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'It's not a future issue, it's a now issue': young climate activists' changing habitus in the face of climate change

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ABSTRACT

Young people traditionally face social expectations about how they should behave according to their position in society. However, these expectations can clash with the realities of a rapidly changing world. This study uses Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis to explore how young activists in Boorloo (Perth, Western Australia) navigate the climate crisis. Hysteresis describes the misalignment of one's internalised disposition and behaviours (their habitus) with the external world and is a useful tool to explain how young people respond to climate change and the associated environmental crises. We argue that young people today experience hysteresis because they are expected to patiently and silently wait and learn while decisions continue to be made that further harm the planet and increase the crisis. This disconnect, however, allows the development of a new set of norms and behaviours, that is, a new habitus; a habitus that is generational while also being radical and ecological.

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Introduction

Young people today are a generation confronted with the multi-faceted concerns of the climate change crisis. Environmentally, the planet is on the cusp of dramatic change, with scientists predicting the earth is reaching global warming tipping points – points where change is so significant that it can no longer be reversed (NASA 2022). Warming temperatures lead to increasingly frequent and intense climate disasters that devastate both humans and non-humans (Verlie 2022). Despite consistent scientific warnings, when governments set emissions targets they often fail to tangibly implement changes. This has allowed the fossil fuel industry to retain a dominant role in energy production and slow progress toward sustainable solutions (Piggot 2018). Although young people have long been at the forefront of social movements, their activism and political participation is a noteworthy feature of the climate movement (Mayes and Hartup 2022). According to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'practice', humans are agents of actions that are embodied

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due to the conditions of their existence. For young people therefore, climate change has led to dramatic shifts in how they navigate their social world.

The paradox that young people face is worth examining in more detail: decisions that are being made now and into which they have little input will affect their futures. Bourdieu is useful here as his concepts aim to provide understandings of people's actions, especially in situations of struggles and intergenerational inequality (Bessant, Pickard, and Watts 2020). If the future belongs to young people, how does the environment (both social and ecological) that they have inherited shape their responses? And given these inherited constraints, how do young people negotiate their responses? The study reported here explores these questions through interviews with a group of young people engaged at the coal face of environmental crises: young climate activists. The climate activists provide an opportunity to investigate these questions from the context of participants who, through their activism, have developed a critical awareness about how their goals and activism is seen by adults around them. This awareness suggests that, for the young activists, there are expectations from those around them about how they should act, and that this is at odds with their need to articulate their own concerns and aspirations for their futures. This disjuncture describes the experience of hysteresis, which Bourdieu (2000) conceptualises as a crisis that occurs when expectations and norms do not match the reality of one's experience. This crisis allows space for the rules within a field to be challenged and re-shaped to better fit the conditions, further enabling a new set of norms and behaviours (or habitus, after Bourdieu 1984) to emerge: a habitus that is generational while also being radical and ecological.

We begin by summarising key literature on the generational approach to sociology in order to position our work within the field. This section also establishes that a generational approach does not suggest that generational cohorts have universal experiences; rather, one's generation informs how they experience the social world, and we suggest that this shapes their habitus. We then explore conceptualisations of habitus based on Bourdieu's work and its extensions. In particular, we consider the framing of *radical* habitus and *ecological* habitus. Next, we introduce our research project in more detail and explain how the young people in our study demonstrate a habitus that has shifted to become generationally defined, radical, and ecological in nature.

Understanding sociologies of young people

The category of 'youth' refers to the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, generally defined as 15 and older but not a fixed category based on age (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.). Sociologically speaking, 'youth' and 'young people' are used in several different ways and the meanings can change depending on theoretical and political interests and research methods (Threadgold 2020). As a bridge between childhood and adulthood, 'youth is just a word' (Bourdieu 1993, 94) but one laden with power, and socially constructed relative to understandings of adults (Bessant, Pickard, and Watts 2020). As Idriss, Butler, and Harris (2022) discuss, the concept of 'power' in youth studies is expansive and incorporates many aspects including race, culture, capitalism, and intersecting inequalities. Specifically in the Australian context, Idriss, Butler, and Harris (2022) argues for the decentralising of a white/Anglo youth as the norm. Threadgold (2020) adds that 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. Similarly, Nakata and Bray (2023) discuss how 'children can be represented as figures of renewal and hope or as figures of risk and threat' (306). Often, discussions that criticise young people fail to account for generational differences in circumstances (Threadgold 2020). In this paper, we use the term 'young people' to refer to our research participants between the ages of 14 and 24 years.

The sociology of young people is largely shaped by two dominant perspectives: the 'life course' and 'generational' approaches. Both approaches offer useful contributions to understanding young people, yet they are often framed antithetically. Young people tend to become more politically engaged as they grow older, and understanding young people through a life course lens can help to illuminate the different expressions of political agency. A key limitation of the life course approach to young people is the presupposition of adulthood as a goal: 'if youth is a state of "becoming", then adulthood is the "arrival"' (Wyn and White 1997, 11). This framing neglects to account for the socially constructed nature of adulthood (Blatterer 2007), with traditional markers of adulthood shifting over time and highly variable. For this reason, a life course approach that sees youth as a transitional phase will provide only limited understandings (Threadgold 2020). What were once seen as the markers of successfully reaching adulthood, like owning a home, marriage and having children, are now achieved later in life or perhaps not at all (Threadgold 2020). Experiencing crisis further exasperates this change. Goring et al. (2023) further discusses how young people's aspirations come into despair and anxiety in the face of their precarious futures. Similarly, in examining young people's responses to the pandemic of COVID-19, Kelly et al. (2024) state that the crisis 'significantly impacted the ways in which they think about the relationships between their past-presents-futures, had created uncertainties and anxieties and concerns about their own well-being and the well-being of other young people' (466). Traditional markers signalling adulthood, such as achieving the 'dream job', are highly problematic and represent a privileged position that is limited in global and cultural relevance (Goring et al. 2023; Threadgold 2020). Not only are these markers highly fluid, in some circumstances, they are irrelevant or undesirable.

In this paper we take a generational approach, focusing on the contexts in which young people engage and the key issues they engage with. 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'. The generational approach to sociology connects young people (and all people) to a relational time and place (Furlong 2012; Woodman and Wyn 2014). The world we experience is relative to time and place, likely to be different than the experience of earlier generations (Mannheim 1952). Instead of one's age, socialisation in a period of history 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. 'Gen Z' is the label given to today's young people, usually considered anyone born since 1997 (Dimock 2019); the participants of this study fall into this generation. Some key defining contexts for this generation include the COVID-19 pandemic, which for many impacted their ability to attend school or university and to find paid work, and the climate crisis. 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' to highlight 'the importance of a global perspective on the nature and impact of ecological and social changes' (14). These challenges have not yet been encountered by previous generations. 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.

A generational approach can risk homogenising young people and assuming they are all affected similarly by major events. While some young people are in a position where they can choose to leave school for a day for climate activism, others may also miss school days due to the impact of extreme weather events. Both reasons are due to climate change, yet the experience of these circumstances is vastly different (Walker 2020). The stark inequalities that are deeply entrenched in complex social, economic and geographical conditions across the globe are widened by climate change, and homogenising young people misses the nuances of their experience (Walker 2020). In addition, research from the global north has dominated understandings of youth, and more inclusive and extensive global research is necessary (Roberts and France 2021). 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 young people are subject to (Woodman, Batan, and Sutopo 2021). The generational approach can be used, however, to contextualise how young people may be influenced by what is happening in the world around them – and at a global scale. For example, Cook et al. (2021) find that events such as the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect young people and significantly impact their lived experience. 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' (25). Whilst not all people within a generation necessarily embody the same habitus, it is the awareness of their position within the generational structure that can create a drive for change. By being aware of their position within the category of 'youth' with little access to formal positions of power and advocacy, young people can seek out alternative avenues towards change.

Sociological understandings of young climate activists

While many of the issues targeted by young people are relevant to their generation, a key issue for Gen Z is climate change (Cocco-Klein and Mauger 2018). Their understanding of climate science and the relationship between human activity and environmental devastation has driven many to protest globally. On the other hand, young people are seen to be removed from politics as they demonstrate disinterest in politics according to traditional methods and pathways. This binary is unhelpful, as young people are political agents whose participation is hybrid, shifting, and complex (Bowman 2020).

While young people are excluded from formal political institutions, their concerns regarding political issues remain, in the face of narratives which frequently seek to misrepresent their voices and intents (Alexander, Petray, and McDowall 2021; Mayes and 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, Wyn, and Younes 2010). Definitions of

political participation, therefore, need to incorporate activities beyond 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' (82–83).

Formal political systems fail to act on behalf of young people who hold concerns for their futures (Mayes and Holdsworth 2020). 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. In addition, young people are gravitating to new forms of participation (Phelps 2012), including humour (Mayes and Center 2023) and embodied inspiration as a tool for 'artivism' (Martins and Campos 2023), or using placards and artefacts as visual political communications (Catanzaro and Collin 2023). There is a tendency to ignore electoral politics, and to focus on activism that is extra-parliamentary, non-hierarchical and self-actualising (Henn, Oldfield, and Hart 2018). This is not to say that all young people have equal access to political participation. Social inequalities can be replicated within the expression of students' voices, with students' knowledge of their political rights not equating to all students having opportunity to take part in that right (Finneran, Mayes, and Black 2023).

Studying young activists' habitus

Young people are often expected to remain politically silent until they reach adulthood, and their views on the climate crisis are viewed as childish and immature (Alexander, Petray, and McDowall 2021). In this paper, we discuss the results of a research project with young climate activists in Boorloo (Perth, Western Australia [WA]). Based on ethnographic research at School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) events and interviews with 10 young activists, the larger project explored the process of hysteresis and conscientisation that leads to young activists' understanding of themselves as political agents (Alexander, Petray, and McDowall 2022).

To do this, we have drawn on Bourdieu's theory of social practice to investigate how activists of a particular generation both inherit and shape their habitus. 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 dependent on the *field* (the social space) in which the practice is occurring (Bourdieu 1977). 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, 44). Habitus refers to the behaviours, dispositions, and habits that a person embodies as their internalised norm (Bourdieu 1977; Husu 2013). 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). Habitus influences how people act within a set of circumstances and how they see others around them, but it can be disrupted.

Hysteresis is how Bourdieu (2000) describes the condition that occurs when life experiences are in crisis, and when this causes a person's habitus to be misaligned with their field. 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, 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.

It is this situation that we argue young people face as a generation confronting a future where they must live with the well-evidenced predicted outcomes of climate change. Building on Alam's (2021) use of Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis where it is found that, 'in the context of environmental protests, hysteresis stems from the disparity between activists' pro-environmental values and the actual conditions or objective environment around them' (para. 9). The reality of climate change is misaligned with the habitus they have inherited, where young people are viewed as not-yet-adult, as lacking in the capacity to be able to speak rationally about their own needs (Alexander, Petray, and McDowall 2021; Campiglio 2009). This misalignment invokes an experience of hysteresis, a perception that one's norms and dispositions no longer suit their field. However, hysteresis can be productive, leading 'the subordinate classes to question the taken-for-granted order of things and to orchestrate their resistance' (Fowler 2020, 439).

We suggest that this process leads to a newly formed habitus, one that is radical and ecological in nature, a *generational radical ecological habitus*. This concept draws together multiple extensions of Bourdieu's habitus. First, Crossley's (2003) *radical habitus* describes both the disposition of individuals to participate in activism, and a habitus acquired from that participation in and which in turn structures further activism. Second, Kasper's (2009) *ecological habitus* refers to the internalisation of ecological frameworks of practice which carry beyond the movement into multiple fields. Combining a generational approach to understanding young people's experience with radical and ecological habitus allows us to better conceptualise the ways in which young people both become involved in social movements and re-configure a new habitus.

Methodology

This paper reports on research conducted as part of a broader project investigating young climate activists in Boorloo. Although officially known as Perth, we use the name Boorloo to recognise that this is stolen land belonging to the Whadjuk Noongar people. Boorloo is the capital city of the state of WA, with a population of approximately two million and located some 3000 kilometres away from Canberra, the federal capital. Grassroots climate organisation 350 Boorloo:Perth named WA a 'Captured State' due to the gripping influence of the resource sector on government and policy. As a research site, Boorloo represents the physical and symbolic distance between young people and government decision-makers in Canberra.

The project is qualitative and interpretive, seeking to move 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). The goal was to conduct research in a way that empowered young people, rather than added to their marginalisation and disempowerment. The project design follows Gibson's (2012) strategy for working with child participants to minimise adult dominance: 'building trust, facilitating understanding and obtaining informed consent, encouraging thoughtful and deep responses and promoting enjoyment and creative responses' (149). Kutrovátz (2017) discusses the dilemma of power dynamics when interviewing

children, arguing that 'the deconstruction of their marginal position and related power inequalities is the most central issue in research with children' (70).

Data presented here include interviews conducted in 2021–2022 with 10 SS4C activists in Boorloo between the ages of 14 and 24, having received approval for the research from James Cook University's Human Research Ethics Committee (H4878). Both participants and their parents/guardians (where under 18) gave written informed consent to participate in the study. Author 1 conducted semi-structured interviews with participants in a location of their choice, and these were audio recorded with permission, and then transcribed. Due to COVID-19 conditions, the use of platforms such as Zoom was familiar and some interviewees requested online as their 'location' of choice. 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). Most participants expressed their appreciation at being included in research, rather than being overlooked in preference for adult voices. They expressed sentiments such as 'I feel like I could talk to you for ages', before nominating pseudonyms and pronouns to be used in the research outputs. While working with the data throughout the transcription process, common discussion points and themes started to emerge. These were further clarified using thematic coding on NVivo software, and organised according to Bourdieu's theories. Some of the quotes presented in this paper have been lightly edited for readability.

Our interpretations are limited to the participants involved in the study and their experiences: a small group of people within a specific context. We do not seek to generalise the findings to other contexts or different groups of people (Shenton 2004). However, this 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 (following Guba and Lincoln 1994). Although this work is a discussion about young people facing, and responding to,the climate crisis, 10 participants are not intended as representative of the entire generation. These 10 politically engaged young people represent a sub-set of their generation which is politically minded, active, and pro-climate action. The group represents participants who are culturally – and gender-diverse, and some with disabilities. The participants came from a range of educational and home backgrounds, some with parents who were supportive of activism and climate action, while others were not. In early stages of data analysis, it became clear that themes were largely consistent across interviews, with no new themes emerging from the later analysis, so we concluded with 10 participants, coupled with ethnographic data.

'Growing up in a completely different age': habitus and hysteresis

A key theme that emerged from our research is that young climate activists see a stark difference between their experience of the world, the experiences of those who came before them, and the expectations that young adults should behave in certain ways, like staying in school and getting a job in order to secure their future. Research participants suggested that young people's greater awareness of climate change leads to different priorities than older generations. Their different priorities lead to choices that challenge traditional expectations, which they see as less relevant.

> Lapis: It's different, like I'm growing up in a completely different age than you must have been growing up in. It's not, it wasn't a big deal for you then … 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?

Although the young activists felt pressure to strive for career and educational success in their lives, they were unsure whether there was any point to worrying about such things.

> Ava: [My 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.

Some of our participants felt that the education system failed to adequately teach them about climate change for a range of reasons linked to their 'perceived incomplete civic development' (Mayes and Hartup 2022, 997). One reason was their perception that adults do not fully understand the magnitude of the crisis through a 'lack of education for some people on the topic' (Piper). Some had adults in their lives who 'don't agree' that climate change is a problem, as they say that climate change is a natural phenomenon that has 'been happening for years', as evidenced by previous ice ages (Maxi). In some cases, activists felt that older generations attempted to shield young people from information that would politicise them.

> 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.

While, from a protectionist perspective, it may seem natural for adults to 'shield' a young person, Bowman (2020) links it to a disempowering narrative that removes the decision-making processes of politics away from young people. Walker (2020) adds that learning about a warming planet through school is disconnected from the reality when weather events occur creating 'the immediacy of the present and climate change as an absent narrative' (9). Wren localises this idea by discussing how the Australian education system avoids climate change education. Young people understand the resource sector in Australia to be a great influence on the government policies and practices (350 Boorloo: Perth n.d.), including education.

> Wren: 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 were like the amount of energy one coal station can produce, the amount of energy one singular wind turbine can produce … Very very skewed. It was a bunch of people from [the resource sector] talking. I wasn't very impressed.

Despite their parents' and teachers' expectations, for our participants, older generations' goals felt irrelevant in the face of an uncertain future. Further, many participants spoke about feeling marginalised by adults, whereby their political views were not valid. This can be seen through examples such as parents seeing climate strikes as 'distracting', as above, or through the ways in which teachers and parents engage with the participants:

Piper: the teachers who would like talk quite negatively about our cause and ridicule the cause.

Maxi: My dad says, oh there was this ice age *(mocking tone of voice)*.

The participants understood that they were seen as 'slacking off', or 'just wanting to skip school', and even labelled as truants by the government and the education department. Such statements suggest that the young people interviewed here are aware of the habitus adults expect of them: as political subjects without agency who do not have a stake in their own futures, and who should not be politically engaged. It is the misalignment between this habitus, and their understandings of the risks of climate change, that create hysteresis.

When a generation experiences hysteresis, the concomitant change is not expected to be a smooth process. Participants spoke about their parents getting mad at them (Ava), and a 'really strong opposition in schools' (Piper). They explain this conflict as the result of 'growing up in a completely different age' and experiencing things that were not 'a big deal for you [adults] then' (Lapis). Generational disapproval of change in practice is expected. Bourdieu (1977) states that fields are sites of conflict between people, including between generations. What one generation may think is rational and natural may appear to another generation as untenable. This conflict is the experience of hysteresis.

Even though hysteresis provides an impetus for people to question things that were previously taken for granted, not all who experience hysteresis will adopt a new habitus. Some people are pulled along the path that they have inherited.[1] The mismatch of habitus to the experience within the field does not guarantee that there will be a revolution to change things, or to restructure and better align habitus and field: that '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' (Lucas). As Lucas says, being aware of reality – and even desperate in the face of it – still requires an awareness that change is possible, and that work can be done to effect that change.

'It's like it's a part of who I am': developing a generational radical ecological habitus

Our participants discussed how their activism had affected them as individuals and shaped their character and practice. Interviewee Adelaide expressed this most profoundly, and here we focus in depth on her discussion of how 'being an activist … has really changed me, it's kind of like, helped me to navigate a lot of the things in the world' (Adelaide). 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' (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.

Rather than seeing one issue needing fixing, Adelaide recognises a broader pattern of systemic issues causing multiple injustices.

> 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.

Adelaide's activism allows her to internalise a sense of the collective power of people, that 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.

> Adelaide: So being part of an activist group, 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.

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, because she has adopted a radical habitus. Similarly, Lucas identified that activism is an essential component of political action, as 'voting is not enough'. By participating in activism, further activism is structured as it becomes internalised as a natural response to injustices, establishing a *radical habitus*.

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. In our research, we found evidence of a radical *and* ecological habitus emerging for young activists, who demonstrated an internalised tendency towards being both environmentally conscious and politically engaged. Heidi, for example, self-identified as 'passionate' about environmental activism 'even from a young age'. She felt that environmental awareness 'kind of does come naturally to me', demonstrating the way the changes to her habitus have become internalised. In our study, even amongst participants who were active in other causes, climate change is the most deeply concerning cause. Other causes are seen as intertwined with the powers of oppression that refuse to act upon climate change. We spoke to two young people who primarily participate in human rights activism, but they both spoke of climate activism as being somewhat of a given, as in, *of course* they would do climate activism. Their words indicate that climate activism is so important that it automatically takes place as their number one concern. This demonstrates the importance of the *ecological* component of their radical habitus. Ecological activism extends activists' learning, and they develop deeper understanding of ecological issues. Activists also learn that their capacity to act upon reality can be individual as well as collective. For the current generation this has occurred in the arena of

environmentalism, and therefore they have developed a radical ecological habitus, not just radical habitus.

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. There is a desire to 'pay it forward for the next generation' (Heidi). 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 ensuring that they feel a sense of belonging to the movement.

> Piper: Right now in WA, we're having a picnic so that we're able to train the new kids coming through because 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. That's why we are organising these strikes right now. We're really teaching people.

Other young activists were conscious of the need to build momentum and think of the 'long-term stuff' (Lucas). Clearly the young activists are aware of the generational aspects of their activism, both past and future: 'maybe they'll be future organisers in the crowd' (Lucas). 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.

As we discuss above, the generational approach to understanding young people does not assume a universal experience of the world simply based on age. Rather, it recognises shared sociopolitical contexts of a particular time period as a considerable influence on one's experience. In the examples presented throughout this paper, the young activists we interviewed speak about their generation as a collective, and recognise their positioning relative to other generations. They use 'us and them' framing when discussing their peers and the adults in their lives. Our participants demonstrated a 'generational mindset', identifying their position within generational structures as influential on their habitus. In this way, following hysteresis, our participants' habitus becomes generational as well as radical and ecological.

Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we argue that young climate activists experience hysteresis through a disconnect between their understanding of the risks of climate change and adults' expectations of youth passivity. This hysteresis leads to changes in their generational habitus into a radical and ecological one. Our argument emerges from the experiences shared by 10 young climate activists in Boorloo, Australia, in semi-structured interviews. We draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and hysteresis, as well as extensions including Crossley's (2003) radical habitus to understand the work of activists and Kasper's (2009) ecological habitus to demonstrate how environmental practice is internalised. We also identify the generational nature of young people's 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. This is in contrast with the expected norm that young people wait to participate while learning to be responsible citizens. Young activists have adapted their habitus to realign it with their reality. Our work contributes to the existing literature in three key ways, which we expand below.

First, in addition to providing more evidence that radical (Crossley 2003) and ecological habitus (Kasper 2009) are useful concepts, this study introduces the concept of a generational habitus. In this study, young people understand themselves as belonging to a generation who will uniquely experience the consequences of climate change (as Lapis says, jobs may not be relevant in the future if the world only consists of 'fiery pits of hell'). These understandings of habitus make clear how young activists' responses to the climate crisis are shaped by the context in which they are operating. Whilst not all young people in this generation develop the same habitus as the climate activists in this study, the participants see themselves as driven to action because of their generational standing, as young people who are not taken seriously by those around them yet inheriting the problems caused by older generations. Further, they feel they must act, as they and their generation will experience the outcomes of climate change whether or not they are politically engaged. Young activists' 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.

Second, this study emphasises the value of hysteresis, an underutilised Bourdieusian concept (Woodman and Threadgold 2015). Hysteresis describes the mismatch between someone's deeply engrained habits and beliefs (their habitus) and their current circumstances (their field). It occurs when significant changes or crises disrupt the established norms and expectations within a field (Bourdieu 2000). Critics of Bourdieu argue that his theory overemphasises the reproductive nature of habitus, neglecting the potential for individual agency (Akrivou and Di San Giorgio 2014). However, in our study, incorporating hysteresis enabled us to demonstrate what drove a change to participants' habitus to become more radical, more ecological, and more generational. Specifically, hysteresis allows us to concentrate on the dissonance between the norms and dispositions others expect of participants and the threats participants perceive to their futures. In other words, young people's experience of hysteresis and the new habitus that emerges for them is how they negotiate their responses to the constraints they have inherited.

Third, our research enhances sociological understandings of young people's activism. We provide a concrete example of how the historical context shapes young people's perspectives and actions, demonstrating the value of a generational approach. Young people are often criticised or framed negatively, described according to figures that suit the narrator's perspective (Nakata and Bray 2023; Threadgold 2020) and due to what Bourdieu (1977) explains as a generational site of struggle. Emerging research on youth activism, especially climate activism, contradicts the notion of apathy, suggesting that young people's political engagement takes unconventional forms (Alexander, Petray, and McDowall 2021; Mayes and Hartup 2022; Vromen 2003). We add to this work by conceptualising young activists' actions through the lens of a generational radical ecological habitus, offering another nuanced understanding of their motivations and behaviours.

This moves research beyond narratives of deficiency, apathy, and/or delinquency by focussing on the strengths young people bring to their generational experience by actively engaging in various forms of political participation.

Our findings suggest that young people are actively responding to the climate crisis and are developing innovative forms of political engagement. The young people in this study explicitly discuss themselves in generational terms. Thus, a generational habitus informs the decisions, actions and participation of today's young climate activists, ranging from their anxieties and frustrations, the development of their political identities, and their participation in the many forms of climate activism. Further research should explore how and why some young people adopt a changed habitus and why others do not. This paper demonstrates how young people experience hysteresis first of all, and that this can instigate the development of a generational radical ecological habitus. Further work will develop understandings into the process through which young people become aware of their hysteresis.

Normative expectations of young people define how they should behave, yet their lived experience and overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change conflict with these traditional expectations. This misalignment causes them to experience hysteresis and compels them to adapt their generational habitus to be more radical and ecological. Young people face a precarious future shaped by decisions made by today's powerholders. Excluded from the decision-making process on the grounds of being too young and therefore too immature, too irrational, or too apathetic to participate meaningfully, young people find other ways to assert themselves as political agents.

Note

1. Bourdieu's other concepts such as social gravity are useful explanations of this phenomenon, but in the interests of brevity we do not discuss it in detail here.

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Data availability statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research supporting data is not available.

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