children walked back and forth in their school uniforms while on a tour of Parliament House. I wondered if the scheduling department would be questioned about the timing.

All speakers were translated by an Auslan signer and the event began with a Kaya ("hello" in Noongar language) and a Welcome to Country performed by Daniel Garlett, a Noongar man, and Greens candidate for a local electorate. He spoke of connection and preservation of country, and the need for First Nations' voices to be included in any plans and solutions going forward. Listening to him speak, I made a note to think through the connection between the Greens party, as part of the formal political structure, and SS4C as a non-traditional and unwelcome political voice.

The student speakers spoke of the government's limited sitting days of Parliament, the Prime Minister's holiday during the bushfire season of 2020, his planned absence from the COP26 climate summit, and federal environment minister Sussan Ley's absence from protecting the Great Barrier Reef. Then they made the following demands:

- No more new coal or gas projects to be approved;
- 100% renewable energies by 2030; and
- A fair and just transition to renewables.

A representative from the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining Energy Union (CFMEU) stood in solidarity to what he called his "young brothers and sisters". He stated how appalled he was that school notices had been sent to parents to discourage them from allowing their children to participate in the strikes. He then led the crowd into a chant of "Students, Power", which echoed the Unions typical chant of "Union, Power". I considered the fine balance between an act of adult take-over, dominance or adult solidarity and acceptance of young people.

A representative of the Extinction Rebellion WA Grandparents gave the next speech. Her words stood out from the rest as she did not address the government with any demands, or speak about the necessity of change. Her speech was one of apology. As an XR Grandparent she stated that they are sorry, truly sorry for what their generation has left for the young people to deal with. Beyond an apology she then issued a pledge, stating that they pledge to the young people to do the best they can, to never give up, and to do everything possible to give them the future they deserve. I found this particularly touching. The activist self within me surfaced and I considered that I, too, felt a deep sadness for the state of the planet and wanted to actively work towards a better future.

The last person on stage was Flewnt, a Noongar hip-hop artist and activist. He performed "Black boy" and "Always was" and spoke about climate justice being intertwined with justice for all. Listening to the speeches and various presentations to the striking crowd, it was clear to me that SS4C's Perth group intended to consistently promote and include First Nations' voices as essential for any future planning and change.

The crowd was then introduced to the chants for the day and proceeded to march away from Parliament House to the city streets. The chants were:

What do we want? Climate Action

When do we want it? Now

No more coal, gas or oil.

Keep your carbon in the soil.

Strike, occupy, shut it down.

Keep your carbon in the ground.

Climate change is not a lie,

Do not let our planet die.

Planet not profit,

ScoMo get off it.

We can march, we can shout,

We can also vote you out.

Most of these chants I recognised from climate change protests I had attended in the past. However, the last one stood out to me in particular in light of the live, mass voting registration they had instigated while still at Parliament House for all people aged 16+. These young people have been growing up through the climate movement. Many of them are not new to this. They been organising and attending these protests for years now and are still being dismissed as too young to be listened to. They're *still* waiting. Yet, while the government insists on ignoring the calls, these young people have quietly been growing up in the background. Many of them would soon be eligible to vote. Soon their voices *will* be legitimate and their votes *will* be counted. No longer outside of politics, no longer deemed unworthy of political participation and no longer ineligible. Perhaps a time of regret for the government will soon be around the corner.

As the strikers marched through the streets, the police presence was significant - Police vans, mounted, foot patrols, motorcycle and bicycle police and one ambulance. At the intersection of St Georges Terrace and William Street one of the activist leaders called out,

"Times Up, Sit Down". This was a prearranged moment that the crowd would sit down and block the intersection. During this time, I noticed a Police Officer in charge making direct signals to the other officers that they must mingle and walk through the seated strikers. Most Police seemed content to stand on the outskirts and observe the peaceful rally, but this officer insisted they walked past and through everyone sitting down. I noted this seemed awkward and unnecessary, if not heavy-handed; a visual presence of power that actually created a greater risk for the strikers than anything else from the strike as they tried to avoid tripping up an officer.

The leader of the strikers discussed the "times up, sit down" moment as being a necessary and deliberate tactic. Their words discussed how they are excluded from the debates around climate change and therefore they need to sit down in order to "take up space". The reference to taking up space reminded me of aspects of prefigurative activism where activists take up space while waiting for the wider circumstances to adjust accordingly, and where action sometimes involves a fine balance of causing disruption, but dispersing before authorities can dismantle them.

The chosen route for the rally passed by mining company offices, such as Westfarmers and BHP. The volume of the crowd increased as the activists yelled directly at the mining offices, empowered and emboldened by their close proximity to the 'target'. However, for all the narratives of deviance and disturbance, the young activists were controlled, agreeable and compliant.

I noted how much of city was ground to a standstill by the strikers. Traffic, as the marchers took over the streets, but also, many workers came out of their offices and stood on the steps of their buildings to watch the strikers pass. As I looked up, in many office windows in the high-rise buildings there were attentive faces peering down; perhaps curious, perhaps annoyed, but clearly distracted from their work by the spectacle of a loud and energetic protest march.

Had the cogs in the corporate machine of production and greed been momentarily stopped? It was as if, for that moment of time, the world as we know it had paused. A crack appeared in the ever-churning systems of production and devastation, and a new way of living seemed possible.

2 Chapter Two: “Always at the bottom of this age hierarchy” - Sociological Understandings of Young People and their Activism

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundational framework for the project. Firstly, I conceptualise the term ‘young people’. This will provide the basis for emphasising my goal to move away from the traditional categories of child(ren) or youth, and use the term ‘young people’ instead.

I then consider dominant perspectives that influence the sociology of children, childhood and youth. Specifically, anticipatory and protectionist narratives relate to their incomplete development and lack of preparedness to fully participate in society until they reach adulthood. These perspectives have persisted in policy, practice and popular discourse, despite studies challenging their validity, and therefore are a significant foundation to the underpinning rationales within which young people exist.

In the subsequent section, I review more recent sociological research regarding young people. I utilise two dominant perspectives in the sociology of youth as a discipline: the ‘life course’ and ‘generational’ approaches. Both approaches offer useful contributions to understanding young people, yet they are often framed antithetically. I am basing this thesis on both ‘sides’ of the debate and in this section of the chapter I firstly explain how the generational approach is beneficial in young people’s activism, yet sociological understandings in this area cannot entirely be moved across into the generational camp. Having outlined these dominant perspectives in the sociology of youth and children/childhood, I then move the discussion of young people into the specific context of their activism and political participation. Referring back to the life-course approach, young people’s engagement in politics tends to increase with age. However, the generational approach to sociology is also essential for understanding the context in which contemporary young people engage politically, as well as the key issues they engage with.

I then briefly review recent literature from the sociology of youth and other studies of young people that utilise the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu. In reviewing sociological research of young people, it is clear that Bourdieu's work is influential, so I consider its impact here before exploring it in more depth, with regards to my research, in Chapter Four. Finally, I shift the focus of this chapter to current research relating specifically to the current global phenomenon of young people's climate activism. Firstly, I explore recent literature which examines young people's political response in activism to the environmental crisis of climate change. Since 2018 when young people collectively began to demand 'system change, not climate change'[5], academic interest in the areas of youth studies, political studies, and activism and social movements has grown exponentially. In this section, I provide an overview of this current research from various locations across the world.

2.1 Conceptualising Young People

It is beneficial to examine the context in which young people exist and operate. Sociologically, we understand 'childhood' and 'adolescence', as well as categories like 'youth' and 'young people', as social constructions (James & Prout, 2005; Jenks, 2005; 2008; Tait, 1993). While there are physiological and psychological differences that can be identified between children and adults, human development continues throughout the life span and does not remain fixed in discreet categories (Ansell, 2005). Nonetheless, understandings of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and the expectations of those categories, have changed over time and in different cultural contexts.

In 10th to 13th century Britain, childhood as a category is said not to have existed, with children expected to contribute to the household from an early age, and no legal separations between children and adults (Aries, 2005). Due to fragility, infants were viewed as incapable of participating in life and, therefore, simply did not count. Braungart and Braungart (1986) state that during this time there was little knowledge of human developmental processes and

[5] "System change, not climate change" is one of many chants frequently used by young people at the SS4C rallies.

children were seen as little adults, fully developed instantaneously at conception and simply needing to grow in size. As soon as that period of extreme dependence was complete and the infant no longer required constant care from its mother, they were integrated into society and adult life (Aries, 2005). Childhood as a separate phase began to develop, in Anglo cultures, from the 13th century (Aries, 2005), but this still shifted across time. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution children often participated in paid labour outside the home. Compulsory education through schooling began to appear in the late 1800s in Anglo settings (James & Prout, 2005; Jenks, 2005).

The consideration of childhood as a separate category is relatively recent, according to Pilcher (1994). This is reflected in contemporary legal categories. The OHCRC (1989) categorises any person below the age of eighteen years as a child. This category is socially constructed and exists on the basis of age without taking into account any individual characteristics, competency, maturity or rationality (Qvortrup, 1989; 2009b). Upon reaching the age of eighteen, children outgrow their label and step over the constructed age-based boundary into the category of adults. This renders children as incomplete during childhood while they are socialised and trained in preparation for adulthood (Castaneda, 2001; Jenks, 2005; Thorne, 1987).

The rigid age boundary between children and adults also fails to consider the vast global differences in the experiences of young people, including Indigenous and migrant children. Children's lived experiences are not universal but rather are shaped by their inner biology and psychology, as well as the surrounding environmental and cultural conditions (Ansell, 2005). Some of the diverse factors that can affect childhood include geographical location, culture, class, rural and urban environments, education and health. In some circumstances children at very young ages are expected to work and contribute economically to the household or family. Children born outside of poverty may grow up with technology and modern convenience, while the workers producing those very technologies and conveniences may be children of the same age. Same age, same generation, yet vastly differing circumstances. In places of war, children may develop with a burden and responsibility beyond their age, yet their time and place dictate the conditions of their experience. The list can go on; child soldiers, girls married at ten or twelve years of age, children raising their siblings, children raised by a village, access to education, health, services and food security - all these aspects relating to access to capital (see Chapter Four)

and many more, including the biological disposition of the child from birth, determine a child's characteristics and their experience of childhood (Ansell, 2005). Clearly, no singular definition of childhood can capture the essence of the universal experience of children.

The category of 'youth' bridges the categories of children and adults. The United Nations defines youth as young people from the age of fifteen years and older, but recognise that is not a fixed category based on age (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], n.d.). The term 'youth' refers to the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood and is typified by the beginning of independence, perhaps with the completion of formal education and beginning of a first job (UNDESA, n.d.). Sociologically speaking, 'youth' and 'young people' are used in a number of different ways and the meanings can change depending on theoretical and political interests and research methods (Threadgold, 2019). The same 'image' of a young person can evoke narratives of being 'at-risk' or a 'go-getter' depending on the orientation that the narrator has towards that young person (Threadgold, 2020a). Similarly, Nakata and Bray (2023) discuss each new generations' unique capacity for change and improvement, and state that "children can be represented as figures of renewal and hope or as figures of risk and threat" (p. 306). In addition, young people are used as a scapegoat for political and economic challenges, with narratives stating that they seek instant gratification, or perhaps are a 'consumer dupe'; narratives which fail to take into account generational differences in circumstances (Threadgold, 2020a). And as Threadgold (2020a) states: "In terms of political figures, 'youth' stands in for all that is wrong in society, but young people are dangerous if they are politically active" (p. 692).

Given Threadgold's (2020a) analysis of the slipperiness of 'youth' and 'young people', above, it is important here to define how I use the terms. As youth can refer to those in either legal category of children or adults, I use the term 'young people' and specify their age where required. Arguably, 'young people' is not a trouble-free label in itself as there is no defined boundary of when one ceases to be 'young'. However, by including participants from the ages of fourteen to twenty-five years, my aim is to capture the continuity of their experience, from child-youth-adult, as relates to them as individuals.

2.2 Dominant Perspectives of Children and Youth

As discussed above, Childhood is a socially constructed category, in that its meaning relates to its specific context such as the era, location and social, economic and political circumstances (James & Prout, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005). French historian Philippe Aries (2005, p. 43) states that, "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist". Since this time, industrialisation impacted on children's lives with expectations of work or education, or both, dependant on the circumstances of the child's environment. Understandings also grew in relation to human development and behavioural changes with age, which resulted in an increased status differential between younger and older people (Braungart & Braungart, 1986).

It bears constant reminding that these discussions relating to young people through history are influenced by far more than time period and age. So many factors affect a person and influence their development, actions and experiences. As Ansell (2005) states, each individual experience of childhood varies greatly. No child exemplifies what it is to be a child; and no one childhood accurately portrays the experience of childhood for all. The list of factors affecting children and childhood is vast, including culture, status, education, health and geographical location (Ansell, 2005), and Nilan (2011) argues that sociology needs to look beyond national borders in order to take into consideration these vast global differences. Even within Australia, Chesters and Cuervo (2021) find that youth in rural locations are less likely to enrol in university, and subsequently are disadvantaged in employability. However, as Cook and Cuervo (2020) argue, remaining rural need not automatically be aligned with a lesser circumstance or a coerced result of disadvantage, for doing so would equate urban as the locational norm in the same way that adulthood is the norm for age-based categorisation. In some cases, remaining in Australian rural areas is a result of family links or the desire to raise children in the environment from their own childhoods (Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2012).

Today, western democratic systems across the globe typically exclude children from politics and, on that basis, they are ineligible to vote (Campiglio, 2009). This legal barrier to political participation stems from anticipatory and protectionist attitudes regarding children and childhood (Qvortrup, 1989). In anticipatory fashion, childhood is viewed as a stage of

development and training for adulthood through appropriate socialisation (Thorne, 1987). Similarly, from a protectionist perspective, children are shielded from matters deemed to be of adult concern, such as economics, politics and social and/or environmental justice issues (Qvortrup, 1989, 2009a). Similarly, Braungart and Braungart (1986) discuss how age is used to create boundaries and barriers: "Age is one of the most basic social categories of human existence and a primary factor in all societies for assigning roles and granting prestige and power" (p. 205). Accordingly, full participation in society occurs upon reaching adulthood.

Despite anticipatory and protectionist perspectives, young people do have the capacity to develop conscious awareness (or conscientisation, see Chapter Five) and become change agents in the world. Dominant adult systems and processes hinder young people's full participation. Even as rights bearers, children's personal power and individual agency do not extend into the realm of formal politics, and in the majority of democracies across the globe children are excluded from electoral systems (Campiglio, 2009). Yet, in a multitude of varying circumstances and situations, and in the face of their political exclusion, children have found non-traditional methods to raise their political voice.

Power and authority are embedded in the foundation of traditional western patriarchal perceptions of childhood and determines their position in relation to the rest of society (Braungart & Braungart, 1986; James & Prout, 2005; Thorne, 1987). Attitudes towards children and societal perceptions of childhood form structural constraints within which children are expected to conform, such as compulsory fixed schooling hours or the requirement to remain silent when adults are speaking. Institutional socialisation stems from the perception that children are passive recipients of adult culture and training and, consequently, children who resist that training are deemed faulty or deviant (Leonard, 2015). However, Coffey & Farrugia (2014) express the need for caution when relying on analysis of structure and agency to understand young people's actions. Similarly, Threadgold, Farrugia and Coffey (2021) understand young people's actions as an interactive embodied process of engagement that is removed from the structure – agency binary.

Nonetheless, formal power is largely out of reach for children and they are 'trainee citizens'; a minority group in an adult-centred socio-political context (Collins & McCormack, 2019; James & Prout, 2005). As Bourdieu (1993) also finds, young people are largely removed or separated from society in practice zones. Theoretical conceptions of children's

agency are controversial – some scholars acknowledge this, including those working from a Bourdieusian theoretical perspective (see Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Threadgold, Farrugia & Coffey, 2021; Woodman & Threadgold , 2011).

Other studies also acknowledge children's agency, particularly in very localised contexts like in the setting of their personal lives. For example, in the context of family matters, they may be able to assert agency in decision-making processes which directly affect them. The emotive voice, or 'pester power', of children attempting to achieve change within the home, is an early display of understanding and engagement with political concepts (Satchwell, 2013; Walker, 2017). Similarly in educational or recreational settings, some opportunity is afforded to them to express their voice and shape the direction of said activity. In matters pertaining to child welfare, policies and procedures have been adapted over time to acknowledge that children have a right to participate in the decision-making process regarding their personal circumstances (Baird, 2008).

Despite common perceptions that socialisation is how children develop, socialisation is not specific to childhood but continues into adulthood and throughout the human lifespan (Leonard, 2009). Likewise, traits that are deemed characteristic of adulthood, such as maturity and competence, are not achieved specifically upon coming of age at eighteen years. Maturity develops at individual stages according to each person's experience and characteristics and some children demonstrate significant competence already in younger years (Thorne, 1987). Individual adults also vary in competence and maturity and Thorne (1987) comments that the personalities and behaviours of some adults could be classed as irresponsible and even child-like. Similarly, Beilharz (in Blatterer, 2007, p. ix) states, "we behave like children, us adults too".

Yet, it is children who are deemed not yet competent or sufficiently rational to comprehend and engage in politics. Their perceived lack of competency leads to notions of protectiveness where well-meaning adults seek to shield children from issues that are considered adult matters (Qvortrup, 1989). This is despite the fact that, across the globe, many children are unable to be shielded from the realities and consequences of those issues from which they are excluded. For example, children's futures are directly impacted by climate change yet it is considered a matter of adult concern. Similarly, Australian children

can be criminally detained from the age of ten years[6], yet it is only adults who have the capacity to discuss and make decisions relating to the age of criminal responsibility (Amnesty International Australia, 2020). It is in this context of adult domination that young people have resorted to the creative and non-traditional pathways of activism to extend their voices into politics.

Perspectives regarding youth are not dissimilar to perspectives of children. Bourdieu (1993) states that "youth is just a word" (p. 94). As a bridge between childhood and adulthood, youth is another socially constructed category, laden with power, and relative to understandings of adults. In the sociology of youth, there are two main perspectives which inform approaches to researching youth: youth as a social process or life course, and the generational approach.

As a social process, youth is seen as part of the life course, or a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood where age is the common factor within the group (Wyn & White, 1997). Age is the most common factor between members of the cohorts of children, youth or adults and has important ramifications for policy and practice which determine inclusion exclusively on age. Other descriptors may vary. For instance, someone of a particular age may have more in common with people of another age group or category, despite age; yet through age they are bound and understand according to the cohort of their age.

Understanding youth in this way presupposes the eventual reaching of adulthood. Adulthood is framed as a goal and an endpoint, or "if youth is a state of 'becoming', then adulthood is the 'arrival'" (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 11). This is a problematic framing because adulthood, itself, is also socially constructed (Blatterer, 2007). If both childhood and youth are understood with regards to their relationship or transitional to adulthood, then what is adulthood? According to Blatterer (2007, p. 26), "Adulthood is always present as a point of reference… and taken for granted as a default category". However, traditional markers of

[6] At this time of writing, long-time activists and campaigners were working in each state to raise the age of criminal responsibility. In 2023, the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Victorian State governments have committed to raising the age to twelve years, with a further extension to fourteen years planned. This has yet to be realised, but the commitment has been made.

adulthood shift over time and are highly variable in different locations and circumstances. For this reason, Threadgold (2020a) concurs that it is a problematic trend to limit understandings of youth to a transitional phase. What were once seen as the markers of successfully reaching adulthood (such as, owning a home, marriage and having children) are becoming achieved later in life or perhaps not at all (Threadgold, 2020a). These traditional markers themselves are also highly problematic and represent a privileged position that is limited in global and cultural relevance. Not only are these markers highly fluid, in some circumstances, they are irrelevant or undesirable.

2.3 Sociological approaches: Generational and Life Course

Thinking about people in terms of generations, rather than age or stage, is one way to address the challenge of relying on arbitrary distinctions between "young people" and "adults". In sociology, the age- or developmental-based approach to understanding young people is known as the life-course approach, or the transitions approach. The primary alternative to understanding young people is the 'generational' approach, also known as the 'cultural' approach. In this section, I outline both.

Understanding cohorts of people based on the era in which they were born is known as the 'generational approach' (Furlong, 2012; Woodman & Wyn, 2014). The generational approach to sociology connects young people (and all people) to a relational time and place. The world we experience is relevant to time and place; perhaps different and indeed, *likely* to be different than what is the experience of generations before (Mannheim, 1952). Understanding youth from this perspective overcomes the reliance on age as a defining factor. Instead of age being the common factor, it is the period of history that provides common conditions which create a 'generational mindset'.

Social generations relate to cohorts born between certain years and who are therefore related to the same broad range of social conditions over that period of time. 'Gen Z' is the label given to today's young people, usually considered anyone born from 1997 onward (Dimock, 2019). Generations born earlier include the Millennials of the 80s - 90s, Gen X who were born in the 60s and 70s and the Baby Boomers from after World War II (Dimock,

2019). The participants of this study are Gen Zers, or 'Centennials'. Other names for this generation include iGen, referring to the Internet Generation (Dimock, 2019). This is linked in with the colloquial term 'zoomers' used in the place of the term "Gen Z'. Using the letter 'Z', and following in rhyming pattern after the 'boomers', zoomers seems an ironically appropriate term since the Covid-19 pandemic has seen many face-to-face interactions replaced by the online communication platform, Zoom.

In a broad and generalised sense, wider society remains rigid in thinking of young people as "barely out of nappies", or "barely literate or numerate[7]" implying that milestone achievements and formal structured learning are a critical foundation. These narratives stem from the life-course approach to young people, which is also known as the 'transitions' approach. The approach aims to understand young people through their journey (transition) to adulthood and is based on psychological assumptions that underpin the development from child to adult (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011). This is a useful perspective considering how society is structured to shape the experience of childhood, and the life-course approach certainly does have a lot to offer. In some cases, young people's lives can be understood as a compilation of building blocks that shape their adulthood, where the experience of one stage influences the shaping of the next. A clear example of this tangible shape through life's stages, is in financial analysis of youth. Financial decisions when young impact following stages via credit ratings, and credit history provides a record of demonstrated responsibility, or lack thereof, to be examined when progressing to the next stage (Farrugia et al., 2022).

The life-course approach also emphasises the developmental stages that occur through age. Young children's development is individualised and influenced by a vast array of factors, yet distinct developmental stages can be helpful. Clearly, a toddler who cannot read, write or speak does not have the understanding to partake in political engagement, whereas a primary school aged child might have this in some capacity, although most likely less so than an older teenager. For this reason, aspects of the life-course cannot be ignored or removed from the picture. Yet this is also a very generalised manner of thinking and does not correspond with the vast array of differing abilities between people, whether young or older.

[7] These are quotes from media representations of social and politics narratives that were used in my honours' project titled: *The Role of Children in Social Change: Political and Social Narratives Surrounding Child Activism in Australia*.

Moreover, too heavy a reliance on life-course reinforces the idea that young people are human becomings rather than human beings in their own right.

In the case of climate activism, it is arguably less relevant whether the person is six years, or eight or fourteen years old; people of all those ages are going to be the generation that faces the brunt of climate change. This is a defining feature of the world for young people today – creating a unique generational context. White (2011) uses the term a 'eco-global outlook' in order to highlight "the importance of a global perspective on the nature and impact of ecological and social changes" (p. 14).

There are, of course, risks in the generational approach of homogenising, and assuming that all young people are affected in the same way by large contextual events. Roberts and France (2021) urge caution,saying that research from the global north has dominated understandings of youth, and more inclusive and extensive global research is necessary. The same criticism can be levelled at the life course approach, of course, if it does not consider the specific structural factors influencing a young person's development. It is therefore essential to remain alert to the constant state of flux that both life-course and generations are subject to (Woodman, Batan, & Sutopo, 2020). The generational approach is useful, though, for the way it does contextualise – at a global scale – how young people may be influenced by what is happening in the world around them. For example, Cook et al. (2021) find that global-scale events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, disproportionately effect young people and have significant impact on their lived experience (see also Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Two). Similarly, Woodman (2016) finds the sociology of generations most beneficial as it "provides the framework that most explicitly links social change, youth and the life course" (p. 25). The life-course approach has an age-based foundation which views youth as a period of developmental transition from childhood to adolescence with a finishing point at adulthood (Wyn & White, 1997). The generational approach, on the other hand, removes the reliance on age as a common factor. Instead, people are viewed in a relational perspective according to time and place, being the period of history that they were born into, and the common generational mindset of their cohort (Mannheim, 1952).

For this reason, in this research the generational approach acts as an umbrella to include a life-course perspective, as per the discussion below, because while age incorporates a language of power it is an inevitable part of growing up, learning and developing, including

in the space of activism and agency. I argue that young climate activists have developed a generational mindset where they are subject to unique circumstances where the future of the entire planet is at risk. These challenges have not yet been encountered by previous generations, where the wellbeing of the human species is threatened due to the current climate crisis. Young people also have access and means to communication and networking in unprecedented ways which ties them together as a new and unique global generation.

2.4 Sociological Understandings of Young People's Activism

This section of the chapter presents a brief review of key literature focused on young people's activism. I begin by reviewing some studies of young people's political engagement and exercise of agency in general terms, throughout all stages in their life-course. Next, I briefly review sociological research on young people that adopts a Bourdieusian framework as a key means of accounting for young people's agency. Finally, I consider the research on young people participating in climate activism specifically, to contextualise this research project on young climate activists in Perth, WA.

2.4.1 Political Engagement throughout the Life Course

From a very early age, young people learn that their actions can influence their circumstances and outcomes. In their play and interactions with peers already in pre-schooling settings, they begin negotiations, protests, and role-delegation. They negotiate regarding the distribution of resources, such as play equipment, food, or the attention of another. They protest against perceived unfairness, and critique each other's performance and roles. In this early interactive play, children are enacting alternative scenarios as they aim to better their status and well-being within the group (Rosen, 2017). Although these interactions or altercations challenge societal norms already in the early years, Rosen (2017) finds that child-play lacks the *intent* to be political and that therefore it is a stretch to class it as activism. Nonetheless, children's behaviour in play demonstrates conscientisation in action

(see Chapter Five). In particular, in child-play they are already developing understandings of, and their ability to manipulate, political matters, such as equality, status and gender issues.

Being taken seriously is a challenge facing many young activists beyond play environments and the family home. To illustrate this point, I briefly discuss two relevant studies: One, is about Leah, a nine-year-old child activist in Simon's (2010) study, and two, relates to young boys in a juvenile detention centre in Myers' (2019) study.

Leah is an example of a child whose engagement in political issues *was* taken seriously and she was able to successfully achieve her goals. In her research at a summer camp, Simon (2010) initially targeted children aged ten to twelve years regarding their preadolescent perception of their world, and this excluded Leah on the basis of her age. Leah identified her exclusion from the focussed literary art group purposed for Simon's (2010) research and demonstrated an understanding beyond surface-level, conceptualising inequality. At nine years of age, she proceeded to rally adult support to enact the policy changes required to promote equality. Through her conscientisation regarding the issues surrounding her exclusion, Leah is able to rally support through the social capital of her supportive parents and enact real change of her circumstance.

Not all children have a supportive adult network surrounding them, with some having little or no support to draw upon. Such was the case for the boys who were held in deplorable conditions during the 1920s and '30s in St John Boys Industrial Home in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. The home was a juvenile detention facility, housing a mixture of boys including some who had committed no crime, but rather were sentenced as a result of poverty, carer neglect and homelessness (Myers, 2019). In 1929, the Industrial Home became subject to repeated coordinated riots by the boys in protest of the conditions they were experiencing, such as extreme filth, inoperable facilities as well as a "culture of sexual experimentation" (Myers, 2019, p. 19). As young people held in detention with little or no resources to mobilise, they were unable to affect change during their personal experience of staying in the home. However, their activism formed part of mounting pressure which eventually instigated an extensive reform of the system of children's institutions (Myers, 2019).

These two studies demonstrate the range of outcomes and support that are possible when young people seek to make change. The differences are access to support networks,

being taken seriously, and as per Bourdieu's concepts (see Chapter Four), the difference relating to their capital and the field they are in.

Further, even in circumstances when young people are free to network with adults to facilitate their activism, a common theme is that, even with the most well-meaning adults, young peoples' voices are either silenced, not heard, or permitted only with the oversight of the adults. In their study of Norwegian school children's bullying complaints, S. Clark (2017) describes adult dominance over young voices as being a voice-over effect. While young people are publicly given the right to speak this does not necessarily mean that they are heard. For example, investigations into some of the bullying complaints failed to consider the individual circumstances of each complaint but were dealt with by means of a generic template response (S. Clark, 2017). Lundy (2007) draws on multiple research projects where young people were interviewed about their experience of political participation. While many of the young people did not use the term 'tokenism', their comments demonstrate a clear feeling that their participation was an insincere performance by the adults. Adult narrators dominate public forums, effectively silencing the young people's voices (S. Clark, 2017; Lundy, 2018). Adults may be concerned about young people's perceived lack of capacity and hesitant to give children more control and therefore, while young people's voices are not silenced, they are also not heard (S. Clark, 2017; Lundy, 2007). In this way, listening without hearing cannot produce an experience of genuine participation but, rather, is a form of tokenism.

Young people undergo a vast amount of socialisation, development and growth and this occurs not only from a training perspective, but also from a personal and self-awareness perspective. Identity formation occurs throughout the human life-span but is an especially significant part of youth development (Renström et al., 2020). They are balancing a growing need for independence and autonomy with an inherent desire for connection, belonging and acceptance (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Renström et al., 2020). In fact, Renström et al. (2020) find that a young person's need for belonging is a predictor for participation in activism. Concepts of self-esteem, establishing a place or belonging in society and the self-assurance to behave true to oneself are fundamental notions of identity formation (Russell et al., 2009). As younger children interact on the playground asserting their status, so do older children and youth engage in activities for the means of establishing their position in society (Farini, 2019; Marzana et al., 2018; Rosen, 2017).

Activism is closely linked to these perspectives that young people's participation aids in the development of their identities, building relationships and networks, as well as establishing their sense of belonging and place within their communities (Collin, 2008; Vromen & Collin, 2010). Through their actions, youth are observed to act not only from personal concern, but out of concern for the wider domain of community, societal, global and even planetary good. These actions occur in a variety of settings and contexts.

School-aged young people may have opportunity to engage in activism regarding wider societal issues in a structured education context in school curriculum based social-justice program. Students from school years K-7 were involved in such a program in Torres-Harding et al's (2018) study, which found that school-based activism can promote civic engagement and empowerment. The students chose social justice issues that interested them, including domestic violence, homelessness and issues of food nutrition and health. In this context of deliberate conscientisation, the young people were able to identify and articulate social issues while reflecting on differing perspectives, goals and plans of action (Torres-Harding et al., 2018). Global citizenship education raises the awareness in young people of global issues, such as climate change, and increases their concern yet Maire (2023) finds that limited research to-date has been conducted in how this translates into practice and action. In addition, Maire (2023) suggests that out-of-school socialisation provides increased opportunity for determining the links between civic knowledge to the resultant actions. Likewise, MacDonald et al. (2023) argue that young people express frustration at limited inclusion in real life situations of active participation, such as, in bushfire recovery which is an opportunity to display their planetary concern with empowered action. Oliver et al. (2006) similarly find that real opportunities for involvement, and the resources and support to engage, assists in developing resilience in young people that further enables them to deal with current global concerns.

Similar results were found in a study of two public schools in the United States which operate with a distinct commitment to social justice (Kraft, 2007). Students in these schools were encouraged to be agents of change in the world and researched a wide range of self-chosen topics including gun violence, poverty, drug abuse and the Iraq war. Through this social justice learning the students developed a strong sense of hope, belief and social conscience (Kraft, 2007). While the young people in these studies are working mostly outside of their own personal conditions and focussing on broader issues of social justice, this is

likely to be because their activism is part of a structured program directed by adults and facilitated by the system of education.

An example of young activists networking beyond a structured program can be found in Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra's (2020) study of young people working towards stopping child marriages in Bangladesh. Interviews with the activists, who were between the ages of 13-17 years, revealed that these young people worked closely with their networks in order to achieve their desired outcomes. When a student was noticed missing from school, the activists reported to The Child Forum, supported by World Vision Bangladesh and focussed on children's rights and stopping child marriage. Members of The Child Forum then involved law enforcement officers and, together with the young activists, they directly approached the family involved to stop the marriage from proceeding. In this particular case study, young people are working on issues of wider concern of their communities, yet it is also a direct issue of self-protection as the activists are part of those communities and are therefore also at risk of experiencing the same breach of their rights. Without the strong ties with supportive organisations and law enforcement, it is unlikely these young people would have seen any success in their efforts to stop child marriages (Tisdall & Cuevas-Parra, 2020).

Shaping the future of one's community for the benefit of all is also motivation for youth activism against brand-scapes in Hong Kong (Lam-Knott, 2020). Observing an increasing proliferation of shopping malls across Hong Kong, youth activists organised to encourage and promote independent small brand businesses and practises to minimise consumerism (Lam-Knott, 2020). While they were largely inefficient due to the overwhelming influence of developers and government, small successes were achieved such as Do-it-yourself (DIY) movements and public support for local produce. Similarly, Carroll et al. (2019) find that young people make a valuable contribution toward shaping the urban environment. However, with the public sphere being dominated by adult processes, true meaningful participation in these perceived adult matters remains limited (Carroll et al., 2019). The Bolotnaya Movement in Russia and the Maiden Movement in the Ukraine (radical political anti-government protests) are both borne out of the activists' lived experience. Yet when they are protesting for change, they are acting beyond the desire to improve their personal lives, but is about collective action that promotes freedom and shapes the political and social environment for the wider community and their country (Erpyleva, 2018).

Migrant youth experience heightened challenges in establishing a sense of belonging to their community, and they are the subject of numerous studies as their position in society presents particular challenges to establishing their identity and sense of belonging. In the context of Australia, MacDonald (2017) argues that young refugees have a particularly challenging time resettling due to media attention that adds to negative stereotyping and discrimination. School activism presents a context for young migrants to develop social capital as it provides opportunity for constructing identities and developing networks (Farini, 2019). In Farini's (2019) study of migrant youth in Italy, school activism enables young people to build relationships with their peers in the dialogues relating to political participation. African immigrant youth in Italy are aided by activism in their social integration. This is because their activism provides an opportunity to adapt to the local context and also creates a space for the active expression of citizenship (Marzana et al., 2018). Motivation for involvement in activism relates to value, community concern and other personal and social enhancements as well as the desire to build bridges with community of origin and the host country (Marzana et al., 2018).

Othering can be particularly problematic to marginalised people or those in minority groups. For instance, Australian LGBTQA+ young people are vulnerable to conversion attempts, or educational messaging, even in case where these practices are banned (Jones et al., 2022). Their experience of socialisation and developing their identities is dramatically influenced by the direct and indirect attempts to coerce them into aligning with cisgender heteronormative ideals (Jones et.al., 2022). Problematic othering also effects Muslim youth who experience disrespect on the basis of their religion and the perceived connections this has to increasing terrorism concerns (Pilkington & Acik, 2019). When interviewing young Muslim activists in the United Kingdom, Pilkington and Acik (2019) demonstrate that their motivation for activism extends beyond building networks and peer connection, but is instigated by a desire to be recognised as trustworthy and safe citizens. Global politics has caused many Muslim people and their communities to be construed as suspects and misrecognition is harmful and causes inequality and injustice. They operate from a marginalised position due to their immigrant status and religion, especially in the post 9/11 era and as a result of the 'war on terror' which sees Muslim communities as the target of regulation, policy design and suspicion (Pilkington & Acik, 2019). Pilkington and Acik

(2019) state that this misrecognition as suspects is the impetus for social activism in Muslim youth in order to be perceived in a favourable light within their communities.

Conversely, Ballah (2017) finds that Liberian youth participated in activism despite their actions being viewed unfavourably and intolerable to the government and community. Their protests related to child-rearing practices which encountered two-fold domination over young people; firstly, from their Indigenous cultural age-perspectives and secondly, through the introduction of colonial Christianity (Ballah, 2017). Cultural and religious expectations strongly emphasise the domination of adults, and youth are instructed by the government to focus on their schooling and not engage in politics in any way. While young people's protests for democratisation were non-violent, the state's response was often brutal, violent and repressive, effectively oppressing and marginalising the youth who were forced to use covert methods as protest (Ballah, 2017). Although Liberia and Australia have differing political and social contexts, there are parallels in the oppression of young people by government, media and community in both locations. In response to recent school strikes to demand action against climate change, Australian school students were labelled as 'trouble-makers' and 'hooligans' and instruction by the government was clear, that 'schools are not for politics' and school students are to 'focus on learning, not activism' (Hewett, 2018; Alexander et al., 2021). This echoes the words of a participant in Ballah's (2017) study, who said, "we were constantly told to focus on school work and to leave politics alone" (p. 369).

Despite facing such criticisms and attempts to silence their voices, young people continue to organise themselves politically. Alternative forms of political participation are often sought as young people reject conventional democratic processes and question existing structures within society (Silva & de Castro, 2014). In their study of Brazilian youth activism against an authoritarian regime established via a colonial past of native servitude, Silva and de Castro (2104) find that doing politics in the context of conflict can also be a youthful experimentation with creativity, freedom and autonomy. Likewise, Spellings et al., (2012) find that Palestinian youth, who are politically active in an active conflict zone, are not passive recipients of the conflict and political unrest that they experience but enact deliberate commitment to insert themselves into the political and social agendas.

The same can be said for today's young people who act with deliberate politically intent to influence policy and practice on a global scale. Young people have responded to

recent events and circumstances of environmental devastation and social injustice by engaging political and entering the political arena. As a result, their actions have become the subject of much political and social debate. It is also a topic that holds the attention of researchers and academics.

2.4.2 Bourdieu & Young People

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are some theoretical tensions with regards to recognising the agency of young people, especially children. One theoretical perspective that is commonly utilised by sociologists of youth that does consider agency is Bourdieu's theory of practice, and specifically his concepts of habitus and capital. Bourdieu's theory of practice bridges the sociological structure and agency divide by providing the concept of habitus as an understanding of the "generative mechanism of structured social action" (Nash, 2003, p. 191). Habitus provides a useful middle-ground approach between life-course and/or generational approaches in the sociology of youth in order to challenge the false binary of structure and agency (Furlong et al., 2011). Habitus is malleable. It is both structured and structuring, and influential but not deterministic. Bessant et al. (2020) contest that navigating the middle-ground using Bourdieu is not a simple exercise but requires a considered and deliberate acknowledgment of Bourdieu as a relational theorist. As a way of understanding people's actions as being both historically and structurally significant, as well as individualised and nuanced, Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a solid basis, upon which his lesser-known concepts can build.

Threadgold (2020a; 2023) argues that using Bourdieu is particularly useful with regards to understanding the sociology of youth. He advocates for moving beyond Bourdieu's theory of practice and the three main concepts within, namely, habitus, capital and field, and ensuring a more complete use of Bourdieusian perspectives which also include his lesser-known concepts (Threadgold, 2020a; 2023). In analysing punk scenes, Sharp and Threadgold (2020) utilise Bourdieu's concept of illusio, being the stakes and rewards within a field, and provide a gendered analysis of symbolic violence. They find that gendered inequality is reproduced in punk scenes, and results in sub-cultures of resistance within punk communities

(Sharp & Threadgold, 2020). In addition, Threadgold (2018) extends Bourdieu's illusio beyond the creative industries and into career aspirations and life decision-making, finding that some young people provide hope for their futures by choosing ethical lifestyles, over and above, material reward. Lohmeyer (2021) considers the nature of Bourdieu's symbolic violence in young people's non-violent direct actions and how it appears when their voices are traditionally overlooked.

Given the popularity of Bourdieu's theories to the sociology of young people, I begin my analysis in Chapter Four by considering the relevance of his key concepts for understanding my research on young climate activists in Perth, WA.

2.4.3 Young Climate Activists Today

While many of the issues targeted by young people in the section above are directly relevant to their generation, a key issue for Generation Z is climate change. Young people are precariously placed in the world, in that decisions for the future are made today. Yet they are not the powerholders or decision-makers in society. Many young people feel that they are facing an uncertain future as they bear the brunt of changing global weather systems (Cocco-Klein & Mauger, 2018). Their education relating to climate science links human activity to environmental devastation and climate change, and this knowledge has led them to protest on a global scale. On the other hand, young people are seen to be removed from politics as they demonstrate disinterest in engaging in politics according to traditional methods and pathways. In considering young people's climate activism, I aim to address this seeming contradiction of positions.

Understandings of political participation have moved beyond the binary of political or non-political and formal or informal. Bowman (2019) discusses the importance of challenging binary approaches and argues that young people are political agents while their participation occurs in hybrid, shifting and complex ways. Similarly, Hilder and Collin (2022) examine the role of social movement organisations in operating from the stance of young people's political legitimacy which builds towards a sustained and growing campaign. Traditionally politics is a place of discussion and democracy, where formally elected

institutions determine the policy and practice of society. While young people are excluded from these spaces, their concerns regarding political issues remain, in the face of narratives which frequently seek to misrepresent their voices and intents (Alexander et al., 2021; Mayes & Hartup, 2022). They may be disenchanted with traditional political systems but continue to be interested and invested in the political issues and also strive to be heard and achieve recognition in the political space (Harris et al., 2010). Political participation, therefore, need incorporate activities beyond the formal electoral systems. Vromen (2003) provides the useful definition that participation includes any "acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society that we want to live in" (pp. 82-83). Young people are engaged in a new way of doing things.

In considering the current climate activism of young people, Mayes and Holdsworth (2020) find that school-aged students have quite literally walked out of schooling (and formal politics). Formal and institutionalised politics fails to address their current concerns, particularly those of young people who hold present concerns for their futures (Mayes & Holdsworth, 2020). Vromen's (2003) study, which was conducted prior to the surge of youth activism relating to environmental concerns, found that women are more likely to participate than men, and that higher levels of education are linked to increased political participation. Yet, all young voices are not equal. Within school settings, Finneran et al. (2023) find that societal inequalities are replicated within the expression of students' voices. Knowledge of students' right to express voice does not translate into the experience of all students having opportunity to take part in that right, and students benefitted from examining their own privilege and, at times, stepping aside to allow marginalised voices to be at the forefront (Finneran et al., 2023). In addition, political disengagement occurs in formal settings with individualised and collective forms of participation are appealing to young people (Vromen, 2003). This is echoed by Phelps (2012) in their anti-apathy model of participation, who found that young people are gravitating to new forms of participation, including humour (Mayes & Center, 2023) and embodied inspiration as a tool for 'artivism' (Martins & Campos, 2023), or using placards and artefacts as visual political communications (Catanzaro & Collin, 2023). Current participation by young people is extra-parliamentary, non-hierarchical and self-actualising (Henn et al., 2018). Being able to participate political in this new way, beyond traditional structures, has been linked to individualisation and post-materialism.

Individualisation refers to people's political choices which relate to issues that have meaning for them, and it results in the rejection of institutional or formal politics for alternative means of participating. It allows people to avoid traditional hierarchies and hierarchical systems to opt for looser avenues of politics. This also leads to an anti-apathy model (Henn et al., 2018; Phelps, 2012). The anti-apathy model challenges notions that young people are disengaged with politics, and demonstrates that they are gravitating to the new way of doing politics. By being individualistic, that is focussing on issues and means that are valuable to themselves, young people are not apathetic but reject the traditional methods of political measurement. Individualism can firstly be linked to Qvortrup's (1989) definition of childhood, how he states that childhood is a unique and personal experience to each person. It also has ties to DIO politics (see Chapter Six), where Pickard (2019) clearly states that the collective nature of young people's activism does not mean that they are alone. Individual, but not isolated.

The position of post-materialism was discussed by Ronald Inglehart in the 1970s (Inglehart, 1971). Broadly speaking, it refers to a shift in attitudes where one's priority may develop from being survival-based or needs-based to a desire for self-expression. If a person or community does not have their basic needs met, they may be unlikely to be concerned with how their needs are provided for, but after a period of sustained provision or supply, then choices become open to them where they may wish to choose more carefully or ethically. Once reaching the need for self-expression, then involvement in social movement or everyday politics becomes possible. Cognitive mobilisation is crucial to this process as it involves a growth in awareness and a focus beyond immediate survival but rather on one's capacity to influence or transform their circumstances. This can be connected to Freire's conscientisation (see Chapter Five) as cognitive mobilisation includes the development of skills which are needed to be able to take on the politics in society. It relates to a shift in thinking, and a mental focus which starts to see outwards to change and influence, rather than inward for personal existence or survival. Higher levels of education attainment as Pickard (2019) states are a contributing factor to DIO politics, also has an impact in shifting one's awareness. But the learning does not always take place in traditional educational institutions, where society has structured young people's socialisation (Leonard, 2015). Learning also takes place in lived experience and participation in social movements (Cox & Flesher-Fominaya, 2009).

2.5 Summary

Young people today are particularly invested in politics despite archaic, and still popular, claims that they are apathetic or a-political, or in need of protection from stressful adult politics. In this chapter I have outlined the two major perspectives adopted by sociologists of young people, namely the life-course approach and the generational approach. I have selected to conduct this study primarily using the generational approach as this generation of young people are politically freeing themselves from age-based boundaries and engaging in politics on issues that directly impact their futures. That being said, the life course approach also contributes to understandings of young people's experiences and therefore cannot be overlooked. Bourdieu's habitus acts as a useful bridge across the middle between these approaches. As young people develop, their knowledge and capacity increases. Their access to resources and opportunities simultaneous becomes greater and therefore they are able to engage at different levels with different stages of development, although this varies with the individualised experience of each child across the world.

I reviewed literature relating to young people's involvement in issues of a political nature. In understanding people's capacity to act politically, it makes some sense to consider this in terms of age as a framework for action. While younger children may have limited capacity to participate in political discussions, they nonetheless have agency, and Bourdieu's theories are a useful framework for understanding the way they enact this agency.

When considering the face of climate change and the actions being taken towards it, it is young people as a cohort, as a generation, who are impacted. As a generation of young people, they are facing the global crisis of climate change, brought on by generations before who are still in power to continue the crisis or act to reverse the damage. This is a generational experience.

People, powerholders, the media, society in general, academics, indeed *adults* have so much to say regarding young people and their position in society and their political actions. This project aims to examine how young people *themselves* see their own activism and political participation. Beyond what adults say, think and believe, how do young activists in Perth WA respond to the global climate crisis? How is the experience age-based political

exclusion for them? How can sociological perspectives on youth and activism theory build understanding of that response and exclusion? And how do young activists navigate their status as future beings and insert themselves into the present? In the chapters that follow, I outline my approach to exploring these questions with young people directly, and my findings from this research.

INTERLUDE: RESEARCHER REFLECTION ONE

AT MY DESK

FEBRUARY 2022

Is it too much?

I discovered the lure of post-qualitative inquiry after I had already progressed to the (almost) half-way mark of my PhD journey, that is, if this educational pathway can ever be marked as a linear progression of time. I was excited to read about abandoning method, refusing method, and conducting an 'inquiry' rather than following a prescriptive methodology. Post-qualitative inquiry aims to step outside of the categories and concepts which are normalised in qualitative research methods (St. Pierre, 2021a; 2021b). In doing so, it strives to bravely forge a new path of learning and understanding, one which does not systematically follow a chosen method in order to travel from a starting point to a conclusion, but one which follows data as it purposefully meanders where the inquiry leads.

How was I to do this? How could I get on board? My study had already been through the process of ethics, I've defined what I am going to do, how I will do it, and with who. I had already conducted some ethnographic observation and completed several interviews. But listening, learning, reading, writing and then listening, learning, reading all over again, sounded relevant, appropriate, tempting, and even somewhat delightful. I began to imagine ways I could reconfigure my study to fit into a post-qualitative approach. This needed to be determined sooner rather than later because "a study that begins as a qualitative study cannot be made post-qualitative after the fact" (St-Pierre, 2021a, p. 5).

In particular I was drawn to the prospect of this inquiry being "too much", "too way out there" and even "too strange" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 607; 2021a, p. 7). It seems fitting considering today's young people are seen as doing *too much* politics. In response to the School Strikes for Climate in 2018, then Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated, "What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools" (in Lock, 2018). His comment is evidence of the social structures which are designed to relegate young people to a place where they are "socially out of play" and conducting "exercises with blank ammunition" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 96). Bourdieu

(1993) elaborates by saying that educational systems separate young people from the world where they are practicing skills that will enable them to fill the position of adults when the process is complete. In this way, when young people reject their position for a day, remove themselves from their educational settings and their 'blank ammunition' in order to fire live political rounds in the real world, they are stepping outside of the boundaries of power established for them. They are 'doing it themselves' as in DIO politics (see Chapter Six), and thereby, doing *too much*.

In attempting to gain ethics approval for this project, I planned to speak with young activists who were high-school age students, and I hoped to do so without seeking parental consent. While I will discuss this in greater detail in the 'ethics' section (see Chapter Three), here I can briefly explain my justification as being due to their acts of activism where they are publicly asking for their voices to be considered. The act of doing so implies consent, or rather implies a request to speak and to be heard. And this request is instigated by the young people, not myself as researcher. Collectively, young people want to be heard and to be taken into consideration, and seriously.

Yet, in asking for this, my ethics application was also *too much*. Too much and too risky to be genuinely considered because strict (and necessary) guidelines have been forged over time. These guidelines rightfully aim to protect young people from potential risk and harm, and have determined that young people are not capable of understanding informed consent sufficiently to be able to provide that consent with the guidance of a person in authority, their parent/guardian (see the 'ethics' section in Chapter Three). Post-qualitative research provides opportunity for considering these processes differently, including the process of ethics: "post-qualitative research lends itself to a new form of ethics" (Le-grange, 2018).

In considering standard ethical practice differently, I am led to consider a post-qualitative position regarding what my data is constituted of and from where it is derived. My world is my research. My children would very much like to be a part of my research, but good research practice denies them that opportunity, and for good reason. Yet, I cannot ignore that my children are some of the biggest influences in my life. How do I avoid learning from them? How do I separate them from my inquiry? As we live, we speak, we interact, we experience and share; together. Inevitably, the personal core of my knowledge is shaped by them, as young people, and especially as young activists. My field of research is my world, my life, real life. St. Pierre (2018)

discusses this quandary when interviewing in her hometown. Which conversations, interactions and observations are *data*? What is permissible? She writes:

> Could I use that data and data from all the other unapproved conversations I had during fieldwork to write with? My hometown was officially the *field* of my study, the natural setting. … *When* was the field? During fieldwork, I was, indeed, in the past–present–future—time was untimely. … I had 35 years of field notes and interviews to work with, and, as I wrote, I strayed far from "official" data, overwhelmed with a lifetime of the real. (2018, p. 606)

In this way, post-qualitative research blurs the boundaries of what is official practice and what constitutes reality. To be clear, at no time did I operate outside of the research guidelines and the ethical conditions agreed upon. However, my inquiry method involved listening, reading and writing and I acknowledge that some of that occurred without a prescribed process. While the interviews were analysed using more traditional, interpretive approaches, these interludes are a result of writing as a process of inquiry. After interacting at activism events, I was able to process the information through writing the story, re-writing the memory, and inquiring as the words formed sentences on the page. In addition, my children are not included in my study, yet they are also not outside of it. I was embedded in the field prior to the commencement of this project, and drawing lines around what is research and what is life proves a difficult task. I follow activists on social media, and some of these were later participants in my interviews. While the social media posts and 'likes' are not counted as data, it would be remiss to assume I am able to completely remove them from having any relation to the project. Once seen, once interacted with, these unofficial micro-interactions inform my mindset, my thought process and how I approach the research in the official capacity.

Post-qualitative inquiry has a lot to offer a study such as this one, and I look forward to the potential of utilising this method in the future, especially as a researcher informed by queer theory (see Chapter Three). Queer theory also aims to question knowledge and restructure frames and thoughts about how knowledge is constructed and designed. Le-grange (2018) speaks of the need for critically applied post-qualitative inquiry to constantly develop because "the human is embedded in/connected to a complex web of life; all modes of life are always in-becoming/unfolding" (p. 9). Qvortrup uses similar language when discussing problematic traditional perspectives of young people (see Chapter Two). He states that these perspectives render young people to be human "becomings rather than beings" (2009a, p. 643). In fact, they

are "not real members of society; they belong to a 'not yet' category" (Qvortrup, 1989, p. 86). Activism and political participation, for young people, is therefore, *too much* for adults.

In similar fashion to how life *unfolds* and young people *become*, this thesis, as an inquiry, progresses and grows as a process of development. The journey of learning is never neat and methodical. It progresses with ups and down, has no concrete starting point and most definitely is never complete. This inquiry follows a similar track, one which has already begun.

The research project examines structures critically, and it aims to look at things differently, and to take on perspectives which may seem too much. The chosen structured pathway will be flexible and revolving in order to avoid a linear or shallow conclusion. Data, constructed by young people's voices and experiences, will shape the inquiry through an open and repeated cycle of reading, writing and listening. It may, and indeed most likely will, incorporate 'data' generated within the home, from outside experiences, gathered in unofficial conversations and unplanned experiences. The very process of learning and inquiry will be guided by the data this is harnessed from the past and the present, and will continue into the future.

3 Chapter Three: “Nobody's listening, because we’re young” - Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide details of the methodology underpinning the research project’s design, as well as the process of implementation and the subsequent analysis and output.

In the first instance, I describe my standpoint as a researcher using feminist and queer theories to shape and guide my worldview. This discussion then leads into my project design in part one. I have designed the project to be a qualitative interpretive ethnographic research project. Beyond these broad frameworks, I specifically intend to be participant/child/young people-centred and consistently reflexive. The first part of this chapter aims to describe each of these key aspects in greater detail.

In the second part of the chapter, I provide specific information relating to the methods employed to address the research questions. This discussion includes ethical considerations and matters of informed consent, details relating to participants and their recruitment, and the data generation methods of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation.

Part three relates to the process of analysis and results. In particular, I outline how the transcribed interviews have been coded thematically in a manual process to enhance the possibility of gaining a deep understanding of the data. This data is analysed in light of the theoretical frameworks that have been outlined in Chapter Two. Lastly, I discuss how this study aims to generate feedback to the participants, the academic knowledge relating to young people and activism as well as potentially informing debates in the wider community.

3.1 Researcher Standpoint

In Chapter One, I described my upbringing in a fundamentalist religious migrant household. While it is easy to live in regret for having grown up in such a deeply strict, conservative and judgemental environment, I have, instead, formed convictions and found purpose surrounding what I consider to be the opposite values. Where there was judgement, I choose acceptance, and where there is expectation of blind obedience, I prefer deep thinking and consideration. From a researcher perspective, this leads me to sit comfortably in the areas of feminist and queer theory.

Feminist theory and queer theory, whilst not the theoretical frameworks which I have engaged as analytical tools in this thesis, have critically shaped my thinking throughout. They inform the research questions, as well as the design, implementation and output. Both are not theories that I have simply just adopted for the purpose of conducting this project, but rather, they are theories which define my, the researcher's, world-view. They are more than a lens, but a living breathing paradigm and provide a framework to guide my reflexivity that is a crucial part of any research project.

3.1.1 Feminist Perspective

Feminist theory provides a useful lens to looking at the categories in society which are laden with power and to be able negotiate a path to minimise the power relations and empower those voices which are frequently ignored.

It used to be believed and arguably still is to a large degree, that women 'naturally' were different to men, in the same way that children are different from adults; namely, in need of protection, nurturing and a place to be free from the pressures of society and politics. This binary underpins many of the relationships that extend to others such as children, slaves (Kulynych, 2015), and Indigenous peoples (Nakata, 2015). Often children are treated as together with women in the category of 'women and children'; they are seen together as relating to the private or personal realm of the home.

For decades, feminist approaches have been used to think about how children are positioned in society. As a frequently combined category, 'women and children', children's delicacy and need for sheltering is strikingly similar to historic (and arguably, current) attitudes towards women in society. Burman and Stacey (2010) speak of malestream theoretical trends and practices that equates women's interests with those of children. Women are infantilised and children and feminised, both with a goal of maintaining a state of dependency (Burman & Stacey, 2010). Similarly, Castaneda (2001) finds that children are described with feminist figuration. Children lack a voice, are silenced or not heard, and are therefore a marginalised group (Mayall, 2000). While they are positioned as a-political, the very act of positioning them as such, is a political act (Mayall, 2000). Through the lens of feminist understandings when considering the position of children, it can be seen that individuals themselves could have internalised the disempowering categories, and their motivation may even stem from nurturing and protectionist aims. Regardless of motive, the power embedded in those perspective continues to exclude children in a similar way that women are marginalised (Baird, 2008).

The above marginalisation and disempowerment relegate children to the 'private' realm, within the home or outside the home when in approved structures. Children in public are cautiously tolerated but not freely welcomed (Cahill, 1990). While to some this may seem like an extreme perspective to think, for example in Australian society, that young people are not welcome in public, it is worthy of consideration. When young people meet in a shopping centre, the word 'loitering' is often used. In public libraries, young people without supervision are frowned upon and watched keenly by staff. Young people walking the streets chatting and laughing together, might be suspiciously observed through shutters to see what they are conspiring to do, with little or no consideration that they may just be passing by.

Their presence is perceived to be potentially troublesome and therefore they are not permitted to freely and fully engage in society (Cahill, 1990). Younger children are treated in an endearing manner with a perspective of incompetence regarding their actions, while the presence of adolescents in society is frequently seen as a threat to public order. Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of 'non-person' treatment applies to young people in these cases as they are incomplete and not full citizens (Cahill, 1990). Young people are a threat to adult society, frequently defined in terms of social problems, and largely it is preferred that they remain in the private realm of family (Thorne, 1987). Through these lenses of power,

understandings of children are filtered through adult's perspectives which enhances the power of adults over young people. This is partly inherent due to greater physical capacity, but is magnified by economic, social and cultural privilege (Thorne, 1987).

Similarly, I use a foundation of queer theory in my positionality, both as an individual and as a researcher. It allows me to question the existence of the societal categories in the first place.

3.1.2 Queer Theory

Queer theory has its origins in studies of sexuality and gender, in particular with the work of Judith Butler. Butler (1988) examines the social construction of the categories relating to sexuality and gender and seeks to remove the dichotomy where one has to fit in one category or another. The word 'queer' itself means to be different or separate from the usual or what is considered to be the norm. As such, there is a lot of power inherent in the binaries of established categories. While queer theory acknowledges the existence of the categories and binaries, it challenges their rigidity and necessity. In this way, as part of my researcher position, queer theory lends itself to be used beyond gender and sexuality studies and into other areas.

Similarly to the categorisations that order society according to gender and sexuality, as previously stated, there are also strict categories or labels applied to young people and their position in society. Queer theory critically examines the divisions in society where socially constructed categories place individuals in binaries or dichotomies (Butler, 1988; Warner, 2004). It disrupts normalised ideas and seeks to find deeper meaning beyond.

The word 'queer' itself refers to not fitting within the norms, being or behaving differently than what is expected. Queer theory has its foundations in fluid tendencies, resisting rigid characterisation, and functions to disrupt normalised ideas. As Koschoreck et al. (2010) state: "queer's ability to destabilize long-held definitions and call into question the very act of defining something or someone definitively" (p. 11). Queer theory lends itself to qualitive research, which similarly seeks to look beyond what is immediately visible or known, and explores the deep meanings that can be located in the analysis of an experience

or event (Wozolek, 2019). In being fluid, queer theory does not attempt to dissolve categories as if they do not exist, but rather it questions why society so rigidly adhere to the categories' boundaries (Warner, 2004). So how can queer theory act as a guiding framework for research design relating to young people's activism? I am drawn to Heckert's (2010) articulate framing of their journey of "becoming-queer" when social research traditionally involves a rigorous scholarship of "putting diverse thoughts into boxes and judging them" (p. 42). To use a queer standpoint therefore is a learning process beyond the ordinary, to quite literally, 'think outside the boxes' and perhaps throw away those 'boxes' altogether. Undoubtedly, young activists are operating in a society of 'boxes' and categories, but these need not be perpetuated in research. In fact, research has an opportunity and perhaps even a duty, to challenge and dismantle disempowering structures.

Browne and Nash (2020) state, "Queer research can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations" (p. 4). It is not limited to categories of sexual orientation but can provide opportunity for enquiry beyond dominant discourses, frequently Western, white, male, heterosexual and often Christian (Honeychurch, 1996). The lived experience of children and youth, particularly in a political context, is enmeshed with structure, labels and power.

Although neither feminist nor queer theories are a framework for my analysis, they both shape my world view as a researcher and therefore influence the design of this project and the manner of my interactions within it.

3.2 PART ONE: Design

3.2.1 Qualitative

This research consists of words, images and conversation, emotions and various forms of expression – all of which are qualitative material. My primary concern in designing this project was to ensure that the voices of the young activists consistently remain the focal

point. The goal is to portray young people's experiences, and their understandings of those experiences, in the specific context of climate activism in Perth, Western Australia. For this reason, I decided to use qualitative methods of data generation to allow for individuals to express the nuances of their experience and what this means for them. Adopting a qualitative methodology does not automatically guarantee the prioritisation of participant's voices, rather it lends itself towards the expression of lived experiences within the context of real and particular phenomena. It is possible to impose one's own comprehension and meaning upon the participants' voices even in qualitative work, and ongoing reflective care must be taken to avoid this. As Merriam (2009, p.5) states, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences". Using a qualitative design, which incorporates data of a narrative style, will highlight the participant's voices and enable the research focus to remain centred on the young activists.

Open-ended in nature, qualitative research lends itself to refrain from imposing a singular world-view over the entire project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It allows the subject to be viewed in the world and transforms that world into representations, such as notes, transcripts, or photographs, available for interpretation. The process of researching qualitatively begins with a paradigm and theoretical lenses to guide the inquiry into the research topic, and ascribes meaning to the individuals, group or social context that is being studied (Creswell, 2007). In this research project, I seek to do so by moving beyond reporting cause and effect, and beyond description alone, to embrace the contradictions and tensions that may arise in the observations and interpretations (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

These interpretations largely relate to the participants involved in the study and their experiences. They are a small group of people within a specific context, and it is, therefore, not possible to generalise the findings to other contexts or different groups of people (Shenton, 2004). As a researcher, without knowing the experiences and contexts informing people's voices from outside of this study, I am unable to assume my findings can add understanding to future projects. However, my research adds to the body of knowledge surrounding young people's activism in a manner which enhances the prospect of relevance beyond the study itself. Guba and Lincoln (1994) discuss how one cannot assume non-transferability of qualitative research for the reason that, although the researcher may not be in a position to apply their study beyond the scope, other researchers can retrospectively

apply the findings to their specific contexts. This is made possible if sufficient detail, description and contextual information is provided, so that the study can be replicated and/or applied in other settings. It is for this reason that I have provided ethnographic narratives in the form of Interludes, and why in the chapters that follow, I utilise lengthy quotes from interviews.

3.2.2 Interpretive and Ethnographic

As a sociological methodology, interpretivism seeks to understand *why* people do things in order to understand *what* they do and *how* meanings are attached to their experience (Marvasti, 2004). It is based in the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that there is no single reality in any given situation. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism, and Cresswell (2007) explains:

> In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences… These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of view… Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. (pp. 20-21)

In conducting an interpretive study, there is no assumption of a simply objective meaning, explanation or understanding to be found: "Meaning is not discovered but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 18). The meaning does not simply exist waiting to be discovered by myself, as researcher, or by participants as they speak about their experiences. Through analysis and producing a description below the surface level that meaning is constructed and interpreted (Geertz, 1973). This is why, throughout this thesis, I refer to data *generation* rather than collection.

By selecting an interpretive methodology for this research project, I acknowledge that constructing understandings of the phenomenon of young people's activism is a process. It requires an interaction of participants with their world, acting in society in the given context,

and then further interaction with myself, as researcher. Data in this study is not a set of words transcribed on paper for analysis, rather, data begins with the initial interactions at activism events. It begins to be constructed with the initial contact with participants through the recruitment and consent process, with the setting of interviews, and with the ongoing interactions for the cause. The process begins before the activism even occurs, because young people are already shaped and influenced by a progression of their own experiences and meanings which determine their world-views. As they participate in activism, further experiences are added, which are then discussed and experienced in tandem with their peers, perhaps in contrast to society's wishes, or with support from those near them, and providing a portion of meaning to be expressed in the study. I purposely use the phrase 'portion of meaning' here in order to acknowledge that meaning is never complete. It begins in the past, is located in the present, and continues to develop into the future.

As such, each voice in this study provides an experiential account from the present for analysis. The discussions with research participants will be generalised in such a manner as to provide space for their own analysis to be highlighted and to determine what their voices and words say about their meaning within society. It reaches beyond a descriptive tale and looks for deeper nuances below the surface level where, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) stated, the "thick description" can be found (p. 10). This allows the construction of a knowledge that challenges existing and traditional knowledge, provides new ways of thinking and incorporating previously excluding perspectives into societal thinking.

Deep listening and careful attention are also the foundation on which the ethnographic observations in this project are built. Thick description is obtained not only via the spoken word, but through non-verbal interactions, context, observation and sitting-in with the phenomena being studied. In this case, I was able to observe interactions at young people's activism events in order to focus on the interactions between peers, between young people and adults, and organisations, to uncover how society reacts at the time an event is occurring. In doing so, power structures were noted and critiqued. My observations record behaviours as they occur, are processed through writing as inquiry in the thesis interludes and add context to the study which is not possible to be obtained via the spoken word alone (Merriam, 2009). Activists, and indeed all people in our daily lives, often do not notice things that have become routine, perhaps mundane, or expected, whereas an observer can take note of these things and allow them to add meaning to the data (Merriam, 2009).

The goal of writing in the style of Geertz' (1973) "thick description" below the surface level in order to obtain meaning, can never be achieved in perfection (p. 10). Interpretivism denies the existence of a single observable truth and it is, therefore, not possible to provide a singularly correct and accurate interpretation of a social phenomenon. Each actor in a social situation, each participant in this research project, comes with their personalised perspectives, experiences and influences. In addition, in a research context, researchers bring their own world-views to the inquiry (Creswell, 2007). The goal is to conduct a broad discussion with participants so that they have ample opportunity to construct their own meaning while in the unnatural setting of a planned interview. This requires deep listening with open and careful attention, and careful consideration of power dynamics also within the researcher / participant relationship, in order to observe the meanings in what people say and do.

3.2.3 Participant-Centred

In maintaining a participant-centred focus, I conduct this research project from the perspective of young people being active agents within the context of their own experiences. The concept of participant-centred relates to a child-centred focus, or a youth- or adolescent-focus, but in being informed by queer theory I strive to avoid problematic labelling. In this case, the labelling is age-based, and I have elected to use the term 'participant-centred' to incorporate the young people included in this study. In order to centre young people's voices, I also examine dynamics of power that exist, my positionality as researcher, and the need for reflexivity. Guided by my personal and researcher standpoint founded on queer theory I interact with young people beyond the categories that society has placed them into.

Participant-centred research acknowledges young people in the present as complete human beings who are capable of experiencing their social reality according to their personal understanding (C. Clark, 2011). As I discussed in Chapter Two, dominant Western patriarchal perspectives see children as incomplete until they develop into adults and they are protected and excluded from matters deemed to be only for adult concern. By adopting a participant-centred focus, and informed by my researcher standpoint characterised by queer

and feminist theory, I have designed this project in a manner which creates opportunity for young people to communicate and disclose in a space with deliberate intent to minimise adult dominance. I follow Gibson's (2012) strategy for working with child participants in order to achieve this: "building trust, facilitating understanding and obtaining informed consent, encouraging thoughtful and deep responses and promoting enjoyment and creative responses" (p. 149).

Kutrovatz (2017) discusses the dilemma of power dynamics when interviewing children and states that, "the deconstruction of their marginal position and related power inequalities is the most central issue in research with children" (p. 70). In my study, the participants are 14-24 years and while some of them are 'children' they are not in the younger age brackets. A main concern with younger participants is that they may attempt to please the researcher, due to society's grooming which trains them from a young age to obey and comply with adults (Kutrovatz, 2017). My goal was to conduct my research in a way that empowered young people, rather than added to their marginalisation and disempowerment. Undoubtedly the setting of an interview is an artificial environment, as naturally the participant and I would be unlikely to engage in conversation together. I took this into account and conducted interviews in a place that the young person is comfortable to be in, and to provide them the opportunity to choose that location.

In writing these chapter, I am consistently aware of the extent of problematic language in this arena. While aiming to empower young people, words that are available include 'allow them', 'provide', 'give them' or 'create an opportunity for'. All these phrases inherently incorporate the sense of greater power being with me, the researcher, the adult. This is where reflexivity is so crucial. Power dynamics are so pervasive in society that even a research project that is designed and implemented with the most empowering, equalising and participant-focus, still fails to reach the mark. For this reason, it is essential that I remain connected with my standpoint that utilises queer and feminist theory to question and challenge arbitrary categories, barriers, and power dynamics. Although my goal is to consistently bring young people's voices to the centre, this is something that can be strived towards but never achieved perfectly. As researcher, I am present within the research. In Chapter One, I have described my background and interest in this topic, as being activist myself and a mother of young activists, and acknowledge how this influences my research. By using conversation-style interviews that are semi-structured, I use my position as an

equalising role, where I am not only a researcher, but a fellow activist with a genuine desire to learn from the participants.

This project draws on feminist theory and queer theory to inform my research practice and framework (see Chapter Two). The goal is to critique and challenge these power dynamics. Using feminist theory, I will endeavour to decrease exclusion by consistently including voices which are traditionally marginalised, in this case, the voice of young people. These frameworks will enable me to conduct this project by questioning the power involved and how it is experienced and navigated. Crotty (1998) writes:

> It is a contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and research that challenges . . . between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression . . . between a research that accepts the status quo and a research that seeks to bring about change. (p. 133)

3.3 PART TWO: Implementation

3.3.1 Ethics and Consent

In the Interlude: Researcher Reflection One, I referred to my initial attempt to apply for ethics approval to conduct this study without seeking consent from a responsible adult[8] prior to interviewing young people. I wish to clarify my motivation for this. Primarily the overarching reason is that I aimed to carry out this project from a standpoint which

[8] I use the term 'responsible adult' instead of parent, guardian or carer when I discuss the ethics relating to this project. Terms such as 'parent' or 'guardian' are used when discussing requirements in relevant ethical guidelines. I have decided to do so in order to avoid the assumption that everyone has a parent or carer, as this is a privileged perspective that not every person has available to them. The term does not imply that an adult is responsible while the young person is not, but refers to the adult person who is practically responsible for their daily lives.

acknowledges and assumes young people's competence and rationality. I aimed to move beyond discussions regarding their abilities to be effective and engaged citizens, but to work from the baseline that they *are* sufficiently capable and agentic political actors. Asking for consent from their responsible adult(s) has the potential to risk this foundation prior to the interview beginning, in a society where their maturity to speak on political issues is already largely questioned and frequently dismissed. Lohmeyer (2020) argues for an approach to youth research projects that decentralises the adult from ethics processes. Far from denying the need for a rigorous ethics process, I echo Lohmeyer's (2020) perspective which aims to respect and centralise the capacity and desire of young people to participate in research projects.

The participants in this study (aged 14-24 years) are self-nominated and recruited through activism networks. The nature of their political actions and comprehension of the issues they seek to address demonstrates a maturity and responsibility even for those below the age of 18 years. In addition, as per 4.2.9.(c) of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research ([National Statement], 2018), this research aims to benefit young people as a group by informing debates relating to their position in society. Young people have their own agendas and their own projects which Lohmeyer (2020) has called parallel projects. Their motivations and desire to participate in research has value in itself and provides a benefit to the young person, even if perhaps not in exactly the same way that the researcher may place value (Lohmeyer, 2020).

The National Statement (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018) provides authoritative guidelines for conducting ethical research, including research with children and adolescents. Chapter 2.2 within the National Statement discusses the requirement for consent, which refers to research participants making an informed choice regarding their participation. It states, "this requirement has the following conditions: consent should be a voluntary choice, and should be based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it" (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, p. 16). When specifically addressing ethical requirements for research involving children and young people, the National Statement adds the further requirement that consent must be obtained from the child or young person themselves, as well as a parent, guardian or primary care giver (section 4.2.7).

This stance outlined in the National Statement affords young people protection from potential risks and harm that may occur in their participation in research. Yet, this is a problematic cycle. The normalised protective stance towards young people is warranted and shaped by the inherent greater strength and greater access to resources that adults have. Protection and power are so intricately linked and difficult to disentangle. Within protection, comes an inherent power to shield, to place boundaries, and to avoid potential harm. And how does one in a position of power, provide protection and safety while simultaneously empowering and setting free?

The stipulated guidelines of the National Statement are very clear, necessary and valid. Yet, I experienced a quandary in regard to young people requiring a responsible adult to give consent for their participation in my study. The protection afforded to young people is required and valid because adults have the greater power which their dependants should benefit from, yet it is *because* of that greater power that young people require protection. In a society where young people are frequently silenced or not heard by adults, they also require permission from said adults in order to speak in the form of participation in the research study. It seems to be somewhat of a perpetual cycle where young people are attempting to speak and act freely and be heard seriously, while simultaneously requiring permission from the cohort they aim to speak and act freely to.

Returning to the guidelines in the National Statement, section 4.2.8 provides an opportunity for an ethics committee to provide ethics approval for a research project which only seeks consent from the young people, under certain circumstances. It states:

> An ethical review body may approve research to which only the young person consents if it is satisfied that he or she is mature enough to understand and consent, and not vulnerable through immaturity in ways that would warrant additional consent from a parent or guardian. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, p. 66)

In addition, when discussing whether or not young people have the capacity to fully understand and to provide informed consent, Chapter 4.2 of the National Statement acknowledges that young people develop maturity at different ages and capacities, and that this cannot be defined by age:

> It is not possible to attach fixed ages to each level – they vary from child to child. Moreover, a child or young person may at the one time be at different levels for

different research projects, depending on the kind and complexity of the research. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, p. 65)

The handbook, titled *Understanding consent in research involving children: The ethical issues* (Spriggs, 2010), sits alongside the National Statement as an Australian handbook for human research ethics committees and researchers. While the National Statement is the overarching guideline, the purpose of this handbook is not to be authoritative but to provide further understanding about dealing with ethical issues when researching with children. I draw particular attention to the frequently-asked-questions section to which Figures 3 and 4 relate. The message is very clear that children and young people can sometimes consent to research themselves, and that parental consent is not always required (Spriggs, 2010).

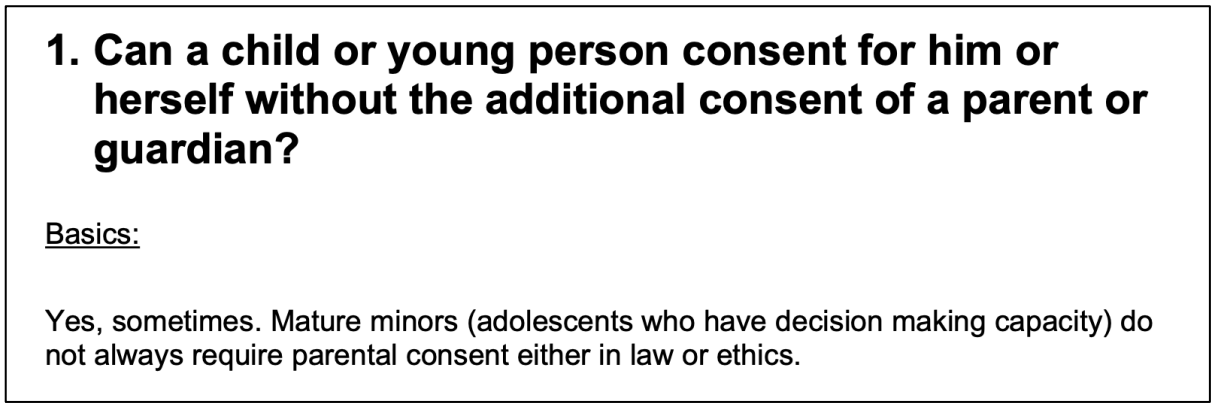

Figure 3 Screenshot image 1 - consent from minors

(Spriggs, 2010, p. 4)

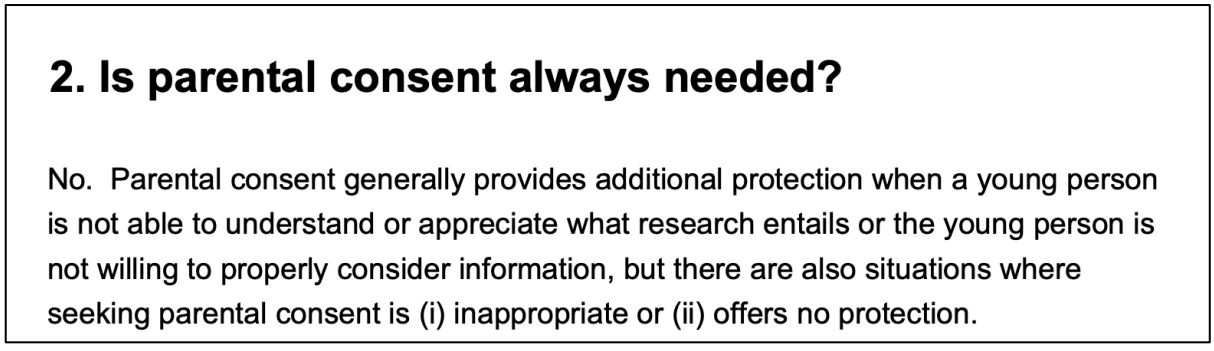

Figure 4 Screenshot image 2 – parental consent

(Spriggs, 2010, p. 5)

Upon examining these guidelines and issues, it is evident that the following is correct regarding the requirement for parental consent for research involving young people:

- Consent for research participation must be voluntary and provided with sufficient information and adequate understanding;
- Parental consent is normally the standard requirement;
- In some cases, ethics committee can approve research which does not seek parental consent; and
- Young people develop maturity in ways and stages that is not necessarily related to age

56When applying for ethical clearance in this project, I requested that the administrators who would not sign off on my ethics application consider the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 4.2.8. which allows for circumstances where young people can be deemed sufficiently capable and mature to consent without their parents. I include, here, my justification to these administrators.

Using a strengths-based approach, young people's capacity to understand and consent, minimal risk of harm or discomfort, privacy and confidentiality, and inclusiveness. I will now explain in further detail what each of those points entails.

- *Using a strengths-based approach:*

Language surrounding children and youth is laden with power, including the terms 'dependant' or 'guardian', and it assumes that adults possess a capacity that young people do not (Leonard, 2009, 2015; Santelli et al., 1995; Thorne, 1987). Youth are often spoken of in a deficit-perspective, for example, the 'cost of dependents' and 'youth at risk', or as Threadgold (2020a) discusses, as "figures of moral panic" (p. 691). This study is designed using a strengths-based approach and is founded on the conviction that young people do have the capacity to act as full citizens and participate politically.

- *Capacity to understand and consent:*

Young people have the means to access information and to organise efficiently using digital means, and this has increased their awareness of current issues that historically may have been viewed as matters of adult concern (Green, 2020, Pickard, 2019). Their capacity to make informed decisions relating to research participation is equal or less significant than

their decision to participate politically in the manner that this research project seeks to examine (Santelli et al., 1995). In an empirical study relating to young people's capacity to provide informed consent, Weithorn (1983) finds that "The fourteen-year-olds did not differ significantly from the adults with respect to their consideration of key elements" (p. 3).

- *Minimal risk of discomfort or harm:*

Although the issues activists deal with are concerning subjects, it is unlikely that participating in this research will be any more cause for concern then their participation in the activism relating to those issues. This is based on Fisher et al.'s (2013) definition of minimal harm that "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort introduced solely by the research are not greater in and of themselves than those encountered in the age-indexed daily life ... or in educational examinations or tests" (p. 5).

- *Privacy and Confidentiality:*

The interviews with young people are likely to include discussions relating to the young person's family dynamics, in particular relating to parental support for their activism. Anecdotally, in my personal movements in activist circles, I am aware of considerable young people who have attended activism events without their parent's knowledge or permission. These young people are unlikely to register for the study if they require parental consent but would make an important part of the study.

- *Inclusiveness:*

Families from lower socio-economic circumstances generally experience tighter schedules, perhaps to coordinate multiple jobs, and are less likely to commit to anything above their regular activities. Even if there is no cost involve or if parents are not required to actively do anything to assist, such as in this project, the burden of responsibilities and busy schedules can be sufficient to discourage them from granting permission for anything extra for their child. This could make it difficult for young people from such backgrounds to participate and the study could be less inclusive and lacking as a result of the absence of their voices.

Despite these justifications, my ethics application was refused *prior* to proceeding to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). *Before* the JCU HREC was able to consider my application and provide guidance, the possibility of conducting research with young

people without consent from a responsible adult was blocked from proceeding. At JCU the process required supervisors' approval, followed by a department level approval, before continuing onto a university level ethics committee. My application was unable to progress through the department level approval due to concerns that young people should not participate without parental consent. This shows that the rights of young people often clash with risk management of adults and institutions. The JCU HREC did not receive the opportunity to consider my argument, as I was forced to include obtaining consent from responsible adults before it passed through the gate-keeping process and reached the committee's discussion table. After consideration from the JCU Human Research Ethics Committee, ethics approval H4878 was received, and all conditions have been followed throughout this study.

As specified regarding consent, when a young person registered their interest to be involved in the study, I made contact with their responsible adult(s), if they were younger than 18 years old. Information sheets were provided to the young people and their responsible adult(s) and a signed consent form was received before proceeding to the next stage of this project. Although informed consent was provided by the responsible adult(s), the young person retains the right to remove themselves from the study and/or to participate in whatever capacity they were comfortable with. This was designed to assist in re-centring the young person's participation and minimising the adult power dynamics (Gibson, 2012).

3.3.2 Recruitment of Participants

The primary participants of this study are young people, aged 14-24 years, in Western Australia who are activists in the SS4C campaign. Recruitment directly targeted the young people themselves by way of initial promotion on social media pages, such as the School Strike for Climate Perth and Activist Events WA Facebook pages. I sought permission from the administrators of the pages prior to advertising. The advertisements encouraged interested participants to make contact via email or by filling out a google expression-of-interest form.

Upon attending a SS4C event, I spoke to young people face-to-face and recruited them directly from the rally. After receiving their contact details at the rally, I forwarded

them the Information Sheet and Consent Form. If they were below the age of eighteen years, this data was also sent to an adult who is responsible for them. Proceeding from this point, I continued recruitment by way of snowball sampling. The young participants were encouraged to speak to their peers about their involvement in this research project in order to gain further interest and I provided additional Information Sheets to assist in this process. Although it would be common practice at this point to provide details regarding the participants, I am doing so with minimal detail. Their identity in my project does not relate to their age or gender; for the purpose of this project, they are young activists, of varying genders and all within the specified age-group of 14-24 years. Table One lists participants in the order of interviews, and shows the pseudonyms of the participants, their preferred pronouns which I use throughout the chapters that follow, and their position in education or employment at the time of interview.

Participant	**Pronouns**	**Education / Employment**
Maxi	they/them	Gap Year
Ava	they/them	Employed in Climate Activism NFP Organisation
Lucas	he/him	Gap year
Wren	she/they/he	High school
Adelaide	she/her	University
Lapis	she/her	High school
Willow	she/her	High school
Piper	they/she	High school
Ryan	he/him	University
Heidi	she/her	University

Table 1 Participant Details

3.3.2.1 Interviews

Although this thesis is a discussion about young people as a generation facing the consequences of, and responding to, the climate crisis, 10 participants are not intended as a representation of the entire generation. The 10 participant activists were recruited to this study via advertising on social media and conversations at activism events, and they nominated themselves. As 10 politically engaged young people they represent a sub-set of their generation; a sub-set that is engaged, politically minded and active, and pro-climate action. The group represents the age range of 14-24 years, with participants who are culturally- and gender-diverse, and some with disabilities. The participants came from a range of educational and home backgrounds, where some parents were supportive of activism and climate action, while others were not. To protect the privacy of the participants within their activist circles, no further individual detail is discussed. In addition, I found that themes were largely consistent across interviews, with no new themes emerging from the later analysis. For this reason, I concluded my research at 10 interviews, informed by ethnographic data. My argument, that young people have adopted a generational radical ecological habitus, is a claim that this habitus is *because of* young peoples' generation, rather than representative of the whole generation.

Qualitative research allows for participants to express nuance relevant to their experience of the phenomena being examined, in this case, their experience of participation in activism, and interviews provide the space for this expression to occur (C. Clark, 2011). My aim was to conduct interviews with up to 20 young people of up to one hour in length. This will enable in-depth understandings of their experience of activism, their political practice and how these relate to the research questions. While interviewing the young participants, I utilised semi-structured interviews to ensure participants were able to take the lead in the discussions while maintaining focus on the key questions. Using semi-structured interviews allows for a general sense of direction according to the research questions while still allowing the participant to disclose their story in a way that is comfortable for them and which highlights factors which they consider important (Marvasti, 2004).

The interviews were conducted individually and at a location selected by the participant. I requested permission to voice-record the interview in order to enable

transcription upon completion. By recording the interview, as a researcher I was also freer to participate in a conversation-style interview rather than be focussed on detailed note-taking. The interview schedule outlined a guide for the topics to be discussed, but was not rigid in format, so as to allow free expression by the young people according to experiences and topics that are important to them.

3.3.2.2 Ethnographic Observation

Ethnography involves collecting data while paying deliberate attention to the social context through involvement in the research topic (Marvasti, 2004). By attending youth activism events, namely the SS4C rallies and online events, I focused my attention on the organic processes of youth activism which may remain hidden in the more formal setting of interviews (Nippert-Eng, 2005). Nuance and surrounding conditions can come into play by being present as an ethnographic observer. Information can be collected as it naturally occurs rather than needing to be recalled in a later conversation (Hamersley & Atkinson, 2007). In practical terms, this involved "watching what happens, listening to what is said … collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (Hamersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3).

In my ethnographic observation I took particular note of how the young people conduct themselves on a political stage. I observed the process of setting up, the rally itself and what occurred with the young people upon its completion. I focussed on the young people's interaction with adults in this context, in particular with powerholders such as police, security, politicians and the media. I also observed interactions between the young people themselves, where possible those that occurred behind the scenes, away from the cameras and not at the centre of the proceedings.

I completed the following ethnographic observations as displayed in Table Two:

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	NOTES	ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION METHOD
15 October 2021	School Strike for Climate	Rally: WA Parliament House, March: Perth city	Part of a global coordinated strike	In-person
25 March 2022	School Strike for Climate	WA Parliament House	During covid lockdown in Perth, no crowd in attendance.	Online – Live Instagram
3 February 2023	The Power of Striking	Online	Panel discussion with organisers from SS4C nationally	Online – Live Instagram
3 March 2023	School Strike for Climate	Rally and March: Perth WA	Personal illness prevented my in-person attendance	Online – Live Instagram

Table 2 Ethnographic Observation details

3.3.2.3 Covid-19 Impact

This entire research project has been conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Western Australia, the impact of the pandemic has been less than in other parts of the country, and globally. At times, there were limits of crowd numbers and lockdowns which restricted SS4C rallies and required them to operate in a modified format, such as online. When necessary, interviews were conducted online instead of face-to-face. At all times, I remained updated on the WA health advice and complied with all guidelines stipulated on the https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au website.

3.4 PART THREE: Process, Analysis and Output

3.4.1 Process

This section will provide a practical account of the steps taken after an event of ethnographic observation has occurred and upon completion of interviews.

After attending a School Strike for Climate event, I return to my study desk armed with photographs, field notes, and a fresh recollection of the event. Firstly, I download the photographs from my camera and examine each of them alongside my field notes. Taking note of the file name of each, I add them into my field notes where appropriate in order to synchronise the stored data. Practically, when being in the rally environment, particularly with a lot of movement and the bustling of the crowd, it is not always possible to write every observation, sense and thought down. For this reason, I add to my jotted notes as soon as possible in order to create a more comprehensive account of the event. My next step is to create an event log, or a narrative, which tells the story of the event. This is completed as soon as is practicable after attending the event, so that my recollections are as accurate as possible. The document becomes my formal data for the research project, with the field notes and photographs to supplement.

After each interview, I access the voice recording and begin transcribing as soon as possible. The transcription process was completed manually using Otter.ai as a transcription tool. This produced a very rough version of the words that were spoken. I then manually went through the recording word for word to transcribe to a workable standard of material. This process allowed for an intimate connection to the data.

By completing transcription in close proximity to the interview, I am able to add notes according to my recollections at the time. It also enables a more accurate transcription as on occasion there is interference in the recording, or the spoken word is not clear. When the conversation has recently occurred, I am able to recall much of the interview and fill gaps that may be encountered in the recording. This creates an opportunity to take note not only of the words spoken, but also of non-verbal interactions, such as pauses, sighs, displays of

emotion and tones of voice (C. Clark, 2011). Transcribing the interviews also forms the initial stages of the data analysis process, as hearing the words a second time allows for analytical thoughts to develop while actively writing the words of the interview and enables the beginning of identification of key themes and emergent patterns.

3.4.2 Writing as Inquiry

At this point in this chapter, I would like to draw focus to the writing that occurs. Upon conducting ethnographic observation, written notes are taken; an ethnographic narrative is produced; interviews notes are jotted down and the recording is manually and meticulously transcribed when complete. The process of analysis and the subsequent physical production of thesis chapters, all involve the act of writing. However, conducting this research is not a process of *doing* the research and then *writing* the research. Writing *is* doing, and writing *is* researching.

Naturally therefore, writing is more than a tool where stages of the research project are formalised and recorded. Writing is, in fact, the process of inquiry, the learning, processing and analysing. As St. Pierre (2018) states: “Writing is, after all, a method of inquiry. In writing, we can and do invent and reinvent the world” (p. 607).

In placing great value on writing as an act of inquiry, I do not abandon theory, and as such, I also take a theoretical approach to the thesis. The data is one part of your analysis, but I have relied on fewer interviews and ethnographic observations in favour of deep theoretical exploration of the key questions. And this occurs primarily through the act of engaging with the data through the process of writing.

As I wrote the notes, started formulating sentences, then paragraphs, which eventually became chapters, it is during this time that my mind would connect ideas and thoughts to data and theory. It is by this very process of formulating each sentence after another, that the theory, data and argument start to weave themselves together and, as the writing continues, it becomes a stronger cemented argument. Writing simultaneously provides a space for reflexivity. Through choosing each word that formulates what is being written, the actual language used is thoughtfully examined. Words matter; language matters. Within language

there is power, and especially so for marginalised groups in society. Writing therefore creates the need for reflexivity and provides the space for this to occur while the ideas are being formulated, written and strengthened.

In reading about qualitative research methods, I encountered descriptions of the writing stage as a separate stage where work or research has been done and subsequently needs to be documented. This requires a disciplined pause in the research and is portrayed as being less engaging or exciting (Merriam, 2009). Implied is a requirement to commit to "write long passages" (Creswell, 2007, p. 41). Although Merriam (2009) acknowledges that there is not a definitive line which separates the writing process from the analysis and inquiry stages, writing can be seen as a separation from the research and a period of documentation instead. From this perspective, writing then presents as an arduous task that distracts from the actual analysis, a 'necessary evil' of sorts, because without writing what would be the purpose of researching as the information would not be accessible to others.

In contrast, Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) speak of writing as involving language as a force in itself. Writing is a language which creates a version of reality, which shapes the writer, and is a form of sociohistorical construction (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2008). In seeing writing as part of the inquiry, not as a separate stage, writing takes on a greater role than being a way of transporting knowledge from an analysis to a document. Yet Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2007) also highlight the valid aspects that writing, indeed, does require commitment and discipline, and it is a way of reporting a research analysis. In this research project, I utilised my writing as a means of deep learning, where the process of analysis took shape, to develop meaning and thought during the writing, which will shape myself as researcher, and the understandings developed through my study. St. Pierre (2018) eloquently summarises the process I can only aspire to:

> "The movement of writing takes over, and the writer, the person … loses control and finds herself barely able to keep up in the thinking- writing as words appear on the computer screen she could not have thought without writing. This writing does not begin in recognition (Ah, I recognize that—that's what that is! I'll describe it.). This writing is adventure, experimentation, pushing through toward what? Toward the unintelligible … perhaps toward a different world." (p. 605)

3.4.3 Data Analysis

Conducting data analysis took three stages for me. After transcribing the interviews and re-reading them multiple times, I began to develop an understanding of common discussion points and themes throughout. I uploaded all the transcripts into NVivo coding software, and started with some generalised codes which had developed during my honours thesis. These were 'protectionist', 'anticipatory', and 'rules and punishments'. I was especially interested in the generational nature of young people's development into activists and therefore I also added codes relating to the influence of adults/people around them. These codes were 'schooling', 'peers' and 'family'. Far from a comprehensive set of analytical codes, this initial system was a starting point that allowed me to think through the data with concepts in mind, while not being restricted in thought. The first set of codes merely provided a minimal framework while I started to learn what the data was telling me.

I proceeded with these codes until over the half-way mark, when it became clear that the data was forming patterns relating to Bourdieu's theory of practice, and therefore included the concepts of habitus, capital and field (see Chapter Four). The generational aspects related to learning, development and influence, and the data was pointing to Freire's conscientisation (see Chapter Five). For this reason, I began a new project file on the NVivo software and set up codes for 'habitus', 'capital', 'field' and 'conscientisation'. My final coding system for analysis is summarised in Table Three.

Concept/Theory/Aspect	Code	Sub-Code
Theory of Practice – Bourdieu	Habitus	Family Location
	Capital	
	Field	
DIO Politics – Pickard	Personal Everyday Actions Collective Community-based Digital Technologies	
Conscientisation – Freire	Formal – Education Informal – Self, Personal	
Intergenerational Factors	Positive Negative & Neutral	
Emotions	Wellbeing, positive Stress, Anxiety, negative	
Radical Habitus – Crossley	Individual Generational Cause, Activism, Issue Eco & other Habitus	
Social Media, Digital		

Table 3 Coding system for data analysis

This set up a conceptual framework that I was able to proceed with to interpret the data. To allow the framework to progress into the writing stage where the ideas, data and theory could be linked together, I completed a final round of coding which specifically related to organising the data into a workable system that would formulate a readable flow of chapters. My system to correspond with my chapters was as follows (see Table Four).

Code	Sub-Code
Habitus	Family Schooling Environments
Radical Habitus	
Conscientisation	Beyond Schooling
Prefigurative Politics	DIO Politics

Table 4 Coding system for chapter design

The ethnographic narratives have been added into this thesis in the form of a prelude and four interludes for the purpose of conveying the energy, vibe and power within a rally, and used data from the event to supplement the words of the interview participants. They demonstrate the key concepts and how they play out in the field.

While a research process is described as a step-by-step approach where the project progresses through a series of stages from planning to publication, a methodical approach need not restrict the researcher to achieving one step before progressing to another in linear fashion. I performed a complex process of balancing a framework with flexibility; to guide the analysis while simultaneously allowing the analysis to guide me.

Analysis is a reflexive activity that can (and should) be conducted during the process of data collection and within the writing stage, with these stages acknowledged as distinct and separate activities yet connected in a blended synthesis to form an articulate analysis. Reflexivity during data analysis, when collecting and writing, progresses in a cyclic manner to inform and develop each stage along the way (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Practically speaking, analysis occurs by way of thematic coding. Interview transcriptions and ethnographic observations were methodically examined in order to determine key re-occurring themes and patterns (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In this way, the data is compacted from a bulk full account into analysable units of data. Although this can be

imagined as a mechanical process, as described above, thematic coding is a form of interacting with the data where the data does not merely be reduced to labels and categories. On the contrary, “codes do not serve primarily as denominators of certain phenomena but as heuristic devices for discovery” (Seidel & Kelle, 1995, p. 58).

Analysing qualitative data in the social sciences involves handling the data that has been collected and examining it through a theoretical lens with the aim to interpret understandings relating to what it being studied. Dey (1993) outlines a three-step process for this to occur: describing, classifying and connecting. In following this method, analysis requires a description of the context and the details that were observed and recorded, followed by a categorisation in order to give meaning to these details, and lastly, a reconnection according to emerging patterns (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Wolcott (1994) describes data analysis as a transformation process, using a similar, yet slightly different, three steps: description, analysis and interpretation. The aim of providing a description is to allow the data to speak and, therefore, to describe as closely as possible to the original data as it was collected. The term ‘analysis’ is then used in Wolcott’s (1994) process as a step in transforming the data beyond its description and the identify key factors and relationships within. What follows is an interpretive step where the description and analysis are transformed into understandings. This differs from Dey’s (1993) three step process, not only in the defining stages, but also in application, as Walcott (1994) acknowledges that the transformation of data into understanding can occur at any point throughout the process. Rather than a systematic order, the researcher can apply each step in varying depths to achieve transformation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Commonalities within data analysis descriptions relate to important key factors. These are primarily that the process is cyclic and reflexive, involves division of the data into meaningful groupings while maintaining their connection, and deriving understanding from the data (Tesch, 1990). When summarising various methods of data analysis, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) encourage researchers to adopt an “imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive” approach while simultaneously advising that “it should also be methodical, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous” (p. 10). It is this open-minded, adaptable, yet academically meticulous, style of researching that I aim to achieve during this project.

3.4.4 Feedback to Participants

Given that this research project aims to highlight young people's voices, it is only fitting that young people are provided with feedback regarding the study's outcomes. In fact, this is an ethical requirement and a condition of my ethics approval H4878. At the completion of each interview, I gave opportunity to the participant to request a copy of the findings when this has been completed. Participants have shown great interest in the study with all requesting to receive data when the project is complete. They have expressed an interest in learning what their peers are experiencing at the same events, and also what their peers are hoping and striving for on a political level.

Respectful consideration has been shown to the participants who freely gave their time and energy to my project because they have willingly shared their personal experiences in order to inform my inquiry (Marvasti, 2004). In return, I will share the data with them (see Appendix A), and also endeavour to allow this project to inform social and political debates regarding young people's position in society and to bring attention to their voices.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have firstly described my personal worldview that has been influenced by my upbringing and background, and subsequently shaped by feminist and queer theory. This worldview allows me to think outside of the categories that society has 'boxed' people into. It guides my actions in a way that demonstrates a compassionate acceptance and non-judgemental manner of operating, and enables me to consciously be aware of the power dynamics that inhabit interactions.

Secondly, I have described this project's design as being qualitative interpretive ethnographic study that is participant-centred, and thirdly, how this design has been implemented in practice.

INTERLUDE: ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION TWO

SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE

ONLINE FROM PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

25 MARCH 2022

Dual Concern on Live Instagram

Too often we hear sentiments that young people have it easy these days. Older generations tend to compare the hardships of their day with their observations of what appears to them as a spoilt and lazy younger generation. I have often found myself biting my tongue as people berate the "youth of today", running down their problems as insignificant compared to what we, the older generations, had to deal with. I was reflecting on this as I scrolled social media and took note of the ongoing plans for a SS4C and how this was going to be negotiated in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Young people across Australia were contemplating the quandary: still wanting to further the climate fight but also needing to remain Covid-safe.

Each state had dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic in their own way, but Western Australia (WA) stood out as a separate entity keeping itself safe. Led by (then) Premier Mark McGowan, WA followed a policy motto of 'go hard, go early' which referred to an instant and tough response to any individual case of Covid-19, with strict testing and isolation requirements. In some cases, this policy was heralded as a textbook response, while others criticised the measures as being an unnecessary over-reaction. Planning for any event in advance was difficult as the government frequently changed the Covid-19 restrictions depending on infection numbers and conditions. The restrictions affected the numbers of people that could gather together, indoors and outdoors, masking requirements, distance of travel a person could go from their home and what activities could take place in certain venues.

This was the situation facing the school climate strikers. Ideas were floated about perhaps doing a photography competition instead of a protest event, to provide a space for inspiration, love and connection for the environment. While abiding by the WA government's Covid-19

guidelines, they needed to ensure that the climate fight continued, and that it was not discreetly (or overtly) swept under the carpet while the world grappled with the pandemic.

On 25 March 2022, the SS4C went ahead in Perth, WA as part of the international strike organised by Fridays for Future. But there were only five people present. Careful to not break the Covid-19 guidelines, five student organisers stood on the steps of WA Parliament House: four speakers and one to record a live video. With ease, they harnessed technology to advance their activism. They stood holding two signs between them, 'Whales not Woodside' and 'People not Profit', incorporating a concern for both animals and people in the face of corporate greed.

Listening to the young activists' speeches I noted how the messaging had shifted to more urgency in the current time. Emphasis was placed on the fact that climate change is already a reality, that it is not a threat for the future but already having devastating effects across the world. One of the speakers spoke in particular about the fires and floods across Australia and how they are often referred to as "once-in-a-century" events. But, as this speaker pointed out, we cannot continue to use that name for these natural disasters while they occur in increasing frequency and intensity.

The emotional connection that the young activists felt for the climate was palpable. They spoke of the terrifying reality for people experiencing tragic natural disasters already. All of them knew at least one person who had been directly impacted by a recent natural disaster. For example, in the south west of WA kids were growing up with fire evacuation plans memorised, and emergency bags always ready by the door. Fear and long-term disastrous impacts were the focus of their words. As one speaker said, the summers of smoke and orange suns are causing climate anxiety in many young people who fear for their safety, their future and their continuity in a place subject to extreme weather events. I couldn't help but think of the narratives that repeat ideas such as 'let them be kids' or 'they don't worry about the big stuff'. For example, 'kids would relish the day they can worry about arithmetic instead of the apocalypse' (then Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in Vos, 2018) and 'how you build a mine…how you drill for oil and gas, these are the type of things that excite young children' (Senator Matt Canavan, in The Age, 2018) – is this really what the young people are saying? The Aussie mantra of kids enjoying the beaches and soaking up the sun, took up new meaning for me, as I listened to them describe the summers of smoke and orange suns. Clearly, the top-down narratives expressing an expectation of kids playing, enjoying and not worrying, was starkly at odds with the lived reality of what they themselves are saying is important to them.

Conversation then shifted to formal political structures. The then Prime Minister Scott Morrison was busy on his campaign trail with the upcoming election set for Saturday 21 May 2022. The young activists spoke of their upset that the PM was more intent on winning the next election, and on appeasing his voting-faithful, instead of acting swiftly on the climate crisis at hand. They expressed frustration at the constant setting of various targets which prolonged the start of action, but instead set goals for the future as if there is time to waste. Their use of the word 'wait' was repetitive, waiting for the election first, waiting for climate action. I was reminded of how young people are relegated to a state of waiting while they achieve the accepted political age threshold of 18 years. They are expected to remain politically silent, as the political train chugs along as per 'normal', while the reality of their lives is the increasing climate crisis. I contemplated these examples of what Bourdieu calls 'hysteresis', where expectation and reality clash. As I listened to the young activists speak, their experience of hysteresis was clear – politics as normal while the 'house was on fire' as per Greta Thunberg's words.

Climate change is not waiting, it is here already. The effects of climate change are also not waiting, as many areas already experience significant changes. In asking voters to consider the future of the next generation, these young activists reminded us that soon, they too would no longer have to wait, but would be able to vote. And when that wait is over, change is imminent.

Each speaker echoed the words:

"Among the floods and fires, there will be no more liars."

With the federal election approaching at this time, democracy and formal politics was central in the young activists' minds. Yet they felt scared and angry, let down by the system of government. In 2020, eight young activists took Sussan Ley to court and they argued that she had a duty of care to protect the youth of Australia from the harmful effects of climate change. They spoke of the elation they had felt, as a collective group of concerned climate strikers, when this court case was won in favour of the eight young people. However, the Liberal government appealed to the federal court and the environment minister was found to not have that duty of care.

Devastated and baffled. The activists asked how a government is expected to represent the people, if it doesn't have a duty to protect citizens. They questioned the point of democracy itself, if those elected to represent do not need to act in the best interest of the people. Again they said, "Among the floods and fires, there will be no more liars."

In my position as s a mother, an activist, and a researcher, I felt a deep empathy for today's young people. Do they really have it so easy as is claimed? Covid-19 was not the first pandemic the world has faced, but with globalisation and a world made smaller by air travel, kilometres distance is no longer a protective factor. In WA, schools were closed. Students preparing to start a new year, perhaps a new school, or move to a new stage such as high school, had to wait. My oldest child was one of many who had been waiting impatiently for the step up into high school, only to have to sit at home for longer, waiting. The stress and anticipation prolonged. When school did finally begin, education was a hybrid mix of online and offline learning, with major disruptions to teaching and learning due to the isolation requirements of infected people and their close contacts. Older generations (me) could not advise them how this was going to turn out, because this was not something we had experience or knowledge of.

Covid-19 was an unknown. Climate change foreshadows a bleak unknown future. This is young people's situation of dual concern. Would they have a future in the face of climate change? And what does the future even look like with a pandemic sweeping across the globe? With all the floods and fires, would there be more liars?

4 Chapter Four[9]: "What if it's fiery pits of hell by then?" - Habitus to Hysteresis

This chapter is the first of three discussion chapters which will focus on the words and actions of the young activists who participated in my research project. As I stated above, this thesis incorporates multiple theories. In Chapter One, I have discussed the current threat to the right to protest, and how my research interest has developed around the topic of young people responding to the climate crisis through activism. Chapter Two focuses on literature relating specifically to understandings of young people (children and youth) in general and related to activism. Chapter Three outlines the selected methodology as post-qualitative, using writing as a method of analysis, and a qualitative interpretive ethnographic methods of data generation. The project design is underpinned by my researcher foundation of feminist and queer theory.

Now I shift focus to the words of the young activists and how they can be understood. This requires theory specifically for the purpose of analysis and discussion, with links to the theory of children and youth as the context in which the data is located.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine young people's activism through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Also called Bourdieu's triad of concepts (France & Threadgold, 2016; Threadgold, 2018), the theory of practice incorporates the concepts of habitus, capital and field as a way of understanding people's actions. Although I explain all three of these concepts, the main focus of this chapter is on habitus. This is not to deny that capital and field are not equally as important in understanding Bourdieu's theory of practice. They are included, but not used as analytical tools, and rather, are an opportunity for further research. The second concept that I focus on is Bourdieu's lesser-known concept of hysteresis. In times of crisis, such as is the climate emergency, the interplay of habitus and conscious awareness of reality becomes apparent in the form of a misalignment that Bourdieu

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has called ‘hysteresis’. I specifically use habitus and hysteresis to understand the data generated in this project, and argue that young people’s ‘inherited’ habitus is misaligned with the reality of the climate crisis, and they are experiencing a state of hysteresis.

In order to progress in this discussion, I firstly provide some background relating to Pierre Bourdieu, in order to provide a foundation for the development of his theory of practice. I then explain the theory of practice, including the triad of concepts with in it, and discuss common critiques of the theory. Bourdieu’s lesser-known concepts are significant in understanding young people’s activism, so I also explain illusio, social gravity, and especially hysteresis. I then make sense of what young people said to me in interviews through the lens of these two concepts.

4.1 Part 1: THEORY

4.1.1 Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) is an influential French philosopher. He studied as an anthropologist and engaged in field work in Algeria during the Algerian war against French colonial rule. This experience developed his understanding of the connections between disciplines and many aspects of life, such as education, politics, community, and culture (Calhoun et al., 1993). Due to this influence, his work is cross-disciplinary and applicable as a research framework in many areas, including sociology.

Sociology has long debated the interplay of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, attempting to answer questions such as, do people act the way they do because of the social structures surrounding them? Or do people have agency to choose their actions? Numerous theorists have provided explanations, and I will briefly outline some key perspectives before returning to Bourdieu’s contribution in this area.

Giddens (1984) developed structuration theory as a way to understand human action, where he argues that people's actions are influenced by the structures surrounding them, and structures are maintained and adjusted through those actions. While people have some capacity to choose their role and actions, this is limited by their knowledge defined by the "limited choice of position in history and in the social fabric they find themselves" (Lamsal, 2012, p. 113). Structuration is where agency and structure intersect. In structuration theory, Giddens (1984) outlines the two factors as not being in opposition with each other but operating alongside in a relationship, known as the duality of structure. In the concept of the duality of structure, structure and agency are not separate or opposing (Lamsal, 2012). Rather they are "mutually dependant and internally related" (McAnulla, 2002, p.278).

McAnulla (2002) also outlines the key perspectives of Levi-Strauss and Althusser. Levi-Strauss is a prominent structuralist who argues that society can best be analysed as a system in which the over-arching rules need to be uncovered. In order to understand individual and community action, one must look below the surface where hidden systems are at work, as a governing complex interaction of structures (McAnulla, 2002, p. 275). Similarly, Althusser refers to the hidden dynamics in a society where structures guide and determine people's choice and actions so that "individuals act in accordance with structures that they cannot see" (McAnulla, 2002, p. 275).

While structure/agency can be understood as two opposing forces determining a person actions, or as a combination of the dual relation of the two, Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a significant alternative. For Bourdieu, rather than understanding people's actions through a push/pull arrangement of structure versus agency, actions can be explained using a combination of factors from a person's internalised history, their access to resources and the environment which they are acting within. For Bourdieu, it is this understanding that developed the theory of practice: "Social life, Bourdieu argues, must be understood in terms that do justice both to objective material, social and cultural structures and to the constituting practices and experiences of individuals and groups" (Calhoun, LiPuma & Postone, 1993, p.3).

4.1.2 The Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's theory of practice incorporates the concepts of habitus, capital, and field. It is designed as a framework to make sense of the relationship between social structures and people's action (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Practice is how people behave in different contexts. It is an interplay of factors from within a persons' history, resources, and environment.

The theory of practice is best visualised where practice is seen as a combination of habitus and capital, in a specific field:

([habitus] [capital]) + field = practice

(Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101)

The reason that all these concepts must be viewed together is because Bourdieu firmly links them all within his theory of practice. According to Bourdieu, the way an individual acts, that is, their practice, is determined by their *habitus* (the dispositions and norms) and *capital* (access to forms of value) and dependant on the *field* (the social space) that the practice is occurring in. The visualisation as a mathematical formula demonstrates that practice is "shaped, simultaneously and in equal measure, by the habitus and capital of agents" in the specific context of the field to which that practice relates (Crossley, 2003 p. 44)

4.1.2.1 Habitus

Habitus refers to the behaviours, dispositions, and habits that a person embodies as their internalised norm (Bourdieu, 1977; Husu, 2013). Described as a "conductor-less orchestration", habitus is not a system of mechanical or practiced reactions but refers to the historical reproduction of practices which have become so internalised over time as to

become nature (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 59). Habitus is the historical and generational repetition of acts which create a tendency or inclination for a particular way of acting/being deemed to be sensible and reasonable in a given set of circumstances (Bourdieu, 1977). It is an informal influence arising from customary ingrained habits that produces practical consequences, shaping new experiences according to prior knowledge (Barker, 2016; Bourdieu, 1990).

Habitus influences how people act within a set of circumstances and how they see others around them. It therefore contains both a unifying and an excluding power by determining who fits in to a particular group or social situation and how those within must act (Wacquant, 2016). For example, how a person dresses is influenced by their habitus and informs the person's clothing decisions based on what is suitable for fitting in, or for making a statement and standing out. Similarly, habitus includes the activities a person chooses, such as spending an evening outing at an art gallery exhibition or attending happy hour at the local pub. These choices are influenced by their habitus, by the norms and accepted behaviours, from a person's world-view, upbringing and history. Additionally, one's habitus is subject to permanent revision (Wacquant, 2016).

Barker (2016) applies Bourdieu's habitus to researching young people's circumstances of homelessness and the decisions they make to navigate this circumstance. He firstly finds that young homeless people have a group habitus; namely, they "share the same habitus" (Barker, 2016, p. 668). Bourdieu calls this occurrence 'homology': "The singular habitus of members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity with homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60). Secondly, Barker (2016) finds that young homeless people have a group habitus of instability: "The habitus of instability provides an illustration of the practical anticipation of the forthcoming, the immanent and imminent state of anticipating what is perceived as inevitable, recognised in the immediate" (p. 677). In reality this then forms a state where 'expecting the inevitable' can produce the inevitable, such that knowing how things generally turn out, or how they have in the past, influences practice in the present. In the case of young homeless people, this occurs in a way that the fear and anxiety of insecurity produce a set of actions that are sensible and practical to the people in those circumstances (Barker, 2016).

4.1.2.2 Capital

Habitus must be considered alongside capital, although this is not the focus of this thesis. Bourdieu's concept of social capital refers to the resources person can access as a result of their networks, relationships and position in society. It refers to the sum wealth of valuable resources at one's disposal due to their social relationships.

Bourdieu (1986) states that "capital is accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its "incorporated," embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or group of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (p. 15). By defining capital in this way, Bourdieu extends its meaning beyond traditional economic contexts by acknowledging the value of other social factors in a person's life. Capital has recognised value in society that is exchangeable into outcomes sought by the individual or group possessing the capital (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Capital is not immediately attainable but requires time and labour to accumulate and, likewise, it also tends to persist over time (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu outlines three types of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital refers to value that is directly related to the economic systems in society and is "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). Relating to elements of production, economic capital most commonly could be cash, bank accounts, and assets which have direct monetary value or can very easily be exchanged into money (Huang, 2019). In this way, economic capital can immediately give access to many goods and services and can be directly transformed into the desired outcomes of the individual or group possessing the capital.

Cultural capital is another form of value and relates to skills, attributes, and tastes. Frequently, cultural capital is spoken of in relation to the field of education where, for example, an academic degree constitutes a form of cultural capital (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. x). Family plays an important role in determining the cultural capital available to an individual, such as the family name, status, and reputation (Wacquant, 2016). Social capital is closely linked to cultural capital and can be understood as the networks that a person is a part of and that they can operate within (Huang, 2019). Social capital is tied to membership in a group which enables a person to have the backing of collectively owned

capital. Memberships can be practical, in terms of exchanges/agreements to maintain the membership, or they can be socially attained, such as through a family name or studying at a particular education institution (Bourdieu, 1986).

Alternative understandings of capital are conceptualised by theorists Coleman and Putnam, who describe social capital as a mutual trust and cooperation between members of a network and of mutual benefit to those members (see Adedeji, 2019; Portes, 1998). In this sense, social capital is a rather transactional arrangement of benefit to all people involved in the network, with each person playing a part to cooperate for the benefit of themselves, others and the network as a whole.

Bourdieu's three forms of capital do not function separately but are intertwined and connected within an individual's circumstances and experience. The structure of society is constantly shaped by the distribution of capital while maintaining, contesting, and renegotiating class and power (Bourdieu, 1985; France & Threadgold, 2106). According to Bourdieu, the way an individual acts, that is, their practice, is determined by their habitus (the dispositions and norms) and capital (access to forms of value) and dependant on the field (the social space) that the practice is occurring in.

4.1.2.3 Field

For Bourdieu (1985) the social space is multi-dimensional and consists of open sets of fields, meaning the social situations and institutions which make up that space. Fields are genres within society where an individual either belongs or is excluded, and where all individuals are people are operating within a power dynamic to improve or maintain their standing within the field. 'Field' relates to the external environment, namely, the settings in which people associate and, as Bessant at al. (2020) state, fields have "rich associations with competition, conflict and struggle" (p. 4).

France and Threadgold (2016) further define fields as being "leaky containers of social action with their own rules and norms" (p. 624). Bourdieu (1977) refers to these rules and norms as *doxa*. To the participants of that field, the doxa appears as common sense and natural. Doxa operates within fields, is often unwritten and taken-for-granted, and is

governed by the beliefs and attitudes of the people within that field (Bourdieu, 1977; France & Threadgold, 2106).

In turn, doxa determines how a person needs to act in order to fit into the field. Within each field that a person occupies, their internalised habitus subconsciously guides their behaviours and interactions as to what is appropriate and normal for each given field. For example, as a school student a young person may interact with other students in a vastly different manner to inside their home environment with their parents. These behaviour choices are largely subconscious and part of an internalised set of knowledge of what is deemed to be appropriate and normal in the circumstances. Despite these norms having been socially constructed throughout history, habitus is deeply entrenched to seem normal and natural.

4.1.3 Is Bourdieu Deterministic?

Critics of Bourdieu argue that he tends towards an approach where personal agency is not sufficiently acknowledged, and perhaps even denied. Habitus is criticised as being deterministic, not able to account for individuals' agency and capacity for change. As Akrivou and Di San Giorgio (2014, p. 1) state, "the main problem in Bourdieu's view of habitus is that it largely accounts for human action being reproductive of an existing field, rather than transformative". In this way, habitus is seen to leave no room for critical questioning and denies the decision-making processes that disrupt the status-quo and aim to interrupt the field where action is occurring.

Yang (2014) addresses such criticisms of Bourdieu as deterministic and argues that there is room for the nuances of agency and change beyond a formulaic understanding of the theory of practice. Despite the influence of habitus over decisions and behaviour, it is not set as a firm or calculated framework. Habitus operates below the level of consciousness and, although it is "durable", it also functions as "structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 71). Actions reinforce and modify the structures. Yang (2014) also highlights how Bourdieu himself developed and moderated his theory of practice throughout his work, suggesting that

change in practice is possible. Yang (2014) states that by engaging in reflexivity, agents have the capacity for change.

Dismissing Bourdieu's work as a deterministic would be a misjudgement, according to Fowler (2020), and Hardy (2014) clarifies that habitus is continuous but at the same time "in constant flux" (p. 127). Bourdieu (2000) states that habitus is constantly subject to change but still relies on the basis established before it.

Threadgold (2018) argues that Bourdieu is not deterministic but that this view can stem from an over-reliance on the triad of concepts that Bourdieu is most famous for, namely, habitus, field and capital. Threadgold emphasises the need to consider all of Bourdieu's concepts, as the lesser-known concepts demonstrate a development of his theory of practice to include a more complete and nuanced insight into people's practice. These are useful in countering criticisms of determinism and include illusio, social gravity, crisis, hysteresis and homology (see France & Threadgold, 2016; Ivanou & Flores, 2018; Yang, 2014).

In addition, France and Threadgold (2016) use Bourdieu to counter Coté's (2014) claim that young people operate with 'false consciousness', meaning that they are unthinking, and their lives and actions are driven by forces outside of themselves. Rather than having a false consciousness, young people's actions are not predictable or predetermined, and they are not passive or mindless 'dupes' (France & Threadgold, 2016). They refute this commonly held belief by drawing attention to Bourdieu's concepts that feature beyond the key triad of habitus, capital and field, and the more sophisticated possibilities these propose.

Bourdieu also leaves room for 'personal' style in practice, stating that individuals create "the particular stamp marking all products of the same habitus" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60). Similarly, Swartz (2012) finds that, although habitus is the reproduction of norms and patterns, change can occur in the place or reproduction when the current conditions do not fit the conditions that existed when the habitus was formed. Barker (2016) also acknowledges how habitus provides the space for change. In the discussion regarding homeless youth, he finds that:

> Changed conditions, external determinations, are the primary factor behind change in Bourdieu's framework. A source of change and adaptation of habitus can be derived from a structural dislocation between habitus and the conditions of existence. When the discrepancy between new situations and those in which the habitus was formed is

> slight, only a gradual modification, if any, occurs. Change is most likely to occur when there is a disjuncture between opportunities presented by external determinations and the expectations of habitus. (Barker, 2016, p. 678)

This specific reference to the 'structural dislocation' that can occur between habitus and the 'conditions of existence' is what Bourdieu calls 'hysteresis' (discussed further below).

4.1.4 Bourdieu's Lesser-Known Concepts

Without a considered look at Bourdieu's work, the theory of practice can appear prescriptive and formulaic, to the point of determining mind-less actions for a given set of circumstances. Structures in society exist across fields, and thereby provide a framework of action in various settings. This similarity in known as 'homology' (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) notes that over-arching structures tend to persist despite distinctions between the context within which they appear. For example, structures of class, gender, race, and others, affect people's practice in many fields such as education, politics and even within the household. This is what Bourdieu describes as the homologous nature of fields due to the underlying structures of social classification that are pervasive across many areas in society. Within the fields, and guided by the structures, are the 'doxa' or rules that operate within fields to govern the expected behaviours (France & Threadgold, 2016).

For the purpose of this thesis, Bourdieu's concepts of illusio, social gravity, and especially hysteresis will be given particular attention.

4.1.4.1 Illusio

Bourdieu (1998) states that *illusio* is "the enchanted relation to a game" (p. 77). It refers to the investment and belief that people have to the doxa and behaviours that apply to the fields in which they operate. From the outside of the field, illusio seems absurd or irrational (Threadgold, 2020b). This is because the people within that field are motivated to act in way through the belief that their actions are worthwhile and valuable, but from the outside looking

in, the aspirations may not seem worth aspiring to. As Bourdieu (1998) explains, “what is experienced as obvious in illusio appears as an illusion to those who do not participate in the obviousness because they do not participate in the game” (p.79).

For France and Threadgold (2016), illusio reaches beyond agency by acting as a realistic response to the world, rather than inert compliance. It involves people sometimes acting outside of what may be the best for them, but they do so because they believe in the game. Wacquant and Bourdieu’s (1992) explanation of illusio is as follows: “it is to be invested, taken in and by the game. To be interested, is to accord a given social game that what happens in it matters, that its stakes are important ... and worth pursuing” (p.116). In discussing illusio, Threadgold (2018) speaks of the field of academia. It is not uncommon for academics to experience a massive burden of demands on them as being necessary or obvious to do if you want to succeed in the field. Participating in long hours to fulfill all the demands is an example of illusio in that the academics believe what they are doing is a worthy endeavour to focus their energy and time on (Threadgold, 2018).

Similar experiences have been found in the field of accounting. As Bourdieu (1998) states, the more entrenched you become in a field, the stronger illusio is. Lupu and Empson (2015) apply this to the accounting field and explain how long work hours, overtime, and a poor life/work balance may not be ideal or desired, but they are done anyway because there is a belief that there is some worth to the effort. This relentless pressure to over-work is rewarded with promotions, a deeper connection and security within the field, but paradoxically doing the extra work is, in fact, rewarded with more work which Lupu & Empson (2015) find can cause contradictions in a person’s experience of perceived ‘autonomy’ and feelings of being ‘trapped’.

In this way, illusio forms a type of trajectory where investment cements the path forward, as stated by Wacquant & Bourdieu (1992), “once an illusio is personally invested in, a trajectory is formed where one is ‘taken in and by the game’ (p. 116). And this is where social gravity appears.

4.1.4.2 Social Gravity

Social gravity implies that while the social world contains push and pull forces, there is space for individuals to immerse themselves in their own interests. This enables individuals to invest themselves and their practice in a specific field (France & Threadgold, 2016). Using the word 'gravity' in naming the concept has effectively captured the two-fold meaning: gravity, as in forces which push/pull, and gravity, as in the seriousness of a situation. Hage (2011, p. 9) explains that "the subject becomes aware of the 'gravity' of the situation, at the same time as society's social forces of gravity pull him or her to become an internalized part of that society".

Once a person has begun investing in a particular field, the forces within that field pulls the person to conform to the doxa within, and a belief regarding the importance (gravity) becomes instilled (Threadgold, 2018). In this way, the investment in the field becomes a trajectory where a pathway or realistic actions and reactions unfold and become seen as viable and reasonable choices. As Threadgold (2018, p. 39) states, "that is, once one has invested through a commitment of time, effort and emotion struggling in a field, these practices become 'serious' and there is an array of consequences if one loses commitment or takes up the wrong strategies."

When people make a series of decisions in life, a trajectory forms and this gains in momentum as further decisions are made to cement the path. It becomes increasingly difficult for alternative decisions to have an effect on the overall pathway, which can cause discomfort, disillusionment and a need for change on a larger scale. The discomfort of a trajectory that is pulling a person along a path they would rather deviate from, is a part of what Bourdieu has called 'hysteresis'.

4.1.4.3 Hysteresis

When considering the current phenomena of young people's activism, hysteresis is a most crucial concept. For Bourdieu (2000) hysteresis is a condition that occurs when life experiences are in crisis, and when this causes a person's habitus to be misaligned with that crisis. He states that hysteresis is when:

> dispositions are out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive of its normality. This is the case, in particular, when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 160)

It is a situation where the known norms do not provide any rational solutions, and do not direct a usual path of action, because the habitus is misaligned with reality. Bourdieu further states that conflicts and crisis have a profound impact, due to hysteresis, and "lead the subordinate classes to question the taken-for-granted order of things and to orchestrate their resistance" (Fowler, 2020, p. 439). In practice, what this means is that in a situation of crisis, people can experience a discomfort towards the status quo. A realisation grows that informs them that the known and accepted standard way of doing things is no longer suitable. This occurs through a process of awakening of the conscious, of conscious awareness raising, according to Paulo Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' (see Chapter Five).

Referring again to Barker's (2016) study of young people's experience of instability in homelessness, habitus allows space for change in practice due to factors that occur in the field and outside of the individual. Barker (2016) finds that; "Changed conditions, external determinations, are the primary factor behind change in Bourdieu's framework" (p. 678). And this change to which Barker (2016) refers is the "adaptation of habitus [that] can be derived from a structural dislocation between habitus and the conditions of existence" (p. 678). Similarly, Swarts (2012) discusses how habitus provides an expectation, but there are times when the external determinants do not provide a pathway to meet those expectations. For Bourdieu, this is hysteresis and provides the conditions which may produce change.

Over the last few years, the world began experiencing the ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Graham (2020) uses Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis to suggest an urgent need

for research regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. They find that the pre-pandemic habitus does not work in the reality of life during and since the Covid-19 pandemic. The pre-pandemic habitus is an uncomfortable fit under the circumstances and common ways of doing things are no longer fit for purpose. This misalignment is once again the experience of hysteresis and provides the conditions where habitus requires adjustment to fit the new circumstances. and knowledge of the "game" no longer relevant, requiring adjustment.

In Part 2 of this chapter, I demonstrate how young people's habitus does not fit the reality of a world experiencing the climate crisis. Therefore, young people are experiencing hysteresis and their habitus requires adjustment.

4.2 Part 2: DATA AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this section is, first of all, to examine the young activists' words and create an understanding relating to their habitus. How does habitus relate to these activists in WA? How do they understand the expectations and norms of the society around them? I demonstrate that young people have inherited a habitus which sees them as a form of pre-citizen, by expecting them to undergo years of socialisation and training before emerging as civically engaged adults. Secondly, I use the participants' words and understanding of their experiences to demonstrate that the current situation of a climate emergency does not sit comfortably with the habitus they inherited. This has caused them to experience hysteresis, where their habitus is misaligned to their reality.

Discussing activism, and issues relating to climate change, justice and human rights, with young people was a thoroughly enjoyable and humbling experience. It is with great care that I now begin to discuss the words of the young activists. I present their words, at times in lengthy quotes, in order to present the relevant information in the context with which it was spoken, and to make an effort to avoid misconstruing what the young activist meant. I have emphasised the words of the key points for which the lengthier quotes have been included, but kept the surrounding context in order to provide additional relevant information.

4.3 Influence and Conformity

Habitus influences people's decisions and actions through a history of knowledge, patterns and norms, and is both reinforced or reshaped through time (Bourdieu, 1997, Swarts, 2012). The environment that a person grows up in a may influence them towards following a similar path themselves, or they may reject it altogether and chose an opposing path, or anywhere in between. Influence does not imply conformity. This is important to provide a basis for understanding the non-deterministic state of Bourdieu's theory of practice. The theory of practice is not a formula that is followed to provide an answer to any given situation; it does not stipulate a course of action. Translating this to young people demonstrates how they grow up in an environment brimming with influence, within the family, among peers, and in the education sector, for example. The influence shapes their habitus and informs their practice, but importantly, does not imply conformity.

Evidence of this was found in the interviews with the young participants. Some expressed a deep connection with the environment and activism from a very young age and described the influence they experience through the example and actions of their parents.

> HEIDI: I think I've always been passionate about that [cause], even from a young age, just I think **my mum has instilled that in me** a lot.

> PIPER: And my parents have always been like, **very conscious** of the environmental issues. It's definitely been [influenced by] **discussions at home**.

For Heidi and Piper, the influence of their family members from previous generations is obvious. On the other hand, Maxi described differences of opinion or belief in her household. Despite their parents raising them in a religious environment, they considered themself only half-religious, demonstrating that the influence of habitus does not imply conformity to it.

> MAXI: And I'm like, well even then because they're religious, but **I'm in the midst** of religious and not religious.

Other participants were influenced to take a similar path to their parents but had increased the intensity of their beliefs and actions in comparison:

> LUCAS: I'd say, I'm a lot more left-wing than they [parents] are though, so **we don't agree on everything**.

Habitus, therefore, is not a clear-cut formula for action. Influence occurs in varying ways for these participants, with some demonstrating a continuation of previous generations beliefs. Others demonstrate a shift towards the rejection of influence, or a decreasing or increasing intensity of those beliefs. These varying responses to influence provide evidence that conformity is not a guaranteed response to influence.

4.3.1 Habitus through Family

Bourdieu's work describes family as being one of the biggest factors in shaping one's habitus. Habitus acquired through family, in the private home, shapes and structures the habitus that is taken into other fields outside of the home, such as in schooling or in the wider community. In Bourdieu's (1977) words:

> the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g. the reception and assimilation of the messages of the culture industry or work experiences), and so on, from restructuring to restructuring. (p. 66)

This quote from Bourdieu demonstrates how society is structured in such a way that the influence a young person experiences through their development begins in the family. Habitus continues to be transformed through schooling, which in turn, leads to a habitus for functioning as an adult, in the workplace, or in cultural settings of different kinds.

Participants spoke of their families as influencing their decisions, actions and lifestyles. For some, this played a direct role in influencing their decision to become an active participant in activism.

> ADELAIDE: I guess **the thing that got me into like politics and activism was that of all my parents have always been pretty liberal**. Pretty, you know, like, we had a very strong, like, anti-sexist **culture in our household**. My dad was very keen on that, you know.

> WILLOW: But I think I was always like concerned about climate because like, growing up in a pretty, I guess you could say **environmental-y family** like my mum used to do a lot of work with protesting forest logging.

Here, Adelaide and Willow refer to the environment and culture within their families. They discuss how the culture was established through the beliefs and actions of their respective parents, and how their personal actions were a natural development and response within that environment. Similarly for Heidi, the influence of her mother had affected her deeply to the development of her core understanding of her position in the world and the responsibility that comes with that.

> HEIDI: I think I've always been very intrigued with how the world worked. And like, I've always been a very curious kid. And so yeah, I just think that, I don't know, like, my parents have been quite very generous and thoughtful, like as humans, like, they're very, very, like, careful on where they tread on the earth. And so I do think **I've always had it in me** and that, like, **I've always been quite aware** of my role within society.

By using the words 'always had it in me', Heidi implies that she experiences treading carefully on the earth as being the only natural way to live. It is her habitus and a state of normal or expected awareness, to be generous, thoughtful and careful as a citizen.

Others, such as Maxi, experience the opposite effect of parental influence. With one parent not believing the science of climate change, and another not wanting to get involved, Maxi felt compelled to be more active due to their inaction.

> MAXI: But like, I'm on like that side where like I believe in climate change and how its effecting like people in rural areas and the Aboriginals. But **my parents, they don't agree with it**, they just say it's been happening for years. … and I'm like, well if you look at the science and the world could actually end if we don't act on it. My dad says, oh there was this ice age (*mocking tone of voice*). … My mum kinda understands but she doesn't really want to get involved. **It definitely makes me want to protest more** (*loud and with laughter*).

Maxi's experience is an example of where parental or familial influence has not produced conformity. Their response to the family culture in the household is to desire opposite action. This links to Pickard's (2019) concept of Do-it-ourselves Politics, where young people are driven to political participation through disillusionment at the lack of action from adults in power (see Chapter Six).

Even those with parental support for their activism were affected by the over-arching societal habitus of securing one's own future as a priority. This evokes stereotypical narratives from previous generations, where achieving secure employment, and perhaps becoming married or owning a home, are seen as markers of successful attainment of adulthood (Threadgold, 2020a).

> RYAN: Mum? A little bit different. Because she's always come from thing where it's like, you know, **focus on uni first, or focus on work first**. [Non-government organisation] work, all that sort of extracurricular stuff come second. She supports me what I do, but it's like, you know, that's getting in the way of the other things, which she's like, 'well, screw that **just focus on work, or uni**' or whatever. Makes it a bit more annoying to talk about some times … Yeah, almost like, it can wait and it's just, you know, why are you focusing so much of your time and energy on [non-government organisation] when you could be, or you should be, focusing on other things? Like, you know, work and uni, that kind of thing.

> ADELAIDE: They're really hoping that I like get a, you know, kind of **well-paying job**. … They asked me if medicine is still on the cards, and I'm kind of like, yeah? *(vague tone)*

These words of Ryan and Adelaide illustrate a two-fold perspective of both family habitus and societal habitus. The general expectation of society for people to be successful is marked by the achievement of an education or a job in order to be seen as a contributing member of

society, a model citizen. Ryan and Adelaide state that their respective parents were concerned by their activism and political participation in case it hindered their pathway to success. In this way, the habitus of wider society enters the family home, causing an influence to shape the habitus of the young people growing up in that environment. However, the influence does not imply conformity. Ryan expressed annoyance at his mother's intent to focus him of work and study instead of activism and politics, while Adelaide vaguely responded to her parents calls for her to focus on developing a career and thereby evaded answering them.

Many of the participants expressed a feeling of gratefulness or security in having a supportive family around them.

> PIPER: Definitely, definitely. Just like having a family who **supports** it and is able to like, **drive** you there so you can keep the equipment. You know, it's just like, keeping it all together. Having a family who **understands** the issue you fighting for is really nice.

For Piper, their family influence resulted in them feeling supported and understood, and also provided access to practical support (such as transporting equipment). On the other hand, negative parental influence was seen as a barrier to some people's participation. In the experience of Ava, their parents were not at all supportive of their activism work. Their reaction to this seemed more of a shrugging acceptance, but they acknowledged it was a distinct barrier for their siblings and therefore they were alone in their activism practice.

> AVA: I just sort of dealt with it [lack of parental support], I mean part of the reason my siblings don't do it [activism] is because they didn't want to have to deal with my **parents getting mad** at them. But yeah, that's just the same as anything, **your parents get mad at you because they're parents and you just deal with it**.

In a collegial manner and a display of solidarity, others are concerned that part of their activism role is to support those who are on their own and who do not come from the security of a supportive surrounding. For example, Piper felt a responsibility towards her activism peers who were experiencing isolation in the face of no family support. They acknowledge the stress of the issue of climate concerns, and how it is far from ideal as a young person to be alone with these worries.

> PIPER: Yeah, I'm not sure how to explain it. But like the **isolation** or like, for people who don't have a supportive family with the issue, because I've got a couple of friends, they're just like, being **so isolated at home with this issue in your head**, I would probably change that if I could.

This echoes the findings of my previous research (Alexander et al., 2021) where the anxiety of young people in the field of climate change, is caused by the issue, not the action of dealing with the issue.

Parental, generational and family influence is parallel to the influence of education, and indeed, part of a family's influence on their young person was in relation to the requirement for education. Parents were concerned about their young person's education which was often seen to be a priority before their activism.

4.3.2 The Role of Schooling

In Chapter Three, I quoted Bourdieu's discussion of schools being 'socially out of play' where students are trained via 'exercises with blank ammunition'. I am particularly drawn to his finding that schools, as 'quasi-monastic spaces' remove young people from reality long enough to produce a break from reality. A lengthier version of the quote is worth discussing:

> I think that's a very important social fact. Even in the milieux apparently most remote from the student condition of the nineteenth century, that's to say in small villages, where the children of peasants and craftsmen now go to the local secondary school, even in that case, adolescents are placed, for a relatively long period, at an age when previously they would have been working, in those positions almost outside the social universe which define the adolescent condition. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 96)

What Bourdieu is saying here is that, in previous times, society was structured in a way that kept young people within the family and society. Training was based in reality; the reality of the working people's lives and jobs, and of contributing to community life. However, the social condition of young people has now changed so that they are no longer actively

participating in daily community life, possibly (and likely) through working. Education through formal schooling has taken that place.

Bourdieu (1993) continues:

> It seems that one of the most powerful effects of the situation of adolescents derives from this kind of separate existence, which puts them *socially out of play*. The 'schools of power', and especially the *grandes ècoles* [elite education institutions], place young people in enclosures separated from the world, quasi-monastic spaces where they live a life apart, a retreat, withdrawn from the world and entirely taken up with preparing for the most 'senior positions'. They do perfectly gratuitous things there, the sort of things one does at school, exercises with blank ammunition. (emphasis in original) (p. 96)

These words from Bourdieu echo the theories of children and youth that I discussed in Chapter Two. For example, Thorne (1987) & Leonard (2015) speak of youth as a period of time where young people are excluded from full participation while they complete an apprenticeship for adulthood. Similarly, Collin and McCormack (2019) describe young people as "trainee citizens" (p. 491). These perspectives align with Bourdieu's description using words such as separation or withdrawn, and practice or preparation.

Importantly, Bourdieu (1993) adds:

> For some years now, all young people have had access to a version of this experience, more or less fully developed and, above all, more or less long. However brief and superficial it may have been, **this experience is decisive, because it is sufficient to produce to some degree a break with self-evidences**. (emphasis added) (p. 96)

I have highlighted the last sentence here to demonstrate the link to habitus. Schooling has a lasting and formative effect on young people's habitus, by effectively removing them from 'real' life and providing sufficient training that breaks the connection with the frames of reference in reality. The participants provided evidence of this in their interviews:

> PIPER: Anyway, but yeah, there's always been like this **really strong oppositions in schools** I've noticed to like students talking about climate change and actually striking for it. I simply can't understand any other reason why other than the fact that they **simply just want to keep the economy up**. And if the new generation comes through

> understanding what the issue is, there will be changes. And I think they're rather scared of that. So yeah, that's why the educations a bit messy, I think.

Here, Piper is describing their experience of schooling being structured towards training in a way that will ultimately keep society flowing as the powerholders wish. In a practical sense, this means education is designed to provide learning that will produce effective workers in the system of economy. And the governments are opposed to any learning to the contrary:

> AVA: School is mixed. **The department of education was very clear every strike about how the schools were not allowed to endorse it at all**. The first few, our principal was pretty supportive, like he wasn't allowed to be supportive, openly, but he let me have meetings with him and, you know, there was no punishment for people leaving for the first one. And then they let us put our posters in the school and it was all good. And then the department of education after that one got a lot more strict and they sent an email out to all parents for the next one, saying '**do not let your kids join this strike** its…there's going to be **criminal activity** there'. Like…there was no criminal activity, it's a bunch of children and it's all completely legal, like protesting is part of, in our rights, so like it's not illegal. But yeah, just like **fear mongering** parents 'your kids will be expelled if they attend', like that was silly. So that was the high school, there was primary schools as well, because we had of lot of older primary school kids coming and one of the primary schools literally told one of the kids 'if you come to the strike you will be **expelled**', which is not true.

> MAXI: Mostly that they'll be judged for not going to school if they do protest because like Scott Morrison said, 'oh these **kids need to be at school instead of protesting**' but really we need to focus so you can act on our future because what you're doing is just not helping anyone.

Here, both Ava and Maxi articulate the decisive power of the government and the education department in instructing children to follow the system as it stands. As I discuss in the Prelude, by using words such as 'illegal', 'criminal' and 'expelled' adds a threatening tone to the instruction which is likely to have the greater impact on parents who do not wish to see their children engaged in an illegal or unsafe activity.

Participants were clearly alert to the consequences of taking political action and/or engaging with activism. This links with the theories of children and youth where young people who act differently than expected, and indeed demanded, are viewed as deviant

(Leonard, 2009). Deviance which, in turn, deserves punishment (Qvortrup, 2009a) (see Chapter Two).

> PIPER: Oh, I used to do that [advertise strikes] in my old school and **they lost it** when they found out it was me doing the postering. I poster for events, and they were like '**absolutely not**'. I had the principals knew my name and there were photos sent to the staff, so that they know who the posterer is. My sister's photo got sent to staff. In other schools, like certain areas, it's all right.

Here, Piper has experienced repercussions firsthand. Using the words 'they lost it', Piper is referring to an uncontrolled loss of emotions, most likely to be expressed in the form of anger and frustration with a hint of craziness or irrationality about it. By seeing the school's reaction as ridiculous, Piper is demonstrating the development of hysteresis. Similarly, students at Willow's school were strongly discouraged from strike involvement and they received a threatening email:

> WILLOW: Yeah, our major strike was in exam week, and there was an email sent out that said any, like any student needs to skip the exam to go to the strikes is, like **automatically failing**.

Both the role of schooling and the influence and power of parents are part of a bigger societal system of an age-based hierarchy. Family and education sit under the umbrella of the wider field of society, and society also both have and influence habitus.

4.3.3 Societal Habitus

Age barriers play a significant role in the experience of young people growing up in most democratic societies and form a major part of societal habitus. The young are formally excluded from voting until reaching the threshold age of 18 years (Thorne, 1987; Campiglio, 2009). This effectively removes them from formal democratic pathways of politic process and allows little avenue for their voices to reach political discussion tables. As an internalised

norm within society, young people are considered to be too immature and not sufficiently rational to take part in serious 'adult matters' (Leonard, YR; Qvortrup 2009b; Thorne, 1987).

In Chapter Two, I discuss the anticipatory and protectionist perspectives towards children and youth. Youth is viewed separately to adulthood, as if adulthood is the goal that youth are working towards, and this view is pervasive and internalised. While in a period of training, an apprenticeship for the adulthood, young people are 'trainee citizens' (Collins & McCormack, 2019, p. 491). They are expected to go to school and learn before seriously contributing to adult society, or before being recognised as competent and valid members of society (Bourdieu, 1993; Leonard, 2009; Thorne, 1987). Some aspects of anticipating adulthood are designed with a nurturing and providing attitude, yet this social structure remains discriminatory as it effectively silences young people and relegates them to a period of waiting (Leonard , 2009; 2015; Qvortrup, 2004). All of these factors, age barriers and attitudes form the societal habitus that young people are surrounded by.

The participants of this study spoke of the age-based discrimination still actively present today. Due to the fact of age, young people's opinions, knowledge and voice is not taken seriously. Ava describes this as a form of social or age-based hierarchy:

> AVA: I think it's just that we're not really taken seriously a lot of the time. **Adults just do not want to listen to young people or pay any attention to young people**, especially coz like the fact that young people use technology and it's looked down on by older people. … Yeah so I think the main challenge is that they don't take anything seriously. … I think it's just like a **social hierarchy thing that young people are always at the bottom of this age hierarchy, and that because we're young** that we shouldn't have a say in what is our future. So really we should be having the most say.

In the experience of the participants here, this exclusion is on the basis of age, not ability or capacity. This links with the work of Thorne (1987), who finds that some adults not competent or rational, and therefore, age is not sufficient basis for this argument. Heidi has also experienced this in her human rights activism work:

> HEIDI: I do think that **naturally, our society instinctively does take the opinion of older women, I think, more seriously than younger women**. And I can see that in my experience in life as well, if I think I still get mistaken for a high school student on the daily. And so I do think that experience and like age as a concept, I think is taken within our society is deemed and put on a higher pedestal. I think, age not even, maybe age over experience. Sometimes **I do think that our society instantly assumes that age therefore qualifies for more experience and more knowledge**, when that is not necessarily always the case, like some young women are very experienced in the sphere and a very knowledgeable, but yeah, I don't think just yet we've realized that women are very unique and individual, and everybody comes with their own experiences and perspectives. And yeah, I would definitely say, especially **politicians that they would see older women as much more credible than younger women**.

Speaking of her interactions with other women activists, Heidi clearly experiences the intersection of age and gender. Although Bourdieu's concept of capital, including social capital, is not the focus of this project, capital is present in his theory of practice as an influencing factor. Age and gender both act as a discriminatory barrier, hence producing reduced social capital or limiting access to social capital. Heidi speaks some more of this, adding that critical scrutiny is aimed at young people when they attempt to be heard:

> HEIDI: I just think there's a lot more **criticism**. And like when a young person is trying to be public about what they're saying, I think that there's just so much more **scrutiny** on them, because they are just trying to be pulled down and proven that they're very young and immature. I think that yeah, makes people hesitant to therefore do like other younger people. Like it sets a precedent that younger people don't want to speak out, speak up for that **fear of the shutdown**.

Similar frustrations have been experienced by Piper, who has frequently been told to go to school to keep learning instead of striking:

> PIPER: Being taken seriously for our age. It's often that people tell people Yeah, I'm youth activists, and they're like No, no, no, you know, **you need to go into schooling, get an education**. This is for later years. And I'm like, Yeah I skipped school, just every now and then, and I always try and catch up on everything. And they're like, no, just do it on a weekend, then you don't have to catch up. And it's just the **constant misunderstanding from people and thinking that we're too young to**

> **understand the cause we're fighting for**, which would definitely be a bigger issue there.

Some adults were seen to use welfare concerns as reasons to stop young people from protesting. Linking to the protectionist narratives from Qvortrup (1989) as discussed in Chapter Two, young people were sometimes confronted with language and attitudes from adults, media and government, which overtly names issues of child welfare (Alexander et al., 2022).

> PIPER: I don't even know what goes on in some of their heads. Some people seem to view us as just **ridiculous**, just not knowing what our cause actually is. And the government especially seems to think that we're just trying to skip school, which I don't know, they just get the most **bizarre judgments** off of us. The government definitely thinks that we're **lost teens**. I think there was an article recently saying that climate activists were like, are getting **abused children** or something, it was the most **strange** thing. They just think we're very lost teens, with big risk perceptions about the world. And it's a bit frustrating, but there's also some people who agree with us and just kind of keep it quiet. So yeah.

In the above quote, Piper also acknowledges that not every person holds the belief that young people should be silent, but it remains the over-arching structural system. Similarly, Wren makes mention of some adults in society who are supportive of young people's actions while many others continue to advance the stereotypical notions of young people's incompetence:

> WREN: Yeah, definitely, there's a difference. Younger people are either seen as wow, so powerful. They know so much about the issue, blah, blah, blah. If you're, if someone's thinking positively of the issue, or, or negatively they're … **they don't know what they're talking about. They should go to school, they're loud, or whatever, continue with all the stereotypes, whereas adults tend to have a little bit more of a weight to what they're saying, like people take what they're saying into account bit more than they do with kids**.

In the face of exclusion based on age, Willow acknowledges that while age may be used as a significant part of the reason to justify exclusion, there is more at play here.

> WILLOW: They have **a lot more respect in terms of things like the older people** that I'm referring to, is either people I've worked with from school strike for climate, or like, I'm trying to think of examples, like the nannas for native forests who camp up in the forests. I think they would **have more respect, because just because they're older**, and sometimes students are viewed like we don't know anything and like we have no basis behind why we're starting, but I think **older people are definitely more respected** and like, kind of, yeah, have that level of respect from the government**. But I would still say the government might respect them, but that doesn't mean they respect their opinion more than they respect us. They're still not going to do anything about it.**

In a display of profound insight, here Willow acknowledges that age alone is not the reason that the government does not listen to climate concern, and if age and inexperience were removed from the equation, the government is still likely to continue on their pathway of refusing climate action. And this produces an uncomfortable misalignment of expectation and reality.

4.3.4 Hysteresis

Young people's inherited habitus has been developed through generations of family, schooling and societal norms, and parts of this habitus do not sit comfortably with them. Their expected habitus has been established through generations of family, schooling and social expectations. But these aspects no longer match the reality. With the earth facing a planetary crisis, young people are questioning why norms and expectations should be continued in the midst of crisis. This in itself represents a new form of hysteresis.

Lapis articulates the generational differences in habitus by describing how climate change was less known as an issue for older generations. For Lapis then, a different set of priorities was established; and these priorities factor into habitus which influences decisions and actions according to the pathway needed for those priorities to be actualised. Other participants, such as Ryan and Adelaide (see above) have spoken about this in relation to the pressure they feel to 'get a good job' or 'finish their studies' before being concerned with things considered of less importance to overall success in life. As Lapis indicates, these

aspects of the habitus of previous generations are not fitting in the entirely different circumstances of this current generation of young people:

> LAPIS: It's different, like I'm **growing up in a completely different age** that you must have been growing up in. It's not, **it wasn't a big deal for you then**. And I'm sure that hundreds of people in my grade, though, I know people that that will argue to death, that it's not a real thing. It's just the earth's cycle. But the earth wasn't doing this, like 100 years ago, the Earth wasn't doing this a million years ago, it was doing natural earth things. **And moving into my future, I have to worry, I don't worry about getting a job. Because what if we don't need jobs, then? What if it's what if it's fiery pits of hell by then? What if we've passed the point.**

In discussing the social structures in community, government and schooling, Lucas based his views on an understanding of using fear as a tool of compliance. He acknowledged how the traditional habitus of many people revolves around needing to get that good job and needing to be successful and not fail.

> LUCAS: You know, **the whole capitalist system is built on fear, fear of losing a job, fear of going broke, fear of all these things, fear of going to jail, it's all fear-based even in school the fear of failing**, you know. The more cynical people seem to think that the only way you can build a society really is out of fear of those things.

Other young activists were also clearly aware of systems in which they lived. They were aware of previous generations' lack of awareness (or lack of acknowledgment) towards climate change and practices which were harming the planet. Their knowledge extended to understanding that this influenced societal structures, such as the education system:

> AVA: I think it's just that there's a lot more information online that, especially about **climate change** that I'm **not taught in schools** because of course **they don't teach us things that are going to make us want to become an activist**.

> PIPER: Definitely not at school [learning about climate change]. Oh, my goodness, **the Australian schooling system and climate change. … At school, I cannot emphasize the lack of climate education there (*laughing*)** Oh, my goodness.

Wren takes this a little further by discussing how the education system not only avoids climate change education but that it is significantly influenced by the resource sector. Young people rightfully understand the resource sector in Australia to be a great influence on the government policies and practice (350 Boorloo:Perth, n.d.).

> WREN: Yeah. I've had one large grievance with the, it's called **energy club WA**. And that came in and went on and on about **how good coal was for the economy**, it was really interesting. **They messed up all the facts**. … They were like, Oh, we're gonna compare the different kinds of energy, solar, solar and wind as a group, hydro, nuclear, coal, oil and gas. And then we're like the amount of energy one coal station can produce, the amount of energy one singular wind turbine can produce. Well, they usually in large farms. There was a lot of things like that. … **Very very skewed. It was a bunch of people from Woodside and Chevron, and different companies talking**. I wasn't very impressed.

Considering the government's overt statements around the 2018 SS4C, the then Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the then resource minister Matt Canavan, clearly continued to pursue and encourage 'old' ways of doing things. They declared that schools provide things that excite children, such as learning how to drill for oil, and that there is no learning available through protesting except for how to head straight for the dole queues[10] (Alexander et al., 2021). This perspective from government, effects the habitus within households, and further influences young people through families, schooling and community.

Although the young activists felt this pressure to strive for career and study success in their lives, they were unsure whether there was even any point left to worry about such things. Success was becoming less of a goal when survival was in doubt.

> AVA: They [parents] were sort of convinced that doing the school strike would distract me from school but the I was like **is there really a point of me doing school if in the future our planet's going to be messed up and also like doing school strike has given me more opportunities than school has ever**.

[10] In Australia, the dole queues refer to an imaginary line of unemployed people who choose to rely on social welfare instead of working.

For some of the young activists, the cognitive dissonance of the government and society as a whole relating to the devastating effects of climate change, resulted in a tone of voice that resembled ridicule towards the systems. Many climate strikers' signs at protests included words such as "why should we learn science when you don't listen to it" or "I've seen smarter cabinets in IKEA". The government's perspective sees young activists as "slacking off" from school, "truants", and "just wanting to skip school", and this perspective attempts to influence public view towards the young people as rebellious and perhaps lazy while looking for a day off school. The activists themselves, however, see themselves as not looking to skip school but rather as questioning the very need for school when survival of the planet was at dire risk. Here, Lapis and Lucas describe that their fears relate more greatly towards the future than to the simplicity of one or two missed days of school.

> LAPIS: I've had people that say that me going wouldn't make a change, or just one person or one group of students. And I'm the fact that I'm missing school for it. But I think **it's more important than the day of school are the next 20 years of the future is more important than one Friday that I've missed**.

> LUCAS: Well, people miss days at Uni all the time. It's not such a big deal to miss one day of school. Like, it doesn't really make any sense to me, like so what if you miss one day? **Lots of people who do school strike are still very intelligent, like, is that how you assign value to one person**, by threatening them if they miss a day of school? **So what if they miss a day of school, so what if they miss two**.

These quotes signify that the structures, norms and expectations that have built today's young people's inherited habitus are no longer relevant. Schooling, success, money or a career are not going to save the planet. Young climate activists are acutely aware of climate change and they believe the scientific evidence that human actions are the greatest contributor to the devastation. In the face of this reality, their habitus is not entirely fit for purpose, as parts of it sit uncomfortably in the circumstances of climate change. Young activists are experiencing hysteresis because of the aspects of their habitus that are misaligned with reality.

4.4 Conclusion

When a generation experiences hysteresis, the resultant desire and actions to change is not expected to be a smooth process. Generational disapproval of change in practice is expected. Bourdieu (1997) states that fields are sites of conflict between people, but also between generations. Generations have differing priorities due to differing times and conditions, and the flow between is a constant site of struggle. This is evident in the field of climate activism where hysteresis has caused young activists to reject aspects of the habitus they inherited that do not fit the current context. And they are rejecting it on the basis of evidence, not rebellion or carelessness, but on evidence that it is simply no longer a suitable course of practice. Bourdieu (1977) explains this generational shift of habitus as a result of hysteresis:

> Thus, as a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implied in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted. This is why generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa (p. 56).

Crucially, Bourdieu's above words state that the environment is too distant from that in which habitus was established. What one generation may think is rational and natural may appear to another generation as ridiculous and untenable. This conflict of what is inherited as being natural behaviour but in reality is untenable in current circumstances, is the experience of hysteresis. And young activists today are experiencing hysteresis.

Even though hysteresis provides an impetus for people to question things that were previously taken for granted, it is not a guaranteed progression into producing change. The mismatch of habitus to the experience within the field does not automatically mean that there will be a revolution to change things, or to restructure and better align habitus and field.

Bourdieu's other concepts such as social gravity, explain how some people (including young people) are invested in the 'game', that is the rules and practices of life. Some people are pulled along by the path that they have inherited and along the course of action on which they began.

For this reason, hysteresis is not a guarantee of change. Other factors are at play, and in the following chapter I discuss Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' which is the development of conscious awareness including one's capacity to influence reality. The below quote from Lucas succinctly provides a contextual link between being aware of reality, and even desperate in the face of it, while at the same time needing an awareness that change is possible and that work can be done to effect that change:

> Lucas: It's a question of, do people think a better world is possible? If people think a better world is possible there'll be very little in the way. They need to have some hope that things can be significantly better. When people are pushed to the point of desperation, that doesn't automatically mean the system gets overthrown, they still need to believe in that something is possible.

INTERLUDE: ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION THREE

NATIONAL SS4C EVENT

ONLINE PANEL DISCUSSION

3 FEBRUARY 2023

"Youth Activism & The Power of Striking"

One of the most insightful youth activism events that I attended was this online panel discussion about the power of striking. Led by four young strikers, the event had been advertised on Instagram with the intention of providing a space for SS4C organisers to talk to their peers about why they were still striking. What was the point? After all this time, was striking still worthwhile? Does it even make a difference?

These are questions facing activists of all ages and in all causes. Why do we do what we do? Is it worth it and does it change anything? I was fascinated to hear how the young minds of these activists would wrangle these thoughts.

The speakers were four school strikers - four organisers and activists - four dedicated and passionate leaders in the climate movement, representing the SS4C from across Gadigal, Dharug and Whadjuk Noongar lands.

With confidence and smooth operation, the speakers navigated the typical and predictable fluster of difficulty surrounding technology. I found myself holding my breath and feeling stressed as the facilitator's internet connection dropped in and out. As an adult activist myself, I am accustomed to online webinars and familiar with the uncomfortable second-hand embarrassment as planned events stutter and falter with the letdown of technology. However, in this case, my stress was entirely unnecessary and within myself, for the speakers themselves showed no signs of faltering. They smoothly transitioned between speakers as dictated by the unreliable internet. Without missing a beat, one picked up where the other left off, handed back when and where possible, and the event continued as planned while the internet lagged and took some time to stabilise.

As I listened to the young speakers, two main features stood out to me: hope and responsibility. This surprised me somewhat, even though I was not quite sure what I had expected instead. Perhaps some bitterness and anger at the inaction of government, or perhaps firm demands. Sure, there was disappointment in the government and corporations, and the movement's demands were talked about. But these were not the key features of their discussion.

Hope – not anxiety – dominated the discussion. Media narratives often focus on stress and anxiety as reasons young people should not worry about the climate crisis. As if they are too young to deal with these massive and serious issues. I recalled how some of the interview participants had already shared with me how they felt anxiety, but each of them emphasised how this is an anxiety towards the crisis, not anxiety towards action in the crisis. In fact, action is an antidote for the anxiety. Similar themes were now being expressed in this panel discussion: "Keep organising because it's a really hopeful movement. Gives you a lot of hope and it's a very community-based movement and very uplifting to be a part of" (field notes, 2023). In particular, one speaker expressed how terrifying it is to be faced with such an uncertain future. Fear is not only extended to the future – it is already a real and present emotion. And it is a fear on the basis of current experiences, such as smoke, evacuations, and environmental loss and grief, as well as the future of predicted realities, including floods and other extreme weather events.

The power of striking was expressed as a deliverer of hope. Not in a way to allay fears, as only positive change could bring that about, but in a way to channel the crisis energy and transform it into possibility and opportunity.

A strong sense of responsibility sits parallel to the feelings of hope. They said, "kids are bearing the impact [of climate change], yes, but kids have a responsibility to it also" (field notes 2023). Sad stories were shared about how they are a generation of people inheriting destroyed land and extinct species, and in knowing these things, the young activists keenly feel that it is their role to do something about it. In their own discussions they spoke about how to only focus on the negatives would be a pessimistic attitude, but they intended to frame activism as a hopeful, resourceful, fun, and energising activity to be a part of.

Acknowledging their personal responsibility adds power to the voices of the young activists. They are not lacking hope, or resigned to the fact that this is their lot in life, but they have grabbed on to the challenge as a responsibility that they personally and collectively have towards future generations. One of the speakers connected youth and change into a powerful metaphor. They spoke of 'youth' as being young and malleable, and how young people are

evidence of the fact that things don't stay the same forever. In the same way, there is still action to be taken that could change the course of climate change. As a symbol of change, the very essence of youth was transformed and taken into the fight as a weapon, rather than a weakness. It was fascinating how something intended as a barrier and a disempowering negative factor, could be turned around and presented as a strength.

Pessimism was turned into power, and this power is in the hands of the young activists. Blame and grief are real and painful; protection from burn-out is paramount, but most of all I felt that the speakers were keenly focussed on grabbing hold of fear, weakness, anxiety and youthfulness, and using these as fuel to ignite their peers' passion to join or continue the fight for their futures.

Without fail, debates about young people striking from school for activism always incurs the usual ubiquitous narratives of criticism. I found myself tense with embarrassment as they sprouted out the usual things that are said about them:

"you just want a day off school"

"you have hot showers"

"I bet you leave the lights on at home"

… and many more.

As an adult in the audience listening, I felt confronted to hear their views of "old people", their sarcastic tones of voice highlighting the ridiculous nature of so many narratives surrounding climate activism. It was uncomfortable, not at all pleasant, yet so true. I was impressed by the connections being made between personal action and result – as they said, mass polluters, systems and reliance on fossil fuel resources are to blame, not an individual forgetting to switch off a light when exiting a room. The timeframe required for action does not fit the cutting down of individual emissions, but an urgent focus on major overhaul of systems and structures was required.

This led to an insightful discussion of intersectionality. I noted how the speakers were careful to not build a mountain of suffering, but to acknowledge the connected nature of oppression. Their conscious awareness of how structural factors created the context for injustice, was rather staggering, for example, one speaker explained:

> The fight for climate justice is a fight for women's justice, it's a fight for queer justice, because all the same powers and forces that continue to oppress different marginalised groups, especially young groups like young people of colour, young queer people, are the same forces that deny climate crisis and perpetuate and continue to expand fossil fuels and the climate crisis. (field notes, 2023)

As I considered the wealth of knowledge being shared in this forum, I pondered the original questions. What actually is the point of young people's climate activism? Is it worth all the fuss?

The speakers contemplated these questions as well, and admitted to their own progression of thoughts on the worthwhileness of their activism. As beginner activists they thought of protests as symbolic, stances against what is wrong, and a choice to ask for better government decisions. But as they have progressed to more seasoned activists, they are able to see the fruits of their work: in smaller changes, such as the Australian Prime Minister bowing to pressure to attend COP-26, or in schools being fitted with solar panels. But also in the bigger changes, of inserting their viewpoints into the narrative, and changing the future even if that future is beyond their own lifetimes.

For young people to be thinking of a future beyond their own lives… for them to be acting for generations to come… really puts into perspective the adult cries of "but they're just out of nappies".

Young people are not empty sponges for adults to pour knowledge onto for them to absorb. If we stop and listen, if we open our minds to take note, knowledge can ebb and flow in both directions. Young people and social movements are sites of reciprocity where learning and engagement simultaneously interacts with teaching and sharing.

5 Chapter Five[11]: "It's really hard to like, put the lid back on the bottle" - Conscientisation to Radical Ecological Habitus

In the previous chapter I argue that the inherited habitus of young people is not suitable to guide and influence practice considering the current climate crisis, and today's generation of young people are experiencing hysteresis. This is because the social norms they have inherited from previous generations are no longer applicable. Their habitus is misaligned with the reality they experience and therefore they feel discomfort and stress, which Bourdieu has called hysteresis.

As a result of their misaligned habitus, young people are at a crossroads. They can continue as things are, carrying on as per previous generations, or they can create a new habitus which better fits their reality. This occurs through a process of conscientisation, following Paulo Freire, where a person becomes aware of their reality and the oppression inherent within it, and also develops an understanding of their ability and capacity to exert change.

By undergoing this process of conscientisation, young people develop a radical ecological habitus which enables and empowers them to face the planetary climate crisis with care towards the environment and participate in activism to effect wider political and societal change towards improved environmental care and protection.

This chapter is in two parts. Firstly, I will discuss Freire's conscientisation and examine the research data through this lens. I will then explain what is meant by a Crossley's (2003) radical habitus and Kasper's (2009) ecological habitus, and combine them together to identify a 'radical ecological habitus'. Data which demonstrates conscientisation and its effect on

[11] Portions of this section have been published in Alexander, N.; Petray, T.; McDowall, A. Conscientisation and Radical Habitus: Expanding Bourdieu's Theory of Practice in Youth Activism Studies. *Youth* **2022**, *2*, 295–308. https://doi.org/10.3390/ youth2030022

young activists' habitus will then be discussed resulting in the argument that due to experiencing hysteresis, young activists have undergone a process of conscientisation, and as a generation they have developed a radical ecological habitus.

5.1.1 Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator whose work focused on the emancipatory potential of education to enable people to effect change within their lives and to liberate themselves. His work was originally in the context of peasant workers who were limited by the oppressive structures that maintained their illiteracy and powerlessness, but has since been used as pedagogy for transformative learning in a range of contexts. Much of Freire's work seeks to counter euro-centric biases by linking the conditions of lived experience to a relationship of oppression. In this way, he reimagines the oppressor/oppressed contradiction in education and society (Macedo in Darder, 2018).

Critics of Freire state that he poses more questions than answers, with his sometimes inconsistent and frequently questioning style of work. Freire, on the other hand, celebrates this style of learning as the "unfinishedness of knowledge" with the belief that it can be liberating to be free from the need to reach a finality in research and learning (Macedo in Darder, 2018, p. xi). In questioning the firm boundaries of Western knowledge and colonial pedagogy, Freire has opened a doorway to the possibility to continue to question firm boundaries, in this case of adult knowledge and age-based hierarchical pedagogy.

Critics of Freire have also raised concerned regarding his patriarchal perspective and lack of discussion relating to issues of gender. Freire himself has spoken about his use of patriarchal language, and his writings demonstrate a change in language over time. Freire refers to this as evidence of his work in a place in history and the conscious development within himself of the issues. Specifically relating to the criticism of patriarchal-based criticism, feminist bell hooks (2014) states that Freire's work is "such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed" (p. 50).

It is with this attitude that I move forward using Freire's conscientisation as a valuable lens for examining young people's activism. Written in the context of Brazil's political

landscape with a continuing colonial legacy despite damage to people and country, Freire offers a perspective keenly linked to young people's current societal disempowerment in the face of surrounding damage.

With the concept of conscientisation, Freire duly acknowledges disempowered people's understanding and capacity in difficult times. Freire writes about the colonial destruction of Brazil, which I apply to the case of young people today, and their age-based disempowerment in the face of planetary destruction.

5.1.2 Conscientisation

The term 'conscientisation' is a concept that has been largely attributed to Paulo Freire. Freire's (1998) theory of *conscientisation* (also known as 'critical consciousness') refers to human beings' ability to be aware of and act on reality:

> Their reflectiveness results not just in a vague and uncommitted awareness, but in the exercise of a profoundly transforming action upon the determined reality. *Conscious of and action upon* reality are, therefore, inseparable constituents of the transforming act by which men [sic] become beings of relation. (emphasis in original) (p. 453)

In order to understand conscientisation, Freire (1970; 1974) states that it is critical to acknowledge how humans are beings who do not merely exist in the world. Instead, they co-exist with the world and with other beings in the world. That is, that humans have a unique and distinct relational existence to the world, their reality and to others, that exists in "the domain of work, of history, of culture, of values" (Freire, 1998, p. 453). Without co-existing in this relational nature with the world and other beings in it, humans could be merely deterministic beings.

To simply exist in the world, knowing how and what to do to survive is vastly different to reflecting upon and questioning the conditions of survival (Freire, 1974). Simply knowing one's condition and the circumstances of existence would bind an individual to these circumstances: determined, stuck, or in a fixed state. But humans exist in relationship with the world and their reality and exist in a specific historical and physical context. It is the capacity to see the possibility of transformation that allows for change. As Freire (1998, p.

455) states, “conscientisation is viable because man’s [sic] consciousness, although conditioned, can recognise that it is conditioned”. And it is this recognition of possibility beyond the limits that motivates and propels change.

Just as with the theory of practice, conscientisation necessitates the recognition of the relational nature of the social world. In the words of Freire (1970), “the oppressed…exist[s] in a dialectical relationship to the oppressor” (p. 34). Merely perceiving oppression without the relationship cannot lead to transformation, but conscientisation involves the understanding of the interdependence of factors in one’s condition; that they are relational to each other, operating as a balance of struggles, not as fixed concrete reactional cause and effect.

In this way, by combining Bourdieu’s theory of practice with conscientisation, determinism is again avoided, and space for the possibility of transformation is recognised. Conscientisation inherently involves awareness; it is a process of consciousness. Importantly, conscientisation is a process rather than a state of being. One may come to a critical consciousness through becoming aware of reality and one’s ability to transform it. Combining habitus and conscientisation allows for the intense learning that occurs through participation in activism, a learning that both understands the issues and what action is possible and required to enact change. I demonstrate the combination of theory of practice with conscientisation by examining literature in the following case study relating to young people’s activism.

Specifically, Freire emphasises the *active* nature of awareness building. Freire (1998) builds on the notion of conscientisation by elaborating that it is not simply about the stage of becoming aware of reality, but importantly, conscientisation also incorporates the transformative aspects whereby people become aware of their capacity to act upon reality.

Dominant perspectives in western patriarchal systems view young people as a blank script from which they can passively absorb adult culture (see Chapters One and Four; Leonard, 2015; Thorne, 1987). Similarly, Freire (1998) finds that oppressors use a paternalistic apparatus to separate the oppressed and regard them as marginal persons. Freire is not specifically talking about young people when he speaks oppressed people, but the similarities provide a useful lens with which to examine the situation of young people today. Oppressed people are seen as marginal characters, needing to be looked after, and as

individuals who need to change their mentality, to be appropriately incorporated into society. This echoes Qvortrup, Leonard, Thorne and others who speak of the anticipatory and protectionist nature of youth (see Chapter Two). Protectionist, in the sense of paternalistic systems aimed at welfare, and anticipatory, in the sense of changing attitudes before being accepted fully into society. Yet Freire (1998) argues that marginalised people are truthfully not outsiders or different, but that they are indeed and "have always been 'inside' – inside the structure which made them 'beings for others'" (p. 55).

Inside the structures of power, young people are not about to be taught how to 'escape' or free themselves from the teachings within. Using the words of Simone de Beauvoir, Freire (1998) argues that, "indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them'; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated" (p. 55). Freire refers to what he calls the banking system of education, where students are considered blank or empty accounts for knowledge to be deposited in. Clearly the power therefore would lie with the depositor as to what the blank space is filled with. Despite this mainstream conceptualisation of education, my research demonstrates that young people *are* aware of their reality around them and the truth of their circumstances beyond what is presented in the classrooms and other formal settings.

In addition, social movements are producers of knowledge (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009). Activism provides opportunity for the information about society to be produced on a grass-roots level about the realities of social conditions with the view to transmitting that information to decision-makers. Young people have no formally recognised political voice yet through activism they are able to produce knowledge and express it to the powerholders (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009). In doing so, young people's personal conscientisation arises and is acted upon. Through activism they then transfer the conscientisation to the wider community and, although their transformative voices may be unwelcomed, they also seek to influence the state, corporations and powerholders.

5.2 Extending Bourdieu's Habitus

In Bourdieu's work he does not delve into the phenomenon of social movements (Crossley, 2003). This is despite his personal involvement and support for social change (Crossley, 2003). With regards to situations that lead people to activism and participation in social movements, Bourdieu calls them 'crises' (Crossley, 2003). In a sense, these situations become crises because people's circumstances do not match their habitus and therefore, they are inclined to strive for change. Sociologist Nick Crossley (2003) addresses social movements by extending Bourdieu's habitus into what he has called, 'radical habitus'. It is the disposition of individuals to participate in activism and is an acquired habitus that occurs from participating in the first place, and in turn, structures further activism. As Bourdieu (1977) and Crossley (2003) state, practice is both structured and structuring. By extending habitus into the disposition that creates the inclination to be involved in activism, Crossley (2003) has also extended Bourdieu's theory of practice in this way:

[(Habitus) (Capital)] + Field = Movement

(p. 56)

A radical habitus, combined with one's access to capital, and in association to a particular field, determines the involvement in social movements. In the context of youth activism, an example of this in practice is young climate activists who, through increased learning of their cause, can see the inequality in climate consequences, where certain members of society are more greatly impacted than others. The young activists may then become engaged in activism relating to that inequality, or for the rights of that group in society, in addition to their climate activism. Their radical habitus expands and incorporates multiple movements and structures their dispositions in a way to enable and increase the likelihood of their continued participation in activism.

Crossley further argues that habitus in the field of social movements and activism spreads into other fields, such as choice of occupation, lifestyle, and habits and practices

within the home such as environmentalism. As per Hanisch (1969) with regards to the feminist movement, 'the personal is political' and when a person's 'political' involves striving towards social change, these actions spread across other fields and become a habitus encompassing their life experience. Indeed, experiences of activism, political participation, and social movements tend to become a long-term disposition, namely a radical habitus (Ivanou & Flores, 2018). Daser (2013) reached a similar conclusion when examining the activism efforts of refugees in Turkey who felt compelled to participate due to their habitus being shaped by their internalised life experiences. In turn, the activists continued to grow and were shaped by their activism to develop a radical habitus which would stay with them beyond the singular cause (Daser, 2013).

Similar questions can be examined in relation to today's young people who are dealing with challenges not yet encountered (see Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Two where I discuss the multiple competing and intersecting concerns that young activists face). The climate emergency, global warming and environmental destruction are caused by human action and are threatening all life on earth (NASA, 2022). It is not a concern for the future but a process of devastation occurring currently, in the lives of these young people and has significant effects on their experience and outlook. In addition, the global pandemic of Covid-19, and its accompanying health concerns, social adjustments and instability of work arrangements, are a new challenge for young people to negotiate. In a way, activism becomes a new habitus in that it is normalised and internalised. This idea has been used to explain how adult learners in Australia form a radical habitus (Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015), how Greenpeace activists share activism praxis with other activists to sustain momentum (Alam et al, 2019), and how Indonesian students struggle in the field of environmental activism (Nilan, 2021).

Simultaneously, today's young people have access to digital communication in ways not available to previous generations. This provides them with access to vast amount of information, the ability to network horizontally on a world-wide scale, and allows for new avenues of expressing their voices (Green, 2020; Pickard, 2019). As such, today's young people are travelling together on a common pathway. The digital era has also created a whole new set of issues and problems for young people to deal with, such as cyber bullying and its relationship to a multitude of social problems like mental health and eating disorders. Yet digital accessibility forms a major part of their everyday lives, personally and socially and in

this case, politically. They have access to information, networking and communication which enables them to think and organise politically in a manner which abandons traditional methods but allows them to 'do politics their own way'. These factors contribute to the development of a radical habitus and present in various forms of prefigurative practice (see Chapter Six)

Bourdieu's habitus and Crossley's radical habitus can also be extended into other applications. Kasper's (2009) concept of *ecological habitus* refers to the internalisation of ecological frameworks of practice which carry beyond the movement to become internalised and personalised as part of an extended habitus into multiple fields. Ecological activism extends activists' learning, and they develop deeper understanding about the reality of ecological issues. However, activists also learn that their capacity to act upon that reality can be personal as well as collective.

Similarly, Ibrahim (2011) argues that an *anti-capitalist habitus* demonstrates the internalisation of a habitus beyond the field of activism. It forms the norms for the activist's life, linking the political and the personal, and influencing their behaviour in the multiple fields they engage in. While radical, ecological, and anti-capitalist habitus are significant topics in their own right, they are included here to demonstrate the possibilities of expanded habitus when learning and awareness is combined with action and practice.

Underlying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts and application of his original work is an all-important focus on the relational nature of the social world – similar to Freire. Applying the theory of practice is not a mathematical process whereby a person's specific habitus, capital and field produces an exact calculated pre-determined outcome of practice. Rather it is the relational balance between the factors that influence, shape and inform how a person acts. However, the issue of habitus as reproductive rather than transformative remains a key problem for studies of social change. Radical habitus seeks to address this, but does not fully explain the processes that enable the shift towards a more radical set of dispositions. Freire's theory of conscientisation may provide a useful way to explain Bourdieu's theory of practice and, in particular, understanding the development of a radical ecological habitus.

5.3 Part 2: DATA AND DISCUSSION

This section examines data generated in this research project in line with the young activists' experience of internalising their environmental concerns and being compelled to act political with regards to it. Firstly, I discuss data which demonstrates how Freire's conscientisation relates to young people beyond what they learn in formal education at school. Secondly, I present data relating which indicates a radical and ecological habitus. I argue that young activists today are experiencing conscientisation and have developed a generational radical ecological habitus.

5.3.1 Conscientisation: Capacity beyond Structured Learning

Through age-based boundaries, young people are relegated to a stage of waiting where they must participate in the formal education structures to appropriately socialise and learn for adulthood (see Chapter Two). Until reaching the age of eighteen years and stepping into adulthood, young people are deemed not yet ready for a full citizenship which provides them with a voice. Reasons such as immaturity, irrationality and unpreparedness are used to justify this age-based boundary. However, formal education is not the only learning available to young people, and learning does also not simply relate to a depositing of information into a brain that begins as a blank slate. In Freire's conscientisation, learning involves a conscious awareness of information relating to learning and reality, but crucially, it also involves the internal development of an awareness of one's capacity to exercise influence over that reality.

Participants discussed how the schooling system frequently does not teach them the reality of the current environmental crisis which should form a significant focus of learning today, considering the dire outlook. In a somewhat ridiculing and disappointed tone of voice, participant Wren discusses how science was more focussed on mining and resources:

> WREN: Oh, **in science we learn how a coal mine works**… by **digging** out a piece of fruit cake. We had to **mine** all the fruit out of fruitcake and then try and keep it **functional**.

> Me and my friends just **destroyed** it. It was an interesting science lesson. … It was a bit odd, a bit weird.

Not only was science lacking in depth and reality, in Wren's experience, their school was clearly being influenced by the WA government and the mining sector attempting to influence young people's opinions towards accepting the economy of mining and green-washing the environmental effects. The tone of voice when Wren spoke about the fruitcake mining experiment showed disdain and disgust at being made to conduct such a task regarding mining while climate change is ignored. As Freire (1998) stated, "conscientisation is viable because man's [sic] consciousness, although conditioned, can recognise that it is conditioned" (p. 455). In this way, as part of their conscientisation process, young people begin understanding that the structures within education are a useful tool for powerholders. As Wren states (see Chapter Four for full quote):

> WREN: **They messed up all the facts ... Very very skewed [to the WA government].**

Many of the participants expressed that their environmental learning has been self-taught beyond school and through research on the internet, discussions with peers or supportive parents, or once they had left high school and were engaged in higher learning at university. Contradictions within the education system has spurred Lapis to seek her own answers and find her own truth.

> LAPIS: When I was younger, …I was moving around a lot. So I spent a lot of **time in libraries**, which is convenient, and I were reading stuff like **National Geographic** and stuff, and reading how dramatic their recounts of these things could be, and then going on the internet and continuing that research. And then like talking to teachers about it, **and teachers having very different opposing views on the topic, made me really interested in learning more about the topic and finding my own perspective**.

In some classes, she experienced learning of climate change via documentaries, but struggled with the knowledge that this was not an issue of the future, but already happening now, today.

> LAPIS: Like we **watched documentaries** about it … like David Attenborough and stuff. We've watched them quite regularly. And I'm glad they're talking about it, **but they're acting as if it's a future issue. It's not a future issue. It's a now issue.** You have to address it now. Otherwise, it will become so horrible in the future.

In using the words "*they're* acting as if it's a future issue", Lapis' conversation melds together the educational and political systems. Although not directly stated, it was evident throughout the conversation that Lapis is aware of the governmental stance that directly influences the education provided at formal schooling. She is criticising adults (teachers and politics, people in power) for treating climate change as an issue for the future, rather than a crisis in the present. This demonstrates an awareness, a conscientisation, beyond the facts alone of climate change science. Lapis knows of the foundational structures which are in place that link education and politics, and which feed into lack of climate action.

Similarly, Piper explains how they have been subject to overt negativity regarding their climate change activism at school, and how this caused them also to became aware of the lack of knowledge which seemed to underpin the criticisms.

> PIPER: It used to happen in my old school where there would be kids mainly, and, of course, the teachers who would **like talk quite negatively about our cause and ridicule the cause [school strikes 4 climate]**. And at the beginning, it was really frustrating and I was like, so annoying. I would get in like big arguments, but at the end, I **kind of realised that they literally just don't know what the cause is**. So I'm, especially by the end of the year last year with my humanities class, all of them knew what climate change was. And it was like this whole change in perspective, because I had talked so much about it in class. **There was lots of people had changed their perspective, it's just a lack of education for some people on the topic.** And so I just kind of keep my calm, I'm like, this is actually what it's about. And I just, even if they get heated, you just gotta remember, they just don't know about the cause yet.

Here, Piper is expressing that the facts and awareness of climate change as an issue is not sufficient to compel people to support or participate in climate activism. Through conversations in the classroom, they were able to influence their peers. Schooling may have provided the facts, but through committed, patient and passionate learning from Piper, their peers were able to change their perspective. Through conscientisation they changed their

perspectives and became supporters of the cause, realising that they had capacity to influence their reality. In the home, Piper's parents provided a supportive environment where she was free to form opinions and learn outside of the schooling system. With the additional social capital through their family, Piper was encouraged to form opinions, to stand up and speak their mind. In this way, they were enabled and supported through the development of their conscientisation.

> PIPER: **They [parents] always wanted us to, like, follow like what our minds telling us, they wanted us to have very clear view of what's going on in the world. They didn't want us to be clouded in vision.** And I think that was kind of just like big when… When was my first strike? I think I found out in a debate, I was learning about student protesting whether or not should be allowed in schools, and that's how we found out about school strike, I think. And we went to the first strike, my sister joined up on Sunday, and **my parents never really had any anything against they've always really wanted us just to like research things, find out our own opinions so that we're able to fully form what we want**. Yeah.

Ryan also gained awareness and built his desire to participate in activism from interactions outside of formal education. Primarily a human rights activist, Ryan's main issue of concern is related to refugee rights. It was personal knowledge through experiences outside of the education system that gave him the space to develop conscientisation.

> RYAN: I think **refugee issues has always been a big thing of mine**. Just because **I've known, like some people, like personally that have been affected by, you know, having to move countries because of political and whatever kind of situations**. And plus, I remember, what was it 2019, at the [non-governmental organisation] AGM we got to **meet**, aah I can't remember his name, but he was I think it's a **Bahraini footballer [Hakeem al-Araibi] who got imprisoned for something stupid, he basically got in prison for a crime he didn't do and we actually got to meet him.** And it was like, it was a big thing back in whenever it was 2019. It was cool to hear his story and how basically his wife, I think she, it was supposed to be their honeymoon, and they rocked up to the airport and got arrested and thrown in jail. So I was like, geez, like, you know, **it can happen to anybody, you know, even if you're a famous footballer kind of thing**. So I guess that's one of the ones that I do care a lot about.

Through personal interactions, Ryan began to understand the structures behind the human rights abuses. As he says, "it could happen to anybody", and therefore, this is an

acknowledgement that it is not due to individual fault that human rights abuses occur, but it is the systems of oppression that create this reality.

While Ryan acknowledges the work of an individual teacher who attempted to keep the students up to date with current world events, most impact of conscientisation occurred through his informal networks outside of the schooling system.

> RYAN: It would have been in high school some time, … I remember **my politics and law teacher, she was very sort of active in all these different areas. And so she was sort of, you know, she would let us kind of know if like, you know, are there's this big like exodus of refugees or there's big world events sort of thing.** So she would, because normally I wouldn't sort of pick up on those sort of things, just through the news or things like that in my life up to sort of find them out through people like her. But that sort of got that first experience because **my girlfriend at the time she had family, I think, that came from Burma, or … Myanmar … they had to flee from there, obviously, because they're in fear of their safety and things like that. So it's quite interesting to hear, not just her personal experience, but like her family's experience of what that's actually like, and it sort of the, you know, the profound effect that it has. It's not just, oh, you know, you hear it in the news. You're a refugee, but it's like, what does that actually mean? What is that experience like?**

In speaking about his (then) girlfriend as being from a refugee background, Ryan implies that learning goes beyond knowledge alone. For him, it is not sufficient to simply be aware from his schooling, even from the teacher who attempted to keep students up to date with current affairs. Through his personal interactions, his knowledge developed deeper into conscientisation, where he was able to consider human rights violations beyond the reality of facts and causes, but into the impact of people every day lived experiences. From this deeper understanding, he developed empathy for refugee issues, as he says, “I do care a lot about [it]”. And this has directly influenced his participation in the (de-identified) NGO working as a volunteer activist on human rights issues.

As a university-aged person and a leader in youth activism through a de-identified NGO, participant Heidi attends schools and speaks directly with high school aged students regarding issues of human rights. Her experience has highlighted a gap in her own learning when she was a school student, and also emphasised a clear understanding and capacity in young people to connect with serious issues and desire to use their power to make positive change. She describes a hunger for learning and truth in the young students, even when

discussing issues that could be seen as matters of adult concern, or something that young people should be protected from having to know and think about.

> HEIDI: And then we do like little community case studies with the kids. … we've done Banksia Hill [a juvenile detention centre in WA] as one of our case studies. And we did the 'kids in watch houses' [human rights abuses of children in custody in Australian watch houses] a couple of years ago as well. …And **it's just, it's so so incredible, just like listening to stuff that comes out of their mouths is so much more than I knew at their age, it's really, really cool. Like I learn, like, I know, I'm going in there to teach essentially, but the amount that I have learned from the students is astronomical**. Yeah, so like, for me, I just like I sort of I preface the conversation all the time with like, I'm no expert like, you can ask me questions that I might not be able to answer them. I'm so happy to look them up with you. Like let's make this like a learning opportunity for the two of us and I think setting up that …from the get-go, definitely helps. **And I just love hearing all these different perspectives and opinions and like, just the dynamics between students and how they think and just how incredibly intelligent some of them are**.

This experience highlights young students' capacity to consider issues rationally and also their desire to do so, to understand and to be involved. As Heidi is an activist volunteer from a deidentified NGO, once again the young students are gaining knowledge of activism issues from outside of the schooling system. Heidi is a peer, volunteering her time to build awareness with young people that she wishes she was subject to through her schooling years.

For Adelaide, her deeper understandings of reality become developed once she finished high school and had progressed into the university environment.

> ADELAIDE: And I guess kind of what changed when I started uni is I kind of like **connected all the dots and realised** we kind of like, you know, live under an economic **system** where a tiny handful of people make all the decisions in society, and most ordinary people really don't. And I think that's where the **large kind of discrepancies lay**. And why **activism is so important**, because it gives like, **ordinary people to come together kind of as a majority and actually have a say over how society is run**, which should just be the norm but it isn't.

Without using the word 'conscientisation', Adelaide describes her experience of the process. Focussing on the highlighted sections in the above quote from Adelaide, she is

clearly expressing that after she finished high school, she began to 'connect the dots' and developed a 'realisation' of the 'system' and the 'large discrepancies' within it. This is the first part of conscientisation, where a person becomes aware of their reality and the structures that enable it to be so. Continuing with Adelaide's words, she then describes how after learning the reality it becomes clear that 'activism is important' and it is a space where people who are not in power, just 'ordinary people' can 'come together' and 'have a say'. This shift from knowledge to action is the final piece that forms Freire's conscientisation, where people not only are aware of reality, but become conscious of their capacity to act upon that reality.

Conscientisation continues as participation in activism develops, due to the production of knowledge that occurs in social movements (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009). It begins the step into activism and desiring change, and increases as knowledge of the crisis increases. This is similar to Bourdieu's concept of social gravity, that once the gravity of the situation is known, the trajectory is set and the momentum increases.

Some learning through activism relates directly to the work itself, such as communication skills, organisation and media relations. Maxi, for example, discusses how they developed the confidence and ability to speak with politicians and the media – a skill not developed through formal schooling. Lapis and Lucas agree that activism is a learning experience, with learning organising skills that can be brought forward into other areas of life, such as public speaking, organisational skills, and communication. Heidi describes her experience of learning in social movement as being like a process of osmosis, where she observed and learnt from those around her, absorbing their knowledge and skills. Other learning related to developing a more in-depth understanding of the issue at stake, such as the science behind climate change, also were enhanced though climate activism participation.

As Ava states, the combination of important and useful life skills, and a deeper understanding of the issue of climate change itself, are both developed by activism participation.

> AVA: And just in terms of learning opportunities that I've had, **I've learnt so much more from the strike than I ever did from school**. … I mean you don't learn how to organise events, how to talk to people, how to do media opportunities, and even like

> in meetings, like taking minutes, agendas and that sort of stuff, I never learnt at school. And **it's just important for like getting a job**.

Wren adds that school may not be relevant on a destroyed planet anyway, and they feel that the ability to express democratic voice is invaluable compared to a single day's learning in the formal school environment.

> WREN: Well, number one, **school's not going to be very relevant if we don't have a world to live in**. Number two, **you learn quite a lot at strikes**, especially organising them, but going to them. **You learn about the issue more and you're able to express your democratic right to have a voice, like you're expressing your voice and that's really really powerful and it feels really good**. And one day off school is not going to fail you, you're not going to not graduate if you miss a couple of days at school.

These discussions with participants demonstrate that their learning continued and expanded through their activism and their participation in politics and social movements. The education system through school is largely described by the young people interviewed in this study as insufficient, contradictory, even ludicrously lacking in addressing the climate crisis. Instead, young people are developing their own critical conscious, through discussion in the home, together with peers, or through resources available online, and through their activism.

Yet conscientisation involves developing a critical consciousness beyond learning facts and skills. Political participation and activism provide the space for young people to develop a holistic standpoint to take forth into their lives. While dealing with climate change, young people are gaining perspective regarding the powers operating in society and the wide-ranging nature of oppression.

> ADELAIDE: I'm able to, like draw all these issues to a **worldview**, see where it's come from, and have a **clear strategy** for fighting it. Like, that's the kind of beautiful thing about like, being a [political group] and **learning from history** as you can like, kind of draw these broader, like a broad draw **broader picture** than your immediate kind of surroundings would give you.

Here Adelaide links ‘perspective’ and ‘strategy’ – two words which are further linked to conscientisation through fighting according to one’s worldview, the interconnection of knowledge and action.

Recognising the forces of oppression in this way, is a critical link to Freire’s conscientisation. Freire (1970; 1998) explains how the oppressed are in a dialectical relationship with their oppressor, and a crucial part of conscientisation is understanding the nature of the oppression. As one of the young activist speakers indicated at the young people’s ‘Power of Striking’ event (see Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Three), one single cause does not sit in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of society. Oppression in one area is linked to oppression elsewhere and the powerholders exert force in multiple areas simultaneously. Young people’s conscientisation is clear:

> The fight for climate justice is a fight for women’s justice, it’s a fight for queer justice, because all the same powers and forces that continue to oppress different marginalised groups, especially young groups like young people of colour, young queer people, are the same forces that deny climate crisis and perpetuate and continue to expand fossil fuels and the climate crisis. (field notes, 2023)

Willow expresses similar understandings, as to how all forces of oppression are linked and gaining freedom from one cannot be achieved with the oppression being dismantled for all.

> WILLOW: I've learned about **intersectional justice** in the last year. So I think, like, you can't solve one issue without the other. So obviously, **in solving climate justice, there's so many other issues that you need to take into account**. And you can't think of one without the other, like, the two that I can think of the most is like First Nations justice and climate justice, because you can't fix out something without first addressing the fact that you're on stolen Land.

The conscientisation of young activists is causing a drift away from trusting formal education to provide alternative knowledge about serious concerns. Young people are looking outside the traditional pathways of ‘growing up’ for avenues that will enable them to increase their knowledge and become involved earlier. The norms established by previous generations are no longer serving the current generation, and with the experience of

hysteresis resulting in critical consciousness building, young people are developing a habitus that better suits the planetary crisis, namely, a generational radical ecological habitus.

5.3.2 Radical Ecological habitus: An Activist's Internalised Disposition

Radical habitus is the internalised disposition to participate in activism. While Bourdieu's habitus is the norms and development of expectations over time that influence a practice, radical habitus refers to the specific aspects of Bourdieu's habitus which influence a person to be inclined to partake in activism (Crossley, 2003). Ecological habitus is another extension of Bourdieu's habitus and refers to the dispositions of people who are inclined to do practice which is eco-friendly, not harmful to the planet and environmentally sound.

In the previous section, I have demonstrated how young activists develop a conscientisation beyond learning in formal education settings, and this is an awareness of reality and their capacity to act upon that reality. For the generation of young activists today, their conscientisation has resulted in the development of a generational radical ecological habitus. I combine radical and ecological habitus, as these activists demonstrate an internalised compulsion towards environmental activism. A radical habitus is not seen in the discussions with the human rights activists, who take on their activism as a role, rather than an internalised disposition.

Just as Bourdieu describes habitus as being an internalised disposition, the participants discussed how their activism had affected them as individuals and shaped their identities and character.

> ADELAIDE: Yeah, um definitely being part of an activist has like really changed me quite a bit. Sorry **being an activist**, and being part of the [deidentified political] group **has really changed me**, it's kind of like, **helped me to navigate a lot of the things in the world.**

Here Adelaide describes how the activism has changed her. Not only has she acted and participated, but a reciprocal action has occurred, where the activism has affected her capacity to understand and make decisions in other aspects of her life also. Just as Bourdieu's

habitus is structured and structuring, so a radical habitus has similar affects. This echoes the findings of Crossley (2003) who states that the "experience of social movement participation has been shown to have a dramatic and durable politicizing effect upon individuals" (p. 50). Adelaide continues:

> ADELAIDE: … **you start to understand that a lot of these things are systematic, a lot of the things you're angry about are part of a wider system**, and you really can't change them as individuals, it makes you feel a lot better about the world kind of going wrong around you, you realise it's not my fault. It's actually a part of the broader thing. **But I think it also just does make you a bit more socially connected, and realise that you're actually part of the collective, not just an atomised individual human being like once you start to get a sense of how our society kind of individualises and atomizes people, you kind of start to get a sense of all this isn't right even on like a fundamental level.**

This part of Adelaide's discussion demonstrates how her conscientisation not only relates to one singular issue that she wants to act upon. Rather than seeing one issue needing fixing, Adelaide sees the broader picture of the systemic issues causing multiple injustices. For her then, her activism allows her to internalise a sense of the collective power of people, namely, as an individual she is part of the wider social community who together need to take action and work to better the systems. This deep understanding of the issues and the desire to make things better has shaped Adelaide as an individual. She does not participate in activism as a hobby or an occasional activity, but it is internalised and a normal part of who she is:

> ADELAIDE: So being part of an activist group, it's not just like, for me, **it's not even like a hobby or anything, it's like it's a part of who I am.** It's like, it's really not really like anything else I do. It's kind of **it gives me a sense of being a part of the collective.** And that's something **that's really quite beautiful**, I think.

Part of the development of a radical habitus is exemplified by most of the participants' hesitation to take on the label of 'activist'. Only three participants were comfortable with taking on the title of activist. Lucas expressed no hesitation about the label, whereas Adelaide was comfortable with being called activist, not as an individual but as a result of her membership of a political group. Similarly, Ava was employed in an activist

organisation and therefore considered themself an activist. On the other hand, Ryan and Heidi only described themselves as activists in their roles in a deidentified NGO and not as a personal label, and Piper explained that she was now using the term activist as a more seasoned activist, but had avoided it for a long time.

Lapis, Willow and Wren were aware that the label 'activist' was used about them, but were very certain in expressing that they would not use the label themselves.

> LAPIS: I wouldn't say that I've reached the point of earning the label that is quite a large label that hold holds a lot of promise, but I … wouldn't consider myself one of the very few who can name themselves an activist. … I think you need to be well researched. And you need to have a certain topic that you will fight for until like death or which is really dramatic. But you need to have a topic you're very passionate about. I'm passionate about the climate, but I wouldn't say that I'm fully rehearsed or researched enough to. **I do say what I do is activism. But I wouldn't call myself an activist**.

> WILLOW: I get called it [activist] a lot, but I'm not quite sure. **I guess what I'm doing is activism work, but I don't really think of it that way.** Like, **I just think of it as something that is important. Like, matters to me, obviously, I think climate action is really important**. So I wouldn't say that like, and when I think of activists, I think people like that everybody knows, like Malala and Greta Thunberg and stuff like that. But I Yeah. So I would say No, probably not.

For them, they see the label of activist as being appropriate for people who have taken on a specific role or made the life choice decision to be a spokesperson for an issue. However, for those not in that position, such as Lapis, Willow and Wren, they know that what they *do* is activism, but they separate this from the title of activist. This discomfort surrounding the word 'activist' indicates further that the young people have internalised their activism work and have taken on the cause of climate change as a personal part of their identity and beings. Unless a person has dedicated their life to the cause and it has become their entirety, to them, it does not warrant a separate label. The work is activism, but the label is reserved for a few.

> WREN: There's a lot of background that comes with the word [activist]. And there's a lot of conversations being had by people I associate with the word activist, people like [deidentified], lots of people are having conversations around the word activist

because it implies a certain thing, it almost seems like there's a checklist before you can become an activist. … Like you have to organised a certain number of strikes. So you have to have this many followers on Instagram, etc, etc. So **I don't tend to use the word activist, I know people who use the word activist for me, … I don't really use the word but.**

I'd call it activism.

I'd call myself an advocate maybe, of the issues.

I organise, so that maybe I don't know.

Here, Willow mentions the names of renowned activists who have attained a status and identity as activists. And for Wren, being an activist has become connected with notoriety and a person's main life task or occupation. The work of the every-day activist is internalised as being necessary and expected response to the climate crisis. It is a normal and expected disposition that influences behaviour.

In this way, they are explaining that they do not feel that what they are doing is worthy of a separate or specific label. They acknowledge that their actions are indeed activist activities and do qualify to be called activism, but as individuals they consider their activism to be normal, expected and common-sense. It has become internalised as part of who they are; it is their habitus.

The two human rights activists, Heidi and Ryan, spoke of climate activism as being somewhat of a given, as in, *of course* they would do climate activism. But their passion of choice was human rights. With their human rights activism, their participation was very much a decision of commitment, a role that they took on, as something they chose to dedicate time and effort to.

For Heidi, as a human rights activist first and foremost, she explained that environmentalism was a natural part of her life that she does not have time to engage in formally but undertakes on a personal level within the home and occasionally to support her mother's environmental activism work. While human rights activism was something she chose to actively pursue, learn about and commit to engage in, climate activism and political environmentalism is a taken-for-granted part of life:

> HEIDI: I wish I could do more. That's where my parents are very, very big in like, I think, living also growing up in [deidentified], they're very much very **environmentally conscious**. And so it's, it has, naturally, **I feel like that that is naturally me like**, I do think that the whole **human rights, I did have to learn a lot**. … And it [environmental actions] kind of does come naturally to me. I do think just like just like little things around the house, like we are always very conscious of what we're doing and our energy and like, just, I feel like it just kind of I don't even think about that. But I do think that climate change as a human rights issue is something that I have learned a lot more about, and over the past few years.

Here Heidi states that being environmentally conscious is something so natural and internalised that she does not consciously consider it to be a separate thing that she does. For environmentalism, Heidi's knowledge and action, her conscientisation, towards the environment are intimately intertwined and inseparable. It is just living life, and the natural actions in her life are eco-friendly. Her human rights activism, on the other hand, is something she has had to consciously decide to participate in, and therefore make the time and effort to learn more about it.

In a similar way, Ryan describes a task-oriented approach to his human rights activism. His passion for human rights dictates his commitment to the tasks that need doing in order to campaign for justice.

> RYAN: For the most part, it's always just been, you know, **I'm passionate about it**. So **that just translates into, you know, doing the work**. Like, you know, if I've got some uni work that I need to do, I've got some [non-governmental organisation] work that I need to do, if it's endless work that like I'm passionate about, or it's an area I'm passionate about, I'll just do that first. Because I enjoy it. Like, **I kind of know how to do it, I can get it done**. …you know, **you've sort of gotten responsibilities now**, especially sort of as [role title] you know, **you've got things that need to be done**. Or, you know, you're **responsible** to a lot of other people and some of the stuff that you do, and you **need to get it done**. Even if some of them are stuff where it's less attractive, like well, like I'm less passionate about it personally. It's still like you got a **responsibility** to do it now.

Here Ryan demonstrates a different approach than the environmental activists have discussed. He has committed to a role in the non-governmental organisation, and therefore accepts his activist work as a responsibility and a task that need completing. In saying it is a

task, Ryan still acknowledges the enjoyment and passion he feels for his activism, but it is described as a role external to him, rather than a disposition. For Ryan, his knowledge and action regarding activism are two linked, yet separate, factors - a learning, and a decision to act and carry our roles and responsibilities. This contrasts with the climate change activists whose activist work comes from within and permeates their personal and public lives, and thus is incorporated an internalised disposition; namely, habitus.

5.3.3 Generational Capacity and Responsibility

The radical ecological habitus of young activists is not separate from a generational perspective. Young activists see themselves as part of a generation both capable of, and responsible for, political action. As a generation, they are linked to the generations before and those following. There is a sense of counter-acting previous generations, and simultaneously preparing a better path for future generations.

For Heidi, this manifests itself in her women's rights activism where she can support her mother's experiences as well as instigate change for future women:

> HEIDI: I definitely think my mum has had a **massive part** to play in it. She had, she had a **pretty shitty upbringing**, to say the least. And so, yeah, I definitely think and like, see how **incredibly strong my mum has been** through all of it. And yeah, like, for example, the march that we did. A couple of years ago, I can't remember what specific march, have gone to so many marches. Which specific one it was, it was something it was something to do with sexual abuse. But like, I don't know, it just I feel like it's definitely **brought my mum and I a lot closer as well**. And it's something that we like, I feel like she is proud of me as well, like almost for pursuing this, Like she feels like she's, **it's past her now**. It's too old, you know, like it's, and so **I feel like I want to carry that forward almost pay it forward for the next generation**, if that makes sense. Yeah, I definitely think **I feel a little bit of responsibility in that sphere**.

Here, Heidi is referring to the suffering her mother faced due to gender-based discrimination. Her words describe how her mother can no longer fight for human rights due to age, but that she feels inspired by her mother's younger self's courage and wants to continue the fight on

her mother's behalf. There is a distinct responsibility to carry on the work, for her mother in the past generation, and also for women in the next generations.

In the case of climate activism, Piper speaks of the importance of incorporating new younger activists into the circle. It is not simply about adding numbers to the protest group, but Piper explains that the younger people are included in the knowledge behind the cause, so that they can feel connected and a sense of belonging to the movement. She is expressing the connection between knowledge and action, is saying that the younger activists need to be taught, and that, as in conscientisation, they are then able to develop the knowledge of their capacity to participate:

> PIPER: Right now in WA, were having a picnic so that we're able to **train the new kids** coming through because there was like, I say, there was a rise in the amount that came through it, like 12 came through all of a sudden. So we're having a picnic next weekend, and **we're going to be teaching them all, how it works**. Before we can organise a strike, because we don't want them sitting there. Not knowing what's going on. **We want them to think that they're able to participate because they can then.** That's why we are organizing these strikes right now. We're really teaching people.

Similarly, Lucas was aware of the trajectory of the movement by incorporating younger people into the scene as a way to keep momentum going and teach them how to continue the fight:

> LUCAS: Well, I guess, if it's the long term stuff I try and think maybe they'll be **future organisers in the crowd**, or you know, … are we building any momentum?

Crossley (2003) refers to radical habitus as being the disposition that allows activism to continue and sustain the movement. It is not specific to a singular movement or cause, but becomes an internalised normality that sees further injustices and issues and therefore perpetuates the continued participation in activism. Adelaide describes is as a connection between herself and activism that is inseparable:

> ADELAIDE: … **it's really hard to kind of separate myself from the part of me that's really involved in all this stuff**. I guess that's also because **once you start fighting for things, you kind of don't really accept the world the way it is,** you can't really go back and say, okay, everything's fine, now, I'm going to just get on with, you know, my social life or get on and get a job. It's like, the world is still, like, quite awful, to be honest. **Like, you know, there are still so many issues that need to be fought back. And you just realise that, like, it's something worthwhile, even if you don't make much gains within your lifetime to like, keep fighting for that and kind of set the wheels in motion for, I guess, a better world to be lived on.**

Clearly the young activists are aware of the generational aspects of their activism, both past and future. Through conscientisation their concept of reality is not limited to one moment of time, but relates directly to action, that is, it has been influenced by the actions of people now and before. They are also aware that the work they do today may not achieve the desired results in their own personal lifetime, but the work is necessary for generations yet to come.

5.4 Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I argued that some parts of young activists' inherited habitus are not suitable in the current climate crisis. In addition, other aspects of their habitus have helped form their activist habitus, such as growing up in an environmentally focused family. Not all activists came from supportive backgrounds, though, suggesting that family habitus is not the sole explainer for how the radical habitus emerges, nor is it a precondition for radical habitus. What the young people in my study did have in common was the feeling of being ignored, especially by the government, and I argue that this has caused them to experience hysteresis: the misalignment of habitus to reality.

Here I have demonstrated that hysteresis is linked to Freire's concept of conscientisation. Conscientisation is the development of knowledge relating to the reality of existence and crucially includes the awareness of one's capacity to act upon that reality (Freire, 1970; 1974; 1998). Conscientisation is a not a process with a start and finish point, but rather is ongoing and acts as both a cause and effect. Through conscientisation, habitus is misaligned and causes hysteresis, and further conscientisation allows young people to

develop a new, more fitting, habitus. In young activists this is a generational radical ecological habitus, and I will now summarise why each of these aspects are relevant.

Generational – Young people themselves articulate their world in generational terms. They position themselves as a generation affected by the actions of previous generations and responsible for the conditions that future generations encounter. In some cases, they wish to atone for or fix the problems caused by previous generations, and in other cases, they want to further the good work started by previous activists. In particular, young activists see climate change as being a generational phenomenon, previous generations have caused and, apart from dedicated individuals, they largely continue to ignore the crisis and refuse to make the changes required. Young activists see themselves as the generation who lives at the crucial tipping point, where it is now up to them to take on climate change as the most important thing in their lives. But they are not full of blame for the previous generation, their activism and political participation stems from a sense of responsibility that they are not going to be like previous generations, but instead that they strive to be change-makers to provide a better world for their future generations.

Radical – Due to their distinct sense of urgency, desire and drive to take action, young activists have become necessarily radical. Sitting with the status quo of their inherited habitus is not fitting considering the state of planet. The climate change crisis is an emergency and is treated as such by young activists. They see politicians, corporations and such power holders in denial and refusal to make the necessary changes to slow the rate of climate change and turn the tide of destruction around. This requires action: political action and activism that stands up to the power holders and demands change. By participating in activism, further activism is structured as it becomes internalised as a natural response to injustices.

Ecological – Climate change is the number one most deeply concerning cause for young activists. Other causes, such as women's rights, refugees, or disability rights, are also acted upon, but they are seen as intertwined with the powers of oppression that refuse to act upon climate change. When taking action for other causes, activists describe their actions as a choice, a passion and a role that they commit to. Whereas with climate change, it is seen as becoming automatic, taken for granted that, of course, climate action is the first and foremost crisis that needs addressing. Young activists have also removed climate change from being an issue framed as the future and operate their activism from the perspective of it being already

an issue of the here and now, in Australia and beyond. It is not just that young people want to make trouble or be loud and politically opinionated or contradictory in all areas, it is only the necessity of the climate crisis that develops a radical habitus. For the current generational this has occurred in the arena of environmentalism, and therefore they have developed a radical ecological habitus, not just radical habitus.

Habitus – Acting radically for environmental causes has become engrained in the being of young activists. It is normalised, expected and internalised to the point that it influences their actions and decisions. It is the new norm and has become their habitus. Norms of the previous generation for young people involves a period of waiting while learning how to become a responsible citizen. Young activists have adapted their habitus to realign it with their reality. Namely, they cannot sit around and wait to become adults before acting, schooling will be pointless on an unliveable planet, and therefore their habitus has become internalised with environmental concerns and their need to take radical action regarding climate change.

Throughout history other generations have also been radical in their actions. Stating that the current generation has developed a radical ecological habitus is not an attempt to provide comparison between generations, nor to suggest that they are more or less radical than previously. It is instead a discussion of the current experience of today's generation of young activists.

This current generational radical ecological habitus informs young activists' experience in the world and influences their decisions and actions, manifesting itself in the form of prefigurative politics (see Chapter Six). The below quote from Adelaide provides a neat summary of the enduring nature of activism. She describes how once conscientisation has occurred, a radical ecological habitus develops to perpetuate ongoing activism, and the compulsion to keep participating forms:

> ADELAIDE: But it's, **once you start to get involved in this stuff,** it's really, **really hard to like, put the lid back on the bottle** and say, Okay, I'm just gonna ignore it all, like **you kind of have to keep fighting.**

INTERLUDE: ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION FOUR

SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE EVENT

PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA – LIVE STREAMED

3 MARCH 2023

Times Up, Sit Down

City driving is stressful at the best of times.

Cars crammed into small spaces, weaving in and out of the busy traffic lanes. Bigger trucks and busses trying to manoeuvre between the congestion. And pedestrians rushing about, looking at their phones, chatting with friends, and dashing across the roads.

Everyone is just doing their thing. Trying to get their work done, meet their deadlines, perhaps make it to an appointment on time, or embarking on a city shopping spree. Whatever it be, it is busy, it is chaotic and everyone just wants to keep moving, be on time, and safely get to where they need to be.

In the middle of all this chaos on the streets sits a large group of climate activists. Looking small and unimposing, they block the middle of a busy intersection of Perth city streets. As traffic is forced to grind to a halt, there is a cacophony of honking horns, and a flailing of frustrated drivers' arms. Stuck. Unable to go forwards, backwards or any which way. At the mercy of the kids on the street. Police are there! Why are they not doing anything?!

Similarly to the plan at the October 2021 Perth SS4C, the action of blocking a busy city intersection was pre-planned and a deliberate strategy[12]. As the group marches along, the leader yells into the loudspeaker: "Time's Up, Sit Down!". And so the group sits.

It is a dreadfully uncomfortable feeling to be in this 'offending' crowd and, if I am honest, it is one of my least favourite aspects of protesting. Despite my understanding of the

[12] This ethnographic reflection focusses on the action of disrupting city movement and, therefore, combines my reflection from the 15th October 2021 strike that I attended in person, and the 3 March 2023 strike that I was unable to attend due to personal illness. However, this strike was broadcast live on Instagram and I attended and conducted my ethnographic observation from my study desk via digital means.

necessity, I find it hard to shake an awkward feeling of self-consciousness to be causing such disruption and inconvenience. Those poor unsuspecting people – they are just trying to do their jobs, just wanting to drive the streets along their usual route – and here they are, stuck in traffic and unable to turn around or do anything different beyond tooting and cursing. Why should they be inconvenienced in this way? How dare the protesters block the streets? What gives them that right, when they should be at school anyway…

Despite the intense tooting and driver despair, the group calmly sits, and I wonder if the young activists are feeling the same tension as I am. Even more than adults, they are programmed or trained not to be disruptive. Taught to obey the rules, follow authority and not be a general nuisance. It really is a big deal that a large group can now gather on the city streets and deliberate act contrary to everything they have been taught so far.

A speaker takes up the loudspeaker and explains that this is a representation of young people taking up space. And more than a representation, this is young activists calling out "Enough!" and "Stop!".

Police officers were present throughout the entire event, officers on horseback, bicycles, on foot, and in patrol cars. And humorously reminiscent of a trojan horse or a clown car, a large squad of officers poured out of a single marked Police van to add numbers to the Police presence in the blocked intersection.

I marvelled at the irony. Who was actually causing risk here? It certainly seemed like the young activists needed to awkwardly manoeuvre their seated bodies to avoid injury from the heavy booted feet of passing officers who, for no apparent reason other than a display of control, decided to walk back and forth through the tight circle of activists on the street. The young activists were obliging and made sure no one got tripped up or hurt, and no one complained. But, why was it necessary? Was there any reason the officers did not stay on the outskirts of the group? No one had caused, or threatened to cause, any damage or violence.

As I ponder the balance between the necessity and the over-presence of Police, I am aware of the potential for problems at protests. Protestors could get violent and cause damage. They could start kicking over bins, or smashing windows, or graffitiing as they march. Similarly, the frustrated drivers could lose patience and perhaps trouble could start via them. Some Police officers were also assisting with traffic control, by going ahead of the group on motorcycles, and clearing the roads. A weird combination of assisting the protestors on the one hand, while

hindering on the other. Largely, the Police presence seemed symbolic. It felt like a display to create the perception of control and a token of authority.

Just as the Police were balancing their work of helping and hindering, similarly the activists were walking a fine line of causing disruption while avoiding arrest. Many of them had expressed to me in interviews that they were well aware of the media and authorities' likelihood to overreact and 'blow things out of proportion'. They had described to me how they made sure they followed all protest rules to the letter, to avoid giving the media any ammunition to fire in their direction. But the young activists carried on regardless.

They spoke of now being the time to listen, to listen to science and the experts. They openly admit to not having the answers themselves and demonstrate no pretence of knowledge or brilliance. On the contrary, they point to the experts and beg for the government to listen and learn from the experts. As one of the speakers said, "We [young people] don't have the answers, but we [humans] have the solutions". It is now time to implement those solutions. Numerous protest signs around the group expressed similar thoughts:

"Why should we go to school if you won't listen to the educated?"

"Do your science homework"

This was far from a normal day in the city. But normal must change. Things cannot simply go on as normal, because climate change is here, with all its disruption and inconvenience, and it shows no regard for human endeavours. Normal is finished and time is up.

In the days following the strikes, I marvelled at young people's uncanny ability to turn the weapons used against them into strength and power. Not only did they turn the city up-side-down into traffic chaos via a strike, they also harnessed the negative energy of the narratives used against them, and recycled it into a positive protest tool. *Youth are too young to protest?* Actually, youth is evidence that everything can and must change. *We don't know what we're talking about?* Well, the scientists and experts do*! Young people should go to school and learn more first?* Why? You don't listen and learn from any of it as adults anyway. Besides, is there going to be any point of schooling on a burning planet?

And most significantly: You think us striking is inconvenient and disruptive? Get used to it because it is nothing compared to the disruption that climate change is bringing.

6 Chapter Six[13]: “You guys aren't dealing with it” - Prefigurative Practice

This chapter extends the discussion of young people’s actions and examine its more practical and tangible aspects. It aims to answer the question of ‘what’s next?’ or ‘so what?’ that follows on from the previous chapters which argue that the climate crisis has caused young people to experience hysteresis, which leads to a process of conscientisation and the development of a generational radical ecological habitus. How does young people’s hysteresis and conscientisation manifest itself in practice? I argue that a key component of young people's generational radical ecological habitus is prefigurative practice.

I demonstrate that young people act prefiguratively in three ways: (1) their engagement in politics is prefigurative due to their formal age-based exclusion, (2) their activism itself is prefigurative of the change they seek to effect, and (3) through the use of Temporary Autonomous Zones [TAZs] young activists engage in a form of prefigurative foreboding, i.e., foreshadowing and warning what lack of climate action will entail.

In order to engage in this discussion, I firstly outline and explain prefiguration from a theoretical perspective, to describe how prefiguration is a way to create change on the small scale in order to work towards large-scale change. I then present the data in three sections, relating directly to these three ways that young people act prefiguratively.

6.1 Prefiguration – The Theory

Prefiguration is a term that is often used in political and activist circles with varying meanings attributed to it. Often, the first thought that appears when utilising the word

[13] Portions of this section have been published in Alexander, N.; Petray, T.; McDowall, A. Conscientisation and Radical Habitus: Expanding Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice in Youth Activism Studies. *Youth* **2022**, *2*, 295–308. https://doi.org/10.3390/ youth2030022

prefiguration is the notion of creating change, whether in one's personal life or in the context of a social movement, on a small scale that points towards the end goal being aspired to on the larger scale. This has been articulated in various ways, all which add to the overall understanding of prefiguration. We can begin with Carl Boggs (1977) defined prefigurative politics as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (p. 7). For Szolucha (2016), prefiguration is "a mode of thinking and organising that helps make sense and fill the intermediate vacuum in the space where grand social change is still in the making" (p. 121). Although others have used the term prefiguration, Boggs is credited with having created prefigurative politics as a defined term.

This form of prefiguration is specifically about the politics. It is about how the movement conducts itself, how decisions are made, what attitudes are encouraged and expected and how the end goal must be reflected in the very practices of the movement as it works towards that goal. As Franks (2003) states "the means be in accordance with the ends" (p. 16). Examples of this form of prefiguration are in movements that are network-based, perhaps anti-authoritarian, organised informally, consensually and horizontally across participants. Occupy Wall Street[14] is a case in point. With protesters distrusting politicians, and disillusioned by the political realm more generally, they organised themselves horizontally rather than hierarchically to demonstrate an alternative method of organising and operation (Barber, 2012). In this way, the vision of the movement is reflected in the actions of the movement.

Not too different but worthy of separate characterisation is another form of prefiguration, being prefigurative activism. This refers to the strategy of the activism movement which aims to act as if its goals were already achieved, that is, to create the change in the present and on the small-scale. Flesher Fominaya (2014) says that "prefigurative social movements attempt to embody through practice an alternative vision of society" (p. 12). Through this form of action, social movements aim to achieve change beyond formal

[14] Occupy Wall Street refers to an iconic movement that began in the United States of America in 2011 and was part of a larger international movement. Demonstrators camped in New York city, taking over the area, for approximately six weeks and similar actions were taken internationally. The protest was mainly against corruption in the finance sector and anger towards the government for inaction, although many groups with differing goals worked together against generalised inequality (Calhoun, 2013).

government policy adjustments, but the action is ultimately targeted towards longer term cultural change, such as attitudes and perspectives within society. As Graeber (2013) concurs, prefiguration can be seen as an attempt to "build a new society in the shell of the old" (p. 232-233).

Raekstad and Gradin (2020) connect prefigurative practices to feminist roots by describing how these practices form the "personal-is-political argument for prefiguration" (p. 88). They state that while the personal is political is "hardly a new or cutting insight", the ideology's fundamental implication is "that power does not just express itself in formal rules and policies, but also in our everyday interactions" (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020, p. 92). In feminist theory, the saying "the personal is political" is attributed to Carol Hanisch (1969) who wrote a feminist memo encouraging women to recognise how their personal struggles were connected to the larger power structures in the public and political world. Similar to the experience of children and young people, women's matters are frequently and traditionally relegated to the private sector, mostly within the home. Bringing women's and young people's issues into the political domain draws in the consideration that all decisions and actions must be based around the recognition of, and dismantling of, formal and informal hierarchies (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020).

For activists then, this means that the ways the collective is designed, from structure, to events, and strategies, are intertwined with the ideologies of the individual activists. Similarly, activists' ecological habitus means that their personal connection to the environment cannot be separated from their actions towards the environment (Kasper, 2009).

Examples of this kind of prefiguration in the climate space are sustainable practices such as community gardens which emphasise a community-based network systems of shared labour and goods. DIY (do-it-yourself) movements aim to reuse and recycle rather than purchase and waste. Similarly, consumer movements of ethical consumption encourage individuals and communities to purposefully consume products that are ethical, responsible and non-harmful. This could involve boycotting products or companies which do not fit the movements' ethos, and boycotting, which aims to actively seek out products and providers which support and respect their goals. These are also known as forms of every-day activism (Schlosberg and Craven 2019; Trott, 2021; Yates, 2021), where an individual's actions through living life and making daily choices according to a particular ethical stance are a

form of prefigurative activism. That is, prefiguring on a small-scale daily basis the goal that is being strived towards on the large scale. In this way, the end goal of the movement is demonstrated as a tactic of the activism practice.

Graeber (2002) discusses prefiguration in his work on anarchism. He states that it is the rejection of politics and the prefiguring of an alternative, where it is demonstrated that another world is possible, and this world can be experienced momentarily during the action. This echoes the work of Gordon (2018) and van de Sande (2022), who in recalling the origins of the word 'prefiguration'/ 'prefiguring' itself, refer to the biblical connotations of foreshadowing or prophesy. For example, in the Christian religion, an event or period of time may foreshadow the coming of the Christian god, Christ, or a biblical king's palace foreshadows the Christian notions of the kingdom of heaven. In this way, prefiguring has an element of looking to the future, and purposefully demonstrating something of that future. This form of prefiguration points to the third way that young people act prefiguratively, and is about shining a light to the future and predicting a snapshot of what is to come.

Flesher Fominaya (2014) brings prefigurative politics and prefigurative activism together in saying that "prefigurative practices also attempt to transform social movement practice itself, as well as that of broader society" (p. 10). Prefigurative practice encompasses the varying understandings of prefiguration, in politics and in activism, and therefore is the preferred term that will be utilised throughout this discussion. Prefigurative practice also leads to two other concepts that need to be discussed in this chapter, namely Do-it-ourselves (DIO) politics and Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZs).

6.1.1 Do-it-Ourselves Politics

DIO politics is a concept established by Pickard (2019) and refers to when citizens take initiative and act politically without relying on traditional collective structures, that is, when people are acting politically without politicians. In current discussions surrounding young people and activism, young people often say that they 'want action'. DIO politics demonstrates they are no longer simply waiting for and demanding that action to come from elsewhere but are doing it themselves. DIO politics fits under the umbrella of prefigurative

practice and Pickard has designed it as a specifically response to the uprising of young people globally against inaction regarding climate change. It is prefigurative in that it relates to young people engaging in politics before their time of acceptance into the political world, and because it involves prefigurative practices performed by individuals and groups who make lifestyle choices which point towards the end goal of the movement on the larger scale.

DIO politics is enacted on a personal and individual level as well as collectively. In using the word 'individually', this does not assume the lack of collective behaviour. Individually young people choose to behave politically, within personal boundaries, in ways that they can take on in their personal life, for example, environmentally friendly practices, or conscious consumerism. Collectively they are able to bond together with people they would not normally connect with but can, now, through social media. They connect, share information, network and mobilise and collectively personalise their political participation beyond the formal institutionalised systems. In the words of Pickard (2019, p. 390-391), "DIO politics is entrepreneurial political participation that operates outside traditional political institutions through political initiatives and lifestyle choices, in relation to ethical, moral, social and environmental themes with young citizens being at the forefront of such actions".

The current societal context that many young people operate in involves a structure of education and socialisation that is formalised, approved and aims to produce competent adults who are capable of contributing appropriately. Yet as a result of the climate crisis of global warming and the resultant environmental devastation, young people have been rejecting pre-structured environments to enact politics in their own way. DIO politics relates to the perception that politicians are not doing enough, or are doing it wrong. Action is, therefore, required of the young people, and they do so collectively; doing it ourselves (themselves), deliberately and differently (Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015; Pickard, 2022; Pickard, Bessant & France, 2018). Pickard identifies that DIO politics is enabled by three main factors: digital technologies, higher levels of education attainment and globalisation. Pickard (2022, p. 736) states that "education and being a student act as a lever to this particular young cohort's political efficacy as DIO politics and environmental activism, which is facilitated by digital connectivity". With regards to education, it is not specifically the studies undertaken that enable DIO politics. Rather, through education young people are exposed to ways of thinking and learning that open their minds and assist in forming their

values. They are interacting with people from many different backgrounds and thereby coming in to contact with politics, activism and participation as a way of life rather than a specific study course.

In doing politics in their own alternative manner, young people are subjected to a great deal of debate and opinion. Mayes and Hartup (2022) find that young people are represented in Australian news media as 'ignorant zealots', 'anxious pawns', 'rebellious truants' and 'extraordinary heroes'. Likewise, my previous research (Alexander et al.,2021) found that young people involved in the climate strikes were represented as immature and irrational, brainwashed pawns. These categorisations contribute to furthering their position as unfinished, still in training, and not yet capable or sufficiently mature. Despite these persistent dominant narratives, young people have demonstrated competent political agency, with an energy that arises from their moral emotions and personal claim in the issues at stake (see Boulianne, et al., 2020; Bowman, 2020; Budziszewska, Glód, 2021; Collins, 2020; Han & Ahn, 2020; Mattheis, 2020; Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015; Pickard et al., 2018). In rejecting their formal education for a day, the school strikers prioritise their internal and generational conscientisation which has informed their political ideology that change is required and possible.

Throughout young people's challenge to the limiting structures in their experience, it becomes evident that their awareness of those structures continues to increase. As stated by Sloam et al. (2022, p. 3), "today's younger generations are transforming democratic politics on a global scale." Not all activists have access to the same opportunities and possibilities for climate action. As in Bourdieu's theory of practice, habitus and capital play an important role in influencing a person's practice. Global inequality pervades the possibility for climate action as well as the consequences of climate inaction (Walker, 2020). Cultural differences also play a role, as argued by Chang (2022) in relation to the Taiwanese expectation of young people regarding academic performance and parental intervention.

For young people it is a conscious and deliberate choice to participate in climate activism. As Brügger et al. (2020) state, politics can have a formative effect on young people and develops a generation with shared concerns and attitudes. This is evidence of a radical habitus developing in young people, not just in the activism field, but as part of their habitus in multiple fields. They are keenly aware of the information and issues, of their limits within

that situation, and of their ability to deliberately do politics differently (Pickard et al., 2018). In this way, activism is a site of learning and education. It results from conscientisation in the political, environmental and radical fields, while influenced by habitus and capital, and is a site of learning for continued conscientisation to transform their reality.

6.1.2 Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ)

Hakim Bey is a pseudonym for anarchist writer and poet, Peter Lamborn Wilson. Using this penname, Bey's (1985) most notable contribution to protest literature is the concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZs):

> The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere / elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. (p. 95)

In effect, a TAZ is a gathering that defies authority and, for a short time, takes over a space for its own purpose. Generally, this space refers to a physical space, perhaps public land or a section of a city, but as Bey states, a TAZ can also liberate time or imagination. TAZs are, therefore, directly linked to prefigurative practice as it is clear that the action taken does not necessarily, and in fact is unlikely to, have immediate effect on the large scale. It is a smaller scale action, temporary in nature, that presents another possibility for life. Bey (1985) refers to this as the "psychological liberation" that occurs when "moments and spaces" are realised and which demonstrate that "freedom is not only possible but *actual* (emphasis in original)" (p. 118).

There are certain circumstances under which a TAZ can occur, and Bey (1985) specifies the following:

1. Psychological liberation (mentioned above) where freedom is actualised, if only briefly and temporarily
2. The "counter-net must expand" (p. 101), i.e. the "TAZ 'exists' in information-space as well as in the 'real world'" (p. 102)

3. The “apparatus of control” or system of authority and rule “progresses on course with hysterical rigidity” (p. 118)

In order for a TAZ to be a viable strategy, Bey speaks of psychological liberation which draws a clear link to conscious awareness of oppression. This realisation is the first step of utilising a TAZ, and Bey (1985) specifies it is “akin to *satori*[15]”, that is, an awakening or enlightenment (p. 96). He states, “we must know in what ways we are genuinely oppressed, and also in what ways we are self- repressed or ensnared in a fantasy in which *ideas* oppress us” (Bey, 1985, p. 118). This echoes the words of Paulo Freire in his concept of conscientisation. As previously discussed, Freire determines that in order to become liberated, a person first needs to have an understanding of the realities of their experience, and their capacity to effect change upon that (see Chapter Five).

The second characteristic of a TAZ refers to the counter-net. Bey (1985) defines the “net” not as a reference to the internet, but as “the totality of all information and communication transfer” and states that it has hierarchical aspects where some information is reserved for elites only (p. 101). Within this net of information is what Bey (1985) calls the “web”, which is the “horizontal open structure of info-exchange” that is non-hierarchical and accessible (p. 101). When the web is used for revolutionary purposes, Bey refers to it as the counter-net. The net, web and counter-net are not individual structures but refer to the tendencies and varying uses of information exchange.

In this second characteristic of a TAZ, Bey states that there must be growth in the counter-net and the TAZ must exist in the information space as well. In practical terms, a group of people taking over a space for revolutionary purposes is pointless if their very presence is not known, noticed and discussed. The purpose of the information space is therefore both for logistical support and organisation but also for making the movement known beyond its temporary location on the ground. The location of the TAZ is physical in

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[15] Satori: sudden enlightenment and a state of consciousness attained by intuitive illumination representing the spiritual goal of Zen Buddhism. Merriam-Webster Dictionary https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/satori.

Satori is also known as an Awakening and defined as “a profound realization of our true nature and the nature of reality”. https://www.zen-buddhism.net/satori/

terms of the geographical space that is taken up, and the location is also in space, virtually, that is, existing "in information-space as well as in the 'real world'" (Bey, 1985, p. 102). For Bey, this could be word-of-mouth, media or zines, but today, this occurs primarily via the internet and digital technologies. This links to Pickard's findings that DIO politics are enabled through digital technologies.

Occupy Wall Street is a classic example of the TAZ. When groups of people descended upon the city areas and took them over to demonstrate their concerns, rapid spread of information enabled the TAZ to reach the size and amplitude it eventually achieved. Many groups, with differing agendas, were able to organise and join together for the same cause due to information sharing. This was not restricted nationally, but had international reach (Barber, 2012).

The third characteristic of a TAZ is the relationship of the movement to the "apparatus of control" or the State (Bey, 1985, p. 118). McArdle (2022) uses Dublin's 'Squat City' as a case study and describes the TAZ as not engaging with the state and providing temporary freedom from the state structures. The temporary nature of these zones is essential so that the movement can dismantle itself and re-form elsewhere "before the state can crush it" (Bey, 1985, p. 95). When discussing Occupy Wall Street, while Szolucha (2016) does not refer to the spaces as TAZs, they find that the Occupy "camps were a political space where debate and action in defiance of the authorities could and did take place" (p. 122). This created a sense of community among participants in the face of disillusionment against politicians and the current system, and also developed confidence by being a demonstration of doing something that was thought not possible, or disallowed by the authorities.

6.2 Part 2: DATA AND DISCUSSION

This section of the chapter will revisit the theory and concepts discussed above by applying them to this research project. Specifically, I examine the data generated in this research project and consider how prefigurative practice manifests in young people's

activism. Firstly, I discuss prefigurative politics, to argue that young activists' actions, regardless of strategy, purpose or cause, is prefigurative by the very nature of it being political action prior to the age of political legitimacy. Secondly, I discuss prefigurative activism, and this section is an examination of the types and style of activism employed and how they are prefigurative by creating early and small change, before the larger scale change has occurred. In the last section, I specifically examine the use of Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZs) and how these zones are a form of prefigurative foreboding to warn of the consequences of lack of climate action.

6.2.1 Prefigurative Politics: Acting Prior to Political Acceptance

By engaging politically, young people are inherently acting prefiguratively. This is because their presence is not welcome in the political space. They are not considered politically valid, and their voices are deemed to be irrational and incompetent. In the current social environment, young people are expected to silently absorb adult culture, while leaving decision-making to the relevant powerholders. Politics is in the realm of adult concern and young people are excluded from this process and discussion table (see Chapter Four). Yet freedom comes with knowledge and action, as per Freire's (1970; 1974; 1998) conscientisation where a person's conscious awareness develops with knowledge of reality, but also one's capacity to act upon that reality. The freedom being sought by young activists regarding climate change is the freedom from powerholders who are wreaking havoc with the planet's survival, freedom from being silenced on decisions effecting their own future, and freedom from the overall inequality and oppression of dominant societal systems.

Prefiguration has been defined as embodying an alternative practice for society (Flesher Fominaya, 2014), as creating a new world while the old world still persists (Graeber, 2013), and as beginning to make change on the smaller scale before change is possible or enacted on the larger scale (Szolucha, 2016).

Parallels can be made with these definitions to the situation of young people doing politics today. If young people are small / new / young, older people or the powerholders are large / old / aged. If young people are immature / irrational / uneducated / ignorant, then older people are mature / rational / knowledgeable / wise. Further, if these binaries of age and

capacity are continued, young people are seen as inferior / invalid / submissive / apolitical, while older people are superior / valid / dominant / political. Each of these words describing the binaries have been curated from the participant interviews in this study.

Regarding the interplay between age, experience and knowledge, Heidi felt that older people are automatically assumed to be more mature and knowledgeable and therefore are taken more seriously:

> HEIDI: I do think that **naturally, our society instinctively does take the opinion of older women, I think, more seriously than younger women** … I do think that our **society instantly assumes that age therefore qualifies for more experience and more knowledge**, when that is not necessarily always the case, like some young women are very experienced in the sphere and a very knowledgeable … when a young person is trying to be public about what they're saying, I think that there's just so much more scrutiny on them, because they are just trying to be **pulled down and proven that they're very young and immature.**

Maxi and Lapis had similar sentiments, and added that a person's values were developed prior to the legally accepted age of eighteen years and that their actions were based in the knowledge from science:

> MAXI: At the age of 16, you would already **know a lot** and have your own **values and beliefs.**

> LAPIS: I'd want people to listen, because we may be young, and but we're doing what we think is right. And we're doing based on science. And we're doing it because it's our future. But **nobody's listening, because we're young**. And I don't think that should be a factor in what's happening

Both Heidi and Lapis are stating that age, and the perceived knowledge and capacity that comes with age, have a concrete effect on how young activists are received. Heidi refers to the increased public scrutiny on young activists purely on the basis of age, while Lapis describes how young people's knowledge is based on science. On the other hand, Lucas acknowledged that young people's opinions and knowledge are still forming, but that

participation in activism is part of the ongoing developmental learning, and regardless, should not erase the validity of their voices:

> LUCAS: I'd say the **biggest obstacle** to any young activist is that, you know, when **you're so young you're still forming opinions on a lot of things**, like there's a lot of things that I wish I knew when I started that I now know. Like, I guess that's just the **learning process**.

For young people, being political is prefigurative because they are doing so prior to being accepted and welcomed. By acting in the adult world of politics, regardless of the cause, their very presence in these discussions is prefigurative. They are acting, in their 'smaller' unwelcome younger way in the bigger, older and wiser realm of adults.

6.2.2 Prefigurative Activism: Small Change before Big Change

The tactics of activism, the very strategies selected and enacted upon, are another form of prefiguration. Under the umbrella of prefigurative activism sits DIO politics and everyday politics, that is, types of actions that Raekstad and Gradin (2020) have found fall under the "personal-is-political" argument for prefiguration. When discussing activists' ecological habitus, Kasper (2009) involves the feelings one has about the environment and the effect this has on their life choices. Someone with good or caring thoughts of the environment or who appreciates nature is likely to be eco-friendly in their personal practices and make ecological choices part of their lifestyle. Extending this to the generational radical ecological habitus I identify in Chapter Five, young people who share this habitus are likely to adopt practices that entail positive environmental action, including both political and personal actions aimed towards reducing harm towards the environment.

6.2.2.1 "Doing" something

DIO politics (Pickard, 2019) was named to assist in understanding of young climate activists' actions. It is enabled by a higher level of education attainment in contemporary western societies. Pickard (2019) finds that climate activists want to use their knowledge and

position to do something. Pickard herself emphasises the *doing* aspects of this form of politics, stating that young people feel that it is up to them to *do* something about the climate crisis. Stemming from the disillusion of politicians not doing enough, not listening and not responding to the climate emergency, DIO politics "is a question of taking part and getting involved, keeping going, being active not apathetic, that is, not doing nothing, but doing something" (Pickard, 2022, p. 732).

Adelaide acknowledges that there are many people in the world who are not in a position to prioritise action on climate, as they may be suffering in many other ways. For her, therefore, she felt her comfortable position in life not only made it possible, but also imperative, to engage politically:

> ADELAIDE: I guess I just kind of had this sense of like, there are people out there in the world that have really tough lives and are really suffering, and there's just so much wrong with the world. And **I'm in a pretty good position, and I can kind of like, do something about it**.

Similarly, Ryan felt a strong inclination to *do something*. Although Ryan is a human rights activist, and Pickard's DIO politics relates to climate activists, the factor of being in a position where it is possible to focus one's energy on activism also relates to his experience. Here, Ryan states that having the passion is a starting point, but this needs to translate into action, otherwise, for him, this would lead to regret. Ryan discussed how his mother preferred him to focus on education and other priorities, but here he describes how his knowledge and position means he can 'do the work':

> RYAN: I'd **be kicking myself** if I didn't do it, at least give it a crack. See how you go. Rather than **never trying and then regretting** it or you've never done it. … I mean, for the most part, it's always just been, you know, I'm passionate about it. So that just translates into, you know, doing the work. … it's endless work that like I'm passionate about, or it's an area I'm passionate about, I'll just do that first. Because I enjoy it. Like, I kind of **know how to do it, I can get it done**.

In addition to being in a position to participate politically, DIO politics also includes a disillusionment in politics and politicians. Young people feel that their governments are not doing enough, they are inactive or absent from the climate crisis, so therefore it is up to young people to do something about it.

> LAPIS: After I'd gone to one of the strikes. I liked the message that they were trying to prove. And I liked it that they [SS4C] were **actually doing something instead of staying silent**. I haven't done much activism in the past, but I want to get more into it. Because I'm really passionate about it.

Ava agrees that it is in the act of *doing* something which allows young activists to stand apart from the government. They refer to political narratives of concern for young people. In some cases, these narratives include aspects of welfare-concern where it is posited that young people are placed in a position of anxiety and unnecessary stress by fighting for climate action (Alexander et al., 2021). The participants in this study, including Ava, clearly emphasise that stress is caused by the climate emergency, whereas the act of *doing* relieves anxiety:

> AVA: I think the funny thing is saying that the activism is causing anxiety is the opposite because I'd say, having activism as a way to express that and to try and fight against it is probably what **decreases our anxiety because we know at least we're doing something, as much as we can**.

6.2.2.2 Political Disillusionment

Pickard (2019) acknowledges the distance between many politicians and young people, and how policy and narratives seek to exclude or ignore young people's politics: "Many young people are also turning to non-electoral political participation because they are disillusioned, disappointed, distrustful or even disgusted with politicians who they say often fail to engage with them or punish them" (Pickard, 2019, p. 39).

The circumnavigation of politics is a crucial aspect of DIO politics. Evidence of this appears differently in the case of young activists in this project and is likely the result of compulsory voting. Pickard's (2019) work is based on projects within Europe where voting is not compulsory and therefore politics is more optional. In the context of Australia, with compulsory voting from the age of eighteen, young people are more inclined to find a way to make politics work for them, rather than disengage entirely. In discussing DIO politics,

Pickard (2019) also acknowledges this: “One type of engaged political action does not exclude another. On the contrary, different forms of political participation can be reciprocal and form a virtuous circle of engagement and citizenship” (p. 377). This is vital especially in the case of Australian young activists, who are required to engage politically by voting when legally of-age to do so, and yet they concurrently participate in non-traditional forms of politics as well.

> ADELAIDE: I think the thing that separates us is like **we don't really see Parliament as something that's going to enact that much more radical change**. Like it's the body that's currently running society.

> LAPIS: It's the fact that we're being overlooked, because we're young, we’re being ignored. Because we don't know anything. And we're just young, we're just working it out and leave it for the big boys to deal with. **You guys aren't dealing with it. It isn't being dealt with. So we're forced to take your place.**

Here, Adelaide and Lapis describe that the Australian government is very unlikely to enact the change that is required. They are disillusioned with the government and the current system of politics and engage in climate activism in order to attempt to invoke change. Willow’s sentiments echo the same disillusion that the government is acting out of short-term self-interest rather than listening to the facts of science which should influence them to act on climate change.

> WILLOW: So I would say they, here they have an obligation to do what's best for everyone, and what they're doing right now, **ignoring the science**, and they’re just **going ahead with what is only really going to work out for them in the short term**.

Heidi is eligible to vote and therefore has experienced activism from the position of being formally and legally included, and of being excluded on the basis of age. When considered the two scenarios, she felt that her formal participation in voting was far less effective than engaging in the less formal politics of activism. In the Australian context, Heidi and the other young activists are arguably in a relative position of privilege where ‘skipping’ school for political participation is a safe and perhaps luxurious option (Walker,

2020). For young people concerned with climate change in other parts of the world, particularly in the Global South, receiving an education can sometimes be a challenge that renders each day of learning unmissable (Walker, 2020). In this way, the social capital available to some can be used for collective action where some can protest on behalf of others. Inequalities also exist within Australia and not all young people have access to the same social capital. Some have parents who will punish them for participating in activism, and for others, the inequality in their family's lived experience may create a feeling of pressure to be at school to create social change through their education. This creates a situation of uneven solidarity where young people "less immediately impacted by climate change are striking on behalf of young people who are often worse affected, yet who may not have the same access to strikes" (Walker, 2020, p. 11). For this reason, to consider activism as an effective and desirable choice requires acknowledgement, first of all, of the disparity in young people's circumstances that affects their access to such options.

> HEIDI: I would say my activism [has more impact]. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, for sure. I think I think **my vote, it makes a difference politically, but I do just feel like one single person in this massive big pile of papers**. But I think with activism, I am able to show my, my unique side of my individual side. …I think with activism, I can, I can **touch a lot more people**. And then hopefully, by doing that, I can **influence a lot more people** to potentially, like, go out and vote or be involved in something.

In this discussion here, Heidi is expressing how formal politics feels like a number and a tick-in-the-box kind of politics that does not affect real change. However, with her activism, she is able to add a personal touch which has a greater effect than the action itself.

> HEIDI: And so I think it's more of that, **like ripple effect that I can achieve with activism that I just can't achieve with voting.**

But this disillusionment with politics does not translate into the total rejection of politics. In this Australian context, and for the young activists in this project, they understand their limitations within the formal electoral system. They know that this is what they have to work

with, and even though the government is not acting adequately on climate change, voting is compulsory and for many for them, their eligibility is coming closer.

Evidence of engagement in formal politics was especially present in the SS4C protest at Perth Parliament house on 15th October 2021. At this particular strike, with the upcoming federal election set for the following year, strike organisers specifically allowed space for the young activists to register for voting. Those who were eligible to do so were encouraged right in the moment at the strike to take out their phones and register for voting with the Australian Electoral Commission. This collective moment of voter registration was poignant and demonstrated a decisive action to use methods of formal politics for their cause. One of the protest chants succinctly describes this:

> We can march, we can shout,
> We can also vote you out
> (field notes, 2023)

The Australian SS4C deliberately chose to act in a non-partisan manner. With the (then) upcoming federal election in May 2022, the activist team was planning to be present and hand out cards which explained each party's climate policies, but without the promotion of any one party over another. Piper explains:

> PIPER: **We're doing the election**; we're going to be at the polling booths. And we're going to just be giving out cards which say, hey, **check out the climate policies**, guys, look at which ones are good and which ones are bad. **Consider it**.

Lucas further describes that there is a complex relationship between the Greens party in Australia and the climate strikers. The Greens see themselves as allies for the climate movement, and in Australia, they represent the current best hope for climate action. However, as Lucas explains, their climate policies are only a small part of what the Greens stand for and do not guarantee voter support.

> LUCAS: We do try to keep our distance because we don't just want to become like an organising wing of the Greens. … you don't want to restrict yourself to one area like voting, for example. **Voting's all well and good, but the majority of Australians want more action on climate change, just because of that, doesn't mean that they're all going to vote for the Greens**. There's a reason they keep voting for these, you know, climate denialist parties. **Voting is not enough**.

More than voting is needed to change the climate crisis because young activists do not see the current political system as offering any real course of change. Adelaide explains that usually politics requires a person to 'follow the party line' if they wish to be successful, and as a result, it is largely impossible for an individual to effect change in the current system, despite what their best wishes may be.

> ADELAIDE: …there are so many obstacles, like it was funny, one of the speeches, he [a union representative] mentioned, like, you know, you guys could be the next prime minister, you guys need to get to the top and then you can flip it and turn around the whole system. But it's like, well, **how do you get to the top? You need to do it by not rocking the boat and not flipping the system** most of the time.

6.2.2.3 Digital technologies

DIO politics is enabled by digital technologies (Pickard, 2019). Since the rise of the 'network society', the internet and social media offer a vast array of useful tools for activist communities (Castells, 2000). As Pickard (2019, p. 395) states: "The internet, social media and other digital technologies can be helpful in informing, organising, mobilising and engaging young people in politics, especially in non-electoral forms of political participation, such as DIO politics".

It is important to recognise here that not everyone has equal access to online and digital technology. Within Australia, and globally, inequality causes a 'digital divide', where some people have limited or no means to access to internet (Norris, as cited in Pickard, 2019). Momentarily taking a step back to Chapter Four, where I discussed Bourdieu's theory of practice, digital access forms part of a person's capital and therefore directly influences their

practice. For the young activists in this project, the internet is a well-used and appreciated tool.

When the Covid-19 pandemic saw the closure of public spaces and subsequently shut down planned protest actions, the young climate activists in SS4C took to social media instead. On 3rd March 2023, the SS4C was held within the confines of Perth's strict Covid-19 precaution guidelines and transmitted live on Instagram. In this way, instead of attending in person and risking the virus spreading further, people isolating at home were able to attend and show their support via online means, and the message was still broadcast.

Using digital technologies largely involves social media. As in the above scenario, a protest could proceed specifically due to the tools available on social media. Willow discusses the experience of protesting in a small group (within Covid-19 guidelines) and on social media, saying that it felt vastly different to being in the midst of a large vibrant crowd. However, they were comforted by the knowledge of the strike being a global protest, so even though the Perth numbers could only be small, it was part of a bigger significant global movement.

> WILLOW: It was still very nice to think, especially as that was an international one, **we're sitting here, but so are like 1000s of other people like literally everywhere** like Europe and the US.

The global solidarity via online means that Willow expresses here is not the first time digital solidarity has been made possible via social media. In 2016, an ongoing protest occurred in North Dakota at Standing Rock. A large group of people were camped on site, to protest the Indigenous waters and sacred sites from the construction of a proposed pipeline. Global solidarity was overwhelmingly expressed using a Facebook function that allows location check-in, where people from anywhere in the world digitally 'checked-in' to the protest location at Standing Rock. This had a dual effect of providing the water protectors a sense of solidarity, as well as potentially confusing authorities as to how many numbers were physically present, and how large the protest was in reality. In this way, for Standing Rock, and for the SS4C strikers, networks of solidarity and belonging spread horizontally across the

globe and connected people in a way not possible without online tools (Baik, 2020; Pickard, 2019; Vromen & Collin, 2010).

For Pickard (2019), when discussing DIO politics, this use of social media causes a change in political dynamic - "hierarchical political structures are being superseded by leaderless, horizontal, networks with participative and interactive practises, leading to the democratisation of non-electoral political participation. Digital technologies enable non-electoral political participation making it more accessible and attractive." (p. 395).

Young people have been called 'digital natives' or 'iGen' in reference to their generation being born into the digital age and technology is naturally incorporated into their lives. It is largely attractive to young people to connect and engage online, and publicly participating in social media 'liking' or 'sharing' and such activities, is a natural part of their online communities (Pickard, 2019).

The young activists in this project also discuss how their initial step into activism frequently began online.

> AVA: I got **involved in school strike for climate through social media** because at the time I was living in [de-identified location] and there was no current school strike group so I started it, with myself and two other people. And I think it was **social media that got me really interested in climate activism**. A lot of old people act like social media is the worst thing ever [laughing] but really it **gives young people an opportunity to be involved in things that are happening around the world** when especially if you're living in a small town where there's not many people interested in what you're interested in.

Here, Ava is describing that in their remote country town, participating in SS4C came to their attention via social media. With a slight sense of ridicule, they comment that older people might not be keen on social media and think it is not a positive factor in the younger generations' lives. However, for Ava, social media made it possible for them to connect to a global movement, bring that global movement to their remote location, and develop a participatory interest in activism, politics and the environment. Especially in a remote location, where distances are greater, costs are usually higher, and isolation is often felt more heavily, social media plays a crucial role. Wells (2015, as cited in Pickard, 2019, p. 395) discusses the possibilities that are created via online means, in saying that "digital media,

with their capacities to reduce communication costs, enable remote activism, and allow the expression of complex individual identities, are reshaping the possibilities for collective action".

Heidi also expresses how she notices the solidarity that is enabled via social media. For her, this provides the inspiration to continue through seeing what others are experiencing and how they are dealing with it.

> HEIDI: I also think, in terms of yeah, in terms of **social media, it makes you feel less alone as well**. I also think if you're going through something, and seeing that other people have gone through it, and that, like they have come out of it. And this is what they're doing now, I think is also **very inspiring and motivating**. ... Whereas I think like, like the Me Too movement or something, I just feel like **once you have you have a community behind you and you feel like you're supported, and like to be able to do something about it. I think that's yeah, huge in terms of people power and being able to connect with others.**

For Heidi, social media tools translate into 'people power' through the ability to connect horizontally and develop a community that may not be geographical close, but is a community none-the-less. Castells (1996) uses Rheingold's (1993) term of 'virtual communities' to explain how people come together online around their shared interests and connected values. Geographical location is no longer the defining crucial aspect for the creation of a community. Castells (1996, p. 386) defines these virtual communities as "a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest or purpose".

The sharing ability of online communication is a vital tool for activism. It allows activists to communicate widely and practically instantaneously, sharing information, and organise. For young activists, the ability to search and learn individually and collectively online, forms part of their activist journey and development.

> AVA: I think it's just that **there's a lot more information online** that, **especially about climate change that I'm not taught in schools because of course they don't teach us things that are going to make us want to become an activist**. And just seeing so many people, especially like early 2019, doing the school strike in, you know, 10s of 1000s of people in each city striking for the future of our generation, and seeing that is really

> **empowering** and then also having all the **information about the climate science** and stuff that we weren't taught readily available on **social media is probably the only place that I found that sort of information** because you don't get taught it in school … The same thing with young people is they [school and the older generation] don't believe social media activism is a real thing. Which is just silly because **social media is such a big part of our world** and they just don't like it.

As Ava states, the government's education system is unlikely to teach or encourage activism, and as previous discussed, learning science related to climate change is not easily accessible at schools. Maxi also states that it was through social media that they realised the seriousness of climate change and were propelled to take action.

> MAXI: It [climate change] was on **Instagram** a lot when I was getting older, and I was like, yep **this is serious, I need to put my foot forward**.

Needing to act, to 'put one's foot forward' is the vital ingredient of Pickard's (2019) DIO politics. Pickard emphasises that the use of Do-it-*ourselves* is purposeful to include both the individual and collective nature of this form of activism. It is not Do-it-myself, or Do-it-yourself, but rather "ourselves" refers to an individualised style of collective politics. In most cases, as per Kasper's (2009) ecological habitus, and Raekstad and Gradin's (2020) personal-is-political style of prefiguration, the collective nature of activism is closely intertwined and intimately parallel to the individual choices an activist makes.

6.2.2.4 Individual Lifestyle

Everyday activism, lifestyle choices, and ethical consumption are all tools for activists to promote their environmental cause. These also relate to the ecological habitus discussed in Chapter Four, where I use Kasper's (2009) version of ecological habitus to explain internalised ecological frameworks of practice. Other definitions and uses of ecological habitus are offered by Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008). Haluza-DeLay (2008) describes the term as an "orientation which privileges ecological considerations" (p. 206). Smith's (2001) definition is similar and refers to the "practical environmental sense" or the

"ethics of place" that are entirely necessary if there is to be an "alternative to the world's otherwise irremediably bleak prospects" (p. 204).

Kasper's ecological habitus has not included the value-related aspects of a person's practice, and without the moral judgement surrounding personal choices, this version of ecological habitus is more in line with Bourdieu. As an enduring disposition of habitus which influence practice, Bourdieu's habitus does not attempt to include determinations of the right or wrong aspects of action. Haluza-DeLay (2008) and Smith (2001)'s version of ecological habitus, on the other hand, include a moral stance in expecting that ecological world-views are essential if the planetary crisis of climate change is to be halted.

Returning then to the project data, all participants expressed a personal and individual lifestyle that was in accordance with the values of SS4C; namely, reducing harm to the environment and focussing on ecological wellbeing. The activists expressed how this also gave them a sense of credibility that they were living in their lives what they were saying when at protest strikes.

> PIPER: I feel like **you have to carry what you're saying like, you know, words are all good. But you've got to do the actions as well, you've got to do what you're saying, you want to see the change in**. … knowing why you're doing this, for me is the biggest thing like **making conscious decisions** about how much you're spending or how many clothes you're buying and stuff, because I recently started switching to recently, around a year ago now started switching to like trying to buy all second hand clothes, and it's a slow move, but it's like all slow **steps towards trying to improve your own lifestyle and mindset** and knowledge on any topic. So that you're able to, when people try to have conversations with you about it, you're able to fully, you know, say yeah, I do this. I'm not just striking out on the street. And I know about this, it's like actually being able to, you know, know what's going on.

Each person has a separate set of circumstances which determine their access and capacity to make certain lifestyle choices. As Piper expresses above, for them as an activist, it is about striving to make change and improve, being careful and learning, without the expectation that this will manifest itself entirely similar in each activist.

At the SS4C strikes there are multiple visible signs of the activists' personal decisions to personalise their politics. Fashion was intertwined with politics, and visible in the form of earrings and garish slogans on t-shirts and clothing (see Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection One). Many of the items were handmade accessories, exemplifying the dual goal of spreading

a political activist message as well as recycling clothing and refraining from commercialising their activism.

Numerous activists, as individuals and some as groups, campaigned for veganism as an environmentally positive choice. Some had slogan stickers on their keep-cups or re-usable drink bottles. Others make conscious choices to car-pool or use public transport, rather than arrive individually at the protest. In this way, they were promoting less use of fuel and more environmental transport options. In some cases, people's placards had no words but were simply a handmade solar panel, and this promoted solar energy as a far more eco-safe option than a reliance on fossil fuels.

In addition to personal lifestyle choices, the SS4C organisers had purposeful discussions to determine their motivations for protest actions. It is important to them, individually and collectively that their motives are towards the environment. They are there to try and influence change that will save the planet, not to personally promote themselves. Piper explains:

> PIPER: And we kind of each wrote our own speech and kind of just like, on that day before we actually live streamed, **we sat in a circle for an hour and we talked about why we're striking and like what we're doing**, it's kind of like what I said I do for myself, like making sure that **you know why you're doing this, that it's not just for the clout. It's not for the popularity**. You're being online or in front of everyone. And we sat there for an hour and had a good discussion about decentralising the organisation, how the organisation runs, **why we personally are doing this**.

Prefigurative practice therefore has many aspects that are both personal and collective. As Smith (2001) discusses, ecological decisions are crucial if there is to be any chance of saving the planet from a bleak future. Pickard (2019) also emphasises both the individual and public aspects in the concept of DIO politics. The alternatives are not pleasant, and perhaps not liveable.

> WILLOW: Like, my sister is the same age as one of Scott Morrison's kids and I'm not sure if he thinks like "**what's the world going to look like when she's older?**"

6.2.3 Prefigurative Foreboding: Signalling the Consequences

Much of prefigurative practice relates to demonstrating a new way of life. Activists use their social movements, as well as their individual lifestyle choices to exemplify that a different system is possible, that change is an option, and that a new world can exist. However, in the SS4C, the young activists use prefigurative practice in an opposite manner. They use prefiguration as a form of counter-prefiguring; that is, not to demonstrate a new world, but to display what the consequences of no change will be. It is a form of predictive activism, and an exposure to consequences of inaction. It presents as a taste of what is to come and what is already happening in some areas.

Van de Sande (2022) describes prefiguration as a form of 'fore-shadowing', referring to foreshadowing the desired change. To foreshadow is to show, and to forebode, is to show with a warning. I call this aspect of prefigurative practice *prefigurative foreboding*, and it refers to the activism that contains implications of a warning, dread, and images of future disaster.

In SS4C, young activists conduct prefigurative foreboding with the use of TAZs. As discussed above, Bey (1985) explains the acronym TAZ as temporary autonomous zones in which activists take over and claim a space to make their political point heard. Bey (1985) describes this deliberate strategy as a way of publicly demonstrating, and bringing attention to a movement, and being in a sense of control for a moment in time and space. In Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Four, I describe how the strikers march through the city streets causing disruption to traffic, road closures, and a cacophony of chaos. And then they all sit. It is a purposeful and deliberate tactic, pre-planned as a well-considered strategy. As the group sits, they take up space in the city, they take up public space, space that is designed for the flow of traffic and the conduction of business.

By sitting in a usually busy intersection in the middle of peak business hours, young activists are utilising this TAZ to foreshadow inconvenience, chaos, and disruption. They are effectively stopping usual business which is unable to proceed as workers are distracted by the noise and watching through office windows, and as vehicles are unable to proceed along their route. The SS4C does not foreshadow a better way of living, but it forebodes the inconvenience of continued climate inaction.

In his description of TAZ, Bey (1985) also discusses the presence of the 'apparatus of control'. In Interludes: Ethnographic Reflections One and Four, I note my observations about the presence of police authority. Bey (1985) states that the 'apparatus of control' "progresses on course with hysterical rigidity" (p. 118). Despite its gendered connotations, I particularly note his use of the word hysterical, because at the SS4C the ridiculous nature of the police presence was glaringly obvious. As I previous stated, police presence is necessary for aspects of safety, traffic control and other reasons. However, it was ridiculous or hysterical in the sense of over-policing with a disproportionate number of officers for a peaceful crowd, and in particular how this caused a greater hazard than the strike itself.

The police presence was largely symbolic. They did not stop the strikers from blocking traffic, they could not prevent the march from occurring as per the right to protest, but their presence conveys the image of control. And the young activists were well aware of the fine line which sat between what was tolerated and when to stop "before the state can crush it" (Bey, 1985, p. 95). Upon sitting in the intersection, brief speeches were given, and a few chants raised, but it was brief enough that frustrated drivers experienced the inconvenience without resorting to violence or acting out in any other way. It was also brief enough, that police did better to tolerate and allow the action, rather than attempt to move the crowd on which likely would have caused its own unsafe issues and chaos, perhaps more so than the TAZ itself.

By participating in the SS4C young activists are also foreboding the potential future uselessness of school itself. Amongst the pervasive narratives requiring students not to miss a single day of school, by acting prefiguratively in the strikes, students are also saying that education and learning, as it is, will not be necessary in a future where science has been ignored and the planet is devastated. They are not saying 'we do not want to go to school', they are saying, 'in the future you are creating for us, there will be no point of school'.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed prefigurative practice. Young activists today have developed a generational radical ecological habitus and this manifests itself in the form of

prefigurative practice, namely prefigurative politics, prefigurative activism, and prefigurative foreboding.

Prefigurative politics occurs when a young person engages politically. As a young person, they are formally excluded from politics and their voices are largely not welcome on the political stage. Society is structured with this age-based boundary. As such, by participating and acting politically, they are acting prefiguratively. Prefigurative activism incudes Pickard's (2019) DIO politics which was created to assist in understanding young people's climate activism. DIO Politics is partly due to young people's generalised higher education attainment in modern times, enabled by social media and other digital means, and fueled by young activist's disillusion at formal politics. Prefigurative foreboding occurs through the use of TAZs as an activism strategy to take up public space and demonstrate. In the case of SS4C, the activists are demonstrating a warning and giving society a taste of what is to come if in-action on climate change is allowed to continue.

Young activists are disillusioned with politicians and corporations ongoing absence from climate change. DIO politics creates an opportunity for them to engage and not to sit back in frustration at powerholders' inaction, but to take on the challenge to 'do something' themselves. When describing the aftermath of a SS4C, Wren speaks of the exhilaration between them and their peers. True to activists saying that action alleviates, not exasperates, climate anxiety, and true to Pickard's (2019) DIO politics where activists just want to *do something*, Wren states that the feeling after *doing* a strike is like none other.

> WREN: [you feel] Like you've **done something** … There's like, some kind of **really weird elation** that comes with it. You probably didn't see us at the end, me and my three friends, were just like screaming, we were just like jumping up and down, like hugging each other **really, really happy**. Because you've pulled it off. Yeah, **you've done it**. And you feel like you're getting listened to. … It doesn't wear off. I've organized three strikes now. It definitely doesn't wear off. And the bigger the strike, the more you **feel like you've done it.** Especially if it's an issue you're passionate about. But I've had so many people I know come up to me who'd never been to a strike before, and they're like, **Oh my God, that's like the best feeling ever**.

INTERLUDE: RESEARCHER REFLECTION TWO

AT MY DESK

NOVEMBER 2023

A Great Mouthful of a Word

The skeleton appeared again. It was still waiting - 'Waiting for meaningful action on climate change'. But this time it was not alone and had joined the growing crowd at Perth Convention Centre where the 2023 WA Energy Transition Conference was being held.

At this time, the city of Perth is in the middle of an early heat wave, yet the crowd was impressive. As I watched the Instagram live stream from my desk, I saw people of all ages joining with umbrellas for shade, crowding under the few trees for relief from the sun. The crowd was filled with young people, many familiar faces, and many of whom wearing their school uniforms. I wondered whether they were planning on attending classes as well, or if it was a visual symbol to emphasise their absence from school. Somewhat like a deliberate and stark message that this strike is connected to their missed education and they were not even going to pretend otherwise.

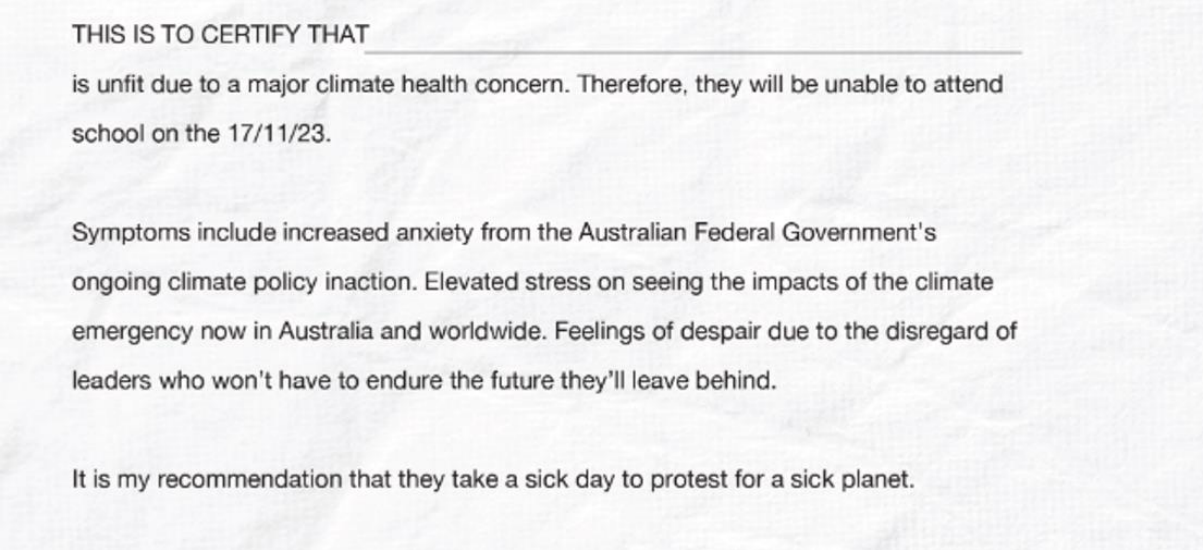
Present at the conference was the WA Premier Roger Cook, federal ministers for energy and resources, and the CEO of Woodside Energy. These authorities were the specific targets of the school strike for climate in Perth. In the weeks leading up to this conference and the subsequent strike, I had been following relevant social media accounts. Young activists talked about how they were fed up with green-washing from the government and corporations, and this energy conference was yet another example of this green-washing. It was called an 'energy transition' conference, yet government and mining giants were meeting together – and for what? More talks? More plans? More targets?

Behind the scenes, more mines were being approved. WA continues to be the leading resource state in the country, and in a display of disregard for the planet, the massive ecological impacts always seem to take second place to the potential for mining, resources, economic growth and jobs.

There was a noticeable new dynamic at play this time around. In predicting the familiar narratives of compulsory school attendance and claims of truancy, in this global strike, the young

activists were supported by climate 'doctors', namely, scientists working on climate change. These scientists had pre-signed a Climate Doctor's Certificate which strikers could add their name and print out as a reason to be absent from school on the day of the strike.

The certificate was worded as follows (a full copy of Climate Doctor's Certificate is attached as Appendix B):



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT _____

is unfit due to a major climate health concern. Therefore, they will be unable to attend school on the 17/11/23.

Symptoms include increased anxiety from the Australian Federal Government's ongoing climate policy inaction. Elevated stress on seeing the impacts of the climate emergency now in Australia and worldwide. Feelings of despair due to the disregard of leaders who won't have to endure the future they'll leave behind.

It is my recommendation that they take a sick day to protest for a sick planet.

Figure 7 Screenshot section of Climate Doctor's Certificate

(SS4C, 2023)

Although not accepted as an official absentee form, the "doctors' certificates" served a dual purpose. They were a display of solidarity with the young activists as well as a message to government. In a similar way to young activists' striking, the climate 'doctors' were also disillusioned with politicians' lack of action and were choosing to 'do it' their own way. I reflected on Pickard's DIO politics and considered the angles that extended beyond young people alone. The actions of these climate scientists similarly represented an entrepreneurial avenue of non-traditional politics, aimed towards politics, but not strictly expecting to make any real change at that moment in time. The climate doctor's certificate also demonstrated an opportunity where adults were able to prefigure true listening and appreciation of the concerns held by young people for their future.

Young activists are sick with symptoms of anxiety, stress and despair.

The planet is sick.

In this context of sickness, I took some time to contemplate where my research stands in the picture. I considered the words of Ellsworth (1989) who ask the question, "why doesn't this feel empowering?". I, too, have often used the buzz words such as empowerment, voice(lessness), agency and knowledge. Even as my project seeks to highlight young people's voices and contribute to the conversations which ultimately aim to help save the planet, the question remains, has anything really changed? Am I actually helping? Targets are being set, small changes are occurring in localised areas, and, in some cases, young people are becoming increasingly included and heard. But is the planet being saved? Is the young people's future being rescued and turned around from devastation? Is climate change slowing down, and will everything be ok? Will anything be ok?

I have often been frustrated by stubborn narratives which circumvent the true words of young people and, instead, focus on irrelevant issues such as their age, maturity or anything else that can be scrutinised and used to undermine them. Does my research have the same limitations, but on the other side of the fence? Empowerment itself can be riddled with power. As I strive towards 'empowerment' and 'voice', is my work also "treating the symptoms but leaves [leaving] the disease unnamed and untouched" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 306)?

Yet second guessing myself and questioning the tangible impacts of research does not mean it is not worth doing. Studying the system as it is, is ground-work for future work which may study how these systems can change. Part of our humanity is the connection between us all that makes social science such an important contribution to knowledge. I recall how Freire (1974,), when discussing conscientisation, says that being involved in dismantling oppression "is a critical insertion into history in order to create, to mould it" (p. 25). People close to me have often heard me talk about standing on the right side of history. Will the future world look back kindly upon what I/we do today?

Although conscientisation is certainly a "great mouthful of a word", it nonetheless succinctly holds the fine line which ties together knowledge and action (Freire, 1974, p. 23).

Once you *know*, even if turning a blind eye, it is still a choice to move to *action*. It is the action a person chooses which allows the 'oppression' (to use Freire's word) to continue. When talking to some of the interviewees for this project, we discussed how this felt for them, and many of them had said that their commitment to fighting for change increased as their knowledge grew. The more they know, the more they want to make change, and this is the cycle or process of conscientisation underpinning their new internalised way of living and being.

My focus returns to the protest live-stream on my screen and I listen as the young activists yell that there has been enough talk, and that it is time for action. No more green-washing!

Over the years of the global climate strike, some positives can be seen. Small scale changes have begun to occur, yet the emergency of the planetary situation has not yet been grasped by powerholders. When does planning become action? When do targets get reached? And at what point do discussions actually make a difference?

I shake my head and consider the concise words of participant Lapis,

"This is not a future issue; this is a *now* issue"

Tomorrow never comes, but climate change does and has, and today is the only right time to act. While the boundaries of this project have been reached, the work goes on. The fight continues. For the activists, and for me.

As I write these words, I smell the distinct crisp aroma of charred wood, eucalyptus-tinged sweetness, and ashen with the dry whisps of grasses, seeds and leaves. Looking out my window, I watch as the light dims and the sky develops a familiar orange haze. Bushfire season had begun[16].

And it is not yet summer.

[16] In November 2023, in the Perth areas of Wanneroo and Swan, an early season bushfire was fuelled by extreme temperatures and dry warm winds. 18 homes were razed, and forced evacuations for people, pets and livestock. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-24/perth-bushfire-updates-live-wanneroo-fires-emergency/103147486

7 Chapter Seven: “It’s not a future issue, it’s a now issue” - Synthesis and Conclusions

In this thesis, I have explored the experiences of young activists in Perth, primarily in the SS4C climate movement. I have endeavoured to discuss their experiences by highlighting their voices and their understandings of those experiences. I have critically examined these narratives through combining the lenses of Bourdieu’s theories, Freire’s conscientisation, and prefigurative practice. Through this theoretical combination I demonstrated that young people are experiencing hysteresis because their reality does not sit comfortably with their inherited habitus. Following an ongoing process of conscientisation, young people adapt their habitus into a generation radical ecological habitus which then manifests itself through various forms of prefigurative practice. The purpose of this synthesis chapter is to bring the thesis to a conclusion which answers the project’s research questions and brings forth a contribution to the sociological understanding of young people and activism.

I firstly summarise the key points from Chapters One to Three, being the Introductory and background context, Literature Review and Methodology chapters. Following this, I answer each of the research questions while aligning them with Chapters Four to Six, the data and discussion chapters. I then discuss the overall theoretical contributions that this thesis achieves, including the implications and significance of the research undertaken. I consider the strengths and limitations encountered and how these present as potential future research opportunities.

7.1 Part 1: CONTEXTUAL SUMMARY

As citizens, and indeed as human beings, we have a right to protest, known as the right to freedom of assembly and association. This right is based on the understanding formed by

the United Nations and inscribed in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Australian Government, Attorney-General's department, n.d.). Australia is a signatory of these covenants meaning that all people have the right to hold protest, including young people who are excluded from the formal voting system below the age of 18 years.

However, in Australia, the right to protest is under threat. Increasingly, peaceful activists are being arrested and detained, with some given gaol sentences. Police powers are increasing over protest activities, and it is evident through ethnographic observation at SS4C that police presence is excessive, largely symbolic, and frequently awkward (see Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Four). Participants in this study also reported that police made things difficult in an unnecessary manner rather than making any real difference to community safety and lawfulness. This is the context in which young people continue to mobilise globally and locally to demand action on climate change.

For young people, this is even more complicated as they have the added layer of the requirement to attend school, and their exclusion from formal politics based on age. Sociologically, we understand 'childhood' and 'adolescence', as well as categories like 'youth' and 'young people', as social constructions. This categorisation exists purely on the basis of age without taking into account any individual characteristics, competency, maturity or rationality (Ansell, 2005; Qvortrup, 2004; 2009a). Until reaching the age of eighteen, children are rendered as incomplete while they are socialised and trained in preparation for adulthood (Leonard, 2015; Thorne, 1987). Democratic systems across the globe typically exclude children from politics and, on that basis, they are ineligible to vote (Campiglio, 2009; Thorne, 1987). The WA education department formalised this exclusion in sending a warning message to all parents of school-aged children. Children were clearly not permitted to attend the SS4C and the education department used intimidatory language about truancy and potential criminal activity (see Prelude).

This legal barrier to political participation stems from anticipatory and protectionist attitudes regarding children and childhood (Qvortrup, 1989). In anticipatory fashion, childhood is viewed as a stage of development and training for adulthood through appropriate socialisation (Leonard, 2015; Thorne, 1987). Similarly, from a protectionist perspective, children are shielded from matters deemed to be of adult concern, such as economics, politics

and social and/or environmental justice issues (Campiglio, 2009; Leonard, 2009; 2015; Qvortrup, 1989). The terms 'youth' and 'young people' are also socially constructed. Threadgold (2020a) states that these are used in a number of different ways and the meanings can change depending on theoretical and political interests and research methods.

Generational ways of understanding children, childhood and youth stem from the work of Mannheim (1952). Mannheim (1952) describes how each generation exists in a specific time and place which is likely to be different than what is the experience of generations before. Furlong (2012), along with Woodman and Wyn (2014), highlights how this generational approach to sociology connects youth (and all people) to a relational time and place. Nakata and Bray (2023) similarly discuss how each new generation is an opportunity for change. Considering people in terms of generations, rather than age or life stage, is one way to address the challenge of relying on arbitrary distinctions between "young people" and "adults". Understanding youth from this perspective overcomes the reliance on age as a defining factor. Instead of age being the common factor, it is the period of history that provides common conditions which create a 'generational mindset'. In relation to this study, the global conditions of climate change, and now also Covid-19, are the major defining characteristics facing the current generation. It is as a generation that they are faced with an inherited habitus that requires them to continue to wait for adulthood before actively participating politically, and it is also as a generation that the participants of this study have shown the development of hysteresis.

When examining the framing of young activists' work, it is clear that age-boundaries continue to have a strong influence. Media, including political and social narratives, continues to utilise anticipatory and protectionist narratives (Alexander et al., 2021). In this research project, I worked with the underpinning principle that young people possess the maturity and competency to act in the way they do and to discuss their understanding of those actions.

This project is a qualitative interpretive ethnographic and participant centred study (JCU ethics approval #H4878). I chose this approach based on the works of Merriam (2009), Creswell (2007) and Denzin & Lincoln (2001) as a foundation. I have chosen this approach in order to hear participants' voices, examine their words, and how they themselves attribute meaning and understanding to their situations. In addition, I have been influenced by the

anthropological work of Clifford Geertz (1973) who encourages researchers to look for the thick description that is below the surface of observed data.

Recruitment was initially conducted through social media advertising, but this only had limited success. Upon attending activism events and speaking with young activists face-to-face, I was able to recruit eager participants, and used further snowballing techniques from there. Data was generated through a combination of ethnographic interactions that informed the interviews and provided themes for discussion into the experience of this sub-set of engaged young people. In total I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour each and interacted in ethnographic observation at four activism events.

To enhance my understanding of the context of young people's activism, and themes that emerged from the interviews, I used ethnographic data as an experiential tool to further my analysis. I processed the ethnographic observations by using writing as a tool of enquiry (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008). As soon as practicable after attending an activism event, I used the interactive experience, my field notes, and the photographic data collected, to write the narrative-style interludes. This process enabled me to formulate a clear analysis which further informed the interviews as well as provided field evidence for the argument. The data generated in these interviews and observations is presented in the Ethnographic Interludes and in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

7.2 Part 2: RESULTS SUMMARY

This thesis has aimed to represent young people's voices in the context of Perth, Western Australia, by highlighting their experiences of activism and to inform debates relating to children's position in society and their responses to climate change. I was guided by three research questions, and in the next sections I synthesise the answers to each of them as discussed throughout the thesis.

7.3 Research Question 1: How do young activists experience their age-based political exclusion?

My exploration of this first research question was conducted through using Bourdieu's theory of practice, in particular the concept of habitus and leading to Bourdieu's lesser-known concept of hysteresis. I found that, for the participants of this study, the experience of political exclusion results in young activists experiencing hysteresis.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus explains people's action within a set of circumstances. It refers to the behaviours, dispositions, and habits that a person embodies as their internalised norms. Habitus is not a system of mechanical or practiced reactions but refers to the historical reproduction of practices which have become so internalised over time to become nature. Habitus is the historical and generational repetition of acts which create a tendency or inclination for a particular way of acting/being deemed to be sensible and reasonable in a given set of circumstances.

Applying this to young people demonstrates how they grow up in an environment brimming with influence that shapes their habitus and informs their practice. The young participants spoke of their respective families and the influence this had on their beliefs and actions. Although influence does not imply conformity, the young participants were aware of their parents' values, including religion, social and environmental concerns, and politics, and related their own values accordingly. Some, such as Maxi, adopted a more moderate stance than their parents, whereas Lucas was led to more direct action than his parents, and Ava, acted political in contrast to their parents' wishes and example. In each case, the participants related their activism to influence from their parents. Schooling and society also formed a large part of young people's habitus, with the continued expectation of learning and training with a view to getting "a good job", such as for Ryan and Adelaide (see Chapter Four).

Yet young people's inherited habitus does not sit comfortably with them. Their expected habitus has been established through generations of family, schooling and social expectations. But it no longer matches their reality. Participant Lucas expressed that missing school for protest made no difference at all to a person's education, and that a person's value should not be indicated by their conformance to educational requirements (see Chapter Four).

With the earth facing a planetary crisis, young people that I spoke to question why norms and expectations should be continued in the midst of crisis. Lapis, for instance, was clear that she was not at all concerned with getting a job when she was older, but her concern lay with what state of liveability the planet might be in when she was an adult.

Hysteresis, which the participants developed as a result of exclusion from politics during a time of crisis, is defined by Bourdieu (2000) as being the experience when habitus is misaligned with reality (Hardy, 2004). For young people, being excluded on the basis of age makes no sense because those who do have political power are refusing to act on climate. Young people's future is at stake, and they are acutely aware of this fact. Lapis expresses her view to the future as being vastly different to older generations perspectives, as goals may shift to a focus on survivability (see Chapter Four). They are faced with a potentially devastating and uncertain future, yet the expectation upon them is to continue as if oblivious. In their own words, they feel it is most bizarre, ridiculous and ludicrous.

It makes no sense to young people that they are expected to be silent when there are things that need to be said, or to be expected to go to school and not miss a single day when education is not valued and the educated, like climate scientists, are not listened to. The reality is urgent, this is a crisis, an emergency, and being socially and politically relegated to wait does not sit comfortably with the urgency of reality. Being politically excluded, therefore, results in young activists experiencing hysteresis.

7.4 Research Question 2: How can young activists' response to the climate crisis be understood using sociological perspectives on youth and activism theory?

My second research question led me to extend Bourdieu's habitus by combining it with Freire's theory of conscientisation and generational approaches to the sociology of young people. I find that young activists' response to the climate crisis can be understood as a generational radical ecological habitus.

Freire's theory of conscientisation (also known as 'critical consciousness') refers to human beings' ability to be aware of and act on reality. It is comprised of two equally important factors, namely, to be 'conscious of' and the 'action upon' reality (Freire, 1970; 1974). Conscientisation inherently involves awareness; it is a process of consciousness raising. Importantly, conscientisation is a process rather than a state of being. It is a process where knowledge develops action, which adds to further knowledge, influencing further action. Hysteresis, as experienced by young activists because of their misaligned habitus, leads to conscientisation.

In the context of youth activism, an example of this in practice could be young climate activists who, through increased learning of their cause, can see the inequality in climate consequences, where certain members of society are disproportionately impacted. Participant Adelaide expressly stated that she had learnt to connect the dots and make links to the underlying structural and systemic issues (see Chapter Five). The young activists may then become engaged in activism relating to that inequality, or for other rights of that group in society, in addition to their climate activism. This is especially evident in the 'power of striking' online event held by young activists where they discussed the systems of inequality that intersected to create a concerning future for their generation (see Interlude: Ethnographic Reflection Three). Participant Willow also discussed multiple causes being linked together, and it was important to them to acknowledge Country at the beginning of our interview, as they were clearly focussed on stolen Indigenous lands as an intersection with climate justice (see Chapter Five). Through their rising awareness, conscientisation leads to a radical habitus, which expands the activism to incorporate multiple movements and structures their dispositions in a way to enable and increase the likelihood of their continued participation in activism.

Crossley's (2003) concept of radical habitus is an extension of Bourdieu's habitus in order to address participation in social movements. Radical habitus is the disposition of individuals to participate in activism and is an acquired habitus that occurs from participating in the first place, and in turn, structures further activism (Crossley, 2003). Due to the connection of habitus to practice, by extending habitus into the disposition that creates the inclination to be involved in activism, Crossley (2003) has also extended Bourdieu's theory of practice in this way:

[(Habitus) (Capital)] + Field = Movement

(p. 56)

Namely, a radical habitus, combined with one's access to capital, and in association to a particular field, determines the involvement in social movements.

Habitus has also been extended into research of environmental activism, to consider the development of an ecological habitus. An ecological habitus is when a person's understanding and feelings towards the environment is not separated from their action towards the environment (Kasper, 2009). Other explanations of an ecological habitus incorporate a moralised tendency, where one's actions aim to do no harm to the environment, and acting in a way that aims to save the planet from devastation (Haluza-Delay, 2008; Smith, 2001.) In a way that reflects Freire's conscientisation, an ecological habitus also connects knowledge and action.

Combining all these concepts together enables an understanding that young people's response to the climate crisis can be understood as a generational radical ecological habitus. Using Bourdieu's concepts alone would not provide this understanding of the process of awareness which allows habitus to be adapted. Although Bourdieu states that habitus is malleable, by adding conscientisation into the analysis, the specific combination of knowledge and action explains how these young activists have developed a generational radical ecological habitus.

I argue that the response is a *generational* response because young people today are a generation that is faced with an environmental crisis that is threatening the entire planet, in a way that has not been experienced by any generation before. While the participants in this project varied in respect to their individual generational connections, with a range of supportive and oppositional contexts, they are all part of this generation responding to the current climate crisis. In addition, the participants themselves discuss their experience in generational terms, such as in response to previous generations reliance on fossil fuels and (generalised) refusal to adapt, and as a responsibility to the generations to come.

The generational response is also a *radical* response because in caring and acting for the environment, young activists are more likely to continue to engage in activism. Becoming political is like a spreading of awareness in that young activists' political awareness and action take place in multiple forms and causes. The causes themselves are therefore able to be ongoing, and the activists are enabled to see the need, and develop the desire, to act on more issues of inequality and injustice. Once the inequalities have been noticed, it is hard for activists to not see more occurrences in other fields, and this leads to the propensity for continued and ongoing radical behaviours.

Further to being a generational radical response, young people's response to the climate crisis is especially an *ecological* response. It involves an internalised understanding of one's place in the environment and how a person's actions, individually and collectively, have a direct impact on the environment, such as in Kasper's (2009), Smith's (2001), Haluza-DeLay's (2008) and Nilan's (2021) studies relating to ecological habitus.

Further, I argue that this generational radical and ecological response is young people's adapted habitus. As a generation responding in a radical manner to the ecological crisis, these factors have become internalised. It is in the disposition of young activists to act in a manner that is non-harmful towards the environment, and encouraging positive change.

7.5 Research Question 3: How do young activists navigate their status as future beings and insert themselves into the present?

Through the spreading nature of the above radical ecological habitus, the climate movement grows. More young people join, those who participate are likely to participate again and ongoing. Their worldview begins to change and through ongoing conscientisation they understand the reality of systems of oppression which have cause more injustice in areas beyond environmental. This then manifests itself with prefigurative practice. Through this study, I argue that young activists navigate their status as future beings and insert themselves into the presence by engaging in prefigurative practice.

Prefiguration is not a new concept in social movement and activism theory. There are many definitions of prefiguration and Szolucha (2016) says it is "a mode of thinking and organising that helps make sense and fill the intermediate vacuum in the space where grand social change is still in the making". Pickard (2019, p. 390-391) coined the term Do-it-ourselves politics which is defined as "entrepreneurial political participation that operates outside traditional political institutions through political initiatives and lifestyle choices". In particular, Pickard (2019) finds this is a type of politics where young people are at the forefront, both individually and collectively.

Prefigurative practice was evident in the words of the young activists who I interviewed. They describe their disillusionment with traditional politics, and even in the context of compulsory voting in Australia, the young people I interviewed are of the opinion that voting is not enough. Their disappointment in older generations, and in politicians, lack of action, propels them into taking action themselves, or as Pickard (2019) says, to do it themselves.

Another term that assists in understanding young climate activists' actions, is that of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), which is described by Hakim Bey (1985) as a temporary uprising that takes up space and defies authority. TAZs are, therefore, directly linked to prefigurative practice as it is clear that the action taken does not necessarily, and in fact is unlikely to, have immediate effect on the large scale. It is a smaller scale action, temporary in nature, that presents another possibility for life.

In particular the use of TAZs was evident in the ethnographic observations I conducted at school strikes. When marching through the city the activists would take up space in the centre of a busy intersection, disrupting traffic, bringing the business day to a stand-still. And as they say themselves, 'if you think this is inconvenient, it's only going to get worse with climate change'.

Prefigurative practice and the use of TAZs assists in understanding how young activists navigate their status as future beings and insert themselves into the present. Firstly, I find that young activists navigate their political and social status through their adapted generational radical ecological habitus. This results in them bringing the future into the present, and this is done in the form of prefigurative practice.

I argue that prefigurative practice occurs in three ways: prefigurative politics, prefigurative activism, and prefigurative foreboding. Prefigurative politics is where young activists participate politically prior to the legally accepted age to do so. Secondly, prefigurative activism refers to the strategies of the action itself, and could include strategies such as inclusive operation, everyday activism, and ethical consumerism. The third way we can see prefigurative practice is in prefigurative foreboding. Prefiguration is generally seen as a way to create a small version of the desired outcome in order to show that it is possible. For young activists in the climate movement, the opposite is the case. Young activists are not showing what is possible with change, but they are foreboding what is likely to occur if no action is taken. By disrupting daily life and the systems of society, the young activists provide a warning, a small taste, of the devastation that will continue if no climate action is undertaken.

7.6 Generational Radical Ecological Habitus

The overall question for this project is to examine: How do young activists in Perth WA respond to the global climate crisis? To answer this question I return to Bourdieu's theory of practice which argues that habitus, when combined with capital and in the context of a particular field, will influence and produce an outcome, an action, which Bourdieu calls 'practice'.

Yet habitus for young people is misaligned with their experience of reality. For the young people that I interviewed, reality is a burning planet, environmental crises, extinction of species, all of which is combined with the ongoing denial and refusal to change from powerholders, while they are expected to remain silent and passively absorb socialization and learning. They are, therefore, experiencing hysteresis (Bourdieu, 2000). Hysteresis occurs when habitus is does not suit the experience of reality.

As a result, the young activists I spoke to have adapted their habitus to better suit their experience of reality, being climate change. They have become environmental in their thinking, radical in their practices by refusing to be silent, and they have internalised a disposition to act in a way that works to reduce and alter the damage caused by decisions of

the older generations, and make things better for the next generation. This is a generational radical ecological habitus. The resulting compromise is prefigurative practice. Young activists work to effect change in the climate crisis by engaging in prefigurative practice, in the three ways mentioned before, prefigurative politics, activism and foreboding.

Therefore, in conclusion, I find that the actions of young activists in the reality of the global climate crisis can be understood using this modified version (Figure 6) of Bourdieu's theory of practice with Freire's conscientisation accompanying the entire process and continuing:

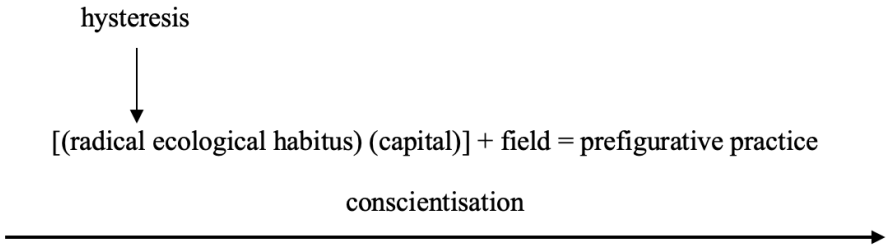


Figure 8 Process of Young People becoming Activists

Young people's generational radical ecological habitus, and assuming an unchanged access to capital, and in the same field, is producing action that can be understood as prefigurative practice.

Throughout this entire process and ongoing, is Freire's conscientisation, which is the raising of consciousness and the building of knowledge and understanding of agency. This occurs in young people through their knowledge of the environmental crisis, and importantly also though their understanding that they have the capacity to act and influence their reality. Conscientisation is the foundation for this change and development in young activists, and how it will further accompany their life into adulthood, is not yet known.

7.7 Strengths and Limitations as Opportunities for Further research

Building on the above modified version of Bourdieu's theory of practice, there is the potential for further research regarding the role of capital in the response of young people to climate change. Particularly in the context of the vastness of WA, many areas of the state rely on different industries for their economies and for the livelihoods of the community. For example, in the mid-west or Pilbara areas, mining is the lifeblood of many communities and towns, whereas other areas rely on tourism due to their environmental beauty and uniqueness. This would result in differing access to capital in relation to climate activism, a variation in priorities and conscientisation is likely to carve a unique path in these different fields. This is an avenue for further research that could also enable a gendered analysis to be conducted, and to take into consideration socio-economic factors.

Further research which explicitly engages with Indigenous voices is also important in the context of climate action. In the case of this project, I made the decision not to directly recruit Indigenous young people. Partly this decision was made in relation to the already difficult ethics process due to concerns of the participants' ages and their perceived vulnerability. In WA, throughout the earlier stages of this project and ongoing, there were major events occurring that directly affected the Noongar Aboriginal people. There had been numerous deaths in custody, and especially the devastating tragic death of 15 year old Cassius Turvey who was senselessly assaulted as he walked home from school. As a result, the Noongar community was particularly suffering at this time, and numerous Black Lives Matter protests were ongoing. It was therefore not appropriate to insert my project into the midst of this trauma, and Indigenous people were not actively sought as participants.

Another avenue for research is a longitudinal study. What happens to these young activists long term, what are their values and actions as adults, how does their conscientisation continue? I am particularly interested in whether the generational radical ecological habitus will be sustained, or if it represents a moment in time. This project involved the participation of only a small number of participants and these tended to be the organisers and outgoing members of the group. Their words do not represent the quieter

activists and those who may simply attend but not be involved in-between events. Future research could focus on a wider sample of participants.

And, of course, the question that remains unasked in this project: what does all this mean for the young people who do not become activists? Not all young people have formed a radical ecological habitus and not all engage in politics or prefigurative practice – why? Is this the result of differing capital and field factors? What about young right-wing activists, how has their conscientisation lead to their political passions and commitments? In answering these questions, it would be possible further build on this study by engaging in a complete analysis using Bourdieu's theory of practice, and also to consider how conscientisation in the same set of circumstances can produce different results.

Finally, I am interested in the role of religion in climate activism. Our government here in Australia is predominantly Christian-based, and faith plays a strong role in people's decision-making. It would be a useful endeavour to examine the role of religions in climate policy and action, particularly considering the links that prefigurative foreboding has to biblical prophesies.

7.8 Prefigurative Practice as Researcher

My personal and professional world view has been shaped by both feminist and queer theories. Those theories are not used as a framework for analysis in my project, but they inform my perspective in a manner that enables consistent reflection over the inherent power dynamics and the assumptions of categorisation that exist in this research space and the political field. When conducting ethnographic observation at activist events, my practice was informed by these frameworks to guide me to pay particular attention to the gendered dynamics at play. Although these were not analysed in this case, it assisted me with recruiting participants as I was able to address them in an inclusive language which led through to the interviews where I used the participants' preferred pronouns in our discussions. Participant Lapis, commented that she thought it was "so great" that I had taken the time to ask, respect and use young people's preferred pronouns.

My standpoint as activist has enabled me to build a meaningful rapport with young activists. The participants have seen me at the marches, perhaps with my children. Participants have seen me chant and march, they have seen me applaud the speakers. This has added to my ability to be non-extractive in my research work, because I have also expended my energy for the cause.

Being an activist researcher does come with risk, though. For example, when interviewing, I would genuinely enjoy speaking to these young passionate and impressive activists. At times, this could mean I would congratulate them, encourage them or thank them for their work. This could be seen as leading them in a direction where they think they need to answer my questions, but for me it was done first of all genuinely, and secondly as a way of answering their request to be heard. Young people want to be heard, and even if nothing changed on the larger scale, I was an adult who listened. It is within my power to do so. It was a small act I could do as one adult in response to young people's demand to be heard.

To mitigate the risk of leading or influential interviewing, I worked with my advisors who read interview transcripts and checked my analysis of the data. Despite my sensitivity to the interview subject material, I maintained sufficient professional distance and conducted a theory-driven analysis within the ethical and theoretical parameters. In addition, I remained self-reflexive throughout the stages of this project. This was achieved through the use of reflexive writing (such as represented in the interludes), and with a committed reliance to a three-way intersection of the data, theories and research questions to produce my analysis.

This project enabled me to demonstrate reciprocity in prefiguration - I could prefigure an adult listening to a young person, taking their words and opinions seriously, and genuinely engaging, believing, and accepting their knowledge and credibility.

7.9 Implications and Significance

Contributing to ongoing debates regarding young people's response to climate change and their position in society matters in the real world and is not simply an academic pursuit. Many aspects of young people's current wellbeing, and their future, depends on climate

action. In their own words, they want to be included in these debates and have decisions made in accordance with the reality that they will bear the consequences of those decisions.

Conducting this research project was significant in its timeliness and currency. Youth activism is not a new phenomenon, but the global mass mobilisation of young people for climate activism is. It has been ongoing now since 2018 when Greta Thunberg first sat in protest on the steps of the Swedish parliament. Since that time, media, political, social and also academic interest in this area has continued to grow, and the implications are multidisciplinary.

In a political sense, this thesis adds to debates about young people's position in society. Currently, in various locations across the world, there has been an increasing push to lower the voting age in order to reduce the exclusion of young people politically. Young people have also been increasingly included in less formal political avenues, such as local council endeavours and youth parliaments. In the field of education, this thesis adds to developing knowledges in education regarding active citizenship, sustainable practices, and bridges gaps between what Bourdieu (1993) calls 'quasi monastic spaces' with 'blank ammunition' by providing a real and tangible space for learning and action. In addition, traditional narratives regarding children and young people involve aspects of concern for their wellbeing. Much research in this field, including this thesis, is finding that young people's wellbeing is affected negatively by their climate concerns, and that activism is an effective antidote for those worries.

This project also has implications for research itself. Firstly, it presents an opportunity to re-think ethics relating to working with young people. Working from a foundation of young people's capacity and agency, and their genuine requests to be involved, provides the potential for a cautious but open-minded space to engage young people in research. A second research implication from this project is the considerations of the researcher's reciprocation of prefigurative practice. Even if governments, corporations, and society in general may not be ready or prepared to change perspectives regarding young people, academia does not need to wait. Researchers have a unique opportunity to prefigure the change that is being asked for by young people. They can be listening and caring adults who take young people seriously while waiting for broader change to occur in the wider narratives.

7.10 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contributions of this study include:

- Analysing young people's climate activism through the combination of Bourdieu's and Freire's work by linking the concept of **hysteresis** and the process of **conscientisation**
- Arguing that, as a result of conscientisation, young people have developed a **generational radical ecological habitus**
- Identifying that through the use of **temporary autonomous zones** young people are conducting **prefigurative foreboding**
- Adapting Bourdieu's theory of practice to accommodate the above contributions, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Bourdieu's theory of practice, and the concept of hysteresis, explains how young people's habitus does not match the reality of their experience. Their inherited habitus involves them being relegated to a state of waiting and training until they reach the age of 18 years, and in the meantime to be excluded from politics. Due to the climate crisis, young activists are unable to sit comfortably with this expected habitus, and therefore, in this thesis I find that they are experiencing a state of hysteresis.

Hysteresis occurs through the ongoing process of Freire's conscientisation. Through the development of critical conscious, young activists grow in knowledge and awareness of the climate crisis and that there is the possibility to act and effect change. Young people are experiencing hysteresis because the process of conscientisation is making them aware that their reality is clashing with their habitus.

As a malleable factor, habitus is able to be adapted and influenced over time. In this thesis, I contribute the theoretical understanding that young people have adapted their habitus to develop a generational radical ecological habitus which better aligns with their experience of reality, being the climate crisis. This manifests itself in three forms of prefigurative practice, namely prefigurative politics, activism and foreboding. Prefigurative politics, including Pickard's DIO politics, is evident in how young activists are engaging politics their own way prior to being considered valid and capable. Prefigurative activism refers to the strategy of the movement, both individual and collective, including aspects such as everyday

activism, ethical consumption, and eco lifestyle choices. Prefigurative foreboding is another key theoretical contribution of this thesis. It occurs through the use of TAZs and provides a taste of the discomfort and inconvenience that will continue to occur if no action is taken.

7.11 Conclusion

Conducting this research project and producing this thesis has been an opportunity to examine a critical point of time. It is a time where planetary crisis meets a formidable challenge from a generation of young people whose futures are at stake. Bourdieu (1977) states that in a contested field of struggles, generations are naturally pitted against each other, in that what is normal for younger generations may have been cause for great struggle for older generations. For Freire, the unique human-ness of all people provides the relational opportunity for the raising of awareness and understanding and the capacity to work on those struggles.

Young people's social movement for action on climate change will be significant in historical terms. From across the globe, we bear witness to both generational struggle and unity. Young people are facing the brunt of environmentally devastating decisions made by older generations, and they have also taken on the challenge to stem the tide for the sake of future generations.

It remains to be seen how the climate change crisis will eventuate. And it also remains unclear how young people's position in society may change as a result of their actions. As earth reaches a tipping point of rising temperatures which threaten to become increasingly unliveable, perhaps we will also be witnesses to a generational tipping point where young people's radical ecological habitus will evolve and spread to create a more sustainable planet and equitable societies. One thing is for sure, however, there is no more time to wait. These conversations, actions, and decisions are crucial to the present moment in time. Climate change is no longer looming, but it is here, and in the words of participant Lapis:

"It's not a future issue; it's a now issue"

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"You kind of have to keep fighting": Young Activists | Becoming Political and Acting Prefiguratively

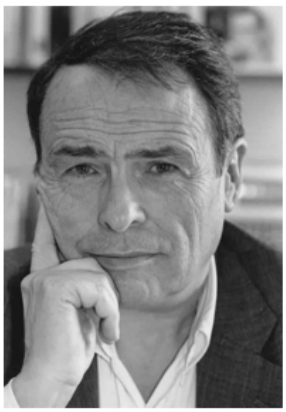
PhD thesis: Nita Alexander

Between October 2021 and September 2022, you participated in an interview about young people's activism. That conversation was an important part of my PhD research, and I appreciate the time you spent with me. I am finishing the project now and would like to let you know what I found.

I start by assuming young people are capable of acting politically, instead of falling into the traditional ideas that young people are too immature. Even with climate change threatening your futures, young people are usually left out of the conversations. Yet, you have not given up on your fights for climate action.

My PhD is a sociology research project and I asked questions about how you respond to the climate crisis. I also questioned how young people feel about being left out of politics, and how you still make yourselves heard instead of waiting until you're older. I then used sociological theories to understand your answers.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)



Pierre Bourdieu

Bourdieu is a French sociologist who is best known for his work on understanding people's actions, behaviours and decisions. His main theory is The Theory of Practice. Part of this theory states that a person's habitus (the rules and expectations around them), has a big influence on the actions they take. These are examples of what you said to me that show your inherited habitus:

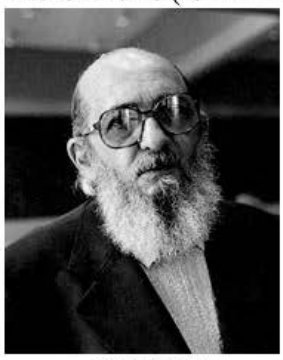
"Older people are definitely more respected"

"Mum says…just focus on work or uni"

But reality does not say the same, and sometimes the world around us changes so much that those rules and expectations are no longer useful. Bourdieu calls this hysteresis. You talked to me about hysteresis in saying things like:

> *"And moving into my future, ... I don't worry about getting a job. Because what if we don't need jobs, then? What if it's what if it's fiery pits of hell by then?"*
>
> *"Is there really a point of me doing school if in the future our planet's going to be messed up?"*

Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997)



Paulo Freire

Freire is a Brazilian philosopher who has contributed significantly to the field of education. He talks about power and oppression in society and how people develop to become liberated from them. One of Freire's useful ideas is that we can develop critical awareness. He calls it conscientisation and says it involves learning about reality, and understanding how we can influence that reality.

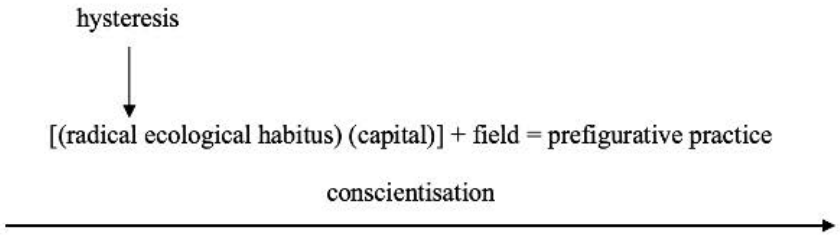
You showed me your conscientisation by saying things like:

> *"This is serious, I need to put my foot forward."*
>
> *"You learn about the issue more and you're able to express your democratic right to have a voice, like you're expressing your voice and that's really really powerful and it feels really good."*

Understanding Young Activists' Practice Today

Through interviewing you and making observations at events, it is clear that young activists are aware of the reality of the climate crisis. This makes you experience hysteresis because the expectation of staying out of politics while young does not make sense when your future is at risk. The habitus that was passed down to you is not suitable and you understand your ability to make changes. This is conscientisation, and you have created a new habitus to better suit reality. I call this your **Generational Radical Ecological Habitus**.

This diagram shows how all those concepts fit together:



Prefigurative Practice

One way that young people do their activism is called prefiguration. What this means is imagining or creating the change here and now, rather than waiting for someone else to change it at the bigger scale.

Prefiguration can happen in a few ways. By joining activist events and demanding to be heard, young people are imagining a world in which they are taken seriously. Many of the people I spoke to also try to live their values as much as possible, by acting in environmentally friendly ways. This is another small-scale way of prefiguring change.

One of the most interesting things about the SS4C in Perth was the way the protests disrupted city life -- when we all sat in the intersections and blocked traffic. This is very inconvenient to everyone going about their day. It stops the normal flow of business and prefigures the kind of disruption they might feel if climate change isn't stopped.

Like to know more?

I have written some academic papers about this research. These ones are free to read:

Conscientisation and Radical Habitus: Expanding Bourdieu's Theory of Practice in Youth Activism Studies

More learning, less activism: Narratives of childhood in Australian media representations of the School Strike for Climate

SCHOOL STRIKE
4 CLIMATE,
AUSTRALIA
SS4C

schoolstrike4climate.com

°CLIMATE DOC+OR'S CERTIFICATE

To whom it may concern,

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT _____
is unfit due to a major climate health concern. Therefore, they will be unable to attend school on the 17/11/23.

Symptoms include increased anxiety from the Australian Federal Government's ongoing climate policy inaction. Elevated stress on seeing the impacts of the climate emergency now in Australia and worldwide. Feelings of despair due to the disregard of leaders who won't have to endure the future they'll leave behind.

It is my recommendation that they take a sick day to protest for a sick planet.

DR. NICK ABEL
HONORARY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
ANU COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

Date: 17 / 11 / 2 0 2 3

Please advise your parent or guardian before attending the Climate Strike.