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Where 'green' parenting meets climate activism: Understanding the affective, political, generative, but challenging 'space in-between' of radical eco-parenting

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## Declaration

I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not be submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that the work submitted is my own, except where work which has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. My contribution and those of the other authors to this work have been explicitly indicated below.

The paper presented in Chapter 4, section 4.2 'Paper 2' was previously published as: Howard, L., Howell, R., & Jamieson, L. (2021). (Re) configuring moral boundaries of intergenerational justice: the UK parent-led climate movement, in the journal *Local Environment*, 26(12), 1429-1444. I was the lead author of this article, having collected and analysed the data and written the manuscript content. My supervisors Lynn Jamieson and Rachel Howell were co-authors due to their intellectual contribution to the paper's conceptual framework.

Two other papers in Chapter 4 of this thesis (sections 4.1 and 4.3) have been previously published as journal articles, as follows:

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## Abstract

The failure of governments to tackle the climate and ecological crisis challenges normative responsibilities of parents to protect and provide for their children's future. Recently emerged parent-led climate action groups have demonstrated concerns for an imperilled future and have put these concerns to work in political action. This takes the form of demanding change through organised actions and expressing ecological awareness in everyday ways of living and relating. This repertoire of radical parenting practices for the future enfoldes notions of care and justice for distant others as well as for children, contrasting with theories of family life as parochial and politically conservative. Yet, it has received little attention in the family or climate action literatures; previous scholarship on green parenting has portrayed this as incremental and atomised steps to sustainability, largely confined to the home, and without much urgency. Studies of everyday activism have helped us understand the collective politics of parenting largely through a lens of motherhood, yet leave questions about fatherhood, and the tensions and contradictions of living one's values within the context of power-laden affective relationships. This thesis addresses knowledge gaps in the ways action on the climate 'crisis' is mobilised within the context of family and personal relationships. The main research questions include: How do parenthood and parenting interplay with activism for climate and ecological change? What are the motivations for and practices of addressing climate change? and, what have been the relational challenges along the way? The thesis draws on a qualitative dataset of interviews and solicited diaries of 20 participants, of which 10 were individual mothers, 2 were a mother couple, and 8 were individual fathers, who were working collectively through organised campaigning and collaborating to influence ecologically oriented family practices. The thesis consists of four interlinked journal manuscripts, each providing an illumination of the facets of what I argue constitutes a 'space in between' of radical eco parenting: ecologically informed practices which connect multiple levels of power, from macro level systemic issues to micro level interpersonal relations. These connections manifest, for example, as shifting norms around 'good' parenting and the everyday resistance and innovations towards socio-ecological justice. I discuss how this 'space in between' expands the notion of parental care, and questions the boundaries between family and civil society, and people and nature. I argue for the generative potential of radical eco parenting, but also the need to understand the relational challenges, contradictions, and tensions. The thesis contributes to social practice and everyday

activism theories from a relational and feminist perspective and enriches social movement and sociological theories of emotions. The thesis deepens understanding of affective and identity-related responses to climate and ecological change, as well as contributes knowledge on processes of social change towards sustainability.

## Lay Summary

The failure of governments to tackle the climate and ecological crisis challenges commonly held ideas of responsible parenting to protect and provide for children's future. Recently emerged parent-led climate action groups have demonstrated concerns for an imperilled future and have put these concerns to work in political action. This takes the form of demanding change through organised campaigning and expressing concern for nature in everyday ways of living and relating. This repertoire of radical parenting practices for the future considers not just one's own children, but all children, nature, and vulnerable others, contrasting with theories of family life as self-centric and politically conservative. Yet, it has received little attention in the literature; previous scholarship on environmentalist parenting has portrayed this as incremental and uncoordinated steps to sustainability, largely confined to the home, and without much urgency. Studies of 'everyday' activism have helped us understand activist parenting but mostly from a motherhood perspective, leaving questions about fatherhood, and the tensions and contradictions of living one's values within the context of power-laden personal relationships. This thesis addresses knowledge gaps in the ways action on the climate 'crisis' is mobilised within the context of family and personal relationships. The main research questions include: How do parenthood and parenting interplay with activism for climate and ecological change? What are the motivations for and practices of addressing climate change? and, what have been the challenges along the way relating to friends, colleagues, and family members? The thesis draws on a dataset of interviews and diary logs of 20 participants, of which 10 were individual mothers, 2 were a mother couple, and 8 were individual fathers, who were working collectively through organised campaigning and collaborating to influence sustainable family practices. The thesis consists of four interlinked journal manuscripts, each providing insight on what I argue constitutes a 'space in between' of radical eco parenting: public campaigning and sustainable living which connect multiple levels of power in society. These connections manifest, for example, as changing assumptions of 'good' parenting and the everyday resistance and innovations towards socio-ecological justice. I discuss how this 'space in between' expands ideas of parental care, and questions the boundaries between family and civil society, and people and nature. I argue for the generative potential of radical eco-parenting, but also the need to understand its challenges and tensions. The thesis contributes to social practice and everyday activism theories from a relational and feminist perspective and enriches social movement and sociological theories of

emotions. The thesis deepens understanding of affective and identity-related responses to climate and ecological change, as well as contributes knowledge on processes of social change towards sustainability.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The intergenerational injustices of failing to adequately tackle climate change have been illuminated by civic actors in the past few years. Children and young people in many countries have mobilised around future- and globally oriented narratives protesting climate and ecological injustice (Walker, 2020). The youth climate movement has attracted much media attention and a growing body of research (e.g. see Luna & Mearman, 2020; Dunlop et al., 2021; Nairn et al., 2021; Emdal Navne & Skovdal, 2021), yet left unexplored is a rich undercurrent of intergenerationally motivated action moving in parallel with the concerns and collective action of the youth movement. This thesis will explore future-oriented collective action responses to climate change as expressed through the narratives and practices of parents and parenting.

Since around the year 2019, a global grassroots parental climate movement has emerged in response to an imperilled future for today's children. In the UK, parents – many of whom had never taken part in activism before - have mobilised collectively in their neighbourhoods, workplaces, and on the streets. Some have joined one of the numerous parent groups: Mothers Rise Up; Extinction Rebellion Families; Parents for Future or Eco Action Families, to name but a few. These groups share a common politicisation of family life and a justice rhetoric to push for change. Parent climate action groups are deploying collective 'parent power' to confront governments and corporations to protect the rights of 'all children to grow up in a safe climate and to breathe clean air' (Mothers Rise Up!, 2022), and empowering parents to use their voice to politically advocate for climate and biodiversity (Parents For Future UK, 2022). Some groups offer support and guidance to inspire action at home and in schools, workplaces, and communities (Eco Action Families, 2022), or share tips through online media channels to help other families emotionally support one another to navigate an uncertain future. Parent activists have even authored books such as Elizabeth Bechard's *Parenting in a Changing Climate*, and Mary DeMocker's *The Parents' Guide to the Climate Revolution: 100 Ways to Build a Fossil-Free Future*, advising how to live in an environmentally low impact way, how to raise children to love the natural world, and how to collaborate with others to bring about a sustainable future.

The cultural narratives of parenting in the climate and ecological crisis resonate with ideas from green political theory about the 'special duty' of parents to mitigate climate change in defence of

children's safe future (Cripps, 2017, p. 308), and sustainable development discourses about the need to protect the environment for our children and their descendants (Weiss, 1992). But crucially, the movement is extending normative parental responsibility for *all* children and demonstrating a global citizenship towards vulnerable humans and other species at risk - both present and future. This civic engagement and collective enactment of care for the common good undermine long-established theories of 'the family' as parochial, individualistic, and conservative in its orientations toward social justice and civic engagement (Habermas, 1989 in Muddiman et al., 2020; Pateman, 1980). The parental climate movement also counters feminist assertions that the gendered burden of familial caring responsibilities leaves environmentalist mothers little room for action beyond privatised green consumerism (Sandilands, 1993; Dzialo, 2017), and movement scholars who have suggested that the affective ties of family are a threat to movement commitment (Goodwin, 1997; Klatch, 2004). The expansive mode of care and global justice ambition of eco-activist parenting seeks to politicise the family and redraw the parameters of parenting, yet the parental movement has so far been overlooked as an important avenue for insight into radical action for change.

There is a well-established qualitative research seam for 'green parenting' that has explored a diversity of parental and family responses to environmental issues. This includes, but is not confined to, ethical consumption and anti-consumerism (Auriffeille, 2021; Auriffeille & Fleming, 2022); frugality (Walther & Sandlin, 2013; Walther & Sandlin, 2008); low impact living (Shirani et al., 2016), and teaching children values and moral stances in defence of the natural world (Nche et al., 2019). Where explored in political socialisation terms, this has been about educating children within the 'moral space' of the home (Payne, 2005; Payne, 2010). This research field primarily conceives of green parenting as a family-centric lifestyle comprising habitual, incremental, and atomised steps to contribute to sustainability; rare are studies which explore green parenting in ways that reveal a collective and interconnected approach to confront the political and justice issues of a threatened future. Today's parents are witnessing ever worsening global environmental conditions with government responses incommensurate with the scale of the crisis, and – as I have outlined - many have decided that families acting together, rather than isolated, is the only way to create change. There is arguably a need for family research in this area to catch up with contemporary radical forms of climate parenting, given the evidence that climate change is seen by some parents as a crisis requiring urgent, holistic, and multilevel action. In the era of a climate emergency, there is a need to theorise these new ways of parenting.

In the search for theories to understand eco-parenting beyond domesticated, green living, scholarship on new social movements offers 'everyday activism'. Theorists in this field have argued that social movements in modern societies are increasingly based on values and identities, and that, in addition to highly visible forms of activism such as attending protests and demonstrations, activism can also be performed within 'submerged networks' (Melucci, 1985) of individualised-collective action assimilated into existing social structures (Pink, 2012; Forno & Wahlen, 2021). This form of activism is situated at the overlap of lifestyle and social movements (Haenfler et al., 2012), integrating movement identities, practices, and cultural codes but using tactics unconstrained by organisational hierarchies (Horton, 2003). Everyday activism involves the interaction of different life spheres, between which an actor can choose to merge ideals, for example, between one's professional, political, and family lives (Passy & Giugni, 2000). Participation in lifestyle activism is said to be more enduring than higher profile forms that may, over time, involve a fluctuating engagement (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). The everyday activist performs a resistant, prefigurative cultural politics beneath the 'militant subject' as part of their daily life, enabling them to transform activism into 'a more accessible set of practices and politics that can resonate and influence the political mainstream' (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 480).

Feminist scholars, however, have offered a more relational conceptualisation of everyday activism, pointing to the power dynamics of everyday life as they bear upon political actors. Social movement studies have paid little attention to the everyday of activism as it is lived (Simi & Futrell, 2009), overlooking people's embeddedness in care networks and the need to negotiate and innovate within social relationships to create the conditions for change (Martin, Hanson and Fontaine, 2007; Kennedy, 2011; Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2022). A relational form of everyday activism allows space to accommodate the structural politics of the everyday (Pink, 2012; MacGregor, 2021). Feminist scholars view everyday forms of activism as more about relationship-building than resistance (Martin, Hanson and Fontaine, 2007), a perspective which can further stretch the boundaries of what constitutes activism. In a feminist contestation of bounded public and private life spheres, maternal activism enables family life to effect change when carried out within networks of social support, for example, by sharing knowledge and resources to reduce barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices (O'Shaughnessy & Kennedy, 2010), developing children's awareness of sustainability (Dombroski, 2016), or by raising children to be gender conscious through the practice of everyday conversations Stephenson-Abetz (2012). These studies have examined the dimensions of everyday relationship building for change primarily using a gender perspective. A wider feminist

purview on other power dynamics and tensions, such as those of generational order, or the expectations of affective relationships as they intersect with parenting, would enrich a relational perspective of everyday activism.

Climate activist groups such as Extinction Rebellion are increasingly invoking ideologies of care for others, regeneration and relating, and advocating tapping into and expressing one's emotions to fully confront the climate crisis (Harms, 2022; Westwell & Bunting, 2020). This radical assemblage of care and affect points to a need to bring the emotional dimensions of everyday forms of collective climate activism into dialogue with the radical care practices of the parental climate movement. Social movement theories have historically analysed emotions cognitively in terms of public problems people care *about*, and how the sharing of such concerns helps to frame an issue, motivate protest, and form collective identities (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Jasper, 2011). In this sense, this work has examined emotions in terms of their structuring of human action (Bericat, 2016). This body of literature, however, provides little to understand the socially embedded context of social movement emotions - for example, the moral sentiments arising from a sense of injustice which drive movement participation. Stets and colleagues (2008) discuss the role of identities in the moral emotions of activism but offer no explanation of the moral *relationships* which define these identities. A related gap in knowledge is that theories of emotions in social movements have so far ignored dispersed, non-protest strands of activism which seek change through the nurturing of relationships.

Insight is to be gained from using a micro-sociological perspective. Feminists and relational sociologists have emphasised that relationships give rise to emotions, thus rendering relationships, rather than emotional structures and dynamics, as the object of study (Burkitt, 1997; Tronto, 1994; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This thinking complexifies the emotional dimensions of collective action at the everyday level when affect is entwined with caring *for*, rather than merely caring *about*. Goffman (1967) stressed the prioritisation of affective relationships in the conduct of face-to-face interactions, a concept later built on by Scheff (1990) who stressed the strong human motive to maintain secure social bonds in the production of shame or pride. Tronto (1993) introduced the significance of care responsibilities in the generation of worry and concern for someone else's wellbeing. In this vein, emotions are related to an ethical disposition inseparable from relationships; they are tied with taking responsibility for something or someone and implicate a greater array of outcomes than the thinking and bodily states shared between individuals as theorised by scholars of emotions in social movements. Affective domains of care, love, loyalty, and attachment create

embodied, productive, cultural, and material work and practices, such as the sharing and distribution of resources within families (Rebhun, 1999; de la Bellacasa, 2012; Lynch et al., 2021). But such practices of emotional responsibility may come at a high cost to and exploitation of the carer or those outside the care relationship. Care work is undervalued within contemporary global north societies and the burdens of care tend to fall disproportionately on women (Doucet, 2006; Cox, 2010). The material practices of reproducing selves, friends, and family are consequential for the environment and may undermine and contradict efforts for sustainable living (Shove & Spurling, 2013). But caring relationships can also be generative when entailing felt responsibilities towards others outside the personal life domain, such as relating with and nurturing of plants and wildlife (Pitt, 2017), or the adoption of low carbon and sustainable practices to care for distant others impacted most by climate change. Care and its attendant emotions are therefore equally about 'mundane maintenance and repair' (de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 198) of others through the material labours of the everyday as they are about the collective emotions felt within in a social movement. In this sense, the emotions involved in responsibilities to care for children, the planet, and a sustainable future imply more than simply the framing of climate change as an issue and the motivation to block a road in protest; planetary care emotions can shape ethical family consumption practices, foster values in children to protect the natural world, and change how parents relate to and interact with friends and family as they struggle to promote more sustainable living.

Therefore, this thesis explores what emotions of care for children and planet 'do' when collectively mobilised within the parental climate movement. I will argue that the future-oriented, collective, relational thinking, feelings, and doings that heal, protect, and sustain family and planetary life constitute an expansive form of care which melts away distinctions between everyday life and global issues, family and civil society, and humans and nature. I will demonstrate that this radical eco-parenting is recognised by activists as deeply political in that the associated relational practices operate between macro-systemic and micro-interpersonal worlds of, on the one hand, changes in climate and ecosystems, and the political, social, and neoliberal forces driving them, and, on the other hand, the micro level of embodied worry, hope, solidarity, knowledge building, and everyday resistance within activists' relationship practices (Jamieson, 2020). In this vein, the forces of each world inform and modify each other through the interconnection of power relations. I will uncover the ways in which this 'space in between' of expansive and radical care is fraught with tensions, struggles, and contradictions, but is also generative and rich with possibilities.

This thesis brings together relational social movement and feminist theories, and the sociology of emotions to explore the nexus of parenting and climate activism. To do this, I employ a mixed qualitative methodology of interviews and a diary exercise to explore the 'space in between' of radical eco-parenting, within which there are circulations of moral, affective, political, and cultural identities, discourses, and practices. In its empirical focus on activist parenting, the study also decentres mothering in eco-parent activism. The lead research question of the study is:

***How do parenthood and parenting interplay with activism for climate and ecological change?***

By parenthood, I mean a social position in which there are normative expectations to care for one's child(ren), and by parenting, I mean a set of practices through which the holder of this role fulfils their care responsibilities. Climate change and ecological degradation present grave challenges for parents: predicted resource scarcities, geopolitical conflicts, extreme weather events, and the loss of biodiversity upon which we depend weigh heavily on parental efforts to create the best future for their children.

The thesis will contribute to social movement studies of identities and emotions driving and sustaining participation, as well as to sociological studies of parenting and family life, by making an underexplored connection of personal lives to the big issue of climate and environmental change. It has been argued that families and friendships can be world-making through the intentional and innovative acts of political socialisation and the cultivation of values and relational practices towards care for distant others (Pink, 2012; Jamieson, 2020). From this standpoint and keeping in mind that one goal of the climate movement is to influence cultural change towards sustainability, the everyday life focus of this thesis will deepen understanding of processes of social change and possibilities of social change. In addition, personal lives and relationships are a rich site for studying change because they are generative of support and solidarity necessary for collective political action, but they also contain power relations and conflict that may entrench resistance to change (Jamieson, 1999; Lynch et al., 2021). This challenges the individualisation thesis of the 'pure relationship', which idealises close relationships for their theoretical ability to foster egalitarianism and self-disclosure (Jamieson, 1998), and presents opportunities to understand the nuances of moral and affective practices in politically engaged sustainable living transitions.

## 1.1 Scope of the study and structure of the thesis

The thesis takes the form of four separate but connected research articles exploring activist parenting as part of the climate movement. Activist parenting includes, but is not confined to, campaigning; it also encompasses efforts to change the unsustainable ways of living of family and friends, and everyday relational and material caring practices towards socioecological justice. These often-invisible forms of activism nonetheless constitute an important mechanism for social change. The papers draw on a mixed qualitative dataset of interviews and a diary exercise with 20 parents and guardians self-identifying as actively campaigning to address climate change. The papers draw on a relational sociological framework to explore the biographies, understandings, identities, values, motivations, emotions, and practices of participants in the context of their personal lives. What follows is a summary of the four papers which make up the study's findings. Then in Chapter 2 I review the literature that contextualises the study, followed by the details my methods and methodology in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I present the study's findings in the form of four standalone journal articles. In the interests of narrative flow, these have been presented in the thesis in a slightly different order to the chronological order in which they were published. Finally, I provide a discussion of the findings and my conclusions in Chapter 5.

## 1.2 Summary of the Papers

### 1.2.1. Paper 1: When global problems come home: Engagement with climate change within the intersecting affective spaces of parenting and activism (published in *Emotion, Space and Society*).

Paper 1 explores the emerging parent-led climate justice movement through the lens of affect to understand what the emotions of being a parent activist 'do'. The analysis of family practices and relational activism incorporates wider networks of care to include friends and extended family. The paper reveals the ways in which these close relationships support or impede participation in climate activism through the politicisation, amplification, and reworking of emotions. The paper contributes to sociologies of personal life and emotions, as well as to the social movement literature, by sketching and theorising the ways in which the moral emotional spaces of parenting, and climate movement values and culture, overlap and inform one another. This nexus of personal affective ties

and activism represents one facet of the 'space in between' of radical eco-parenting that connects micro and macro worlds.

### **1.2.2. Paper 2: (Re)configuring moral boundaries of intergenerational justice: the UK parent-led climate movement (published in Local Environment).**

Paper 2 builds on Paper 1 to explore the demarcations of the in-between space of parent climate justice activism and the potentialities and tensions of these. Using an analytical framework of discursive moral boundary work, the paper describes how a dystopian future imaginary and ideas of 'good' parenting were entangled and crucial in shaping a morally responsible route into politicised climate action. For some participants, the collective emotions, motivations, and identities of parental activism were solidified and fortified by generational and repronormatively informed views on who was excused or excluded from taking climate action. In underscoring the interplay between collective, social, and personal identities, the paper contributes to the literature on everyday and relational activism to reveal the ways in which individual and collective values and actions are bridged, but also the way in which affective and morally informed social boundaries can be selectively drawn by parent activists, sometimes problematically.

### **1.2.3. Paper 3: Breaking climate silence within everyday life: The environmentalist killjoy, negotiation, and relationship risk (published in The Sociological Review).**

Paper 3 explores climate campaigning within personal relationships, as activists try to mobilise friends and family through conversations about the justice dimensions of climate change. Participants encountered resistance and negative stereotyping from some friends and family that necessitated a careful management of their environmentalist identity to protect their relationships; various communicative practices were used to negotiate and break climate silence. The paper reflects on the wider forces shaping interactional spaces around the justice dimensions of climate change. In describing the links and disconnections between affective relationships, everyday environmentally oriented practices, and wider discourses of the climate movement, the paper delves further into the ethical continuities between personal and collective identities to support the theorising of a dynamic and situational everyday activism.

**1.2.4. Paper 4: Re-thinking children's connection to nature: Parenting an ethic of truth-telling and socio-ecological justice (First round peer reviewed by People and Nature).**

Paper 4 draws on and bridges theory from children's education, psychology, politics, and sociology to explore eco-politicised parenting as engaging children with nature. Parents' past experiences with nature and current understandings of environmental issues informed an ethic of truth-telling and justice in their efforts to raise their children's ethical and critical consciousness about nature and its socioecological relations, with the aim of equipping children with the tools to resist systems of socioecological oppression. However, despite the potential of radical eco-parenting to disrupt power hierarchies and resist cultural norms, these efforts were not without their tensions and contradictions. The paper offers a significantly developed concept of children's connection to nature by underscoring the limitations of previous individualised childhood nature theory and bringing to light the bridging and connection of radical parenting and collective climate action in building a sustainable future for all.

## Chapter 2: Positioning my research

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the thesis by critically reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature on parenting, family life, and responses to environmental issues. Although each of the four articles in the Findings chapter has its own literature review, these pertain to each articles' thematic research questions. In this chapter, I provide a broader synthesis and illuminate the knowledge gaps that have justified the research.

### 2.1. Situating parenting and family life in the problem of climate and ecological change

Despite increasing evidence of dangerous climate change, how parents are responding to climate and environmental threats has received little academic attention. Humanity's impact on the world's natural systems is producing catastrophes never seen before in our history: a multisynchronous assault of mass species extinctions, pollution, wildfires, floods, and droughts that threaten our availability of water, food and shelter, and will worsen the incidence of disease, civil unrest, and geopolitical conflict (Brulle & Dunlap, 2015). The impacts of past and present human activity will affect present and future generations, despite recent global agreements committing to greenhouse gas mitigation (Climate Change Committee, 2021). In 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a hard-hitting report warning policymakers that

*Limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. With clear benefits to people and natural ecosystems, limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society...The decisions we make today are critical in ensuring a safe and sustainable world for everyone, both now and in the future (IPCC, 2018).*

This report was a call to arms for the climate movement, spurring a contemporary wave of direct actions and public marches across the UK. The concept of justice became more prominent in the rhetoric of activists, reflecting an increasing awareness of the highly geographically and temporally unequal impacts of the climate and ecological crisis. In the privileged regions of the world that produce the highest environmental impacts, the dire scientific outlook has, for some people,

challenged not just efforts taken for granted to ensure the prosperous and flourishing future of children, but also more basic and normative parental responsibilities to provide protection, provision, and care. It has challenged parental power in individual terms; the climate and ecological crises are globalised issues with complex and multiple socio-political drivers, producing ecological risks which percolate into micro-level worlds but go beyond the capacity of parents to mitigate on their own. In this sense, it connects with issues of justice for children and young people and calls into question the spaces within which parents must engage to tackle climate change, troubling the so-called boundaries between family and civil society, and humans and nature.

The evidence discussed earlier of parents collectivising their responses to global ecological threats with a sense of urgency invites enquiry into the ways in which families have responded to change the business-as-usual status quo and unsustainable ways of living toward a safer, more just, and sustainable future. Yet when we search the literature, parenting and family life have more often been seen as problematic sets of practices than as a realm of progressive social change. This view stems from several major theoretical and empirical fields of family scholarship that appear to paint a pessimistic picture in terms of sustainable transitions. These include: 1) theories of 'the family' as emotionally insular and oriented inward, thus foreclosing civic engagement and concern for distant others; 2) contemporary middle class intensive parenting cultures in which individualism reigns, class and gender inequalities are reproduced, and children's competitiveness is encouraged; and 3) generalisations of family life as highly routinised and locked into environmentally high impact practices. I will now discuss these theories in more depth, and the debates they have given rise to.

Some theorists have in the past placed the family as inimical to social change for the common good (Jamieson, 2016). Liberal theories of modernity have portrayed family life as a separate sphere to civil society and political life. The private sphere arose from capitalist social relations and was said to represent a space impenetrable by the market and the state, enabling one to be an authentic self and live without restrictions (Habermas, 1989). The family as a private domain came to ideologically represent individuality and private concerns which were distinct from the universal nature of public life (Bounds, 1996). This perspective proposed a naturalised ordering of gender roles and went on to inform family theorising. Functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons analytically distinguished family from public life and argued that the family had become relatively isolated from wider friends and family, an idea which informed his 1960s theories of the nuclear family model (Jamieson, 1998). This led to further theorising of 'the family' as the main source of emotional life, with assumptions about tensions in emotional loyalty between the family and wider society, often along lines of gender

(Bounds, 1996). For example, Pateman (1980) pointed out that it is often women who are positioned as the familial figure of threat to civic engagement because of their love for their families; she suggested that there was an incompatibility between universalist social virtues and the emotional demands of family life, claiming that 'love and justice are antagonistic virtues; the demands of love and of family bonds are particularistic and so in direct conflict with justice which demands that private interest be subordinated to the public (universal) good' (p.24).

Some scholars of care ethics have accorded with Pateman's theorising of women's caring roles and assertions of the disharmony between justice and care theories, arguing that the feelings involved in recognising the needs of a vulnerable or dependent other, for example, one's child, and taking action to address those needs can shape moral and ethical decisions toward those outside the relational commitment. An ethical commitment may therefore be in tension with action on behalf of a neutral conceptualisation of citizenship and may present moral dilemmas for caregivers, which more often burdens women than men (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1982; Sevenhuijsen, 1998), even when care is given to people outside the home (Gerstel, 2000). This line of thinking within care ethics, which arose from a critique of masculinist, rationalist theorising of normative moral conduct and justice from within liberal theory, foregrounded maternalistic relational concerns as a crucial moral compass guiding daily life (Ruddick, 1989). This biologically determined notion of an ethics of care was taken up by 1970s ecofeminist scholarship, which drew parallels between the patriarchal oppression of women and masculinist exploitation of the environment, suggesting that women and mother earth were of the same nurturing, life sustaining archetype (Stearney, 1994). This then positioned maternal thinking about fixing the world as superior to other ways of thinking (MacGregor, 2004), an exclusivity which denies the contributions of people who are not mothers when mobilising action to protect the earth (Stearney, 1994).

On the other hand, Joan Tronto (1993) argued that the feelings involved in contextual and situated caring relationships *can* be compatible with reasoning and morality towards unfamiliar others, as is required for an ethic of social justice. She called for a degendering (and, by association, a defamilialising) of notions of what it means to care posited by earlier care theorists. Tronto highlighted the invisibilisation of women's care work and social reproduction, and put forward a need to politicise caring, attentiveness, and responsibility by drawing attention to its lamentable devaluation but also its potential for positive societal change. Tronto's thinking allowed conceptual boundaries between private and public life and differing ethical concerns between family and civil

society to be transcended, recasting care as a form of citizenship (MacGregor, 2004). This idea is well illustrated by Tronto's (1993, p. 103) definition of care:

*...a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.*

From this perspective, and in contrast to earlier ethical care theorists who stressed care was most readily found within dyadic relationships of mother and child, care can be practised by anyone, for anyone. Tronto's concept of caring extends to species other than humans, and the environment, as well as encompasses collective caring with other citizens by taking responsibility for equality and justice (Gottschlich & Bellina, 2017). Similarly, Held (2006) believed the caring relations inherent in family and personal relations are nested within broader networks of care and concern, stressing the potential of a collectivised, extended care to distant others:

*The small societies of family and friendship embedded in larger societies are formed by caring relations... A globalization of caring relations would help enable people of different states and cultures to live in peace, to respect each other's rights, to care together for their environments, and to improve the lives of their children (Held, 2006, p. 168).*

The work of Tronto and Held saw care not just as a value orientation and moral reasoning, but also as a set of practices (Held, 2006). Unlike earlier essentialist care ethics, the ideas of Tronto (1993) and Held (2006) suggested that the needs of vulnerable others and the responsibilities around these require greater public deliberation (MacGregor, 2004). This lends us conceptual and theoretical tools to imagine the possibilities of the expansive caring alluded to in the narratives of the parental climate movement: care narratives and practices could include collective action to change political and social systems that oppress children and distant others impacted by climate change, pioneering a way to live lightly on the earth, and nurturing children's sensitivity to the natural world.

## 2.2. Intensive parenting cultures in an era of risk

In today's affluent global north regions, parents are told that raising a child is the hardest and most important job they will ever have: a happy, healthy, and prosperous future for their child very much depends on the decisions they take today (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, and Macvarish, 2014). 'Failing' to

participate in activities that provide the best outcomes is letting down not just children, but the society in which they will become citizens (Lee et al, 2014). As a result, 'parenting' has become a term to define not just a set of practices to raise a child, but also a culture of rules and codes of conduct that define expectations about how a parent should raise their child (Lee et al, 2014). Contemporary intensive parenting is said to represent 'a job requiring particular skills involving resource-intensive, child-centric practices which are informed by experts and qualified professionals' (Gillies, 2008, p.1080). Parents are expected to shape the lives of children's future by acquiring and implementing expert information on how to optimise children's nutrition, health, and education (Hays, 1996). As one of the first authors on intensive parenting, Hays (1996) contended that it is predominantly mothers who bear the most moral weight of 'good' parenthood and found that it is middle classes that most readily circulate the cultural discourses and practices of good parenting.

Intensive parenting ideology is more commonly found within middle-class families and is said to internalise a neoliberal logic of individual responsibility and self-management of risk (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Gillies, 2008; Shirani et al., 2012; Cairns et al., 2013). This future orientation is particularly significant in an era of unfolding climate breakdown where coping with future instability becomes another goal in the project of raising a resilient child (Eichler, 2015). Scholars studying parenting cultures, self-responsibilisation, and resilience building have contended that the defence of children's emotional and capital resources in the face of risky futures tends to be part of a familial intergenerational adaptation strategy that does little to address the causes of such changes (Hoffman, 2010; Shirani et al., 2012). Other scholars have noted the high economic and social capital required in this parenting model and the disproportionate time burden on mothers, underscoring intensive parenting's reproduction of class and gender inequalities (Doucet, 2011; Ribbens & Edwards, 2011). Further pessimism can be found in appraisals of the tendency of modern parenting to promote performance and competitiveness between families (Lee et al, 2014; Abatsis McHenry & Schultz, 2014), and an upholding of capitalism through the production of educated and financially successful workers of the future (Ansell et al., 2016).

The intensive parenting literature might leave us feeling rather hopeless about the potential of parenting to forge a collective transition into a fair and sustainable society. Much like earlier theorising on the family, contemporary parenthood has been portrayed as somewhat apolitical, narrow-minded, and conservative, as if parents are merely disciples of mainstream discourses and practices. Climate change, we could be led to believe, is just another risk that parents must manage by building children's economic and emotional independence (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). But

when we pause to think that members of social movements that push for change and justice might also be parents, we can see that the family life and justice activism are not mutually exclusive. Activists are familial people and parents can be political actors, and the two social domains can breach their alleged boundaries to inform one another's political and care-giving values and practices (McComiskey, 2001). McComiskey's study of peace activist parenting, for example, found that activists felt that challenging systems of injustice needed to be included in family life and that raising children to carry forward their own political values helped change the world today and in the future through their legacy. Political and justice values were imparted to children through everyday conversations about global issues or by taking children to peace demonstrations. Activists were also able to influence the self-conscious caring practices of others in their immediate family, such as spouses. When considering the risk outlook for their children, activist parents believed there was no safe future from war without a non-violent and fair future for *all*. Decisions on child-rearing practices were guided not by expert advice as a model of intensive parenting would follow, but by the shared counterculture of other peace activists.

Since McComiskey's doctoral study more than twenty years ago, family scholars have unfortunately not taken advantage of the opportunity to investigate further radical forms of parenting in the face of environmental risks. Radical parenting is an important area of study because it departs from individualised responses to risk that do little to address systemic drivers and power structures of environmental problems. There is much to explore in terms of how parents challenge the individualism of intensive parenting and balance the unjust aspects of 'good' parenting ideology with their radical political views and approaches. There is work to be done to understand how childhood vulnerability and risk are seen by parents in light of climate change and a dire need to chart the contemporary parenting contours of 'doing much more' for children than simply feeding and sheltering them (Faircloth, 2014) in the era of climate crisis.

### 2.3. (Un)sustainable family practices

Households in the affluent global north typically consume environmentally unsustainable levels of energy, water, food, and other material resources through their repetitive and routine daily practices (Warde, 2005; Warde, 2015). Practices are socially shared and temporally coordinated patterns of going about life, such as eating, transporting oneself and one's family from place to place, and fulfilling social functions - for example parenting (Southerton, 2013). To understand how practices might become less impactful, sociologists have used theories of social practice (for

example, those of Schatzki, 1996 and Reckwitz, 2002) which see impactful 'behaviours' as socio-material and institutionalised (Keller et al., 2016), as well as recursive. Activities can be local or global in scale and mesh micro and macro worlds as 'forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (Reckwitz 2002, p 249). Although emotion and knowledge feature here, this is in terms of shared understandings, norms and meanings of people as the 'carriers' of a practice, and practice theories tend to emphasise structure over agency: 'routine over actions, flow and sequence over discrete acts, dispositions over decisions, and practical consciousness over deliberation' (Warde, 2015, p. 126). Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) contend that a social practice is an entity consisting of integrated elements of materials, competencies, and meanings (p.22), and argue that practices change gradually over time through changes to the links between one or more of the elements of meanings, materials, and competencies.

While theories of social practice have been helpful in identifying the complex socio-material arrangements which lock in high impact patterns of living, and in illustrating the ways in which the micro is connected to the macro level social world, critics of the theory have pointed to a silence on power and justice (Sayer, 2013), its difficulty in identifying the boundaries of a practice, and its overly deterministic role of structures and norms, to the detriment of exploring the role of social agents in processes of change (Keller et al., 2016). Here, we can consider emotion, in a sociological sense, as complexes of embodied expression arising from social relationships (Burkitt, 1997), and the influence these have in reflexively challenging social norms. In a social practice, this is Shove and colleagues (2012) 'meanings', which is a shorthand for Schatzki's 'teleoaffective structures' of 'ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and mood' (Schatzki, 1996, p. 89), and Reckwitz's (2002) emotion and motivational knowledge. However, for Shove and her colleagues, the role of emotion within this element seems to hold little sway in an ability to link with other elements other than in a gradual way, for example in their discussion of the meanings of driving a car:

*Forms of social significance seem to accumulate, one layer being added to the next, with the result that previous meanings are overlain rather than obliterated or dissolved (2012, p.35).*

Shove and colleagues go on to argue that changes in meaning are interdependent with changes in the co-elements of materials and competencies, but they do not value the moral meaning making and affective dynamics associated with changes in human life stage. For example, transitions to parenthood bring an extra expectation for mothers to make additional material purchases to perform culturally defined ways of caring, and this life stage involves situational emotional

engagement of what it means to be a good mother in resisting or maintaining the discretionary moments of everyday consumption (VOICE Group, 2010). Further highlighting the relationality of sustainable consumption, even when mothers want to adopt a sustainable way of family living, thoughts and feelings about creating a secure material future for children may often be prioritised, which may involve high consumption activities to preserve or even improve standards of living for the family (Burningham & Venn, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to question the assumed stable and nonreflexive nature of social practices, particularly when ideals of a secure material future may collide with socially shared ethical concerns, moral emotions, and risk perceptions around global crises such as climate change.

I will now consider the literature on family practices and their impact more generally, before examining green and ecological parenting practices in the next section. In the past 20 years family and relationship scholars have discussed a blurring of the meanings of family and friend (Pahl & Spencer, 2004; Widmer, 2006; Spencer & Pahl, 2018). People may consider siblings or partners as their friends, and friends might be considered as family members (Spencer & Pahl, 2018). People therefore engage in practices that sustain these areas of their intimate lives. David Morgan's (1996; 2002; 2011) work on family practices concurred with this thinking, arguing that families are diverse and fluid and are best defined by the actions and activities they engage in every day that are oriented toward one another, rather than 'the family' as a social entity. Multiple meanings of kinship mean that studying family relationships and their relational practices requires us to understand them as being embedded within wider networks of care and emotional interdependence (Hansen, 2005).

David Morgan argued that emotions are a crucial part of family life, occurring both as mundane feelings (for example, feeling comfortable within someone, or irritated by someone's actions), or as stronger emotions such as love and anger (1996; 2002; 2011). Morgan recognised that there is moral decision-making involved in family practices, and there is licence and mandate inherent in family ties, strategies, and practices that are informally sanctioned by wider social networks (to produce, for example, the emotion of guilt). Morgan's framework of family conduct also encompassed power differences along lines of class, gender, and generation, thus addressing some of the limitations of consumption-related social practice theory. For example, everyday life has a politics around interdependent bonds which involves exercises of power over another in the doing of practices: power over a spouse, child, or sibling. This may mean some family members are made to do things they do not want to do (Morgan, 2011). Power is also found in the way women carry the greater

burden of managing the emotions of others within close relationships (Morgan, 2011), or the ways in which gender dynamics tend to shape most of the practices within the home (Murphy & Parry, 2021; Parry & Murphy, 2022). His theories also allowed for a more blurred boundary between family practices and the wider social world with which they interact, for example 'home, school, state and community' (2011, p. 5). Morgan also saw family life as a meshing of domestic time, space, and embodiment producing family memories; the emotions attached to these memories are anchored in particular practices which can carry over the years and into new practices. This point is important because it allows us to revisit the issue of the so-called nonreflexive, stable practice in social practice theory. Although Morgan discussed a 'taken-for-granted quality' of family practices (2011, p.11), we can consider that if emotions are inherent in family practices, they can play an important role in innovating for change and in carrying on routinely. As Holmes has argued, 'the reflexive self is formed by emotional relations to others and thus emotions play a more complex part in deliberations than helping us form and maintain commitments to our projects' (Holmes, 2010, p. 142). Holmes stressed how feelings about and connection to others are crucial to reflexivity, which suggests that practices can be reflected upon collectively with like-minded others – for example, within the parent climate movement, and moral feelings of concern and wanting to care for distant others as well as one's children can motivate collective action. The relational perspective on family and emotional reflexivity of Morgan and Holmes reminds us of the porous boundary between domestic and public life and help undo criticisms of the family as the main site of everyday high carbon consumption.

To summarise this section of 'problems and possibilities of family life', parenting and family life has been somewhat dismissed as parochial and conservative when assessing sites of social change towards sustainability and justice. Yet, when we reflect on the emerging parent movement and look deeper into the literature, we can find empirical support for an expansive, reflexive, and future-oriented ethic of care, which is expressed as collective emotions and action, guiding parents through uncertain futures for children and the world around them. In the following section, I will elaborate on these ideas through a critical engagement with the theory and empirical literature on 'green' parenting and everyday forms of activism.

#### 2.4. Environmentalist and 'green' parenting

Eco parenting, broadly defined as a repertoire of child-rearing practices with the environment in mind, involves 'walking a thin green line' between what is best for children and what is best for

ecological protection (Kaylin, 1994). Within these ways of parenting, emotionally challenging dilemmas arise in everyday ethical living, balancing the minimising of wasteful food, water and energy practices with the needs, comforts, and wants of children (Kaylin, 1994). This burden of care, it would seem, resonates with contemporary intensive parenting cultures in which children are central, but guilt and worry prevail. Feminist scholars have condemned this 'privatisation' of environmental issues, where tackling them through consumption merely serves to depoliticise inherent power structures and entrenches environmental action in the private sphere (Sandilands, 1993; Judkins & Presser, 2008). When environmentalism is seen as household behaviour, we are told, 'it is women's lives that come under the most intense scrutiny as the new private ecological morality comes into focus' (Sandilands, 1993, p. 46). Even when mothers' environmental concerns for their children spill over from the 'private sphere' and into political engagement and advocacy for children, such action is said to be the result of cultural guilt-tripping by 'how-to' parenting books, burdening women with front-line environmental demands and reifying motherhood's connotations with Mother Nature (Ray, 2011), and perpetuating heteronormative myths about family, motherhood and safeguarding the future (Munro, 2017). These critiques portray parental environmental action as at best gullible and naïve and at worst oppressive and ineffective. Invoking mother identities within political advocacy is said to undermine women's progression; mothers nurturing their children's love of nature reinforces gender stereotypes of caring; and mothers' efforts to influence relatives and friends with their environmentalism are dismissed as 'Green Nagging' (Ray, 2011, p. 97). The family consumption-oriented actions are allegedly without consciousness of wider politics and injustices; we are led to believe that greening the home is individualised, upholds capitalism and patriarchy, and does little to contribute to a sustainable society (Maniates, 2001; Judkins & Presser, 2008; Cairns et al., 2013).

There are several holes in this repudiation of green motherhood. First, to agree with the belief that ethical consumption cannot be collective would be to ignore scholarship on how responsabilisation processes can generate resistance in the form of anti-consumption movements (Pentina & Amos, 2011; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Soneryd & Uggla, 2015), or how political orientations to consumption can lead to participation in an environmental social movement as part of a holistic approach to confronting environmental issues (Passy & Giugni, 2000; Micheletti & Stolle, 2012; Lorenzen, 2014a; 2014b). Second, the complete absence of fathers and fatherhood in this scholarship resonates with MacGregor's (2009) critique of the 'strange silence' around gender within environmental social science. MacGregor argued that analysing gender beyond the men/women binary as a 'discursive

construction that shapes social life' (p.127) would help us understand the power relations of and the ways in which gender contributes to debates around and responses to environmental issues. Attention to gender dynamics rather than just women's experiences could better uncover the contributions ecological forms of masculinity might make to sustainability (Martin Hultman & Pulé, 2018). And finally, calls by feminists to 'target the policy, not the mom' (Ray, 2011 p.97) sound hollow in light of decades of environmental activist demands for policy reform going unanswered. As you read this, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, forests continue to be felled for farming and development, and ever more species are going extinct. Sociological inquiry into grassroots parental responses to this ecological crisis should encompass a lens on justice beyond that of gender to include, for example, its ecological and intergenerational dimensions. This would encourage a purview of ecological practices beyond those of material consumption.

Expanding the analysis beyond motherhood, since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century a small but growing empirical scholarship on green parenting and green family lifestyles within global north contexts has emerged. In contrast to earlier feminist theorising, this work suggests that a more positive contribution is made by domestic environmentalism. Still focusing on the home as the primary domain of change, Philip Payne's (2005; 2010) Australian studies recognised an 'everyday ecocentrism' shaping family practices, motivated not by parental guilt but by ethics and ecopolitics stemming from parents pre-existing environmentalist identities. For Payne, experiential education of children and ecological identity were seen as the most generative outcomes of this ecologically informed parenting and lifestyle. Also exploring intergenerational passing on of values to children were Walther & Sandlin's (2008; 2013) studies of voluntary simplifiers in the US. In these studies, parents were rejecting traditional markers of middle-class life and eschewing conspicuous forms of consumption. The authors discussed the tensions of living frugally in terms of mainstream cultures which encouraged their children to ask for material goods, and of resisting wider family members' insistence on buying new toys for children. Parents were trying to socialise their children about waste and consumption issues through cultural and social practices as "anti-consumer and thus as future activists" (p.16), which is perhaps one of the first indications of families' engagement with forces outside the home: in this case, with wider cultures, disapproving grandparents, and the realm of politics. However, the families in this study seemingly left more inconspicuous but high impact forms of consumption - such as energy usage - as unproblematised, although this is perhaps more a reflection of the cultural rather than sociological lens on consumption deployed by the researchers.

In this vein, several studies of ecologically oriented family living have brought together relational sociology and theories of social practice for an analysis which includes but also looks beyond environmentalist identities, thickening social practice theories by highlighting how tensions and contradictions of everyday green consumption and environmental responsibility arise. Boddy and her colleagues (2016) found that activist self-identities or ‘moderate’ positions were invoked and refused depending on the moral tale told in the interview; fathers tried to distance themselves from radical environmentalism and an activist identity, preferring to be seen as ‘normal, but doing everything I can’; the authors contended that this was to protect against accusations of hypocrisy in relation to their family consumption practices and stressed that there is a complexity and contextual specificity to morally charged environmental concern. Henwood and colleagues (2016) explored the social embeddedness of sustainable energy use in UK case studies, contending that being ‘locked in’ to sociotechnical infrastructures, as presented by theories of social practice, is also contingent on relations of care and ‘relationally meaningful practices that are both practically and emotionally significant’ (p.399). The authors provide one example, among others, of turning up the home heating to keep sick relatives warm. In this sense, there are embodied dimensions to practices and people can reflect on their practices, an idea that contests the assumptions of routineness and lack of reflexivity of practice theory. The authors also identified a conflict between eco-minded and older members of the family, with the latter perceiving low-impact routines as ‘a return to hardship’ and domestic labour they recall from their childhoods. The authors concluded by underscoring the generational differences in values and habits associated with heating practices and emphasised the entanglements between practices, identities, and familial relationships.

A book based on a study by Phoenix and colleagues (2017) of families in the UK and India found that green practices were intimately tied to and emotionally invested in everyday enactments of being a ‘good’ parent. The authors sketched out the power relations between parents and their children, and between the structures of macro-level systems and micro-level worlds – for example the socioeconomic affordances of being mindful of family consumption. Also drawing on social practice theory, studies by Auriffeille (2021) and Auriffeille & Fleming (2022) explored narratives of self-described green parents in the US. Participants talked about their motivations and understanding of environmental issues and where their parenting fitted in, as well as the numerous challenges that arose routinely. The arrival of children into the family presented challenges to consume lightly, but also motivated an intergenerational extension of green living: parents wanted to lead children by example, demonstrating daily practices of connecting with the natural world, critical decision-

making in consumption routines, and socially connecting to people outside the family. In their contention that this was a form of intergenerational social change through innovating long-term pro-environmentalism, the authors appear to be theorising a temporally extended reach of parenting beyond parents' own lifetime. This distal future perspective was also found in a study by Shirani and her colleagues, (2016) who interviewed residents of a UK-based ecovillage to find that having parental responsibilities intensified imaginative, emotional, and apocalyptic visions of the future. Children provided a tangible link to the future and motivated sustainable lifestyle choices in the present. However, neither Auriffeille's nor Shirani and colleagues' work revealed whether parents engaged in notions of justice for other people's children or for beings other than human (such as plants and animals), which calls for further work to understand spatial and species dimensions of parental care and responsibility.

There are two notable exceptions to the general lack of attention to parenting for children's connection with nature as 'more-than-human' beings. Martens' (2016) study was based on an ethnography of families combing for sea life at a Scottish beach. The author drew on scholarship on family practices and agential realism from Karen Barad to present empirically grounded notions that a more-than-human ethics of care is learned in family life through the discursive material practice of parents and their children searching for and handling animals. Her study emphasised this 'embodied and moral engagement' with this practice, an attentiveness-building process that appears to enrich social practice theory with a discursive-material element. A study of family nature clubs by D'Amore (2016) argued for the sustainability potential of family time spent in nature. She sought to contribute to the literature on 'significant life experiences' on children's paths to environmentalism by stressing that connection to nature was brought about through an intergenerational learning experience. It was this, she suggested, that allowed both parents and children to discuss the wildlife they encountered, and this time with an emotionally close role model supported children's engagement with nature, in contrast to theories that promote children's autonomous experiences in natural spaces.

The literature reviewed here on green parenting has sketched out the potential of family life to contribute to sustainability by demonstrating the ways in which parents foster values and practices with children in the hope that they will carry this forward into their adult lives. It has also provided some initial insights into the relational tensions of living one's values within family life; however, there is room to further uncover whether and how relationship disharmonies arise in living one's values when one parent does not feel as strongly about the environment, or when friends and

relatives do not feel the same way. These interactions are a crucial process of social change: when an environmentalist parent seeks to engage, inspire, and persuade others in their personal networks to adopt ecological politics or practices, but may need to navigate around the interests of others along the way. We must also be mindful of the power inherent in the parent-child relationship, which invites inquiry into how this plays a role in processes of change. How parents attempt to politicise relationships to better connect the everyday to macro-level systemic issues will now be explored in the literature on parental and everyday activism.

## 2.5. Maternal activism

The maternal identity has served as a tool of empowerment to engage in social issues and collectively push for change in a wide variety of 21<sup>st</sup> century issues, including educational reform, state-based and gender-based violence, and environmental justice (Panitch, 2012; Weed, 1990; Conradsen, 2016). Mother activism has been largely studied through feminist and social movement lenses, which have charted the various ways in which women have politically mobilised a maternal citizenship in the face of various forms of oppression. The siting of toxic waste in low-income and racialised neighbourhoods in the late 1970s led to local women of Love Canal, most of whom had no previous activist experience, to foreground their roles as wives and mothers in legitimising demands for familial relocation (Hay, 2009). Abrahams (1992, 1996) explored women's activism in low-income neighbourhoods in the United States in the 1990s, finding that larger social justice issues such as racism were a motivator for mothers to mobilise for change. The women felt that this societal level injustice could better be addressed by mothers together, although, as with the mothers at Love Canal, they framed their actions as community work and an extension of 'good' motherhood, rather than as social justice activism (Abrahams, 1996). Brookfield (2012) explored the various ways women responded politically to the threat of the Cold War in the 1970s. Mothers saw that their children's future welfare depended on their efforts to demand peace for the common good. Caring and nurturing were central to their work and ideologies, through various practices based on 'skills as mothers, nurses, social workers, teachers, etc.' (p.228). Their maternal rhetoric and practice were strategic in part because women had been excluded from the realm of politics; maternalism was a way to reach policy makers and resonate with those who valued traditional ideas of the family (Stafford, 2013). Although maternalism has had some success in politicising the state's responsibility to care for children (Reese, 1996; Stoltzfus, 2004), it has also left the politics of private feminised

identities untouched (MacGregor, 2014), hindering debates around women's social position in the home, workplace and state (Stafford, 2013). For global socioenvironmental issues such as climate change, maternalism could be seen as aligning with essentialist ecofeminist ideas of women's role in protecting and nurturing children and the earth (Daggett, 2020), a maternal stereotype which does little to question the role of masculinities in environmental stewardship.

However, looking wider than the interface of middle-class white mother activists with elite and institutional structures, maternal ethics have been found to have agentic value in 'behind the scenes' efforts toward change, demonstrated in the cross-generational continuity of community work found in Naples' (1992) work on Latina and African American women who performed 'othermothering': the nurturing of people outside their kin network, in raced and classed contexts. Naples theorised that activist mothering demonstrates the inseparability (and interlocking) of social spheres: paid work from social reproduction, activism from mothering, and family from community. Identifying this relational and intergenerational social change requires a perspective on activism which pays attention to the quotidian and ongoing, rather than just high-profile and episodic actions. The ethnographic study of working women's activism in rural Canada by Glynis George (2000) explored expressions of a grassroots, feminist politics. The women sought to politicise their experiences of marginalisation and gender-based violence, constructing these as social rather than personal problems. The author contended that 'spheres of family, workplace, and community constitute key discursive arenas through which women's identities and social relations are reproduced; these social spaces form the loci for their evaluation of and response to daily crises and specific struggles' (George, 2000, p. 60). Arguably, the intersection of politics, parenting, and community in these studies, and the ways in which women's role as mothers is politicised, suggest the need to understand the gendered identities and positions of activists, and the various social spaces and timescales in which these are performed. Moreover, it has been noted that a more developed picture of men in these activist contexts could provide a deeper and broader understanding of the role of gender in processes of social change within family contexts (Benoit, 2002).

## 2.6. Everyday activism

Structural theories of social movements and activism tend to orient towards high-profile expressions of resistance and demands for change (McAdam 2017). This scholarship has been interested in personal relationships in terms of how they facilitate movement member recruitment (Gould, 1993),

or contribute to the collective framing of an issue and the identities which sustain movement participation (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996). Of less interest in this body of work is how a social movement intersects with everyday life and the personal relationships within it which support or hinder political action. New social movement theorists, on the other hand, see the everyday of submerged activism as crucial in fostering the interactions and practices which support movement values and identities (Melucci, 1985). The environmental, feminist and peace movements are considered new social movements, which rely on a diverse repertoire of activist practices beyond highly visible protest and conflict (Yates, 2015), including, for example, interactions with others to shape new social norms around issues of injustice (Hannigan, 2006), and sustainable consumption practices which reflect the values of the movement (Yates, 2015). According to Mansbridge (2013, p. 437), everyday activism can be defined as 'talk and action in everyday life that is not consciously coordinated with the actions of others but is (1) to some degree caused (inspired, encouraged) by a social movement and (2) consciously intended to change others' ideas or behaviour in directions advocated by the movement'. This implicitly introduces close others such as friends, family, and neighbours, but the relational dimensions of the everyday have been largely undervalued, or even dismissed. For example, in their examination of the domains of everyday life in sustaining movement participation, Passy & Giugni (2000) argued for the importance of integrating an activist's 'life spheres' into their political commitments through social interactions and self-interaction. The authors argued that effort was required to maintain affective commitment and interest in the goals of the movement without letting one's relationships 'lead them astray'; they talked about an 'erosion' of the emotional space of activist commitment by a spouse unsympathetic to the cause, yet they do not dig deeper to understand this. This is perhaps another example of the assumption of a public/private life dualism, which leads to the belief that the moral identities, emotions, and solidarity sustaining a movement can be found *only* in activist circles. This idea that activists can only be embedded within one set of close relationships at a time is evident in the authors' claim that life spheres can get 'symbolically disconnected' from one another through a change in activist orientations. We might wonder how the side-lining of affective relationships (and their attendant roles, identities, and practices) in social movement research might limit a more holistic understanding of processes of cultural change.

Also located within the life sphere seam of thinking is Haenfler et al's (2012) empirically grounded theorisation of 'lifestyle movements'. The authors contended that individuals can 'consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as a primary means to foster social change' (p.1) and

argued that a way of life is culturally spread in pursuit of both self-actualisation and social change goals. For these authors, 'the self becomes the site of change', motivated by 'a personal quest for integrity, meaning and authenticity' (p.15). The authors see that social change arises from ideas that filter into discourse through the informal networks of the lifestyle movement. However, critics of the individualisation thesis - upon which these authors base their theory - would argue that such personal identity work does not account for normative social identities that conflict with ideas around 'choosing' how to live their life. The individualist thesis of reflexive modernisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) is silent on power and its effect on further marginalising raced and classed subjectivities who cannot conform to middle class, affluent lifestyles (McRobbie, 2013). Moreover, individualised politics appear to erase the power hierarchies of intimate life and the ways in which these shape everyday 'choices' (Jamieson, 1998). For example, studies by McCalman (2022) on everyday environmentalism and Mansbridge & Flaster (2007) and Blais & Dupuis-Déri (2022) on everyday feminism have documented how discursive backlash from one's own relatives can lead activists to need to micro-negotiate their politics within interactions. These authors have drawn attention to gender in activism and the way that women are more vulnerable to social sanctions than men.

Feminists have long analysed power as integral to everyday activism. Organising grassroots and everyday 'small' political acts are in response to women's historical exclusion from formal politics and are often acted as pragmatic workaround to the many demands on women's time, for example, the needs of family and work (Staeheli, 1996). Power in the form of normative roles and identities can limit change even within activism – for example, as touched upon earlier, the mobilisation of maternal politics has been deemed 'a way to embrace an identity as a good mother' thus reinforcing problematic gendered norms (Naples, 1992; Abrahams, 1996, p. 780). Although research has found that women spend more time than men reconfiguring family practices into more sustainable forms (Organo et al., 2013), maternal activism has frequently been overlooked as a form of political activity because it has been 'dismissed as "just mothers" performing their domestic responsibilities, protecting their children' (Conradsen, 2016, p.1), an idea sometimes articulated by the mothers themselves. From a feminist perspective on activism, gendered power relations can be a lens to connect macro and micro level issues (Abrahams, 1992, 1996).

The seemingly durable inequalities of social position, for example, gender, class, and race, might leave us wondering how activists can tackle social justice in the context of everyday relationships. This question is about agency and could be seen as one element of the structure/agency debate

which characterises many social science divisions (Burkitt, 2016). Relational theories of human action account for both structure and agency, stressing the embeddedness of individuals within relationships that are dynamic, unfolding over time and space and precluding a fixed social categorical way of relating to others (Emirbayer, 1997). This way of understanding social action allows for the concepts of power and agency to be concepts of *relationship* rather than an entity someone possesses, enabling power and agency to fluctuate according to the situated transaction (Emirbayer, 1997). A relational understanding of agency 'is to do with people producing particular effects in the world and on each other through their relational connections and joint actions', recasting singular actors into 'interactants' (Burkitt, 2016, p. 323). Turning back to the issue of gender, the analysis could then focus on the situated performance of socially constructed roles and identities; in this way, gender is an outcome of culture and institutions which shape patterns of embodied interactions in different social settings (Connell, 1990). This leaves room for micro-scenarios in which the gender order can be reimagined, for example in Connell's study of environmentalist men who sought to adopt feminist principles of equality, collectivity, and solidarity in their daily conduct as a way to collectively challenge hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1990).

Relational theories have been used within studies of new social movements to explore how social relationships help initiate or sustain political action. Cherry (2006) explored the ways in which vegans unaffiliated with a formal group created networks of social support, collective identity and self-empowerment to sustain the movement. This suggests the vegans were up against a hegemonic mainstream omnivore culture, although Cherry did not elaborate on the moral dilemmas of navigating this world in the vegans' daily lives. It would appear that in focussing on like-minded *vegan* networks, the author uses a rather thin interpretation of relationality; the interactions with *nonvegan* others were not discussed, leaving us with a gap in knowledge on whether and how conflict or solidarity may arise in politicising everyday consumption. Eating and dining are social practices, an aspect of everyday activism scholarship that demands a need to consider how the care of the ties of the interdependent relationship ties could intersect with the politics of care for animals and the environment, potentially supporting or undermining the cultural fuel of the vegan movement. A thicker relational analysis of everyday veganism would look not just at the collective framing of the issue between vegans, but also at the micro negotiations of political agency within the embeddedness of vegans in their non-vegan family and friendship networks.

O'Shaughnessy & Kennedy (2010) substantiate their theory of relational activism with a more explicit attention to the connections between multiple levels of power. Interviewing mothers who

strive to reduce their environmental footprint, the authors pointed to the scholarship's exclusion of pro-environmental work of women because it is not in the public sphere, a realm traditionally dominated by men. The authors argued that the daily environmental care practices should also be defined as activism because they allow and support others to take up these pro-environmental practices. In this way, they argued

*Relational activism is a long-term form of activism that utilizes relationships among networks of like-minded individuals, and blurs the distinction between public and private spheres by using daily behaviours as the locus for social and environmental change (O'Shaughnessy & Kennedy, 2010, p. 553)*

The authors note a nuance of the potential for ecological and social justice in their recognition that eco behaviours in the home tend to be divided along lines of gender, thus reproducing inequalities, but this work can at the same time be progressive in that close personal others are supported in more visible forms of activism. However, as in the study by Cherry (2006), this analysis tends to reify 'like-minded others' as crucial nodes of change. Arguably, it is activists bridging and forming solidarities with others *unlike* themselves that could yield the greatest degrees of social change.

In this vein, some scholars have explored the negotiating of relationships across social divides to reconfigure social relations, a process that has remained a blind spot in social movement theories. Martin, Hanson and Fontaine's (2007) relational feminist theorising of activism stood in contrast to the collective action and group norms of structuralist social movement theory in their contention that 'creating change can mean simply intervening when and where one happens to be' (p.90). They stressed the importance of an ethic of care in this type of activism, in which 'women [are] literally seeing and hearing and feeling the needs around them' (p.90). They argued that the embeddedness of women within work, family, or community attuned them to the problematic power relationships in daily life – in this sense, the structures that constrain change, and this awareness enabled them to innovate and change power relationships by involving people in positions of authority (such as local business owners) to help their cause. This type of activism is as much about relationship building as it is about everyday forms of resistance (Martin et al., 2007). Horton & Kraftl (2009) build on this in their analysis of acts of kindness and care cutting across relations of power. The authors studied a public parental advice centre and argued that care was expressed and enacted by the staff of the drop-in centre, in the form of welcome, support, empathy, atmosphere, and continuity. Relationships between staff and parent users were formed through these acts of care that precipitated political outcomes, such as parent users of the centre perceiving threats by the council

to close the centre as something 'we' need to tackle together. The authors argued that care-related affective bonds were empowering for parents and helped to promote an 'activist mindset' of political intentions.

Building on the attention of Horton and Kraftl's and Martin and colleagues to different ways of relating to bring about change, Askins (2014) pointed out the value of emotionality in such processes, in her study of a refugee befriending scheme. Askins discussed the ways in which refugee women reached out and engaged with local residents, disrupting the scripts of refugees who needed to be 'saved'. One of the refugee women formed a close bond with a local resident that encompassed caring emotions and mobilised a 'quiet politics' (p.353) of reconfigured social relations. Also exploring an affective, political spanning of power relations Stephenson-Abetz's (2012) study of feminist mothers' discursive practices with their daughters. Mothers were seeking to raise the political and social justice consciousness of their daughters from a young age by engaging with conversation topics and raising awareness of everyday sexism, practices which were not typical ways of contemporary parenting in global north contexts. Stephenson-Abetz argued that mothers' accounts of creatively fostering their daughters' feminist identity through everyday dialogue 'challenged dominant ideologies about what it means to mother and what it means to be an activist' (p.115). I suggest that what could add to an activist mother epistemology is an account of the moral dilemmas with other family members (who are outside the movement) in living one's political values; Stephenson-Abetz did touch on this, identifying it as a process of 'negotiating self and others' (Stephenson-Abetz, 2012, p. 103). In terms of activist self-identities, this could arguably be an emotionally fraught area of trying to build bridges with others. The author discussed tense conversations with non-feminist family members and emphasised the embodied nature of this type of activism in its need to engage sensing and emotions to navigate interpersonal conflict.

This suggests that everyday activists' efforts toward cultural change require a great deal of care and emotional engagement and management with people outside activist circles, in an ongoing way. As feminists and family researchers have laid out, the facets of care and emotional involvement are political in that they are structured by power relations and interdependencies, along lines of gender, age, and generation (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Thoits, 1996; Wharton & Erickson, 1995; Jamieson, 1998). A sociological lens on emotions focusses on the culturally shared meaning-making of experiences, and on the structure of relationships (Smith-Lovin & Thoits, 2014), to theorise the arousal and flow of emotions and the social actions they motivate (Turner & Stets, 2012). In the next section, I will bring social movement theories of emotions together with thinking on practices of

interdependent care relationships which have the potential to affectively motivate, sustain, or challenge everyday climate action and activism.

## 2.7. Emotions in social movements

I have outlined how emotions are a key feature of family and personal life. Emotions also play a crucial role in responding to climate change: in how we understand and share information about social problems (Roeser, 2012), and in motivations to collectively confront the social order when it is recognised as driving the problem (Della Porta et al., 2014). But what of the affective dynamics and structures at the nexus of personal life and politicised responses to climate change? To explore this as a space between macro- and micro-level responses to climate change, in which emotions are a conduit for meaning making and which overlap, amplify, transform, or diminish, we might look to the literature on emotions in new social movements, and synthesise it with a feminist sociology of emotions.

Social movement theories have analysed emotions in terms of their presence in the framing or perception of a public issue, in collective identity formation, in the focussed emotion cultures of a movement group, and in the role they play in movement decline. These theories tend to portray emotional dynamics as linear in nature and as somewhat insulated and separate from other areas of an activist's personal life. In social movement theory, an issue provokes moral emotions, such as anger and indignation, or moral shock around a perceived injustice (Bericat, 2016); a movement may emerge when there is a collective identity around an issue, that is, 'an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution' (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285), as well as a shared way to frame or interpret the issue (Snow et al., 1986). The collective identity and framing can help to define the moral obligations and pleasures which motivate and sustain movement participation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Emotions also play a role in drawing the public's attention to injustice by harnessing sentiment in narrative and symbolic practices (Flam & King, 2005; Ruiz-Junco, 2013). Feelings may form an emotion culture when the rhetorical performance of these emotions successfully recruits new members (Gamson, 1995; Jasper, 2011). And finally, when the force of emotion in a movement begins to wane, it can contribute to the attrition of members and the movement's demobilisation (Flam & King, 2005).

Because social movement theories of emotions perceive activism as an activity in the public sphere, they are less helpful in understanding how movement-related emotions interact with the emotional dynamics and structures of personal life. As my discussion on everyday activism has shown,

relationships outside activist circles are of great importance in effecting social change. Yet within movement scholarship, relationships with friends and family are viewed as important only in their supportive role, for example, the networks of trust in movement recruitment processes (Gould, 1993). However, relating back to my earlier discussion of the relationality of human action, activists are embedded in multiple realms - for example work, family, and neighbourhood (Craddock, 2020a), involving many interactions associated with different self-identities, thus rendering relationships with friends and family significant for concerns about, and acting on, social issues. Emotions in personal and family lives are cyclical rather than linear; the routines of everyday life ebb and flow, and relationships bring a manifold and sometimes conflicting pattern of emotions (Gabb, 2009). The emotions of family life are subject to norms imposed by wider cultural scripts, such as the shame of failing to uphold parenting ideals of a 'good' childhood, producing emotion regimes and rules which shape gendered, emotionally-taxing parenting practices (Björk, 2018). The normative emotions of guilt and shame relating to responsibilities may at the same time conflict with other emotional ideals, for example, pride in fostering gender equality within a mixed sex parenting couple (Björk, 2018).

What this tells us is that the emotions of everyday life, though attached to routine practices, are nonetheless connected to normative systems, and could matter for the motivations to participate in a political movement. As Wettergren (2009) has noted, the cultural context of a movement group is not 'unemotional' and the relationships and structures that foster these emotions are entwined with the emotions of a movement. Wettergren (2009) gave the examples of activists designing fun into their activism and carefully managing their anger and argued that these reflect cultural emotional regimes that work through bodies in the self-discipline of one's emotional expression (Foucault, 1991). Therefore, emotions in social movements may necessarily be integrated with other concerns, roles, and identities, rather than circulating freely as a product of the group (Craddock, 2020a). An analysis of movement emotional dynamics therefore requires a disaggregation of collective emotions to the micro-level. Brown & Pickerill (2009) have explored the ways in which emotions within other spaces of an activist's life, for example, personal life, can provide emotional fulfilment for group members and contribute to the sustainability of collective action in the long term. These conceptual spaces of emotions were place, time, self, and interpersonal. Of these, place can provide a sense of familiarity and safety in high-risk protests; time can provide memory of experience (including intergenerational activist orientations) and a future vision; self provides a space for emotional reflexivity about one's relative social position; and interpersonal provides the care,

emotional support, and sense of solidarity with other activists that sustain activism (Brown & Pickerill, 2009). It is important to note that this study was of high-profile, protest-oriented activism within a bounded group. Given that we know of parental climate activism as a less visible, more quotidian type, it is important to gain an empirically grounded understanding of how emotions motivate and sustain more dispersed forms of action. As Lynch and colleagues (2021) have argued, sociological studies of justice should give greater attention to affective care relations and the emotions of love, care, and solidarity if we are to understand the thinking and doing of practices which are oriented to others.

## 2.8. Summary

To summarise this review of scholarship on the problems and possibilities of family and personal life for a sustainable and just future:

- In social theory, family life is often implicated in reproducing power inequalities and exacerbating climate injustice and climate risk, but some feminist care ethicists have offered ideas for radical, political parental care
- Reflexive embodied orientations towards an issue can support changes to unsustainable family practices
- Family life scholarship has argued for overlaps with multiple realms and loci of power, which challenges ideas in the green parenting literature of atomised and individualistic action
- There is a lack of attention to fathers and male masculinities in green parenting studies
- The green parenting literature has tended to gloss over tensions and contradictions which arise in everyday sustainable family living
- A relational lens on sustainable living could identify agents of obstruction and conflict, as well as the relationships which greatly facilitate inter- and intra-generational change
- Everyday activism is affectively embedded; relational activism offers insights into micropolitical negotiations of power
- Emotions and sense-making are a key ingredient in processes of ethical change

## 2.9. Statement of research questions

To reiterate the main research question of this thesis:

***How do parenthood and parenting interplay with activism for climate and ecological change?***

This is a question concerning the concepts of responsibility and care; the feeling of accountability and obligations to children, thinking about risks to the child, and taking action to manage these risks (Sutherland, 2010). It is therefore crucial to explore the embodied and emotional dimensions to climate activist parenting if we are to uncover whether and how parents bring about new norms, general understandings, and affective engagements in collective and familial practices and political activities.

The main research question is therefore developed into the following sub-questions:

1. When and how does engagement with environmental issues occur in family and personal life?
2. How is action on climate and ecological change practiced within family and personal life?
3. How does being a mother or father play a part in these practices?
4. What have been the relational challenges in tackling climate and ecological change?

The following is a chapter on the methods and methodology used in the study.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins by presenting the study's rationale for the research design used to answer the research questions. It then outlines the methodological approaches which were available and reasons for proceeding with, or rejecting, particular methods. As the data collection and analysis methods have been explained within the four research papers in Chapter 4, I will not duplicate this with further discussion in this chapter. Rather, I will address the foundations of my research design and the cross-cutting issues that arose during implementation.

### 3.1 A feminist approach

As outlined in the Introduction chapter, this thesis takes the form of 4 separate but linked projects produced as journal articles, which individually tackle all or part of this list of research questions. Each of the papers explores its own research sub-questions and contains a brief overview of the research methods used. The articles are connected by the same goal of exploring the experiences and motivations of parents who participated in climate campaigning. I will now discuss the theoretical-methodological approach to answer the main research questions, and the decision-making process around the methods on offer.

My own feminist politics have informed the formulation of the central aim and design of this study. Essentially, a feminist theoretical perspective enabled me to see the difference in parenting and in climate action patterned along axes of power inequality (Hesse-Biber, 2012). I have been a climate activist on and off for a number of years, and in 2019 during the first months of my research training as I became interested in the parent climate movement, I had several off-record conversations with founders of parent-led climate action groups to get a sense of the motivations and goals of both the groups and the individuals I was speaking to. I learned that it was mostly mothers who represented an eco-politicisation of parenthood and publicised parental grievances around current climate injustice. This was puzzling because I was aware there are plenty of men who are extremely concerned about climate change, but far fewer of them foreground their father identity in their public-facing activism. None of the organisers of the mother group I spoke to seemed to be aware of this difference or if they were aware, they did not feel it as important. I knew that maternal activism

around various public issues has a long history (Connolly, 2004; Logsdon-Conradsen, 2011; Naples, 1998; Reese, 1996; Stearney, 1994), but in relation to climate change, parental concerns of both mothers *and* fathers had featured in previous survey research on motivations for participation in activism (Martiskainen et al., 2020). This posed an interesting question about the role of gender in parenting identities and care practices around climate action and drove my inclusion of fathers to interpretively explore parenting, rather than solely mothering. Gender roles and relations are both performative, and structural (Connell, 1987), and constituted through social practices (Poggio, 2006). Poggio (2006) has advocated the use of narrative interviews and participant observation to access gender dynamics. I drew on Schatzki's (2001) idea of meanings and identities being intimately entwined with social practices to capture the practice of gender in parenting and activism. I was attentive to differences in mothers' and fathers' accounts of parenting and activism, asking questions which teased out meaning making around practices, for example, the expectation of mothers to be the primary caregiver (Walzer, 1998) or fathers as the primary protectors and material providers (Doucet, 2013). I asked probing questions about motivations, activities, and identities which aligned with the affordances and constraints of gendered divisions of labour, as well as asking direct questions about gender in the interview to access participants' thoughts on gender inequalities.

My guiding research question specifies familial *and* collective types of action. A feminist approach enabled me to envisage possible links between the two in terms of personal life being inherently political and connected to wider social and ecological systems. This perspective spurred my desire to explore the activism-sustaining emotional webs of interdependent relationships in the everyday lives of participants (de la Bellacasa, 2012; McComiskey, 2001; Jamieson, 2016), and the labour of childrearing practices oriented to treading more lightly on the earth and encouraging care and justice for distant others (de la Bellacasa, 2012).

### 3.2. Ethnographically informed methods

As discussed in the literature review, a practice approach to everyday collective climate action offers an analytical framework to understand the routine *and* purposive dimensions of activities toward sustainable transitions. A practice approach explores environmental action in the everyday, but unlike individualised accounts of green parenting, it overcomes micro-macro world dualisms by looking at such practices in their macro-institutional context (Gherardi, 2017). In this way, a practice

approach offers an ontological framework for the link between practices within the home and practices within activist groups.

As I have identified in the literature review, practice theory somewhat neglects structural social inequalities and power relations, for example, along lines of gender and generation. Reconciling a feminist approach with practice theory is difficult, but, as outlined earlier in this chapter, I pay attention to gender and generational differences in the accounts of the participants of their practices. In particular, I draw on feminist theories of care to explore in depth the mundane, gendered, but often overlooked acts of caregiving which are performed within interdependent personal relationships.

One methodological approach that I considered to explore the collective dispersed activity of eco-activist parenting was ethnography. Ethnography uses participant observation, in-depth interviews and sometimes document analysis to gain a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the cultural milieu under study, that is, methods of generating words which 'capture the thoughts, emotions and web of social interaction among observed participants in their operating context' (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 542). Katharine Dow (2016) used ethnography to explore understandings and constructions of kinship and stable environmental futures within a wildlife volunteer community in northern Scotland. However, conventional ethnography was ruled out for this study as it was felt that participant observation of parenting would raise privacy issues. My avoidance of the participant observation method is consistent with previous studies of environmentalist family living, which have instead relied on in-depth and narrative interviews (Payne, 2005; Phoenix et al., 2017). Furthermore, it would be impractical to follow activists around in their other spaces of personal life and activism, such as the workplace, and this would complicate the unit of analysis if I followed a traditional ethnographic approach, which tends to ringfence people into bounded social groups (O'Reilly, 2009). Even if it were possible, an overarching issue was that the first phase of fieldwork coincided with the height of the coronavirus pandemic in spring/summer 2020, a situation in which the UK government had imposed stringent and far-reaching restrictions on mobility.

In light of these issues, I chose to continue with fieldwork using remote methods. Following studies of relationships that use mixed, emotion-oriented methods to 'drill down into realms of embodied lived experience' (Gabb & Fink, 2015, p. 974), I felt a mix of an online, in-depth conversational video interview supported by a pre-completed solicited diary (in this context, a log of daily activities, thoughts and feelings, rather than an intimate journal) would best capture a rich and multi-layered account of 'how the biographical, experiential, and social are interwoven' (Gabb, 2009, p. 37). In-

depth interviews are a widely used method of data collection in qualitative social research and are seen as a form of 'conversation with a purpose' (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 130) that enables the personal account of the participant to come to the fore. The expressive power of language presents explanations, descriptions, and evaluations, and illuminates meaning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In-depth qualitative interviewing is an established and pivotal method in research on relationships and everyday living (Gabb, 2009). I wanted to combine structure with flexibility, so I opted for a semi-structured thematic format built around my core research questions (for example, around the events and situations in people's lives) but allowing for the fluidity of exploring topics or areas of interest and meaning raised by the participant (Mason, 2004).

The complement the interview in this study, the diary method is preferred by researchers for 'capturing life as it is lived' (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 579) and can produce a micro-level of data that grasps within-person variations of thought and feeling, unseen and sensitive practices, adding insight into participants' embodied experiences (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). Capturing emotional experiences is said to be difficult because these are not necessarily translatable into words (Bondi, 2014), however, my sociologically-informed position on emotions is that emotions are a form of embodied, socially derived meaning-making (as opposed to individual psychological states) and, coupled with my social constructionist position on how people understand climate and environmental issues, I felt that asking my participants to write down their emotions as they arose in relation to climate and environment could still represent their social reality because these emotions draw from a sociocultural register (Turner & Stets, 2012).

The solicited diary is a well-established method for getting around the privacy problems of participant observation, while adding value for the researcher in its ability to travel with the participant across the many different spaces and places of daily life (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Wenzel & Süßbauer (2021) used a 7-day solicited diary for their diary-interview study of everyday pre- and recycling practices, finding it very useful to capture routine activities which might not have been reflected upon in the interview. The pseudo-observational method of temporalised data collection is also proven to be effective in accessing the emotions around, and other everyday responses to, a particular issue (Larson & Almeida, 1999; Meth, 2017). McManus & Gallagher (2015), for example, studied water consumption habits and ruptures of habits after the emotional trauma of experiencing an earthquake. When requested in advance of an interview, diaries also have the advantage of serving as an interview prompt, generating avenues for discussion that might not otherwise arise (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). An example is Molander's (2021) used photo diaries over

the course of a week and interviews in a study of single fathers' everyday childcare, 'as a way to approach everyday care practices and reflections thereon, including the consumption associated with this care' (p.199).

For some emotionally sensitive topics, participants have reported that the experience of recording in a diary can be cathartic and therapeutic (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). From an ethical perspective, I felt this was important given that the participants self-identified as concerned about the climate crisis. An additional rationale for choosing the diary-interview approach was that it could enable me to get at the temporal and personal context of activist parenting: the historical biographical aspects – as well as a log of ebbing and flowing emotions. My decision was to ask participants to record the daily thoughts, feelings, and actions relating to climate or environmental issues over the course of 2 weeks. I felt that, compared to the more common duration of 1 week found in previous studies, this longer period might better allow for lost data if the participant does not always have the time to make recordings (Emmel & Clark, 2009). Following Filep et al. (2018), I also offered to provide a daily text reminder to participants to complete the diary, although most did not take this offer up. Fortunately, those who did complete the diary exercise provided me with a full and rich 2-week record.

All methods have limitations. I considered how online interviews might shape the sample I recruited because online methods depend on participants having access to and confidence in using technology. This would normally present issues for recruiting participants from older age groups; however, I felt that the relatively young age of the parents I recruited meant that they were more likely to already have experience of mediated conversations. In addition, I considered how the interactional dynamics of a remote video interview might shape the rapport I build with participants. Rapport is 'an orientation towards 'euphoria' or 'ease' in interaction, a harmonious connection or a 'working consensus', and is said to be important for both building trust and enabling mutual disclosure (Weller, 2017, p. 614). During in-person encounters, prolonged small talk at the beginning and end of the interview is often used as a way to put participants at ease, something not easily done online; however, the 'pressure of presence' in this form of encounter also presents risks of embarrassment, an issue mediated video interviews have been shown to provide participants relief from (Weller, 2017, p. 623). Another benefit which offset any limitations of online interviews is that it saved time and money in not having to travel, enabling me to access a more geographically dispersed sample (Iacono et al., 2016).

### 3.3. Implementation of the methods

#### 3.3.1. Pilot study

I carried out a pilot study before embarking upon my fieldwork to test the data collection tools to identify any practical issues (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001), and to reflect on the applicability of the diary-interview approach more generally. A friend of mine who was an environmentalist (although not a parent) volunteered to participate in the pilot study. She completed the diary initially over the course of a few days; I had asked her simply to make daily written recordings in an unstructured way; the guideline issued to her was to record each day ‘thoughts, feelings, and actions relating to climate change or the environment, detailing the social context of the moment’. I offered to send her a daily reminder to make recordings. The main finding of piloting the diary study was that the lack of clear guidelines on how to complete it had been confusing; my participant reported being unsure how much to write. After discussion we agreed that this lack of structure could be resolved with a simple diary template with columns of date/time/location/who with, and then a larger column for diarist comments. Given the proposed 2-week commitment to complete the diary exercise, I felt that the template document would be effective in capturing moments as lived and the situational specificity of emotions, without the burden of producing lengthy textual narratives.

The post diary interview was semi-structured around both the diary content and my predesigned interview guide. The interview proved fruitful in generating insights into motivations to take action on climate and ecological change, and together with the diary exercise, provided context of everyday activism practices.

#### 3.3.2. Sampling and Recruitment

As discussed, my unit of analysis was everyday parenting practices which were strategically oriented toward protecting the environment and bringing about a sustainable future. I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit parents or guardians who were concerned about climate change and their children’s future and who were campaigning in any way to push for systemic change. In my recruitment wording I intentionally avoided the term ‘activism’; an activist is commonly understood as “a person working to achieve political or social change, especially as a member of an organization with particular aims” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022), yet not everyone wishes to self-identify

as one due to occasional negative stereotyping of environmental activists (Barr & Gilg, 2006; Capek, 1993; Hargreaves, 2016). In an effort to capture the interest of parents whose collectivised work toward change did not necessarily involve protest tactics or lead to defining oneself as an agitator, in recruitment calls I instead defined activism as *any type of organised, shared campaigning to address climate change*. I used social media (Facebook and Twitter) to place recruitment posters inviting participation and linked this advertising to a research profile page I had created especially for the purpose of building confidence and trust in me and the research project. I also directly emailed the organisers of three climate parent groups as gatekeepers to help me access parents in the community. One of these groups agreed to post a blog piece I wrote on my research to garner interest in the study. Finally, I attended two online meetings of activist parent groups to introduce myself and invite participation in the research project.

To encourage participation in the research at a time when the challenging conditions of the pandemic could potentially compromise participant recruitment, I decided to offer an incentive of a £25 donation to a charity of the participants' choice. This was partly inspired by previous ecological practice research which offered a donation to an environmental organisation as a thanks for participation (see Judkins & Presser, 2008). I chose to offer a donation rather than an extrinsic monetary reward because pro-social populations like those in my study are more likely to be motivated by altruistic incentives, whereas monetary rewards may undermine an altruist self-identity (Batson et al., 1978; Conn et al., 2019).

Although payments as an incentive to encourage participation are becoming increasingly common in qualitative research, this is not unproblematic (Head, 2009). Head (2009) argued that compensation of any kind can create conditions where participants feel obliged to share details they might not otherwise disclose. To protect against this, I provided participants with copies of the interview transcript and invited them to review and redact any details they were not happy with, without me needing an explanation.

A total of 8 fathers and 12 mothers were recruited (a 13<sup>th</sup> mother, Bridget, only agreed to a few email exchanges). The details of the participants can be found in **Table 1**. My data set included field notes as well as transcribed interviews and digital diary recordings.

**Table 1: Participant details**

<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL DETAILS</b>	<b>TYPES OF ORGANISED CAMPAIGNING</b>
<b>PETER</b>	30s, daughter 18 months, son age 5	Eco parent group; Social media activities; lobbying MPs and getting friends to write letters
<b>FREYA</b>	20s, expecting first child	Eco parent group; social media and lobbying MPs; pushing for eco education at work (school)
<b>LENA</b>	30s, one son aged 1 and expecting 2 <sup>nd</sup> child	Blogging; eco parenting groups
<b>SOPHIA</b>	30s, one daughter aged 2	Eco education reform at work (school); Extinction Rebellion
<b>CASSIE</b>	30s, one son aged 3, one daughter aged 6	Extinction Rebellion; workplace eco-influencer
<b>HELEN</b>	40s, one daughter age 17	Transition Town groups; Permaculture movement; Extinction Rebellion; Women's Environmental Network
<b>LEAH</b>	30s, two sons aged 13 and 14	Extinction Rebellion; Greenpeace; local Transition Town
<b>MEL</b>	20s, one toddler and the organiser of a parent group	Eco parent group
<b>FRAN</b>	30s, partner of Mel and stepmother	Extinction Rebellion
<b>RYAN</b>	30s, two daughters aged 3 and 5	School curriculum reform for eco education; public talks for Extinction Rebellion
<b>CHARLOTTE</b>	30s, 4 children: toddler (gender not known), twin girls aged 6, daughter aged 8	Workplace sustainability education; campaigning to halt destruction of local woodland

<b>MARC</b>	50s, one daughter age 16	Extinction Rebellion
<b>RUBEN</b>	50s, two sons aged 6 and 8	Extinction Rebellion; local climate action group
<b>ALEXANDER</b>	30s, one daughter aged 13	Photography activism; relational activism with friends
<b>MEGAN</b>	40s, one daughter aged 5	Member of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth; Transition Town; local educational activism
<b>PATRICIA</b>	30s, three children aged 2, 7 and 9	Founder of a mother-led eco group
<b>TIM</b>	50s, two sons age 20s	Extinction Rebellion; previously involved in other green groups
<b>RICK</b>	40s, three children aged 14, 12 and 8	Workplace environmental education; XR direct actions
<b>DEE</b>	40s, two children aged 6 and 3	Started a parent eco club (social learning); wrote a book on low impact family living
<b>MARIUS</b>	30s, one child aged 4	Advises charities on climate and ecological issues
<b>BRIDGET</b>	50s, family details not known	Promoter of ethical financial investments; eco parent groups

### 3.3.3. Data Analysis

As will be discussed within the four research papers, I analysed my dataset using a thematic approach guided by Ritchie & Spencer's (2002) staged procedure: re-familiarisation with the data; identification of a thematic framework; line-by-line inductive coding; grouping of similar codes and assigning of analytical concepts; and identification of thematic patterns and associations across the dataset. I used NVIVO software to support the coding of the text in the interview transcripts, diary exercises, and field memos. To arrive at the initial list of themes, I used various spider diagrams and freewriting to generate ideas, mental maps, and connections between the coded data. During these freewriting exercises, I was constantly revisiting the literature around various concepts, such as

relational identities and parenting. The themes identified across the dataset required yet another layer of abstraction to enable me to define the research puzzles detailed in the four standalone journal articles in this thesis. This involved me being vigilant for concepts which connected my data to important debates on the climate action and sociology of personal life spaces; these concepts provided a framework with which to empirically and theoretically contribute to debates around these issues.

#### 3.3.4. Issues in the field

I encountered several issues around recruiting participants. First, I had previously assumed that it would be straightforward to recruit parent couples to participate in the research. My desire to interview parent couples was driven by my desire to explore the gender contours of eco-activist parenting; this followed feminist research which has found that, despite middle class and educated people's ideals of practicing gender equality in partner relationships, the arrival of children and the intensive parenting cultures that ensue still primarily burden mothers with more practical and emotional labour than fathers (Faircloth, 2021). My intention was to allow gendered identities and practices to reveal themselves relationally within the interview setting. Dyadic interviews – where multiple members of a family are co-present - have long been valued for their methodological ability to gain 'a collaborative, co-constructed family reality in the interview setting' (Valentine, 1999; Reczek, 2014, p. 326). However, in practice, all but one of the individual activist parents who responded to the recruitment call were unable to convince their partner to participate in the research with them. As the research process unfolded, I learned from participants who were in a couple relationship that the practical and emotional labour of campaigning activities was almost always carried out by them alone, even though their partners were willing and active in changing family high impact consumption practices to more sustainable versions, for example, agreeing to forgo car ownership and flying. When I asked participants why their partner did not participate in campaigning, the most common reason given was that their fear and concern about a climate-changed future was not intense enough to become politically active. My inability to recruit parent couples led me to change my purposive sampling from parent couples to singular participants.

The second issue was that at the beginning of the recruitment phase, I was struggling to find enough fathers who were willing to participate in my research. This is perhaps consistent with research finding that men are harder to recruit in research on 'soft' topics due to masculine norms around not

sharing feelings about a topic (Butera, 2006). I realised that I would need to tailor my recruiting strategy, finding success in tweaking my recruitment poster to specifically invite fathers (appealing for help to gain fathers' voices). I also relied more heavily on the snowball method, asking gatekeepers and participants if they could recommend fathers whom I could contact. Once I had recruited and interviewed fathers, I found that they were as concerned as mothers about their children's future; they appeared to be as passionate and dedicated to working collectively to change systems.

Another issue related to gender that arose was that I had not anticipated that far fewer fathers than mothers were willing to complete the solicited diary exercise. Although all eight fathers were invited to participate in the diary recordings, only three agreed, compared to 9 of the 12 mothers. The reasons given by the male participants ranged from having a lack of time to simply confessing disinterest in the method. In retrospect, one possible reason is that keeping a written diary tends to be associated with girlhood. My use of the word 'diary' may have been compared to a masculinised self-image; If I were to carry out this exercise today, I would use a more gender-neutral term such as 'daily log', although even this still required recording feelings that may have troubled some participants' masculine self-identities.

There were multiple fieldwork challenges related to the impact of the pandemic on mobility. During the data collection phase, there were two 'lockdowns', which were government bans on travel and in-person meetings to control the transmission of Covid-19. The necessity for many people across the country to work from home meant that it was almost impossible to create conditions of privacy for the interview; I could not assume that the participant would be alone for the interview. This became an issue when some participants told me in our discussion that they often felt emotionally isolated in their families because they were the only parent in a couple who expressed a great deal of worry about climate change; asking them for elaboration on this sensitive point was an ethical dilemma in light of the risk of partners in proximity of the interview setting.

Another problem was that the lockdowns had drastically affected the ability of the research participants to move around and interact with family, friends, and colleagues in a normal way. As everyday forms of activism rely on relationships for their dynamism, this had an impact on how representative the diary study could be of 'normal' everyday life. Despite this limitation, climate change remained a highly salient force in the diary entries, with participants documenting their use of greater time freedom to interact more with their children outside in natural spaces, and a pragmatic use of online climate campaigning communication methods in place of in person.

A final point relating to the constraints of the lockdowns was that the responsibility and time burden of home schooling on potential participants meant that my recruitment efforts became progressively harder toward the end of the fieldwork period; for all my efforts during winter 2020/21, I was only receiving minimal interest, and often participants would read the information sheet and then drop out of the process by not responding to my emails. This challenge was one reason which led me to decide to stop recruiting participants at the 20<sup>th</sup> person, which, in light of the lack of new themes emerging from my data, felt the right time to move on to the next stage of investigation.

### 3.3.5. Positionality and ethics

Qualitative research has been characterised as ‘a moral practice’, presenting political, ethical, and moral dilemmas at all stages of the research process (Mason, 2004, p. 8). The process should entail active reflexivity on the part of the researcher, to consider one’s own position in the generation of findings (ibid.). I was careful to consider how my own gendered and classed social position, interests, and personal experiences had played a role in my interpretations of, and emotional-political reactions to, the data emerging from my participants. This enabled me to reflect morally on the ways in which I constructed my findings. For example, I am a climate activist who has experienced resistance from friends and family when trying to discuss the privileges within the global north in the context of climate change. My moral and ethical position on environmental justice activism, grounded in personal emotional experience (Denzin, 2016) made me interested in asking participants about the ways in which environmental topics are broached in day-to-day conversations with friends and family, and further spurred a curiosity to pursue any relational tensions that participants might allude to.

Ethics in qualitative research is not just the responsibly to obtain informed consent and follow guidance on privacy, anonymity, and data security. It is also about reflexively making decisions throughout the research process around issues that might cause harm to participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). For example, Morrison (2012) found that the very act of participants consciously reflecting on the negative emotional dimensions of day-to-day life may be unsettling. This knowledge made me adopt a very sensitive approach in the interview when referring to diary entries documenting difficult feelings; I paid close attention to participants’ body language and speaking tone for signs of distress, reassuring the participant that we could change focus if they wished. The same interview principle was applied when asking participants how they came to be concerned about climate change and how they see the future. Fortunately, I learned from the participants that

the diary and interview proved to be a positive experience because participating in the research allowed them to take stock of the extent to which they were working to create a better future for their children, with several saying this gave them a feeling of satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research finding that one benefit of diary keeping is that it can be cathartic for participants (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015).

## Chapter 4: The findings in four papers

### 4.1. Paper 1:

When global problems come home: Engagement with climate change within the intersecting affective spaces of parenting and activism

(Published in *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2022)

#### **Abstract**

Emotional engagement with climate change has been identified as an important research agenda. Recent studies have suggested parental worry for children and future generations are motives for climate activism, highlighting both personal and social justice concerns. A global parent-led climate justice movement specifically articulating this has emerged, yet currently remains under-researched. At the same time, social movement research has tended to overlook the social embeddedness of activism. To address these gaps in knowledge, this study used a qualitative mix of diary entries and interviews of UK-based mothers and fathers to investigate the overlapping emotional spaces of climate activism and parenting. It found that a parental lens on climate, informed by dystopian imaginings and processes of responsabilisation amplified fear and risk-related feelings, but were managed by channelling energy into a diverse array of collective action spaces. This led to positive emotions of hope and solidarity which were fostered and circulated within close personal relationships. In addition, the study found times and spaces which put a strain on affective engagement, and on partner relationships. The paper discusses the lack of moral anger in this sample of climate activists compared to previous research and calls for further enquiry into the movement's development of intergenerational justice grievances.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time for the sustainability of human and natural systems. Grassroots movements play an important role in raising public awareness and concern and in generating political pressure to effect change (Meyer, 2007). The recently emerged justice claims mobilised by the global youth climate movement have drawn attention to the need for an orientation which goes beyond governments' short-termism in climate policymaking and the

'future blindness' in public engagement with climate change (Lorenzoni et al., 2007, p. 452; Luna & Mearman, 2020).

The youth climate movement is part of an increasing diversification of environmentalism (Rootes & Saunders, 2005), promoting the interests of marginalised people and returning environmental justice to an issue of 'where we live, work and play' (Agyeman et al., 2016, p. 336). The parent-led intergenerational justice movement has received less attention. Grassroots organisations such as Parents 4 Future and Extinction Rebellion Families have coalesced around the goals of preventing the ecological destruction which threatens the future of their children, and effecting systems change (*Parents for Future*, 2021). Despite its global reach, this movement has been described somewhat insignificantly as youth movement 'spin-offs', or 'solidarity groups' (see de Moor et al., 2020).

Understanding how and why people engage with climate change is crucial for understanding processes of social change (Ockwell & Whitmarsh, 2009). Recent empirical studies by Wang and colleagues (2018), and Martiskainen and colleagues (2020) found that concern for, and a sense of responsibility towards, children and future generations, are important motives for climate protest attendance, signifying an affective pathway into climate activism (Roser-Renouf & Maibach, 2014). Parents as a diverse public offer insight for understanding 'bottom up' pathways to policy change acceptance (Whitmarsh et al., 2013). Despite this, little is known about what role parenthood plays in politicised responses to risk and uncertainty. This paper addresses this gap. I first outline previous research on the intersections of parent activism, everyday life, and emotions. I then set out the methods used to investigate UK-based parent-led climate activism and present and discuss the findings.

### **Previous parent-led activism**

Parenthood was a pivotal identity in the US environmental justice movement. The mobilisation of families concerned about exposure to toxic waste was predominately led by women from marginalised black and low-income communities (Brown & Ferguson, 1995). The movement's rhetoric used righteous anger to confront the breach of their human rights by those in power (Capek, 1993). This social justice frame went on to shift public understanding of the issue and changed policy-making around the siting of toxic waste (Capek, 1993). Studies on parent campaigning on other social justice issues have shown similar successes (Katz, 2017; Leiter, 2004; Panitch, 2012; Weed, 1990).

### **Emotional responses to climate change**

Emotions are important in social responses to climate change, determining the way information is acquired, understood, and shared (Davidson, 2018; Roeser, 2012). Climate change can evoke emotions such as anxiety and grief (Head, 2016), which may lead to denial and apathy (Norgaard, 2006) or emotional suppression to fit with contextual emotion norms (Head & Harada, 2017). Anger can be a powerful mobiliser of climate action (Nabi, 2002; Stanley et al., 2021), often reshaped into hope and solidarity (Roser-Renouf and Maibach, 2014) through a shared identity and issue framing (Melucci, 1985). The interaction between negative and positive emotions – termed the moral battery by Jasper (1998) is a core dynamic of social movements, often capitalised on to create emotional energy (Jasper, 2012). The moral battery is shaped by power relations and sociopolitical context: Kleres and Wettergren (2017) found that global north activists held a fear/hope dynamic but downplayed their anger, while global south activists felt less hope and more fear and anger. In contrast, Curnow and Veal's (2020) study of global north student activists found that anger was an expressed emotion that reflected disempowerment and helped recruit new members.

The study of emotions in social movements has paid little attention to the everyday of activist life which might interplay with group emotions (Simpson, 2015). One exception is McComiskey's (2001) study of peace activism, which explored the blurring of boundaries between parenting and campaigning, and political action driven by the merging of collective emotions and ideology.

Parent-led social justice activism has given insight into the social contextual origins of emotions that motivate and sustain social movements. Leiter (2004) and Weed (1990) showed how activists draw on their parent identity to mobilise fear, anger and frustration and effect social change. These studies demonstrate that emotional dynamics of activism are not shut off from everyday life. But for a deeper level understanding of the moral underpinnings of political action (Jasper, 2012) we need to consider how the micro-level of interactions with partners, children, relatives and friends that may amplify or diminish emotions recirculated within activist spaces. This paper will explore the overlapping emotional spaces of climate activism and parenting in the UK. By understanding parents' emotional engagement with the issue, this paper contributes to knowledge on identity-driven forms of engagement, and how action is micro-mobilised within personal life (Valocchi, 2012). More broadly, it contributes to knowledge on an emerging discourse of climate justice which is consequential for 'just sustainabilities' within global north geographies (Agyeman et al., 2016).

## **Theoretical framework**

In this paper I use a sociocultural perspective of emotions as ‘embodied meaning-making’ (Lupton, 2013a, p. 637) in combination with Sara Ahmed’s (2004) concept of affective spaces, to analyse parents’ engagement with climate change activism and the everyday social spaces which sustain it. According to Ahmed, emotions often have a cultural politics which are discursively deployed to gain affective intensity and value; they may ‘stick’ to objects and join people together. Ahmed sees emotions as culturally shaped and shaping, along axes of social sameness and identity. I apply Ahmed’s thinking to the parent activism in this study to make visible a symbolic boundary between the ‘we’ of worried parents taking action and the ‘other’ of non-activists. Climate affect can be circulated within and between the social spaces of, for example, the family home, the street protest or the workplace, and may be situationally maintained, amplified or attenuated.

## **Methods**

The data presented here are from a PhD study of the experiences of UK-based mothers and fathers mobilising to address climate change. Data were collected between June 2020 and January 2021. This period coincided with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on mobility, necessitating a use of social media and snowballing for recruitment. A purposive sampling strategy was used, inviting parents/ guardians based in the UK who considered themselves worried about climate change and its impacts on their children’s future, and who were involved in any kind of climate change campaigning. Participants were offered a £25 donation to a charity of their choice as a thank you. 12 mothers (including one stepmother), and 8 fathers were recruited before additional ‘lockdowns’ stemmed further interest in participation.

A mix of in-depth interviews and a diary study were used to explore the thoughts, feeling and actions relating to climate change in the course of quotidian family life. Diary studies are helpful to record those more fleeting and mundane moments which may be difficult to recall in an interview setting (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). Videocall interviews lasted 45–120 min. Interview questions were structured around the main themes of the PhD, including motivations and routes into activism, and relationships with friends and family.

## **Participant details**

Participants were mainly middle class, possessing a tertiary level education and a medium to high household income. All but one participant were White. The social class and ethnicity of this sample reflected the wider UK climate movement (Bell & Bevan, 2021; Saunders et al., 2020). My wish was to attract a more diverse interest, but the coronavirus restrictions ruled out a more targeted

approach. For details of the participants, please see Table 1 in section 3.3.2 of the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Being a ‘normal parent’, avoiding an activist identity**

Table 1 illustrates the diversity of grassroots climate activism in this sample. Activism spaces tended to align with participants’ interests, skills and experience, and social networks. This meant that the parent movement was diffuse and often subsumed within broader climate activism. The unifying goal of justice for children was evident in participants’ narratives.

As I have outlined in an earlier output of this project (Howard et al., 2021), many participants in this study chose to disassociate themselves from an activist identity, preferring to self-identify as “normal” parents with “normal everyday concerns”. I have argued that the parent identity is used as a bridge to the public and to politicians to avoid the stigmatising effect of the environmentalist identity.

All participants practiced their politics and activism within their family lives, raising children to be engaged with the natural world, to foster a “keen sense of morality” and “consciously think about the impact they are having on the planet”. The politics of inequality and climate justice were regularly discussed within the home, and where children were considered old enough, they were encouraged to accompany their parents on climate protests.

### **Coming to activism: the moral shock**

Participants foregrounded fear and alarm in their reasons for mobilising. Dystopian imaginations of the future climate-changed world were a common emotional backdrop. Evident in the diary exercise was also everyday grief and a sense of loss from witnessing the decline and death of local wildlife. But there was a particular parental lens which amplified risk and shaped generalised ecological grief into visions of food insecurity, increased social conflict and political volatility. Participants described feeling terrified and desperate, future-orientated feelings which they distinguished from “social outrage” for people already being affected by climate change in poorer communities. These risk-related emotions were powerful in overcoming feelings of paralysis, evident in one father’s narrative of his activism: “regardless of my element of hope, it feels like my moral duty as a parent to do it now”.

Although the majority of participants reported being aware of environmental issues and making efforts to consume responsibly for some time before their campaigning efforts began, eight participants recalled specific points in time when a connection was made between the future climate-challenged world and their role as a responsible parent, often described metaphorically as ‘switches’ which focussed their thinking and action around “the world I want my children to grow up in.” For three of these participants, such moments came with the arrival of a new baby, described as a sense of guilt resulting from tension between the caring spaces of parenting and protection of the environment. Rick described this as “a really important moment” in particular because the expression of his environmental politics violated the emotion norms of the time around childbirth: “When my first daughter was born, I said to my mother-in-law, it would be irresponsible to have any more children because of global warming”, even though he felt “aware that it was a really unacceptable thing to say at the time”. Similarly, Charlotte’s child’s birth brought on guilt around car use:

“I remember suddenly becoming really anxious about driving a lot, and that being a bad thing. You suddenly see it for what it is, that everything I did, and we all did, and all the choices we make, are going to cause problems or be solutions”.

Seven of the participants described the high-profile climate-related political events around 2018 and 2019 as catalysing moments of emotional reflexivity and paths into activism, meaning-making moments that Jasper (2011) might call a moral shock. Charlotte described how the arrival of her 4th child coincided with the publication of the 2018 IPCC Report; what Ahmed (2004) might call an ‘object’ from which flowed “terror” and guilt into the parenting space of “bringing another person into this world”. Other objects acted as an alarm bell such as the popular book *Uninhabitable Earth* by David Wallace-Wells. Several participants cited this as holding great affective capital in driving their path into activism. Sophia explained her feeling after reading it:

“I felt absolutely shock, and panic and all the things Extinction Rebellion said it would be. It was like grief. It was a really powerful switch, and I switched from being completely naive to kind of being awake to it”.

Sophia’s crisis narrative connected the globalised spaces of climate change to her personal family spaces: “It’s not confined to a situation where it’s happening in a far-flung corner of the world which is easier to ignore. It’s going to impact everybody and everything you know”. For Sophia, concerns about “societal breakdown, lots of death across the world, large parts of land underwater” was a

scenario impossible to ignore. The Wallace-Wells text was also a “massive shock” for Cassie, who added:

“My first reaction to all of that was just fear, fear for my kids. The first thing I thought when they said 12 years was - do the maths and I just thought, they’re not even going to be adults by then!”

Part of the power of these moments to move parents into action related to a reading of Ahmed’s (2004) ‘relationships of difference’. The fear was starkly different from their previous sense of ontological security and was thus able to ‘stick’ more readily. Like many of the newer activists, Patricia had not felt worried about climate change until a point in 2018 when the direct actions of Extinction Rebellion served as an epiphany, which was amplified within the space of family life when her young children would come home from school and ask her existential questions about living on an overheating planet.

Marius said he felt accountability to his son and the future of the planet on multiple levels. His sense of responsibility was intimately connected to guilt around his own ecological culpability, which was evident in a heartfelt poem he’d written for his son, as if by his son. Too long to include here, the poem spoke of his dad Marius being “part of a society that was all wrong”, and “You did your bit but you weren’t that strong [...] You’re not a bad person but you were partly at fault”.

For these parents, biography, accumulation of memories, and understandings of chronological time as a causal chain constituted the temporality of living with and responding to climate change (Smart, 2007). In this way the past and future weighed upon the present: shame and guilt of historical high consumption practices intensified expectations of climate hazards, evoking a moral narrative of the need for good parenting to create a desirable pathway for children as they journey into adulthood (Cassidy & Lone, 2020). This responsabilised, anticipatory subjectivity articulates a late capitalist Western world temporality in which time is linear, and in which intergenerational justice equates with one generation blameable for harming the next (Nairn et al., 2021; Šubrt, 2021). Within this Cartesian technoscientific frame of time, climate change is quantifiable and is believed to be controllable by reducing global carbon emissions, a notion reflexively engaged with through linking personal actions with planetary issues (Adam, 1996; Beck, 1992). It is important to add that not all parents viewed climate change with such dystopian affective intensity. Alluding to what Hochschild (1979) might identify as the influence of ‘feeling rules’, Dee confessed:

“I wouldn’t say I’m driven particularly about her (daughter) future [...] actually I’m almost going out of my way to make sure I read stuff to make myself more concerned about the climate crisis [...] and to really feel how important it is and how it really will impact my children’s future, and my grandchildren’s future. And I feel like I need to do more learning, because I still don’t feel it, if I’m honest”

Dee had earlier told me how other mothers could often be judgemental of parenting styles, which suggests that group processes of emotion normativity made her feel guilty for not feeling fear for her children’s future. Her allusion to the interplay between the objects of climate change texts, environmental discourses and the people and spaces of her activist circles gives some insight into the genesis and flow of the affective intensities around climate change.

### **Suppressed anger**

Despite the awareness of inadequate government and societal responses to the injustice of climate change for children, there was little anger expressed by parents in the interviews or diary studies. Where it arose, anger was reflected upon and suppressed. This was notable because it contradicted the already-discussed literature on anger as both a personal motive in politicised parenthood, and as a collectivised affect that helped publicly frame an issue as one of injustice (e.g., Capek, 1993; Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Weed, 1990). Participant Megan had documented in her diary feelings of anger about supermarkets’ livestock processing practices but dismissed her own righteousness by reflecting – with expressed guilt - on her non-vegan diet. Anger was again tempered by guilt by Peter, this time for compromising his ‘good’ fatherhood, telling me he’d got frustrated about recent government inaction, but added “it’s really hard to be a good dad when you’re angry about things. And so, you draw that line between, don’t bring it in the house!” Similarly, two other parents told me of trying to hide their feelings at home when frustration surfaced regarding couples’ difference in levels of engagement with climate change. Marc wrote in his diary that he is “mostly able to cruise along, not getting too angry/frustrated about the suicidal path we’re on and the lack of action”, and when I pressed him on this in the interview, he admitted feeling ‘frustrated’ when other parents do not get involved but once again, referring to guilt, said:

“I feel I have to just let go of that, because I was in a position of doing nothing myself, and I must have been frustrating to all those other people who’ve been trying to do something for so long. And it’s not helpful!”

Marc then added “I don’t think you win round many people that way, I think we learn from watching other people panic”. Witnessing others panic had also been mentioned by activists Sophia and Cassie, as they recalled their first forays into activist cultural spaces that painted a bleak scenario of the near future unless there was radical political and economic change. The rhetorical use of apocalyptic framing has become increasingly mainstream in contemporary climate activism (Cassegard & Thorn, 2018). In this vein, Marc’s ‘letting go’ of ‘unhelpful’ anger served two roles: first, it assuaged his sense of guilt for having come to activism only recently; and second, Marc felt that performing the socially contagious emotion of panic was more valuable than expressing anger or frustration for connecting with an apathetic wider public.

### **The emotional battery: hope and solidarity as an opposing force**

I have described the way that risk and moral emotions have brought about engagement with climate change, moments involving negative emotions of fear, guilt and frustration. This poses the question of how such negative affect was transformed into a mobilising energy. Using Jasper’s (1998) concept of the moral emotional battery, the diary and interview data revealed that various climate activist spaces fostered an opposing positive ‘charge’ of empowerment, hope and solidarity. These affective spaces served to counter the potential for negative emotions to paralyse and impede social action. Charlotte’s quote demonstrates this with her metaphor of moving her body and mind into the affective space of activism:

“I have found that throwing myself into all of this actually really does help. Because you’re doing something about it. And so, I think when I’m anxious, I’m having those pangs of grief and anxiety a bit less”.

Similarly, Melanie illustrates the transformative ability of activism to turn worry into empowerment:

“This worry is quite a big thing in our society, but that’s maybe linked into not necessarily feeling like we can take action so easily, feeling more frustrated [...]. We can get on and take action, and then it becomes powerful”.

The online sphere featured frequently within everyday activist life,

in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessities of remote communication. Engaging with the online space enabled participants to proactively absorb or evade affective intensities around climate issues. Freya often sought out happier stories to counter relentless bad news. From this diary entry her sense of hope is explicit:

“Saw an online screening of 2040 and found it painted a very hopeful future. It seems that many solutions that could support a green recovery are already in place, we just need the leadership to take us in that direction [...]. There is hope for a brighter future where we start to reverse the negative impact we’ve had on the world, so let’s do it!”

Influencing others was a common source of hope and positive affect, including the spaces of family and friendship. Parenting was frequently featured in the diary study as a space of pride and hope when the ecological practices parents fostered at home were embodied in their children’s engagement with the natural world, demonstrated in Megan’s diary:

“Walking with my daughter to school though the countryside, morning:

We chat about how it is a lovely morning, and the landscape is beautiful and I’m so proud of her for finding beauty in the slightest things and showing kindness to everything, no matter how small - her bike screeched to a halt so she could pick up a tiny snail and put it on the grass. Feel thankful there are children like her in the world who will make everything better [...].”

The workplace could be an unexpected affective space for activists when colleagues enthusiastically shared what they had learnt from the influence of activists’ practices. Charlotte told me she was “so pleased” with the outcome of her efforts to influence:

“I came back from on maternity leave and so many people were proud to tell me they’d changed practices or been talking to people about the environment. So those little things, the little effects you can have without really trying!”

### **Affective spaces of solidarity**

Interactions with fellow activists were a crucial source of communal, supportive feelings to counter uncomfortable emotions of fear and frustration, often resulting in feelings of affection. These interactions were found to occupy both the online and in-person activist spaces. Cassie’s diary described her pride and feeling of inspiration when seeing her sister deliver a rallying speech for Extinction Rebellion. Affective interactions with fellow activists brought positive emotions, as Marc’s diary documented:

“Checking photos of the day and tweeting about our action I feel a surge of affection and appreciation for the friends I’ve made through XR. Also, a sense of achievement at having done something (however ineffectual) rather than nothing”.

I was told by the majority of participants that the need for shared time and space with activists was driven by a frustration with everyday public silences around climate change, as well as life at home making them 'feel alone' when their family and friends did not share their fear and anxiety about the future. In our discussion, Charlotte explained how this isolation was apparent against the contrasting affective engagement expressed by fellow activists:

"So, a really frustrated feeling, and I felt very alone in that. But actually, the first time that I didn't feel alone in that was when XR started last year. That's the first time I was like ah! Finally, someone is talking about it!"

With this in mind, I asked other participants whether they were able to turn to their partner for emotional support. Cassie answered:

"No, not about the climate. I compartmentalise that bit of me, and I really lean on my activist friends, because they get it. And my husband [...] doesn't deal with emotions the same. So, if I felt really upset about something in my family, I would absolutely turn to him and he would be there for me, and he would make me feel better. But when I read the Committee on Climate Change thing, I turned to my activist channels, because I want other people to be like 'fuck, this is really bad!' [...] It's about letting yourself breathe and coming together to recognise how difficult all these feelings are to handle".

Cassie's narrative illustrates the way that emotion is supported in different ways according to the affective space in which it circulates. Shocking news required an emotional culture of solidarity and connection, an affective intensity inadequately supported within the spousal relationship. In contrast, the public activism space could foster an affective intensity and connection with strangers, evident in Rick's account of his encounter with a mother at a street protest:

"She told me she was there on her own [...], she was the one in her family that it mattered enough to. And she told herself, well it's better if my husband, if one of us is holding it together! But on the other hand, as we were talking, we were both expressing this feeling of kind of, limited support and a sense of isolation as well. And it was a really cathartic conversation, in which I recognised that she experienced a similar sense that this issue was causing a kind of difference, or distance within her family relationships".

Ryan talked in a similar way about an emotional moment at a protest event when he reflected on the shared feelings and solidarity formed against a backdrop of public silence that often made him feel he was 'crazy':

“On one of the first Extinction Rebellion protests I went along with my daughter [...] and thinking, look at all these people who feel the same as me! And that was quite an emotional point, and I felt actually, I’m not some sort of crazy person who is isolated and on his own! There are actually lots of people! And that’s something I found through all the groups that I’ve participated in, the more valuable thing has almost been building relationships with other people”.

Ahmed’s (2004) idea of affective value was identifiable as Ryan went on to tell me that the formation of valued friendships was a selling point that he used in recruiting new group members.

### **Spaces of emotional disengagement**

Participants reported that climate action took up most of their spare time and imbued every moment of their daily lives. The emotional charge of activism was at times exhausting and required various strategies to “make headspace”. When affect was not usefully circulating within social interactional spaces, it was relatively easy to disengage from, albeit with some reticence. For example, when reading social media newsfeeds, many reported they guiltily scrolled past bad news stories, or avoided watching any upsetting nature documentaries because they “needed a break”.

Sometimes disengaging temporarily from some activist spaces was a strategy to emotionally recharge before the next high-risk protest, as Marc’s diary documented:

“Decided not to attend another XR meeting about tomorrow’s march to Parliament sq. Need some headspace prior to week of rebellion. Feeling slightly anxious wondering how we will be received by the police and how it will all go”.

Despite many reporting feeling emotionally isolated at home, sometimes the humdrum of quotidian family life served to mollify the emotional demands of activism and worry about the future. In order to function parents would “sometimes let the anxiety wash over a little bit”. Rick told me:

“It’s [climate change] terrifying of course, but it’s part of this contradiction that we live with, isn’t it? I get up, I do these things, I make coffee, I carry on life”.

Similarly, Cassie explained how managing emotions was necessary for family life, particularly in the context of competing parental responsibilities:

“You’ve still got to live day to day. At the moment I’m managing my own emotions in relation to the climate, I’m managing my own emotions in relation to lockdown, and I’m fully responsible for managing my kids’ emotions about not being at school and being at home together. And that’s draining!”

Cassie’s narrative exemplifies the complex ways that climate-related affectivity is negotiated within daily family life. The ability of climate affective intensity to ‘stick’ (Ahmed, 2004) depends not just on the individual body and relations of difference with which it comes into contact, but also the context of competing affective subspaces and temporalities. In contrast to the perceived linear timeframe of the climate crisis, the need to suspend climate worry in order to “function” day-to-day demonstrates the reproductive temporality of day-to-day family life: one of relational practices, rhythm, and routine, and adjusting to situational requirements in material and affective ways (Elder, 1994; Holmes, 2010; Morgan, 2011).

## **DISCUSSION**

This paper has explored the emotional engagement and affective practices of members of the under researched parent-led intergenerational climate justice movement. In doing so, it uncovers the micro-level processes that effect politicised behavioural change. In recognition that the collective emotions of social movements are not shut off from everyday life, it pays particular attention to the overlapping affective spaces of activism and personal life. Using Ahmed’s (2004) concept of the movement of affect through and between bodies and objects, it explores the interactional spaces within and between which affective intensity may arise and become amplified, accumulated, attenuated, and transformed. In this way, it also improves understanding of how emotions relating to parenthood and personal life may motivate, sustain, or impede political collective action.

The study found narratives of fear, grief and dystopian imaginaries in parents’ interviews and diary entries, reflecting apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic emotion cultures found more widely in the climate movement (Cassegard and Thorn, 2018; Kleres and Wettergren, 2017). Ahmed’s (2004) conceptualisation of fear involves anticipation of harm from a proximal object, which she argued is distinct from the less focussed emotion of anxiety. Using this reading, the object of imagined negative future material conditions and the absence of adequate governance to prevent them, weighs upon the present for the parents in this study. Ahmed argues that the power of fear to move

people is the potential to pass the object of fear, in a way that less focussed anxiety cannot. For participants, the possibility of passing this object of fear came about through taking collective action to confront it, reflecting a Western cultural construction of time and climate change temporality as one of past, present, and future, and with it, modernist expectations of progress and assumptions that humanity can reverse the harms of industrialisation (Adam, 1996; Nairn et al., 2021; Subrt, 2021). As Nairn and colleagues (2021) have discussed, this technoscientific view of the future is not universal. Indigenous and traditional epistemologies understand the natural world and generational environmental stewardship in terms of overlapping timeframes and nonlinear temporalities, within which ecological harm and the interconnected complexities of climate change may be non-reversible and subject to unknowable futures (Hatfield et al., 2018; Salick & Byg, 2007; Wildcat, 2009).

Parents' fear was amplified to a level of alarm and existential terror when viewed through a reflexive risk lens of parenthood and circulated within parental discourse. This climate risk was often catalysed at significant moments such as the arrival of a new baby, or when young children asked direct questions about the climate. Recent high profile scientific publications and media coverage of activists served as 'wake up moments', moral shocks that were intimately tied to guilt at their own historically high consumption and lack of political action. A sense of moral obligation suggested an internalised micropolitics of 'actionable responsibility' (Eden, 1993) as well as hallmarks of some environmentalist discourse which repudiates human reproduction (Lappé et al., 2019; Schneider-Mayerson, 2021). It is important to consider that pre-existing environmental values are likely to have preceded the moral shock described in these findings. Moral shocks tend to activate underlying values, and the process tends to be part of a more gradual flow of towards political action (Jasper, 2011).

Despite the injustices that climate change will bring for their children, parents' individualised guilty consciences usurped moral anger that might arise from a sense of intergenerational injustice. This contrasts with previous research on environmental social justice activism (e. g. Capek, 1993; Curnow and Veal, 2020; Stanley et al., 2021), as well as on parent-led justice activism (e.g. Katz, 2017; Leiter, 2004; Panitch, 2012; Weed, 1990) which have found that moral outrage at a sense of injustice can be a strong personal motivator as well as a collectively interpreted and constructed issue frame (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; McAdam, 2017). In this study anger was suppressed and 'let go of' in the belief that it was inappropriate at home and ineffective in the public realm. Collective action frames are collectively held beliefs and meanings that legitimate social movement activities (Gamson, 1995). Parents preferred to accumulate and deploy a panic frame, which was seen as

holding more affective value in mobilising the public. This finding suggests a more nuanced view of anger is required, illustrating that moral anger and outrage can be subject to relational mediators. It is also important to highlight social backgrounds when comparing activists' emotions: the low income and racially oppressed groups which constituted the justice movements in many of the previous studies contrast with the white, middle class and relatively privileged biographies of those in this study. Privilege was a factor in the findings by Kleres and Wettergren (2017), where activists living in countries that have historically contributed more to greenhouse gas emissions expressed fear and guilt, but the expression of anger was more often rejected in the belief that this would blame and alienate the general public. The findings of this study are consistent with this insight, but also add to it by suggesting that anger is additionally managed to protect personal life spaces that overlap with activism – for example, to fit within ideologies and identities of being a 'good' parent and intimate partner.

Undeterred by a weight of painful emotions that could potentially paralyse, parents transferred (but not transformed) fear and guilt into a mobilising force. This was done by drawing on social and educational capital in the form of supportive partner relationships, strong social connections, and professional skills to create or move into a diverse and innovative array of activist spaces. Using Jasper's (1998) analytical concept of the moral battery of emotions, the toll of fear and grief was balanced by fostering hope and solidarity within particular affective spaces. This is not to confuse hope with optimism (Cassegard and Thorn, 2018), as parents knew of the current climate tragedies already unfolding across the globe. Hope is an emotion said to be evoked by a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) but importantly, it is brought about socially within the affective practices of everyday life and is preceded by struggle (Anderson, 2006; Kraftl, 2008). Drawing on this idea to add to research on the cultivation of hope within climate movements (de Moor et al., 2020; McAdam, 2017; North, 2011), this study found that everyday, momentary hopefulness was nurtured and co-constructed within personal life spaces such as ecologically oriented activities with children, or with friends, colleagues and siblings who had been influenced to take their own forms of climate-related action.

Closely related to hope in this context, solidarity with an emotional community was an important source of empowering social scaffolding (McGeer, 2004) which accumulated an affective value and sustained movement participation (Ahmed, 2004). The majority of parents in this sample were the only activist in their family and consequentially felt emotionally isolated; however, support was found through emotional connections with other activists. This also created a collective identity of

us who 'get' climate change. Participants were resigned to their partner not expressing the same level of fear about the future climate-changed world for their children, which supports arguments by Jamieson (1999) that the realities of intimate coupledom are multi-dimensional and often pragmatic, in contrast to ideas of the emotionally self-disclosing relationship.

While the findings of emotional engagement with climate change in this study suggest a good deal of agency in risk selection and the mobilising of concerns, there was evidence that even individuals who are passionately dedicated to activism are subject to structural constraints. The affective intensity of activism was often incompatible with some of the times and spaces of 'doing' family and its competing practical and emotional demands (Daly, 2003). In this sense, parenting served as a structuring effect to constrain engagement with climate change, necessitating the compartmentalising of climate-related worries. Other structures influencing emotional management may be the feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979) of family life, cultural codes "that are passed through the generations and that influence whether, how, or when family members can express anger, joy, or sadness" (Daly, 2003, p. 775). Overall, the temporalities and messiness of family-climate change intersections found in this study support arguments by Anne Phoenix and colleagues (2017) on the limits of research that uses individualised methodologies to investigate responses to climate change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Emotional engagement with climate change has been identified as an important area of research. This study found that parents were highly emotionally invested in climate change impacts and mitigation. The parental lens of risk evoked feelings of fear, grief, and guilt, which were often catalysed by recent high-profile climate-related events and discourses. These painful emotions were managed by activist and parenting practices which fostered countering emotions of hope and solidarity. This insight adds to research which has identified that personal and familial risk narratives can be important in climate change communication that seeks to mobilise the public (van der Linden et al., 2015), as well suggestions of making climate change "come home" by tapping into a "common self-interest" of emotional attachments to people and places that may lead to the support of adaptation policies (Moser, 2012, p. 11). It also suggests that potential climate action paralysis can be overcome through hope for the future fostered not by climate scientific discourse, but from strong personal relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and fellow activists.

The study also uncovered ways in which climate-related emotions are entangled with family relations and practices in both positive and negative ways. Everyday life often necessitates

emotional disengagement to enable activists to function within their roles as parents. This reiterates work that cautions against individualised understandings of engagement with climate change. In addition, climate-related emotions have the power to impact the quality of family relationships, for example when partners supportively participate in sustainable family practices and take care of children when activists attend meetings, or in raising children to be compassionate and engaged in environmental issues. An apparent division in emotional labour appeared to both increase and diffuse intra-partnership discord, depending on the context. More research could delve into the emotional isolation parents feel within their relationships and how they negotiate this over time.

The interactions of activists in their social world are consequential for wider societal feeling norms of climate change. The lack of moral anger in participants' narratives suggests an injustice grievance is yet to surface in climate parents' rhetoric, an expression which could contribute to a framing of climate change as an issue of justice and human rights for children. As found in previous research on other realms of parent-led activism, injustice framing has succeeded in resonating with policymakers and the public. As we witness increasingly damaging climate impacts around the world, a continued lack of urgent, proportionate mitigation by governments could put children's future further into jeopardy and ignite public consciousness on intergenerational injustice. More research is needed to explore the temporal unfolding of the nascent parent movement, as it augments and possibly reorients from fear and guilt narratives towards the outrage of earlier environmental justice activism. In particular, a wider socioeconomic and ethnic range of perspectives than this sample recruited during the Covid-19 pandemic could advance an understanding of the role of class and race in affective responses to climate intergenerational injustice.

Echoing conclusions drawn from a study by Howell and Allen (2019), this sample of parents' primary concern of their children's future shows that issues of social justice can matter more to people than 'the environment', which has implications for how climate change is framed and communicated to the public at large. A final point is that the sample of parents in this study generally consisted of parents who had recently moved into activism; it would be fruitful to do more research with parents who have been engaged for a longer period, as well as to conduct longitudinal research to document any changes over time as activists become more experienced, and their children older. Importantly, future research should interview children to gain their accounts of responding to climate change in the family context, an epistemic scope outside the design of this PhD study. These investigations could uncover whether and how children join or rebel against the activism their parents are involved in.

## 4.2. Paper 2: (Re)configuring moral boundaries of intergenerational justice: the UK parent-led climate movement

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### **Abstract**

The interests of children in a climate-challenged future are under-represented within UK policy-making and public discourse. Debates on intergenerational equity have centred on economic logic rather than the moral issue of harms to the next generation, or the responsibilities of today's generation. Civil movements play an important role in changing public and political thinking on this issue; however, research on intergenerational climate justice activism has so far been confined to the youth movement. This study uses an in-depth diary and interview dataset of 20 UK-based activist mothers and fathers to explore the emotional spaces of parenting and campaigning for intergenerational climate justice. Attention was paid to the role of parenthood in the framing and motivation for action, and the way that campaigning was sustained or impeded by activist parents' personal relationships. The study found that the emotional spaces of activist parenting were managed and demarcated through moral boundary work that was used to define, distinguish and legitimise a collective representation. These boundaries were relational and drawn selectively to include similar others and to form bridges with politicians; boundaries also functioned to delegitimise the role of adults without children, and to exclude and excuse younger children and older relatives from playing a part in justice activism. The paper concludes by considering how these processes might impede the movement and have implications for wider social justice.

### **Introduction**

The burdens and benefits of environmental and ecological exploitation unfold across time, spanning generations (Page 1999). The principle of intergenerational justice, as a key moral concern in the issue of climate change, requires the present generation to "assume duties and responsibilities toward later generations" (Davies, Tabucanon, and Box 2016, 418); however so far, the concept of intergenerational justice has largely been confined to rationalist economic and philosophical theorising on the intertemporal distribution of resources, social discounting and the non-identifiable entity of "generations", and often framed in the legal language of human rights (Nguyen 2020). The notion of responsibilities to future generations is under-represented within both the UK's current political structures and the public sphere (Jones, O'Brien, and Ryan 2018; Graham and de Bell 2020).

Formal structures aiming to represent the interests of future generations have been subject to the short-termism of election cycles and a lack of public support and legitimacy (Jones, O'Brien, and Ryan 2018). The role of civil society movements has been identified as important in initiating discourse about intergenerational equity and for garnering public support for the implementation of long-term thinking in cross-party policymaking (Jones, O'Brien, and Ryan 2018).

The recent emergence of grassroots youth climate activism has gone some way in introducing intergenerational justice to the politics of climate change in the UK. Striking to demand more rapid action on climate change, children and young people have deployed powerfully moral narratives of intergenerational inequality and a stolen future. While scholarship on youth climate activism is growing, there is currently little research on the important role that parents play in intergenerational justice. Parents are in a key position to advocate for children's climate justice through their emotionally and practically supportive roles for children's civic engagement (Sanson, Burke, and Van Hoorn 2018), as well as expressing solidarity through attending youth strikes with their children and voicing feelings about generationally unfair burdens of inaction on climate change (Martiskainen et al. 2020). The past couple of years have seen an emergence of grassroots climate activism in the UK that is specifically parent-led.

The parent movement has foregrounded the parent and family identity in representations of intergenerational climate justice, forming groups in the UK such as Mothers Rise Up, Parents for Future, Eco Action Families and Extinction Rebellion Families. There are also environmentalist parents who are not part of a distinctly parental group but are nonetheless motivated to engage in various forms of climate campaigning primarily out of concern for their children's safety.

The parent movement has the potential to forge a new moral argument into public discourse on climate change, one that advances longer-term thinking and an ethic of intergenerational solidarity for children's climate-challenged future. This could assist in the public's legitimization of political structures that change the current priorities of climate-relevant policymaking. It is also important to study politicised parenthood to understand processes of cultural change. There is, however, currently a lack of research on parent intergenerational climate justice activism. As family scholars have argued, personal life is consequential for environmental challenges because families and personal relationships effect macro social change; the agency, capacity, and motivations to act on climate change are grounded in the practices of embodied, emotionally charged intimate relationships (Jamieson 2016; Howell and Allen 2019). This paper addresses this gap in research by drawing on an empirical qualitative dataset to explore UK-based activist parents' conceptualisations

of intergenerational justice that arise from the emotional spaces of parenting, family life and activism. In analysing parenting as a site of ethics and responsibility (McEwan and Goodman 2010), this paper looks at the micro-scale of social relations that foster and circulate meaning within these spaces.

### **Parental environmental activism**

Parenthood and political action are not new allies, although past research has focussed mainly on mother activism (e.g., Katz 2017; Naples 1988; Panitch 2012; Weed 1993). Brookfield (2012) provides an account of women's political struggles in Canada during the nuclear crisis of the Cold War, when the government's regime of female labour force-supported civil defence was perceived by Canadian women as a negligent response to protect citizens. Motivated primarily by securing safety for their children, activists mobilised a pacifist and international disarmament agenda which contributed to ending the crisis. The US environmental justice movement arose from the deployment of the symbolic power of the mother identity in the fight to protect children from local toxic pollution. More recently, mothers have broadened their scope of motivation beyond their own children to advocate for wider issues of social justice, in what scholars have called the "21st century global motherhood movement" (Conradsen 2016, 2). This movement has operated within a feminist ethic of care principle (Tronto 1994), tackling issues of public concern such as disability, domestic violence and school reform (Panitch 2012).

### **Justice and morality in family life**

While justice is often represented by the formal language of legal rights, obligations, and equality between individuals (McCarthy, Edwards, and Gillies 2003), within everyday embodied relationships, justice is enacted by a sense of what is right or wrong, tending to follow cultural codes that specify what is "good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable in society" (Stets and Carter 2012, 121). Alternatively, feminist perspectives have shown that morality in practice can be rather more complex, being emotionally guided but reflexive, operating dynamically, relationally and negotiated according to the specific context (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Held 1995). "Doing the right thing" as a parent is driven both by cultural narratives and by the relationally context-specific moments of family life. A strong sense of moral responsibility for the interests of children is an outcome of "the ways in which we have constructed the relational social categories of Adult and Child in contemporary societies" (McCarthy, Edwards, and Gillies 2003, 135). The parental moral identity, influenced by gender and class, shapes ideas about fairness towards children that "encapsulates what is good for children, and

what constitutes a good childhood” (McCarthy, Edwards, and Gillies 2003, 107). What follows is an outline of empirical family studies that have shown the dynamic and contextual nature of morality within ethical environmental family practices, which operate in tandem with the structuring role of cultural codes and discourses.

### **Family, environment, and morality**

There is a small body of empirical work on environment and family intersections. Phoenix et al.’s (2017) in-depth study explored how parents and their children interpret cultural discourses about environmental responsibility within different socioeconomic and local contexts in the UK and India. They found that ethical and responsible family consumption practices were structured by socioeconomic and material affordances, gender, and generation. Affluent families in the UK drew on Minority world environmentalist discourses to moralise and account for the inaction of diverse others who were “unconcerned” and “ignorant” about the environment, and to disassociate themselves from “hairshirt” fanatic environmentalism. These narratives of “responsible privilege” helped to distance them from others to “affirm particular identity positions” (371) and to avoid being accused of moral hypocrisy in relation to high consumption practices. The diverse “others” included their own children, who were often viewed as less responsible than their parents, highlighting parent–child power relations that constrain children’s agency to act on their own environmental concerns.

A study by Shirani and colleagues (2013) also looked at consumption, exploring ethical responsibilities to future generations within home energy use practices. The authors used a “living links” concept to understand connections participants made to environmental futures through the presence or absence of children. The authors found that both parents and those without children were concerned for the future and felt connected to it, but that taking personal responsibility for the future was contingent on the pressures of daily family life and moral discourses of “good” parenting, which often competed with moral environmental discourses.

These two studies provide useful insights into the negotiation of family life and environmental ethics within the milieu of household consumption practices. To date, research has not explored such a set of negotiations within the ethical and emotional sphere of activism. Moral discourse within social movements can create group bonds and boundaries that are activated within social dynamics to distinguish shared identity within and between groups (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Brown 2009). Symbolic boundaries create a collective representation and group vocabulary which can recreate

cultural codes and narratives (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Hitlin and Vaisey 2010). In this vein, it would be useful to understand how parental identities interact with the moral discourses and identities of environmentalism in this emotional space, to explore the potential of refurbishing and recirculating cultural codes and narratives that may be consequential for social justice.

## **Methods**

The data presented in this paper are from an in-depth qualitative study involving interviews conducted from summer 2020 to early 2021. The project used a gender-sensitive approach to explore the lived experiences of UK-based mothers and fathers mobilising to address climate change. The gender-sensitive approach aimed to bring to light similarities and differences between accounts of participants of different genders. As outlined in the literature review, past research on parent-led activism has tended to focus solely on the role of mothers; with this in mind, one aim of this study was to contribute additional knowledge to the under researched field of men, masculinities, and responses to environmental issues (Connell 2017). My research questions included: (1) How does being a parent play a part in the framing of climate and ecological change, and in the motivations to become an activist? and (2) How are campaigning practices sustained or impeded by parents' personal relationships?

Recruiting was conducted through social media and snowballing. Participants were offered a £25 donation to a charity of their choice as a thank you. Informed consent was obtained via a signed information sheet. I used a purposive sampling strategy, inviting parents or guardians based in the UK who considered themselves concerned about climate change and its impact on the future of their children, and who were involved in any kind of climate change campaigning. Using a gender-sensitive approach, it was apparent in the early stages of recruitment that I was receiving considerably more interest from mothers than fathers, which was not ideal as I had planned for a gender-balanced sample. I decided to turn my social media recruitment towards a direct appeal to fathers, conveying that their voices were currently under-represented in my study. I also made greater use of the snowballing technique to leverage the contacts in my network which enabled me to approach fathers directly. These targeted approaches were largely successful, and I recruited 12 mothers (including one stepmother) and 8 fathers. Of these mothers and fathers, only two interviewees formed a relationship couple. This number of participants was deemed suitable because I had started to reach saturation of data themes, and the demands of home schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on mobility made recruiting parents very challenging.

My data collection methods included a solicited, semi-structured qualitative diary exercise carried out over the course of two weeks prior to the interview. As the study's focus was on the personal life context of parent activists, the aim of the diary exercise was to capture the everyday thoughts, feeling and actions relating to environmental issues in the course of family life, the more mundane moments that may be difficult to recall in an interview setting. Diary studies are also useful for "capturing the weight and meaning people attach to different events, issues and activities in their lives" (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, 14). A pilot study revealed that participants needed guidance about how to structure their diary recordings, so I provided a template document with table columns for the date, time of day, who they were with, and the details of the thought/action/feeling.

The diary exercise was followed by an in-depth, semi-structured video call interview. My interview schedule was open but included several core questions about routes into activism, motivations, how parents see climate change and the future in relation to their children and their parenting role, and how they felt parent-led campaigning was different to other types of environmental activism. I made field note memos as my thoughts and analytical insights arose throughout the fieldwork period.

I collected basic demographic and household income data. Analysis was an iterative and ongoing process, reading field notes, transcript, and diary accounts multiple times for familiarisation before employing line-by-line inductive coding. Higher-level concepts were then identified, reading across the dataset. I used N-Vivo to assist in organising the data into codes, categories, and themes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Participant characteristics**

Participants ranged in age from 20s to 50s, all had tertiary education, with medium to high household incomes. All but one participant were White, with one person of Pakistani heritage. Children ranged in age from pre-birth through to teenagers and, in one case, adult children. Although I originally planned to interview parent couples, my recruitment efforts revealed that it was most common for only one of a parent couple to be campaigning actively, with the other parent providing practical support of childcare and participation in ethical family consumption practices. I was given two main explanations by participants for this: the time and emotional input required for campaigning was not sustainable for both parents concurrently; and a lack of interest or motivation to campaign. All but three of the participants had been campaigning for less than 5 years, with their previous environmentalism confined to ethical consumption practices.

Despite the UK being in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the diary exercise provided evidence that everyday concerns around climate had not abated. Participants expressed a great deal of worry about the future climate-changed world, and many spoke explicitly of feeling morally compelled to act; One mother told me: “I approach activism as a moral thing on the grounds of that I couldn’t not do it. Like I would feel like I was failing as a mum if I wasn’t doing it. I don’t think it’s a choice for me”. One father expressed similar sentiments: “The effects [...] not so much in my lifetime but certainly in my children’s lifetime, that’s where the moral obligation comes in”. Participants predicted food insecurity, societal breakdown, and mass extinctions without a radical change in the current order. They felt a great deal of anxiety for their children’s future, but activism often helped to counter these difficult emotions.

Participants found a shared sense of desperation but also a sense of purpose and solidarity with other activists, revealed in one participant’s diary which documented how regular activist group meetings provided “connection and space to talk about feelings” that related to fear, anger, and sorrow. One father told me of a highly emotional encounter with an unknown fellow parent activist at an Extinction Rebellion protest, with whom he had shared tears and an embrace:

“We had this great fear for our families and for our children, and this sense of wanting to look them in the eye later on. There’s so much based on what a sense of what the future may be. It’s an awful shadow to live with”.

Types of activism varied among the parent sample. Several were involved in parent-led groups which campaigned for change at both the local and national political levels. Many were part of the direct action group Extinction Rebellion; some were involved in activism to put climate change on the school curriculum; others were pushing for change in employer cultures and practices. All parents spoke of the need to address both governmental and cultural levels to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to encourage people to change their family practices towards a greater care for the environment.

Some practices of activism within this sample followed a gendered pattern. Although both mothers and fathers took part in direct actions, it was the male participants who more frequently reported preferring disruptive protest tactics and asserting their politics within public spaces – for example by giving talks or approaching members of the public in the street to “communicate the facts” of climate change. These findings of dominant, self-expressive masculinities support work by Chan and Curnow (2017) that found men to be more likely to see themselves as experts and more likely to

take up more conversation time with rational arguments. However, using a reading of gender as a situated social practice rather than a set of essentialised traits (Poggio 2006), nuances in the performance of masculine identities were found across the dataset. Within some spaces and places, fathers in this study articulated a reflexive, pro-feminist masculinity; for example, one father – Marc – spoke of “taking Extinction Rebellion principles” into his workplace managerial role to try and undo the hierarchies of business norms; by having an “open mic session” with his team members to “talk openly about feelings and issues”, towards being “kinder, more human, to care more about people”.

Parents were trying to manage the world for their children, and they embedded climate and environmental issues into family life. All of the participants practiced as much as they could in the way of low impact travel and consumption and felt the need to model the “right” behaviour to their children. Ecologically oriented childrearing also included an encouragement of children to engage with the natural world, and for older children, family discussions were regularly initiated around the politics of climate and ecological issues, including gender and racial injustices that underpin ecological issues. I was told that this was in part due to the lack of climate change and ecological education on the school curriculum, although parents felt it was ultimately their “job” to teach it. The diary study revealed that campaigning was often all-consuming. For the participants in my sample, making sense of their moral identity as parent activists required a relationally specific, selective moralising of the actions of children, parents, and extended family members. By distinguishing the moral contours of action on intergenerational justice, parents were clarifying their belonging in the emotional spaces of parent campaigning, to enjoy the solidarity of ingroup relations and to advance their justice rhetoric within a particular meaning of family. What follows is the presentation of three themes from the data which demonstrate how parent activists draw moral contours defining whom they feel should be taking action for intergenerational justice. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

### **Moralising of children**

Without prompting from me, several participants raised their reproductive decisions as a moral issue. They felt that having children was a choice – but one that was important to deliberate over responsibly in light what they saw as the problematic environmental impact of raising children. The decision to have children was justified by reframing it as a moral act; raising an ecologically conscious child could rectify the impact:

“We had some friends who had made the choice that they didn’t want to bring children into this world. They had a really negative idea of the impact of it. But mine and my wife’s perspective is actually, children bring hope, and they are going to help correct the wrongs. And so, by raising our children in the way that we think needs to happen, they are then going to help make the world a better place”. (Ryan, 30s, two children aged 3 and 5)

Parents’ narratives of responsible reproduction pointed to the politics of reproduction seeping into everyday climate discourse. Contemporary richer-world framings of parenthood suggest it is a personal choice and matter of ethical deliberation (Dow 2016). Freya justified her reproductive decision by extending the moral contour around her child’s generational cohort. Further distinguishing her future child’s moral status, she morally delineates the “trouble” with “the current generation”:

“Hopefully this is going to be a generation of people who at no point think that their actions don’t have an impact on the planet [...] So I’m hopeful that the next generation and my child included I’m going to live pretty consciously. I suppose the trouble is the current generation, making sure that we get that in motion as soon as possible, so that they have a hope!” (Freya, 20s, pregnant with first child)

In speaking of the optimism created from raising “good” environmentalist children, participants were reflexively linking procreation, responsible parenting practices and climate change issues, demonstrating the multi-layered, complex ways that participants understood and enacted intergenerational justice. Several parents spoke of feeling optimistic that their children are “going to make everything better”. Charlotte – who, unprompted – told me she felt very guilty about having four children, felt a sense of relief in watching her daughter connect with nature, a relationship she had fostered through engaging her children in outdoor family practices:

“[...] my daughter said “Mum, shall we go and see that tree on the way home? I’m really looking forward to seeing it again!” [...] And it was one of those moments where I thought, it’s going to be OK! Like, if that can happen all the time, like if a human can love that tree [...] then we’ve got hope, haven’t we? (Charlotte, 30s, four children aged 8 and under)

In contrast to the moral boundary of “good” environmentalist children, some fathers in my sample were more likely to be ambivalent about the moral agency of their children and drew boundaries of generational hierarchy to distinguish children’s innocence and lack of environmental responsibility (Phoenix et al. 2017). Peter (30s, two children aged 1 and 5) talked about encouraging his son to

enjoy engaging in books about sea life but felt “sad” that this entailed learning about plastic pollution as he believed that his son was “not complicit” in this issue and asserted that “it’s not children who should be sorting this out”. Similarly, Alexander (30s, one child aged 13) thought that it was unfair for today’s children to have to change their standard of living from that enjoyed today, adding that Greta Thunberg “shouldn’t be campaigning for the climate” because she is “only seventeen”.

However, the perceived lower status of, and lack of power held by, children was capitalised upon by several parents. When I asked Ryan about family identities in campaigning, he felt that the presence of children on a climate march “can be really neutralising” in the face of public aggression, and he believes people see them as separate from consumer society, therefore morally guarding parents against accusations of hypocrisy:

“[...] they are kind of our part of society, but they’re not. They’re not consuming and they’re not part of that system. So actually, that detachment allows them to have a bit of a different perspective. Because I think a lot of people who are adults have bought into the system and therefore think that if they start to criticise it then they’re becoming hypocrites, and that they can’t do that. Whereas children, being separate, kind of have that role to play”. (Ryan, 30s, two children aged 3 and 5)

With other participants, the picture of children’s moral status is nuanced, with Marc highlighting some of the tensions in what he sees as burdensome climate action and missing out on a “normal childhood”:

Diary 5 Sept: I sometimes wish Millie was more active on climate as she was back in 2018 and 19. But at the same time I want her to just have a normal childhood. I don’t want to fill her head constantly with talk about climate breakdown, ecosystem destruction, mass extinction, broken democracy etc. It’s too much. Also, the burden for action should not be on the young. (Marc, 50s, one child aged 16)

Like other fathers in this study, Marc is conforming to a cultural idea of childhood as one of innocence and passivity, but as a social construction, childhood is contingent on where different cultural and institutional structures set the upper age limit (Hill and Tisdall 1997). In Britain, Marc’s daughter’s age of 16 is where children are seen to begin the transition into adulthood, and this could play a part in Marc’s ambivalent feelings about the suitability of his daughter taking part in climate activism.

### **Moralising the parent identity**

Participants said they strategically foregrounded their parent identity in campaigning to present moderate “normal everyday parental concerns”. This was chiefly a strategy to counter the stigma of the environmental activist identity (Barr and Gilg 2006; Hargreaves 2011). Citing the desire to distance themselves from what they felt the public saw as “a bunch of tree hugging hippies”, participants told me that “Extinction Rebellion is not my identity”, and “I’m a climate funder, campaigner, board member, Investor, charity trustee but I’m a mother first”. Marc demonstrated that parent activists themselves can stigmatise environmentalists:

“I don’t like activism and protest [labels] because it just compartmentalises you, and then you’ll just be one of those people! I really like the term “parents for the future” [organisation]. It’s normal people who have had enough, and that is my experience with XR, it’s just normal people who want to do something”.

The presentation of a professional frontstage image (Goffman 1959) was one way that the boundary between parent activist and environmental activist was reconfigured; Ryan explains how he attenuates the environmentalist cultural stereotype by sartorially presenting an image of respectable professional:

“I purposely make the effort to wear a shirt, so that I’m not perceived to be some hippie! Because that’s the perception often, that it’s some sort of crazy hippie, and then that doesn’t give you much gravitas”. (Ryan, 30s, two daughters aged 3 and 5)

Parenthood was seen as playing an important moral role within society. Tim (50s, two sons aged 20s) asserted, “there’s no job more important than being a parent...we all bring up our children as best we can, and hope that the next generation is going to be better”. The moral agency of parenthood meant several participants made assumptions that parents were more concerned than people without children about the global threat of climate change. Sophia (30s, one child aged 2) thought being a parent meant “[climate change] it’s scary. People like my sister, who do not have a child, don’t quite feel it maybe”. The assumption that the capacity to care about children requires the position of child carer constructs a symbolic boundary that excludes non-parents in claims to and responsibility for the future (Rosen and Suissa 2020). Additionally, the catch-all parental frame does not explain the different levels of concern for children between parents; Sophia later told me that her husband, who is not a campaigner, was not particularly worried about climate change’s impact on their daughter.

The in-group thinking about motherhood arose again when a remark made by an organiser of parent group during a phone call spurred me to record this field note:

12 June: Spoke to Jane who said she could help promote my study invitation; we chatted about the origins of the parent group. In the context of her telling me that climate change makes her terrified for her children, she asked whether I have kids, to which I replied no. I don't know why she asked me this; it made me feel a bit alienated from her. I wasn't sure whether she considered it a pre-requisite for being scared about the future, or a prerequisite for researching parenting.

I felt Sophia's question might relate to gendered assumptions about me as "the imaginary mother" as a "responsibilised moral agent" (Wilkinson 2020, 667) in my investigations of intergenerational concern. I decided that going forward, I would only disclose my non-parent status if asked directly. This situation led to Lena displaying embarrassment about her assumptions that I had children:

Lena: [...] So amongst my friends that don't have babies...I think they're not as much [environmentally conscious] as me because they don't have children, I mean I think when you have...do you have a child?

Interviewer: I don't, no!

Lena: Well, I was going to make the assumption, that I think people are more passionate when they've got children, thinking about the future, but obviously that's not true because you're... [chuckles] obviously very passionate! (Lena, 30s, one 1 year-old, 2nd baby on the way)

In subsequent interviews I gained an insight into how moral parenthood was mobilised. Participants explained that the parent identity was deliberately deployed as a way to broach the boundaries of traditional environmentalism; having children along to a march was seen as "a really powerful bridge between climate activists and the general public". Marc told me he would often say to people he canvassed "it's often framed as the green environmental issue, and my point is no, it's not! It's about our children's future!". Marc used this as a strategy to find common emotional ground with people he canvassed on the street: "Quite often the first thing I'll say to people that I talk to on the streets as well, is: have you got children? [...]. What we're trying to do is protect our children, which is our first responsibility". This indicates that Marc sees all parents as holding a responsibility to take action

on climate change and that his hopes of tapping into this moral realm would augment the movement.

This moralised parent identity as a strategy to find common ground with the public extended to building bridges with levers of power. One parent group organiser said that MPs were usually happier to engage with young families because it feels less confrontational than constituent meetings with traditional environmentalists, based on their assumptions that parents with children would be law-abiding and “kind of normal”. Patricia, the co-founder of a parent action group, outlined her thoughts that being a parent is a common experience that could cut across political as well as class and race boundaries:

“The parent voice is so powerful... I think that idea of providing for your children, providing for their welfare is intrinsic to so many people. No matter where they sit on the political spectrum [...]. And I think any parent will tell you that being a parent is a leveller, in the sense that you start speaking to all kinds of people that you wouldn’t have done otherwise. [...] so, there is just something quite unifying about being a parent that I think does open the door. And no one, whether you’re on the political right or left would want to say that they want to do harm to children, or their children. That’s a complete political anathema! So, the starting point is, we’re mobilising for a healthy planet for our children, no one can disagree with that!” (Patricia, 30s, 3 children of 2, 7 and 9)

### **Moralising extended family**

The emotional space of parent activism was delineated from everyday discussions with other family members. Participants told me climate change and the impact on today’s children was rarely discussed within conversations with extended family, often because they felt older relatives “just don’t get it”. Several participants spoke of “drawing a line” when I asked them what they thought about their own parents getting involved in fighting climate change. Peter explained to me that his parents “haven’t really grown up with it, so I kind of draw a line there I think”. Peter went on to assert that “it’s our generation who are the ones who need to be dealing with it”, serving to both excuse and exclude his parents. In a similar way, Marius made excuses for his parents, comparing levels of consumption in his evaluation of his parents’ contributions to climate change:

“I think they knew a lot less than we know. My parents were probably a bit wealthier than I am, and yet lived a much lower carbon lifestyle [...] they’d go on holiday only once a year. Whereas, by the time I was 25, I was on a flight every couple months or something. And so, I think that they are statistically less culpable. And morally in terms of like, knowing the impacts of this stuff, they’re less culpable”. (Marius, 30s, one child aged 4)

This selective moralising that excused older people was also evident when I asked Patricia what she thought about generational differences in concern and action for climate change. She did not talk about civic or political participation, but rather connected consumption to the environmental future:

“I think that generational issue is really difficult, like grandparents who fly all the time, haven’t changed their lifestyle, and who are like: well, I haven’t got much time left! And I can see where they’re coming from as well”.

Patricia’s recourse to time and life stage as an excuse was interesting when we consider a distributive intergenerational justice framework would in fact see grandparents and their historical contribution to greenhouse gas levels in a greater position of responsibility. However, the avoidance of imposing expectations on some relatives – including siblings and aunts – was also performed as an act of care, of wanting to preserve good relationships, and to prevent emotionally close relatives from feeling guilty in comparison to the standard of others, as Marius explains:

“My family are very close [...] my brothers, my mum and dad - I accept them as they are, and I don’t want to try and change them. But at the same time [...], even if you’re not judgmental about it - by people knowing you’ve got a stance on it affects other people’s views on, views on themselves. And that’s a difficult thing to do in a family.”

The selective moralising that bracketed off extended family members from taking responsibility can be seen as an act of care; concerns for the future are suspended temporarily to protect the present for their relatives. Participants felt that they did not want to impose their politics on intimate others, they did not want to make them feel awkward. It is not to say that grandparents or other relatives are not concerned about the implications of climate change on future generations, as research has found (Shirani et al. 2013). In a similar way, Dee suspended any judgment of family consumption interactions because it was entangled with practices of giving and receiving care, and recognised that accepting transgressions of her own ethical boundaries was part of the wider goal of protecting life in all its forms:

“...And it feels like grandparents, and aunts and uncles, and godparents [...] are allowed to do what parents can't do, they're the rule breakers! [...] So, you take on board the specific circumstances of family member or the person who you might have differing ideas from [...], you suspend that on the basis of the specific person, I think. I think that environmental stuff, you've got to approach it from a sort of, a humanity approach. This is about protecting life, people as much as it is about the animals. No one goes first, right?” (Dee, 40s, two children aged 6 and 3)

By reasoning that there is no natural hierarchy in nature, Dee is adopting an equality of all approach, which respects “the intrinsic value of every other person” (Adam and Groves 2007, 147). This perhaps shows that in the context of personal life, using the principle of an ethic of care in the message for intergenerational justice can sometimes be a complex matter.

### **General discussion**

This paper set out to investigate activist parents' reasoning of intergenerational justice in everyday lives, in particular how this arises from parental identities and moral discourses and identities of environmentalism. In so doing, it explored the potential for cultural narratives about activism for intergenerational justice to be refurbished and recirculated. The study found that motivations to act on climate were deeply emotional; as well as grief about worsening global conditions, parents felt fear about the future for their children which drove a moral imperative to effect change. The emotional spaces of parenting and activism were managed and demarcated symbolically through relational, discursive means through boundary work (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007). This created moral spaces that were exclusionary, deployed to define, distinguish, and legitimise the collective activist parent identity (Lamont 1992). Adding to the theory on boundary work, the research also found that symbolic boundaries were often re-drawn in a selective way to include or excuse others.

Children and childrearing were the subject and focus of parent activists' symbolic demarcation, informed by cultural scripts and codes about what it means to be a “good” parent for the climate. Moral dilemmas about choosing whether to procreate may be influenced by environmentalist discourses of the carbon footprint of raising children. The politics of reproduction are increasingly overlapping with environmental politics (Lappé, Hein, and Landecker 2019). Procreation has been demonised as a burden on ever depleting resources, reproducing one's impact well into the future as a carbon legacy (Murtaugh and Schlax 2009; Wynes and Nicholas 2017; Sasser 2018). At the same

time, children are often culturally represented as an optimistic project of hope for changing the trajectory of human impact. Childhood is seen as a crucial pedagogical window to shape ecological values, norms, practices, and identities that enable the environmentalist child to grow up as a steward of the planet (Kraftl 2008). This futurism is seen in the responsabilisation of children as subjects of education schemes and sustainability policy interventions, children are seen to be sites of influence and progressive consumption change within family and home life (Phoenix et al. 2017), as well as being encouraged by parents to collaborate in ethico-politicised family practices (Payne 2010; Istead and Shapiro 2014). Parents in my study showed how the politics of reproduction and the cultural representations of children as hope for the future influence their justification to have children, and by raising “good” environmentalist children, parents kept their in-group parent activist status, and this reaffirmed a desirable identity position (Boddy et al. 2016). However, this may be problematic as Walker’s (2017) empirical study found, assigning children the identity of “next generation” environmental activists can be at odds with the extent to which children wished to push for change. Another issue with boundary work around the “good” environmentalist family is when the privileges and affordances of a future-oriented environmentalism are not enjoyed by all, a classism that was found by Phoenix and her colleagues (2017) when environmentalist parents disparaged the non-environmentalist “other” family.

In contrast to framing children as moral agents for the future, some parents – in particular the fathers in my sample, drew boundaries around their younger children, asserting they should not have to “sort out the mess of today’s generation”. This consigned children too innocent and non-complicit passive subjects, as victims rather than actors (Stephens 1996). This links to cultural ideas about children lacking power and status, which has the effect of dismissing their agency to advocate for themselves, to think independently (Cassidy and Lone 2020) and to influence the environmental views of others (Uzzell et al. 1994). Childhood is a bounded social category within most Western societies (Kraftl 2008), defined by adults rather than by children themselves (Hill and Tisdall 1997), and some see children as humans-in-the-making rather than human beings (Qvortrup 1994). However, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are problematic if children are to be recognised as legitimate social actors to participate in climate decision-making (Cassidy and Lone 2020; Dunlop et al. 2021).

Parenting was considered “the most important job”, and being a parent was a salient identity. Assumptions about the motivations of people who did not have children are a form of disidentification and further delineated the in-groupness of moral parenthood. While not all of my

participants were in heterosexual nuclear family units (there was one same-sex relationship and several participants who had separated from their partner), the majority were part of heterosexual couple, and all had biologically related children. In their assumptions that parents care more than non-parents about children's future, the participants were naturalising adult-child connections of care. A queer reading uncovers how normative heterosexuality can have a structuring effect (Gaard 1997). Participants' essentialising of adult-child relations devalues the concern of non-parents who may feel compassion and take action on behalf of children and their future. Edelman (2004) critiques reproductive logic in contemplating the future, arguing that procreative norms lend parents a moral position to project the actions of today into the future, "through concern for and imaginaries of their descendants' lives" (Rosen and Suissa 2020, 127). For Edelman, the future represented by the "perpetual horizon" of the child pervades cultural politics as a "structuring optimism" (2-4), suggesting a special power of parents. Such structuring casts aside the possibility of alternative communal relations (Edelman 2004).

Supporting Phoenix et al.'s (2017) empirical work, participants in this sample distanced themselves from stereotyped environmentalists, often referring to them pejoratively as "hippies". By constructing moral boundaries around their own "normal parent" identity, participants protected themselves from stigma and criticism of the daily environmental transgressions of family practices (Phoenix et al. 2017), but in turn, bridged the public – political worlds by constructing a moderate and "safe" identity to which politicians could relate. Participants' narratives of parental symbolic power chimes with the recent ascendancy of the parent voice in UK politics (Jensen 2018) and builds on environmental advocacy in the US that has successfully leveraged parenthood as a narrative persuasion technique (Munro 2017). In the UK, family as political rhetoric aligns with conservative ideologies of stability, tradition, and continuity (Little and Winch 2017). Within this logic, by representing the concerned parent in their constituency, MPs of all parties can fit in better with the social and institutional norms of Westminster than representing more radical constituent identities (Willis 2020). The UK Conservative party, having held a majority in government since 2017, has an uncomfortable relationship with climate change policy. Notwithstanding the current Prime Minister Boris Johnson's disdain for environmental protesters (Laville and Taylor 2019), the party has not acted on the scientific recommendations which urge a rapid decarbonisation of the economy. This regime, termed "new denialism" (Buranyi 2019; Daub et al., 2021) acknowledges fossil fuel's role in global heating while taking no meaningful action that is commensurate with the urgency. Against this political context, I suggest that activists are seeking new ways to connect to government that

are akin to Lorenzen et al.'s (2016) study of US environmentalists' deployment of moderate identities to cut through to Republican legislators. However, as parents foreground their identity as they engage with MPs and other levers of power, the codifying of reproductive morality could entrench a moral narrative of naturalised adult-child relations.

When asked about the involvement of their extended family in fighting climate change, many participants "drew a line" effectively excusing the non-participation of older relatives, particularly their own parents. The logic of relatives not knowing the impact of past practices indicates that some participants were basing responsibility for the future on the knowledge of causality of one's actions. This led them to a logic of blamelessness and, therefore, lack of responsibility (Adam and Groves 2007). This reflects common understandings of responsibility "being rooted in causal authorship of harm" (Adam and Groves 2007, 144), which has implications for who parent activists think should be taking action to push for political and social change. Boundaries were drawn around older people by defining their participation only in terms of consumption; civic engagement of older relatives was not mentioned, suggesting that it is considered an unsuitable realm for older people. Assumptions about older people as set in their ways, being unreceptive to new ideas and unable to cope with the demands of activism might be seen as a form of ageism and generationalism, an undesirable outcome as it can damage community social integration and reinforce the marginalisation of older people (Scharf et al. 2001; Little and Winch 2017; Farber 2020). The exclusion of older people from political citizenship mirrors the marginalisation children have experienced in this realm (Nolas, Varvantakis, and Aruldoss 2017).

There is a further issue with the framing of how older relatives engage (or not) with issues of climate justice. Using a lens of consumption to bracket off older relatives from taking action could be limiting. If climate campaigners ignore older people in their aims to grow the political movement, they are missing the chance to persuade a large politically engaged cohort of people in the UK; 1 in 5 people in the UK were over the age of 65 in 2018, with 74% turning out to vote at the 2019 general election (ONS 2019). But considering that 64% of this cohort voted Conservative compared to the 27% and 36% of 25-34 and 35-44 age cohorts, respectively (Ipsos MORI 2021), campaigners' efforts to push for a more progressive politics for change towards climate justice might be a challenge. With an ageing population, the risks of an increasing conservatism and anti-youth sentiment mean that politicisation of older people to engage in social justice is becoming increasingly important (Guillemot and Price 2017). Families have an important part to play in this regard, as a politicising institution they can transmit knowledge, behaviours, and skills (Guillemot and Price 2017). Empirical

studies have shown that older people can be politicised for the first time in later life, debunking assumptions of their frailty (Guillemot and Price 2017). Other work has found that environmental activism in older age groups enabled an intergenerational community cohesion and provided older people a new sense of meaning in a post-work life (Gearey and Ravenscroft 2019). Moreover, dealing with the threat of climate change will require a greater number of people to engage civically and politically, and older people have been deemed an underutilised resource to benefit national mitigation efforts and contribute to community resilience (Cohen et al. 2016; Pillemer et al. 2021).

The research found that drawing moral boundaries around the emotional spaces of activism and parenting was often flexible, highlighting a compatibility between practices of intimacy and the interests of community (Jamieson 2005). Activists showed in their willingness to share emotionally intimate encounters with other activists, enabling them to circulate meaning and build a common identity and sense of solidarity. In particular, the fathers' transforming of norms of invulnerable and tough maleness into a connection with one's inner emotional self that is expressed publicly and politically in relational, embodied displays of caring, and in demands for justice for environment and children suggests ecological masculinity that confronts and re-draws the borders of mainstream hegemonic masculine norms (Pulé 2013; Hultman and Pulé 2018). This boundary-reconfiguring was also found in Marc's reflexive refusal to align with masculine dominant business norms by taking a caring and non-hierarchical approach in interactions with his team, and in the various ways that fathers were socialising their children to be sensitive to gender and racial oppression. Caring for the local and global commons has long been associated with feminine and maternal traits (Macgregor and Seymour 2017), but research is beginning to uncover sites where men are interrogating and challenging their personal role in reproducing intersecting gender and ecological inequalities and through this process, reconstructing their gendered self (Connell 1990; Twine 2018; Hedenqvist et al. 2021). In the examples of compassionate masculinities in this study, fathers were drawing on, and recirculating learned eco-activist vocabulary and codes of care for others, connections between self and all life on Earth, and non-violent protest, and enacting these within their personal, family and work lives. Notwithstanding the occasional contradictions of a plurality of masculinities in this sample of activist fathers (Connell 2017), such pathways of reflexive ecologisation may nonetheless be valuable as part of a feminist agenda to confront the socially constructed boundaries of "malestream" norms (Hultman and Pulé 2018).

The research found that boundaries were also fluid to protect relationships with other relatives, such as siblings who did not share political views. Relatives' transgressions of environmentalist

consumption codes were granted to prevent moments of awkwardness and to maintain intimacy. This demonstrates that morality is entangled and intersubjectively constituted within the specific moments of everyday family life (Holdsworth and Morgan 2007), alongside being influenced by wider cultural and normative discourses (Finch 1989).

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has explored the under studied emergence of parent-led intergenerational justice activism in the UK, by examining the emotional spaces and cultural context of parents politicising their concern for their children's future. In so doing, it aimed to consider how parent activism might recreate a moral narrative about children's climate-challenged future and shift political and public conversation. Parent activism plays an important role in advocating for children's and future generations' interests. A parental ethic to reframe intergenerational justice ushers in a much-needed input to a conversation that has hitherto been encumbered by the ideas of generational conflicts of interest (Barry 1997) and the abstractness, and non-identifiability of future generations. The study therefore contributes to debates about the role of an ethic of care within the public realm (Tronto 1994). Supporting the research of Howell (2013), this study has shown that the issue of social justice can be as important as "nature" or "the environment" in motivating some people to act on climate change. It also demonstrates how the boundaries of commonly understood environmentalism may be stretched to more holistically engage with climate change. The study supports work by Shirani and her colleagues (2013) on the role of children as living links to the future that shape parents' views and actions on sustainability. New insights have been provided into the role of fathers' environmental activism, which warrants further research to connect ecological forms of masculinity to family and environmental issues (Hultman and Pulé 2018).

The research also showed that the symbolic moral boundary work of parents within the emotional spaces of activism and parenting may limit the movement's ability to advance a social justice rhetoric. Identity-driven activism facilitates a collective agency, which is enacted within bounded moral spaces that define the collective as right and good (Cerulo 1997; Lamont and Molnar 2002). However, because identity-based movements form relative to distinctions, movements may struggle to bridge to social actors beyond their identity boundary (Piore 1995) – in this case, to adults without children. When we consider that policy changes that reorient priorities to future generations will require a broad and diverse public support brought about by cultural change, there are implications for the reach of the moral parent discourses found in this study to broaden intergenerational solidarity. Additionally, identity meanings are circulated within, and reinforced by,

the everyday relations and social practices of family. Participants drew relational moral boundaries that are a function of entwined moral discourses of good parenting and environmentalism, with the predominant narrative being that protecting children's future is a matter for parents. The study found this could exclude and marginalise the participation of younger children and older adult relatives, which presents issues of social justice for these groups to participate in public conversations and political decision-making on intergenerational fairness.

### 4.3. Paper 3: Breaking climate justice ‘silence’ in everyday life: The environmentalist killjoy, negotiation, and relationship risk

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#### **Abstract**

The moral and justice dimensions of climate change are uncomfortable and commonly avoided in the conversations of day-to-day UK life. This ‘silence’ impedes the genesis of a public discourse to drive justice-oriented social and political change. Two social realms identified as silence-breaking are social movements and personal relationships, yet the potential of this intersection has yet to be explored. This article applies Goffman’s theories of interaction to a qualitative study of UK-based climate activists to show how silence around climate justice is often a means to avoid relationship conflict, and the ways in which this is negotiated within everyday interactions. Activist participants faced conversational resistance through normative avoidance of climate-related death talk, and from negative environmental activist stereotyping. In efforts to protect relationships while promoting their climate politics, participants backgrounded their activist identity, slowly ‘chipped away’ at climate obstruction through social and sustainable practices, and prioritised humour. Breaking silences required taking relationship risks through radical environmentalist ‘killjoy-talk’: a deliberate, politicised transgression of polite conversation norms. The article reflects on the normativities and loci of power discursively obstructing a moral engagement, and the potential for activists’ practical and discursive strategies to work against these to normalise politicised climate talk.

#### **Introduction**

This article explores how climate activists find ways to broach difficult conversations about climate change with non-activist family, friends, and colleagues, while protecting these relationship bonds from possible interpersonal conflict. The research questions are: (1) How do climate activists use and manage their environmentalist identity and politics to break silences around climate justice? and (2) What are the implications of this for activists’ personal relationships? The article is located in the UK cultural context to explore how the politics of death – in this case, climate-related death – are sequestered and uncovered through negotiating norms of convivial conversation. I will demonstrate that climate justice silence between personal ties is an interactional issue; being silent or silenced

may result from, or be accommodated within, power-infused relationships (Fivush, 2010) but particular identities can break climate justice silence as a political act (Katriel, 2021). The article contributes to an understanding of how the moral dimensions of climate change are engaged with in the everyday, supporting the wider goal of how to drive social change and action.

Currently, justice is absent from much of UK public discourse on tackling climate change, which tends instead to focus on the depoliticised technicalities of carbon emissions (Institute of Development Studies, 2021). This problem is compounded in light of recent survey data finding only moderate population-level felt responsibility to help reduce climate change (Phillips et al., 2018). Everyday conversations with friends and family are crucial in the problem of collective silence around climate justice because conversations are social practices carried out routinely and frequently whilst always entailing improvisation and emotional involvement; conversations can perpetuate established views, or they can effect innovative thinking and actions (Jamieson, 2020). Face-to-face political talk about an issue can function as an everyday pedagogy of open and civic-minded attitudes and practices (Conover & Searing, 2005). Private-sphere dialogic deliberation then feeds into wider conversations, and into reasoning and the negotiation of meanings of climate change at public discourse level (Boykoff et al., 2009). In parallel, social movements play a crucial role because in the public realm they can break social silences by narratively foregrounding the moral, ethical and justice perspectives of an issue (Zerubavel, 2006). Members of the climate movement of course also lead personal lives, providing opportunistic spaces in which to confront climate justice silence as a form of relational activism – that is, everyday activism which uses the power of personal relationships to effect change (O’Shaughnessy & Kennedy, 2010). Currently, little is known about whether and how everyday forms of activism confront social silence around climate justice. To situate the study within the literature, I will discuss the cultural and political economic conditions for silence around climate justice, linking these to everyday relational activism and the significance of activist identity management. I will then introduce Goffman’s theories of social interaction as a framework to analyse the personal (rather than the public) sphere of climate activism, within which activists seek to mobilise their friends and family into dialogue and action on climate injustice. After outlining the study’s methods, I then present the findings, discussing these thematically.

### **Everyday activism, identities, and negative stereotyping**

While some scholars have suggested that discussing climate change is easier in a relaxed setting with trusted friends and family (e.g., Wang et al., 2020; Zerubavel, 2010), empirical work has found the

topic is often avoided with friends and family as a depressing ‘conversation-killer’ or suspended to shield loved ones from emotionally troubling information (Norgaard, 2011). Similarly, research on contentious topics such as ‘Brexit’ has suggested that people self-censor as an act of care for loved ones (Davies, 2021). What has yet to be explored empirically is an in-depth understanding of the discursive obstruction or facilitation of climate change in different relational contexts, and in which relational situations might silences be broken. For example, what is the role of social identity in the ethical act of being silent, and in the process of being silenced?

To consider how silences are broken we must first consider why they occur and how they are sustained. Kari Norgaard’s (2011) study of socially organised denial within a Norwegian rural community found citizens actively kept climate discussion at arm’s length to construct innocence, maintain social privilege, and uphold a sense of security and order. Implicatory conversations were particularly unwelcome in social and domestic spaces where there were expectations of emotional shelter. Norgaard suggested Norway-specific cultural factors supported the socially organised denial of climate change, which in turn helped reproduce the polity perpetuating insufficient governmental climate action. Norgaard’s findings provide a useful framework for thinking through the normative forces shaping climate silence, but they leave room for understanding how conversations play out when the interaction is seen by some as a political opportunity to confront climate non-response, despite this risking the sense of security and order.

Turning from Norgaard’s Norwegian study to this article’s UK context, we can consider matters of culturally acceptable conversation. Today in the UK there is frequent and troubling media coverage of a climate-related disaster happening somewhere in the world. Yet in the UK, as in many richer regions of the world, much of how we go about living everyday life depends upon actively forgetting about our own, as well as others’ mortality (Bauman, 1992). But the shadow of death is ever present in people’s lives in the way it is avoided through routine activities; the inevitability of death is said to give quality and colour to our time spent alive (Simmel, 2007). The same can be said of our entanglement and implication in the causes and effects of climate and ecological change; the high carbon practices which support our emotional and social lives are intricately woven into the capitalist economy (Urry, 2009) and these practices indirectly harm and destroy life. Scholars of death and society have suggested the cultural and institutional sequestration of death in affluent societies is ever more difficult during the contemporary crises of armed conflicts, global pandemics, enduring racial inequalities and climate change (Walter, 2022). Social movements have in the past politicised taboos around the injustices of death, for example the Silence = Death banner slogan

used by AIDS campaigners in the 1980s, in calling out the perils of moral apathy (Gamson, 1989). More recently, mortality has been 'dramatised' by the climate action group Extinction Rebellion, who have used various communicative techniques to highlight the injustices of death and destruction brought about by structures of power and privilege (Walter, 2022). In light of the anxiety evoked by climate death narratives, Walter (2022) notes the possible counter-productivity of death and extinction rhetoric by the climate movement. This raises the question, are there social settings in which the politicised discussion of climate death is more or less discomforting?

Activism is commonly understood as public sphere activity which seeks political and social change. Activists in a social movement 'frame' or represent an issue of injustice in part by publicly expressing and managing a collective identity to distinguish 'us' from opponents and bystanders (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). For example, this expression included foregrounding one's gay or lesbian identity during the AIDS ACT UP campaigning mentioned earlier (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Activism can also be performed within private sphere 'submerged networks' (Melucci, 1985), integrating everyday life with material and cultural codes and practices towards collective action goals (Horton, 2003). Within private sphere activism, a collective identity may be less important because its expression does not necessarily help to frame an issue. Cherry (2006), O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy (2010) and Haenfler et al. (2012) showed how vegan, environmental and sustainability activism may rely more on building strong personal relationships to advance a movement's goals than on a collective identity. These authors have described the ways in which relational forms of activism typically involve demonstrating to and encouraging friends and family to care for non-human others. These studies point to a porous boundary between activist practices striving for cultural change, and the many identities, roles and responsibilities in which people are situated day-to-day.

While much literature infers social movement-aligned identities can be autonomously promoted or deprioritised, fewer studies have considered the situations which necessitate active dissociation from a group identity. An 'identity dilemma' (McGarry & Jasper, 2015) may arise when the activist perceives disadvantages of aligning themselves with a particular collective identity. Simi and Futrell's (2009) work on white supremacists found that activists experienced cognitive dissonance between self and social identities as they concealed their activism to limit stigmatisation by outsiders. For environmentalists, experiences of negative stereotyping have long been documented (see Barr & Gilg, 2006; Capek, 1993; Hargreaves, 2016). This poses a problem when the movement requires public buy-in to the reductions in privilege required for climate justice. Some climate activism has recently met with a degree of public backlash (Steentjes et al., 2020), identified as one form of

climate denial (Norgaard, 2019). As seen in the past with feminist activists, ridicule and negative stereotype labelling may result (Ferree, 2004). Occasionally articulated in rhetoric by public figures, labelling terms such as ‘irresponsible crusties’ (BBC, 2021) and ‘environmental extremists’ (Hymas et al., 2021) have recently been used by members of the UK government to publicly deride and demean individuals who attempt to disrupt ways of doing business-as-usual. Even people not opposed to tackling climate change can still perceive environmental activists as militant, pious and eccentric (Bashir et al., 2013). This can lead to those campaigning for change to distance themselves or disidentify from the images, practices and narratives of environmentalists and activists (Cherry, 2019; McCalman, 2022).

Few scholars have explored the negotiations of an environmental activist identity within the interactions of personal life. Exceptions include Hards (2013) and Hauxwell-Baldwin (2013), both of whom examined the ways in which environmentalists present a version of themselves in domestic contexts according to expectations of the situation, with friends and family triggering the most discomfort with an environmentalist self-identity and lifestyle. The aforementioned two studies did not delve into the reasons for this discomfort but suggest expressing one’s environmental politics within the interactions of trusting personal relationships is not as straightforward as advocates of this idea have claimed (for example, see Wang et al., 2020; Zerubavel, 2010). Human action is always embedded relationally within social practices, which, in Western societies, often harbour unequal power relations and cultural ideals, such as those concerning gender, age and generation. These social relations may diminish a sense of self and foreclose the sharing of one’s concerns (Jamieson, 1999; Smart, 2007). In this vein, environmentalists’ struggles to speak their mind about climate justice as a form of relational activism may necessitate what Jamieson (1999, p. 477) would call ‘creative identity and relationship-saving strategies’. The role of these processes in climate silence has yet to be explored. In the next section I will discuss how a Goffmanian micro-level analysis can help to understand how identities and relationships are managed and negotiated, with the aim of discovering how the avoidance of climate justice talk might work within this context.

### **Goffman’s interaction order**

Erving Goffman’s (1967) theories on the interaction order provide a framework for thinking through conversational lulls. I have applied Goffman here because his work explores literal silences, as well as the performance of identities which precede them. During the early stages of data collection, I found that Goffman’s theories resonated with my participants’ reports of climate silence being literal as well as symbolic; participants would describe moments in everyday conversations when

they raised the subject of climate change but were met with an awkward non-response. According to Goffman, within a focused face-to-face interaction each person takes a line according to the socially defined situation. During the conversation, each presents a version of themselves according to expected social norms and identities. Some aspects of one's 'self' may be revealed or concealed to maintain a favourable impression, or 'face'. In the ritual code, conversation interactants also seek to preserve the 'face' of one another by avoiding threatening topics or questioning claims people have made about themselves. Differences of opinion might be covered up by polite acquiescence or ambiguous speech (Collins, 1988). Significant for this study's examination of silences in personal life, Goffman pointed out the importance of inclusive, involved conversations to reaffirm affective bonds: 'conversations form the bridge that people build to one another...It is this spark, not the more obvious kinds of love, that lights up the world' (Goffman, 1967, p. 117). These 'solidarity feelings' and 'moral sentiments' are the foundations for the enduring emotions of mundane life (Collins, 2004, p. 106).

Goffman's concept of socially defined situations might include a family meal or a relaxed gathering with friends. In these settings, one is not routinely expected to present a self which is responsible for the global environment (Hargreaves, 2016), or to raise difficult subjects such as the death and loss of climate change. Goffman's concept of conversation alienation explains the fragile situation in which failure to take turns in talking results in 'painful silences' (1967, p. 120) and a swift change of subject is usually required to restore the interaction order. The rupture in dialogical involvement may arise when the topic matter runs out of material, or when one person withdraws when they consider the talker is 'externally preoccupied' with something unconnected to themselves (Goffman, 1967). Returning to Norgaard's (2011) findings of silences within intimate settings, alienation may arise when people feel the boundaries of climate politics do not extend to themselves. Goffman theorised that alienation also results from the 'faulty interactant': a 'killjoy' who drags down the mood of a conversation and deters mutual involvement (Goffman, 1967, p. 129). But how does the killjoy as a faulty interactant help us understand how climate silence may be sustained or be broken in everyday conversations? Goffman's theories were underpinned by his belief that the individual is always shaped by the moral sentiments of the society in which they live (Collins, 1988). Considering Goffman's concept of the faulty interactant, the ability to deter emotional involvement in the conversation would therefore be contingent on topics which are culturally and situationally less acceptable. Here we can connect back to the earlier points on the faux pas of discussing mortality or the troubling topic of climate change. We then begin to see how, rather than a clumsy

conversationalist, the killjoy as an individual who aligns themselves with a social movement's goals may be self-aware of the risks and benefits of introducing a difficult topic, at the same time as others may recognise this tendency in her or him. To support this idea, I will now draw on Ahmed's (2010) notion of the 'feminist killjoy'.

### **The strategic use of the killjoy identity**

According to Ahmed (2010), the feminist killjoy is both a pejorative stereotype and an accusation, used to dismiss an individual aligned to the feminist movement who calls out gender injustice. Ahmed found particular resistance to her feminist identity and politics with friends and family who would accuse her of getting in the way of their enjoyment but, in her commitment to opposing inequality, she would continue to raise such topics to confront denialism (Ahmed, 2010; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). An environmentalist killjoy could therefore be thought of negatively as an identity stereotype who is recognised by themselves and others as someone who drags down the mood, or makes people feel guilty by talking about climate change. This identity may be concealed or revealed according to the acceptable degree of risk to positive 'face' and affective bonds within a conversation (Goffman, 1967). I have outlined how the literature argues that the symbols and expression of a collective identity are less important in private than in public sphere activism to promote a movement's goals. And yet, Goffman emphasises the importance of carefully managing one's identity to protect affective relationships. Further complicating the picture is Ahmed's strategic use of a culturally derided feminist killjoy, suggesting there is a place for oppositional identities expressed within personal interactions to unsettle moral apathy. Taking into consideration the UK cultural backdrop of negative environmentalist stereotyping which might structure the expression of a climate activist identity, this article seeks to uncover the strategic use of the environmentalist killjoy identity to get climate justice on the conversational agenda with family, friends, and colleagues.

### **Methods**

The data for this article arose from a larger study of the intersections of personal life, parenting and environmental activism. I used a purposive sample of mothers, fathers, and guardians, recruited through social media and snowballing. I invited participants who were based in the UK and 'involved in any type of climate campaigning'. Participants were offered a £25 donation to a charity of their choice as a thank you. I recruited a total of 12 mothers and 8 fathers. This article focuses on adult

only rather than adult–child conversations, and the continuities between the public and private spheres.

Data were collected between June 2020 and January 2021, using a mix of in-depth semi-structured interviews and a diary study. The diary was used both as a pseudo-observational method to understand climate change within the private spaces of daily life, and as an interview prompt. Participants were sent a Microsoft Word template with columns asking for information such as the time, place, and situational details, as well as a free text section to be completed over the course of 2 weeks prior to the interview. Participants were asked to note the thoughts, feeling and actions relating to climate change in the course of daily life which might include the more mundane moments difficult to recall in the interview setting (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). All interviews were by videocall (18) or telephone (2) and lasted 45–120 minutes. Questions were structured around themes concerning motivations and experiences of parent activism, views on climate change and climate politics. Following a relational approach to personal life which sees identities and practices as embedded within, and connected to, personal relationships (Smart, 2007), I asked participants to talk about their activism within various friendship and kinship settings. Data were analysed using a thematic approach guided by Ritchie and Spencer’s (2002) staged procedure: re-familiarisation with the data; identification of a thematic framework; line-by-line inductive coding; grouping of similar codes and assigning of analytical concepts; and identification of thematic patterns and associations across the dataset. I used NVivo software to support this process, going back and forth to the theoretical and empirical literature to arrive at the explanatory themes in this article’s findings.

In reflection on the limitations and ethics of the sampling and of the interviews, the study’s commencement coincided with, and was greatly impacted by, the coronavirus pandemic. First, the ‘lockdown’ restrictions on mobility prevented the targeting of a more diverse sample; most likely due to the time pressures of home working and home schooling, participant interest in the study was very slow, which hindered my original plan to locate gatekeepers to access a broader ethnic and socioeconomic representation. The sample was therefore rather homogeneous (most participants recruited were middle class with a tertiary level qualification and a medium to high household income, and all but one participant were white; however, this sample reflects the wider UK climate movement ((Saunders et al., 2020)). Second, the prevention of in-person meetings caused by the lockdowns created barriers to openness in the videocall. The disadvantages of videocalls include a limited control of interview privacy; coupled with the government stay-at-home order of the moment, it was possible there was a spouse or other family member in the vicinity who could

overhear the discussion, which necessitated me asking non-specific questions about 'your friends and family' to allow the participant to choose whom they included or not. While this study could not always explore specific family or friendship relationships in everyday climate activism (for example, with partner, or flatmates), it has nonetheless uncovered some key insights into micro-level discursive obstruction of climate justice talk.

In the next section I will turn to my findings which are laid out thematically and discussed in turn. All participant names are pseudonyms.

### **Silences arising: The uncomfortable topic of climate mortality**

The injustices and dangers of climate change were emotionally charged topics for the activists I interviewed. Painful feelings of grief and desperation around the present trajectory of climate inaction were instrumental in the drive to raise awareness of the need for collective action. For these activists, climate was spoken of as a moral matter of life and death for their children, distant others, and future beings. But despite emphasising the "supreme importance" of raising the public consciousness, activists were often reticent to politicise friends, family and colleagues who were outside the climate movement. Many told me they had tried in the past but found conversations petered out, what Goffman would call the 'painful silence' in the turn-taking of conversation, and efforts to 'save face' (Goffman, 1967) led to a mutually orchestrated change of subject. Tim's quote below sums up the notion of such silences:

"You make the point about climate change, and it doesn't really matter how strongly or weakly you make it, it just falls into silence, and nobody replies. And it's not that people necessarily change the subject in a hostile way, nobody's ever said anything particularly negative [to me], it's just that it doesn't go anywhere! No conversation starts, it's broaching the world's most important topic, and it goes nowhere!" (Tim, male, 50s)

Here Tim describes literal conversational silences as a means to avoid interpersonal conflict. Other activists drew out connections with wider cultural attitudes such as 'burying heads in the sand' around existential threats, exemplified by Sophia:

"I find it's quite a hard conversation to bring up with anybody. It's uncomfortable for people to talk about it. It's like talking about death really, isn't it? It's a bit of a faux pas! You mentioned what you're doing but they don't really want to hear". (Sophia, female, 30s)

Sophia's quote provides an example of the sequestration of climate-related death in everyday conversation (Mellor & Shilling, 1993); climate mortality is almost a taboo. Conversely, Tim felt that death was just not a matter of concern for most people in Britain because it was not personally relevant:

"I don't think the population is ready yet (to take direct action) [. . .] It's not like Black rights where every individual in Birmingham Alabama was so impacted that they were going to turn out on the streets, because it was life and death to them. But climate change isn't life and death to people today in Britain". (Tim, male, 50s)

Here Tim connects ideas of existential threat with issues of justice by contrasting British people's lack of justice consciousness with the imperatives of the US civil rights movement, pointing to relative existential privilege in Britain. On the other hand, Freya agreed with many others in that climate change was a present absence, underpinned by a governmental level implicatory denial of death of distant others:

"It'd be such a big change for people, and they would have to then admit that their governments are complicit in ecocide and genocide. It's just too much I think for people to take on". (Freya, female, 20s)

As well as a tactic to deny responsibility for climate-related death and loss, for others the silence was inextricably connected to living, and with it the environmentally damaging practices which make life comfortable and convenient. Sophia points to others actively keeping climate at arm's length:

"It's never the right moment actually, to have these conversations, I find. You're always consciously judging the situation. It's quite rare that I find the opportunity because other people aren't in the same space as you, or they're still resisting it, and trying to keep up their fairy tale existence". (Sophia, female, 30s)

In this quote Sophia recognises norms of conversation which work to maintain comfort and privilege. Staying silent helped prevent disruptions to 'the good life' and the self-identities it was entangled with (Willmott, 2000).

The above examples attribute climate silence to active avoidance by non-activist friends and family; normative silence was an outcome of resisting social change. But activists often silenced themselves in relationally specific situations. With older relatives, activists taboo-ised climate change partly because they felt senior people should be spared the discomfort of climate politics at their life stage;

it was considered inappropriate to involve relatives who have fewer years ahead of them to enjoy life. For example, Patricia told me:

“I think that generational issue is really difficult, like grandparents who fly all the time, haven’t changed their lifestyle, and who are like: well, I haven’t got much time left! And I can see where they’re coming from as well”. (Patricia, female, 30s)

This quote illustrates that silence around climate change was a form of intergenerational emotion management against negative topics and served as a discursive strategy to cope with the proximity of mortality in later life (Mellor & Shilling, 1993). However, this generational ordering of climate action could be seen as an intergenerational ‘discounting’, a practice reflected in climate policymaking in which the value of the present is given more weight than the value of the future (Elliott, 2022). This discounting works within a Western cultural conception of linear time, distinguishing the past from the future (Adam, 1996), and a future-oriented politics is deemed of little concern to older people today.

#### **Maintaining silence: Concealing one’s activist self**

Other relationally specific self-censoring arose when one’s antagonistic politics were an unwelcome mood dampener in group family practices, in which questions about consumption might unsettle what it means to enjoy ‘doing’ family festivities. Many participants spoke of needing to hide their feelings about climate to ‘keep everybody happy’, as Marius explained:

“It’s delicate because I’ve got three brothers who I’m incredibly close to, and talking about family holidays, or stag dos, or weddings abroad. . . all of these things end up. . . where you go out for dinner and what you’re served for dinner if you’re eating together and stuff, it all becomes quite personal-political, and I don’t want to proselytise to my family about it!” (Marius, male, 30s)

In talking about the ‘personal-political’, Marius was raising issues of alienated identity in particular settings. Supporting ideas by Ahmed (2010), this suggests that family members together are a powerfully normative force in marginalising the individual when their personal politics do not fit with the collective orientation towards positive affect. Similarly, Ruben’s diary entry of his recent camping trip with friends and family shows the collective power of the group in this regard:

“Have to watch what I say about Extinction Rebellion as Owen works for Boeing! Hard to know what to do when it is bad manners to be concerned about the future of humanity”.

(Ruben, male, 50s)

This quote illustrates Ruben’s hiding of his activist self to uphold norms of positive conversation. Noticeable is his perceived greater risk of creating emotional discomfort brought about both by Owen’s job role and his and close personal association. In a setting outside that of family and friends where a relaxed atmosphere was not necessarily the goal, there might otherwise be an opportunity for serious debate about ‘the future of humanity’, as he put it.

To contextualise this study’s findings of concealing one’s activist self, strategic disidentification from radical activism within other contexts was evident across the dataset. Even though a large proportion of participants were involved in direct actions, many distanced themselves from a strident activist image in favour of a parent identity because they felt the milder image of ‘normal’ parents with ‘normal everyday concerns’ would be more effective in connecting with politicians and the public, particularly given recent negative media and public discourse around Extinction Rebellion direct actions (Howard, 2022). This was buttressed by a cultural backdrop of negative views of radical forms of social movement activism more generally (Roth, 2016). As an example, Ryan felt that the negatively stereotyped image imperilled his gravitas, so he chose to dress in a shirt and tie when giving public talks on climate to ‘avoid being seen as a crazy hippy’. Ridicule and negative stereotyping had been experienced directly by over half of the participants, who had received comments from the public, friends or acquaintances relating to a presumed lack of personal hygiene – for example one activist was laughed at by passers-by at a protest, who claimed she smelled bad, or had been ascribed labels such as ‘eco-warrior’ or ‘hippy’. A typical interaction of ridicule was given by Alexander, illustrated below from his diary record:

“A friend of mine decided to strike back at an article I wrote without even reading it and say, ‘You know the planets align every year to cause changes in climate’. She is the type to watch YouTube videos instead of reading a research paper. When I explained what she was referring to, she said ‘alright Scorpio’ (referring to astrology and my star sign). It was a bewildering experience”. (Alexander, male, 30s)

Similar to the ‘OK Boomer’ phrase which is a mocking rejoinder to older people for being out of touch (Elliott, 2022), ‘alright Scorpio’ was an attempt to ridicule and belittle Alexander. I was told by

many participants these encounters often made them feel alienated and 'like a weirdo', which caused them to play down their environmentalism because of a 'worry you'll lose friends over it'. Charlotte said she would rather 'keep people on side' than assert a strident activist self, elaborating: 'I try and keep it quite brief. And I don't say things like "if we just loved the trees!"'. Charlotte had earlier told me she feels close to nature but wanted to avoid this as a reference point to disidentify from the much-derided stereotype of 'tree-hugging' environmentalists. This dissociation from part of oneself, as well as from a collective identity suggests that self-censoring and compromise were part of relational activism within everyday life to protect relationships, to avoid alienating others, and to ease one's climate politics into normal conversations. Additionally, concerns around revealing one's climate politics related to a perceived risk of being called a hypocrite for less-than-perfect consumption practices, as Freya explained:

"You need to be very strong, because it is so important! But if it's just a situation where somebody says I'm taking a flight, I no longer make a point. I just say, 'Oh that's nice, where are you going?' partly because I have also taken flights". (Freya, female, 20s)

Freya's quote suggests she was experiencing tensions between expressing her justice politics and dealing with retaliation. Ridicule, stereotype labelling and attacking the environmentalist identity with accusations of hypocrisy could be interpreted as a form of backlash by those whose own actions (or inaction) are under scrutiny (Anderson, 2010). Ferree (2004) might even describe this as a form of 'soft repression': the ridicule deployed at the interactional level towards a movement's collective identity in order to stigmatise and silence cultural challenges to the dominant status quo. Ferree distinguishes soft repression from conventional 'hard' forms by its non-violent use of power and informal, decentralised deployment. Adding to Ferree's concept of soft repression by recalling Goffman's importance of inclusive and involved conversations to maintain intimate bonds, we can consider the augmented power of soft repression within personal life settings: at the same time as social movements have been increasingly turning towards influencing civil society rather than the state (Ferree, 2004), fighting ridicule and negative stereotyping, and potentially losing friends through discomfiting discussion is a structural challenge to overcome for the activist who seeks to mobilise others at the everyday level.

### **Negotiating silence: Using stealth tactics**

Despite the barriers to broaching the topic of climate change, and perhaps resulting from degrees of soft repression, several participants had found creative ways to launder the subject of its discomfort and reduce the risk of resistance. By using ecologically oriented practices to act as an oblique portal to the topic – often using the body and health – or opportunities to socialise, a conversation seed could be planted. Participants spoke of cooking vegetarian food for guests and explaining its wide range of benefits, exemplifying cycling to work as a route to fitness, or even organising sociable film nights around ecological themes to ‘bring people together and offer opportunities to think about things’. These were referred to as ‘careful stealth tactics’ to engage people, to ‘slowly chip away’, ‘not push it too much’, and instead ‘tell a story to remove the taboo’ of climate change. It spoke to concerns around tensions between wanting to unsettle climate apathy, and the risks of invoking painful emotions of guilt, anxiety, and ultimately, dissent. Activists told me their overarching aim was to mobilise critical thinking around climate change, not make people feel bad and rebel. Other techniques to lighten climate change – what Goffman (1967) would call preventing negative ‘face’ in conversation participants – included the use of humour. Humour was particularly effective in ameliorating the alienating ‘faulty’ interaction (Goffman, 1967) of inviting serious conversation. Marc (male, 50s) told me he teases his friend Bryn ‘in a jokey way’ about his regular meat intake, choosing to ‘demonstrate’ his own vegetarianism to avoid ‘breaking those bridges, those relationships’. This upbeat approach to relational climate activism was nonetheless effortful and ongoing, described as something ‘you’ve got to just keep working away at’. Fran and her partner Leah also used humour with relatives:

“I talk to them about it in a fun way. Whereas before they just thought, oh a bunch of hippies, we tell them what actually happens, and they go, oh right! [chuckles]. Because they’ll see it in the media, and on the news, and the media will twist it and say they were violent. And we’ll say, no they were just sat locked onto barrels! The police got them a cup of tea and had a chat with them! [chuckles]”. (Fran, female, 30s)

Fran’s form of climate talk was to dispel myths around climate direct actions, also serving to undermine negative environmentalist stereotyping. In this way she was managing her identity to increase her family members’ receptiveness to talking about the deeper issues at stake.

We can borrow Lévi-Strauss’s (1966) concept of bricolage, applied to environmentalism by Janet Lorenzen (2012) who described it in terms of creatively uniting different practices, materials or knowledge to get around a problem, to consider these examples of negotiating climate silence. But climate was viewed through the sustainability lens of making tweaks to the ways of doing life, rather

than confronting its more fundamental politics of loss and death. Highlighting a neoliberal logic, this idea resonates with Eva Illouz's (2007) observation that in recent decades intimate relationships have increasingly become the site of politically and economically informed bargaining and exchange. However, this poses questions about social change. Given the urgency of addressing climate change, we might ask whether this individualistic and piecemeal socialisation of climate change will enable the development of a critical perspective on climate politics and governance at pace.

### **Breaking climate silence: Risky killjoy-talk**

Three of the 20 activists I interviewed provided instances where they had transgressed norms of polite conversation through what I call 'killjoy-talk'. By this I mean intentionally adopting the role of Goffman's (1967) faulty interactant to drag down the mood in an interaction, with the aim of disrupting everyday conversations that tend to perpetuate climate avoidance. As I will show in these examples, the participants reflected on the risks of performing their activism in ways which starkly articulated the seriousness of climate change or performed their environmental identities in potentially stereotypical ways. However, as with Ahmed's (2010) feminist killjoy, the risks encountered by the environmentalist killjoy as an individual may be worthwhile to advance the collective politics of a movement.

Charlotte, a medic campaigning in her workplace for sustainable practices, documented in her diary an instance of killjoy-talk with a job-share colleague:

Diary: "Had a meeting with Mike. I insisted sustainability should not be an add-on, not optional. Why is it unusual to be expressing the concern that without our ecosystem we don't survive? Feel uncomfortable saying 'we die' without it, like a hippy/eco warrior in a setting where that doesn't happen much. Risky". (Charlotte, female, 30s)

Here we can see how Charlotte felt a degree of embarrassment for using the stark statement 'we die', fearing conversational alienation in a setting where collaboration rather than confrontation was the norm. Charlotte's reference to negative environmentalist stereotypes illustrates another dimension of perceived risk. However, the strategic imposition of climate life and death politics within the highly-controlled and rational-thinking hospital setting had the potential to be emotional dynamite to break through to the seriousness of climate change. Marc also used the workplace as a setting for his climate activism. He gave an example where he was open with colleagues about

attending a recent Extinction Rebellion protest, proudly explaining to them why getting arrested was 'a good thing'. I probed Marc on the implications of this:

Interviewer: So, was telling them about your arrest a risk for your job?

Marc: Oh God yeah. Every year I have to sign a form saying I don't have a criminal record. So, they could probably sack me, but I haven't been charged, I was released pending investigation. (Marc, male, 50s)

For Marc, admitting a criminalised act in a workplace setting was risky but – as with Charlotte – self-disclosing in an environment where socially fitting in was the norm served as a political act, and a chance to start a conversation. As well as breaking norms of maintaining the professional 'self' in a work setting, Marc's diary entry below showed he would also thrust the serious politics of climate life and death into office small talk:

Diary: "Peter (colleague) asked how the protest went. Derek asked what it was about, and Peter said global warming. I reframed it as about the future of humanity".

This comment demonstrates Marc's boldness to dramatise his perspective despite the risk of conversational alienation. Another participant, Rick, also confronted conversation and emotion norms to advance his justice politics. He recalled a moment some years ago, shortly after his daughter was born, when he used killjoy-talk to run starkly against the celebratory emotion norms of a new baby's birth. He had said to his mother-in-law, 'it would be irresponsible to have any more children because of global warming', explaining:

"It was so obvious to me that that was a thing not to say, like it was a really unacceptable thing to say [. . .] socially, and within my family's culture, I had transgressed [chuckles]".  
(Rick, male, 40s)

Rick was referring here to mother-in-law's puzzled reaction, and to his wife's 'horror' at the uncomfortable moment. I interpreted Rick's chuckle at the end of this statement as a sign he had reflected on the moral paradox of the 'transgression': he had caused his affective relations some emotional pain in expressing his wider social concerns.

Breaking silences head-on occurred when activists took risks with who, how and in what setting they raised the topic of climate change. The risks were of isolation or threats to professional standing. But this risk-taking was not a simple matter of courage; the risks inherent in interactional accountability are often connected to one's gender (Hollander, 2018). Violating the normative expectations of a

situation risks being discredited, and this is riskier for those who are expected to display gendered norms of feminised care and nurturing (Hollander, 2018). Feminists have argued that men are more likely to take physical and emotional risks than women (Lois, 2001) and are more likely to use 'statements to open up topical talk', which arises from their greater chance of being listened to by others (Fishman, 1978, cited in West, 1996, p. 359). Such statements are more likely to confidently reorient the conversational agenda (West, 1996). Risky killjoy-talk in this study was mostly performed within masculinised norms of self-assertion and 'doing power in face-to-face interactions' (West, 1996, p. 359), as well as the more self-oriented motive of being authentic to their 'true' self (Lyng & Matthews, 2007). Marc exploited his managerial position in the workplace, and Charlotte, who holds a high-status job as a medic, enjoyed a degree of authority in her work setting. For these situations, there is a lower risk of ridicule and social sanctions. The other key observation is that killjoy-talk was most often performed with people outside the highest-stakes frame of very close relationships – evidenced by Marc's and Charlotte's encounters with work colleagues.

## **Conclusion**

If richer nations are to respond to the climate crisis in a globally just way, we need to have deeper and more challenging public conversations about it. Silence around the moral responsibilities of climate change does nothing to challenge the incremental top-down technoeconomic 'solutions' currently put forward by government, largely seen by the climate movement as inadequate in the face of devastating environmental conditions for the world's poorest (Nightingale et al., 2020).

This article set out to understand the conditions for social silence around climate justice in everyday life, and the ways in which activists as political agents seek to break through discursive barriers to normalise the topic with friends and family. The article also set out to understand what the implications are for activists' personal relationships. The study's location in the UK cultural context has found that a cultural tendency to sequester mortality structured the discursive resistance to moral issues around climate change. The discomforts of climate's life and death politics were a powerfully normative force within kinship settings where comfort, affection and conviviality were expected. Following Ahmed (2010), a feminist reading of the silenced environmentalist who drags down the mood makes visible the ideology of familial happiness as a mechanism to normatively define what is deemed to be a social 'good' within a particular neoliberal frame. I suggest that this ordering of conversation away from the inconvenient truths of death, oppression and injustice is underpinned by, and helps to reproduce, climate 'new denialism' (Buranyi, 2019; Daub et al., 2021) – that is, the governmental and corporate delay tactics to obstruct transformational but disruptive

change, instead offering technoeconomic 'solutions' which are silent on the justice issues of climate change (Lamb et al., 2020).

Climate change within personal relationships was a nexus of possible conflict and risk. In the face of a cultural negative stereotyping of environmentalists, activists struggled to manage their identities within personal interactions due to the risk of ridicule, isolation, and destabilisation of relationships. This often necessitated a backgrounding of one's politics, or an adoption of humour within interactions to remove the 'sting' of a potentially depressing topic. Group family gatherings were particularly powerful in this regard, within which normative expectations of going along with the positive mood could silence the individual when killjoy-talk could threaten the sense of occasion. The actual or expected ridicule and stereotyping represented a percolation and amplification of 'soft repression' into personal life. This informal and decentralised social control polices normative boundaries of so-called acceptable identities at the interpersonal level and serves to limit or silence the ideas and discussion of a collective political position (Ferree, 2004). Recent reinforcing narratives of negative climate activist stereotypes by powerful public figures in the UK government to limit public acceptance of disruptive protest tactics underscore the ability of soft repression to work as a form of social control. In the case of this study, the effect of soft repression is to water down the urgency and seriousness of climate change within relations of intimacy. Discursive obstruction of climate talk could be circumvented and negotiated with a range of creative face and relationship-saving social practices. These aligned with the ideals of sustainability which attempt to balance different social, environmental, and economic priorities. Breaking silences head-on on the other hand did not entail such diplomacy, and instead mobilised the environmentalist killjoy as a gendered risk-taker to break through norms of convivial conversation. The environmentalist killjoy can be situated within consumption-based notions of 'the good life', designed by capitalist institutions and architecture which socially mandate optimism and faith in the promised happiness of goods and services, while pathologising pessimistic affect (Busk, 2016; McKenzie, 2016). While this context works to stifle dissent and re-entrench goals and practices towards 'life as normal' and 'business as usual', it appears activists have identified chinks in this armour to normalise climate talk with friends and family and hence keep climate change on the table as a political topic for future discussion.

The article adds to knowledge on everyday relational forms of climate justice activism and its links to the broader puzzle of high public concern about the climate but low engagement in action (Whitmarsh & Capstick, 2018). The findings support previous work by Hards (2013) and Hauxwell-Baldwin (2013) on the situation-specific hiding of environmentalist identities, and to social

movement literature on processes of disidentification. This insight into the management of activist identities adds complexity to previous studies of discomforting political talk with friends and family which have suggested self-censoring is an ethical act (e.g., Davies, 2021; Norgaard, 2011). The findings in this article have made visible the false boundary between the public and private realms and highlighted the need to maintain analytical links between the two. Affective relationships are not shut off from the cultural codes and discourses of wider society and are a powerful agent in shaping climate conversations. This implies it is a lot to expect environmentalists to effect change with friends and family. We must be mindful of the multi-level and situated power relations within and beyond personal life which both reproduce and disrupt silences. Moreover, there are likely to be inequalities based on class, race and ethnicity which play a part in conversation norms. This study has helped to understand how conversational norms may be unsettled, but it is not known to what extent these influences effected longer term or broader change in discourses and practices. This was beyond the scope of this study but presents an opportunity for longitudinal research. Further research should also consider a more diverse activist sample, or better still, to focus on raced and classed climate activists to understand the specific contextual and social identity barriers to normalising climate talk.

#### 4.4. Paper 4: Re-thinking children's connection to nature: Parenting an ethic of truth-telling and socio-ecological justice

(Has been first round peer-reviewed with *People and Nature*)

##### **ABSTRACT**

In the context of an intensifying climate and ecological crisis, children's connection to nature, defined as an emotional affinity and self-identity with the natural world, is an increasingly important research and policy area. This paper highlights a research gap on the family context of children's nature connection, and the need to recognise the importance of negative emotions and critical perspectives in conceptualisations of nature connection. The paper analyses the results of in-depth interviews and daily diary recordings with 20 parents who are campaigning to fight climate change. Four main findings emerged: 1) Parents drew on their own experiences of nature and environmental problems; 2) Parents taught their children about problems with the natural world in an "unvarnished" way; 3) Parenting was practiced in ways which aimed to disrupt problematic power hierarchies; and 4) Nature was re-embedded into everyday life through anti-consumerist family practices. The paper discusses parents' representations of nature as a web of ethical relationships rather than a separate entity to be "saved" and argues that an ethic of truth-telling and justice helped children self-identify with nature, develop a critical consciousness, and ultimately gain confidence to resist the unequal systems driving environmental change. The paper bridges disciplinary boundaries of theory and empirical research on nature connection to offer a significant development of the concept, contending that this broader connection to nature offers greater potential for change towards a sustainable future.

##### **INTRODUCTION**

As future custodians of a planet experiencing worsening climatic and ecological conditions, how children think and feel about, and act towards, the natural world is crucial in shaping a sustainable future (Stern et al., 1993; Cheng & Monroe, 2012). In this paper I use the term 'nature' to mean 'non-human nature', at the same time recognising that it is problematic to treat the two as

synonyms because it encourages dualistic thinking about 'nature' versus humans. The term nature will be used to reflect its widespread usage in the literature referred to in this article.

An affinity with nature, commonly referred to as 'connection to nature', involves an expanded cognitive and emotional self-identity to include the natural world (Schultz, 2002; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Otto et al., 2019). This may also include enjoyment of and empathy for non-human others, as well as a sense of responsibility towards them (Cheng & Monroe, 2012). Connection to nature has become a priority area for policymaking in post-industrial nations for adults and children alike (Bragg et al., 2013). Nature-based interventions which promote access to natural spaces seek to simultaneously address other issues, including the promotion of children's development, and physical, emotional and mental wellbeing (Flett et al., 2010). Accordingly, researchers, environmental groups and education practitioners aim to understand the ways in which we can encourage and enable children's connection to nature. Some scholars have advocated spatialised experiences which promote learning through the senses, discovery, and finding beauty and joy within green spaces (Wilson, 1995; Beery et al., 2020). These positive embodied encounters are said to provide children with knowledge and an empathy for plants and animals (Chawla, 2009), and recovery from psychological stress and fatigue (Li & Sullivan, 2016). However, this work has assumed that nature is solely a source of positive affect. As Chawla (2020) has recently argued, worry and fear about climate and ecological change are arguably expressions of nature connection. This idea links to contemporary debates on the need to engage children with difficult emotions about nature if they are to develop a *critical* emotional awareness to cope with, and build constructive hope for, the future (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012; Pihkala, 2020; Chawla, 2020; Ojala, 2022).

But how to support a critical awareness of global environmental change? The significant life experiences literature contends that family values, family conversations and parental eco-friendly behaviours are important factors in children's emotional engagement with the environment (e.g., Wells & Lekies, 2006; Collado et al., 2017, 2019; Cheng & Monroe, 2012; Hahn, 2021), however there is little research on children's informal ecological learning within family life. Moreover, psychological perspectives on connection to nature as a form of self-identification with the natural world underplay the ways in which identity construction and the development of children's subjectivity are embedded within interdependent social relationships (Kallio & Häkli, 2013). We know very little about parents' thoughts and feelings around nature and the environment, and how these shape ecologically oriented parenting practices. The epistemological implication is that by overlooking parenting and parents' conceptualisations of nature, and their attitudes towards the

climate and ecological crises, we impede a holistic understand of the experiences which shape children's critical engagement with nature, as well as parenting practices that enable children's collective action competence to demand change (Blom, 2020).

### **Established perspectives on connection to nature**

The connection to nature agenda has been highly influenced by Richard Louv's (2005) nature deficit thesis which contends that nature, considered an objective domain, is increasingly alienated from children's lives due to urbanisation, fearful parenting and other demands on children's time. This in turn affects children's physical and mental wellbeing and attitudes towards protecting nature (Flett et al., 2010; Gelsthorpe, 2017). Getting children outdoors to play and discover in open countryside, parks, gardens, fields, and forests is said to encourage children's connection to nature (Bragg et al., 2013).

Critics of the nature deficit thesis have suggested it reproduces rationalistic and colonialist thinking on the separateness of humans and nature (Dickinson, 2013; Fletcher, 2017), and have questioned whether objectifying nature and ignoring the cultural roots of its alienation are appropriate in the face of deteriorating global environmental conditions (Dickinson, 2013; Larson et al., 2021). In richer Anglophone nations the cultural term 'nature' has tended to be dissociated from environmental issues (Haluza-Delay, 2013). The dominant Western narratives of an asocial nature are silent on a violent and exploitative history between social groups and between humans and non-humans (Cronon, 1996; Braun & Castree, 1998), as well as how such domination is connected to modern systems of oppression along lines of race, gender, class, age, and species (Plumwood, 1999). The ideological underpinnings of humanity's disconnect from the environment manifest at the psychological level, and can infiltrate to intergroup processes (Feygina, 2013). The social roots of exploitation mean we need to represent nature in alternative ways if children are to deal with environmental crises in adulthood (Bell & Russell, 2000) and challenge simplistic technological solutions to them (Plumwood, 2002). For example, many indigenous societies see nature not as a wild space, but as a web of interdependent social and ethical relationships (Hall, 2011). Within this perspective, such relationships encompass equality, responsibility, care and justice for both human and non-human others (Plumwood, 1999).

A further issue with the nature deficit thesis is that children's wellbeing is seen in narrow and individualised terms of emotional and physical health. When we consider that ecological and

environmental decline will impact children and young people the most, despite them having contributed the least towards it (Davies et al., 2016; Gibbons, 2014; Howarth, 1992; Page, 1999), a less myopic concept of children's wellbeing would include a healthy environment for a just and safe future.

This paper examines and bridges thinking from childhood studies, children's development, environmental education, environmental psychology, sustainability, politics, and sociology of childhood and families in a study of climate activist parents who represent nature to their children not just as a space within which to play and spend time, but also as a web of ethical relationships. For these activist parents, 'connecting' children to nature entailed developing a self-identification with, and critical consciousness of, these relationships to take forward the environmental values they held themselves. The paper therefore develops the concept of children's 'connection to nature' by encompassing orientations and practices towards social and ecological justice. What follows in Section 2 is an overview of previous empirical work on critical consciousness and parent-led activism, including environmentalism. In Section 3 I detail the study's methods, followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings in Section 4, arranged thematically according to parents' own motivations and experiences around nature, and their parenting practices which enable their children to emotionally connect and form a self-identity with different forms of nature. Finally, in Section 5 I conclude with a discussion of the contributions and implications of the research.

### **Previous empirical research**

Educational philosopher Paulo Freire might argue that to resist the injustices of climate and ecological change, children must develop a critical consciousness - a form of political engagement, enacted through dialogue to develop awareness of, and a resistant subjectivity to, systems of oppression and the contradictions of social and political worlds (Freire, 1973). Although most critical consciousness research examines the educational realm, parenting can play an important role in developing children's critical consciousness and civic attitudes - elements important in stable political engagement and political identities in later life (Jennings et al., 2009; Neundorf & Smets, 2016; Hayward, 2020). Much of the in-depth work covering parenting for children's critical consciousness has explored activist parenting in marginalised social groups. One highly influential text is Naples (1998) study of the work of Black and Latina mothers working as community volunteers to fight for racial and social justice in the US, which found blurred boundaries between

family and community life, personal responsibilities and politics (Broad et al., 2008). Many of the children of these mothers went on to identify as activists themselves, crediting their mothers for raising their consciousness and demonstrating how to fight for justice. Similarly, Stephenson-Abetz (2012) explored the ways in which conversations between feminist activist mothers and their daughters fostered a critical gender consciousness from as young as age 5. Conversations often confronted 'painful truths' about the sexism and misogyny daughters would likely encounter, but these conversations empowered daughters to find their own voice and fight for change in adulthood.

While there is research investigating the presence of environmental consciousness, this comprises mostly survey studies which tend to illuminate correlations between environmental awareness, attitudes and behaviour, rather than explore the social context bringing about the awareness, either critical or otherwise (e.g., see Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Gericke et al., 2019; Krause, 1993). The significant life experiences literature offers some insight here, relating to adults' formative pathways into environmentalism. This work has identified negative environmental experiences (such as witnessing pollution or habitat destruction), and parents who sensitise children to social justice issues as important in shaping environmental action (Chawla, 1999; Chawla, 2007; Howell & Allen, 2017). Ceasar (2015) took these lines forward with a study of people resisting negative environmental experiences and fighting for equal access to nature. While not examining parenting specifically, Ceasar highlighted dimensions of power and privilege by investigating how experiencing environmental disasters and being in a marginalised social position act as strong motivating factors for parents to take collective action against the authorities.

In contrast to the disadvantaged activist groups in Ceasar's study, studies of political socialisation in more privileged contexts can be found in studies of ecological or 'green' families, often encompassing what Phoenix and colleagues (2017) might describe as 'responsible privilege': a parental self-identity associated with 'good' and responsible conduct. Payne's (2010) study of green families in suburban Australia identified parents' striving for an intergenerational transfer of ecopolitics and environmental ethics via the 'moral spaces' of liberal parenting and open communication. Payne found that parents were less concerned about how much contact with nature their children had, and more about developing self-confidence in their children to take part in political discussions at home around the family's ecological practices. More recently - perhaps reflecting an increasing salience of climate change in everyday life and the ever more pressing need to address global justice issues - research has begun to examine families who nurture ethical socio-

ecological relationships. A US-based interview study of green parenting by Auriffeille & Fleming (2022) found that parents encouraged children's conscious decision-making about anti-consumerist family practices; their connection to nature, and connection to each other (although the authors did not elaborate on how they defined 'connection' and how it was practiced by families). Martens (2016) study of family rockpooling and human-animal relationships in the UK explored questions of ethical responsibility by uncovering multidimensionalities of caring and carelessness for wildlife within outdoor learning activities, although the wider politics of biodiversity loss was left untouched in this study. Grimwood's (2017) ecofeminist perspective on a family nature connection programme in Canada found parental motivations of community-oriented citizenship for their children, which they felt supported the twin aims of developing collective ideals and children's sense of self-efficacy. Importantly, the mothers had reflected on the hierarchies of mainstream education and problematised conventional ecological learning.

These studies have brought into view the important link between nature, environmental issues and children's ethical relationships with others. However, concerns about justice remain secondary (Jamieson, 2020). As a site of moral, ethical, and political learning, parenting can provide children and young people with the tools to recognise and challenge structures that bring about alienation, domination, and hierarchy (Gaard, 2017). This offers more transformative potential towards global justice than the individualised ecological behaviour that conventional connection to nature seeks to foster. This paper takes a critical perspective of the human-environment nexus to illuminate the meanings and experiences of climate activist parents as pioneers of a more progressive form of connecting to nature.

## **METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS**

The data in this paper are from a larger doctoral study investigating how parenting and personal life intersect with climate and environmental activism. I used a purposive sample of UK-based 20 parents /guardians active in campaigning to mitigate climate change. Recruitment and data collection were carried out between June 2020 and January 2021 at the early stages of the global coronavirus pandemic, a challenging situation which prevented in-person contact and necessitated recruitment online through social media and via the 'snowball' method. The call for participants invited parents or guardians who were worried about climate change and were involved in any kind of collective action to address it. The method included in-depth semi-structured interviews, as well

as a 'snapshot' of daily life via a two-week diary exercise collecting everyday thoughts, feelings and actions relating to the environment. Diary methods are very useful to capture the more mundane moments of daily life which may be difficult to recall in the interview setting (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015b). Sociodemographic details were collected. All but one participants were White and all were highly educated, which although not representing the class and ethnically diverse sample I had aimed for, nonetheless reflected the relative homogeneity of the UK environmental movement more generally (Bell & Bevan, 2021). I recruited 8 fathers and 12 mothers. Interviews lasted 45 – 120 minutes and were carried out by recorded videocall (18) or phone call (2). Questions were structured around themes concerning motivations and experiences of parent activism, views on climate change and other environmental issues, and climate politics. Participants were offered a £25 donation to a charity of their choice as a thank you.

Interview data, diary data, and researcher field notes were coded descriptively and analytically (Gibbs, 2012), organised with the use of NVivo Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Cross-dataset codes were grouped together according to similarity, and were given summary meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). At this stage, a broader revisiting of the literature to include socio-environmental theory enabled me to explore relationships between the codes and generate the higher-level concepts and themes identified in section 4. This project was subject to ethical review by the University of Edinburgh and was approved (ID: 267778) prior to commencement.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Theoretical approach**

The framework of this study employs a critical perspective on the climate and ecological crisis, considering climate change and mass extinctions as linked issues stemming from humanity's destructive and exploitative relationship with the natural world. This viewpoint is shared by the wider climate justice movement, which offers scholars a site for investigating the radical envisioning of a fairer and more sustainable future, and how this might be brought into being through the world-making practices of raising the next generation of earth custodians.

One of the early interview questions invited participants to talk about their own relationship with 'the natural world', and to discuss when they first became aware of climate and ecological issues.

Whilst participants often used the term 'nature', they also used common non-human synonyms such as 'the environment', 'wildlife' and 'animals'. My analysis of connections to nature included these terms, as well their relationships to temporalised, spatial, and social worlds within which participants practiced ecologically oriented parenting. The following themes illustrate parent activists' meanings of nature, as well as the ways in which they engaged their children with nature and environmental issues.

### **The temporalised nature of 'nature'**

Interview questions exploring participants' significant life experiences of the natural world found that motivations for environmental action were temporally structured by personal biography and memory, a future orientation, and a desire to create a positive personal legacy. These in turn shaped why and how participants engaged their own children in different meanings of nature. Most parents fondly recounted an early childhood with access to green spaces and opportunities to encounter wild plants and animals, unaccompanied by their parents. However, participants discussed what they saw as limitations of this autonomous engagement because it did not help them think about the various systems of human activity impacting on the natural world. Learning about environmental problems had come about in their adult lives (either before or after becoming a parent), mostly through environmentalist discourses or non-mainstream media. Wildlife TV documentaries about 'spectacular' nature were lamented for their misleading portrayal that everything is OK, and it was environmental activist messaging which had made connections between disappearing nature, climate change, and the politics of production and consumption. This then attuned participants to notice changes in their local environments, comparing or contrasting with memories of times past, such as blossom now arriving earlier in the spring, a reduced number of garden species, and saplings which had died in recent droughts. This localised demise of nature represented the wider global forces wrought on wildlife, and the resulting feelings of sadness and grief set up an anticipatory imaginary of a disappearing living world, a world of intergenerational injustice in which the world's children and theirs will be faced with an impoverished environment if there is not urgent and radical social, economic, and political change. An understanding that human life depends on a healthy environment created a sense of both emergency and uncertainty, shaping a moral subjectivity in which the weight of responsibility for the future was felt in the present. Parents spoke of feeling profoundly accountable to their children, of wanting to "at least be able to say I tried to make her a better world". But rather than being confined to a parochial materialist notion of the future for their

own children, parents' ethical and moral concern was global in scope, and reflexive in their families' relative geographical and socioeconomic privilege. This quote from one father in is his response to me asking how he imagines the future, and how this makes him feel:

*The future scares the hell out of me; thinking about the conditions of [my son's] life. It's affected all of my thinking and all of our practices. I think we're very much already in it. You turn on the news and you start to see stories that connect to drought, to climate change, stories of floods, and you see stories of inequity and destruction of natural resources [...] and refugees. And I think, I see almost everything around me as now connected into this. I see it as getting worse. And for many of course, it will be the poorest who are hit hardest, who have contributed the least to it. And it's dividing society much more as a result - if we don't get it right, in terms of the response.*  
(Marius, one son aged 4)

This quote sums up the sense of global responsibility parents in this study felt. For them, the 'right' response included raising their children according to their own environmental identity and politics, which encompassed a sense of efficacy in taking personal and collective action (Eden, 1993). In this vein, participants wanted their children to be connected to environmental issues in ways which avoid the nostalgic and romanticised framings of idealised nature that masked the politics of issues they experienced as they were growing up. This included cultural silences around historical systems of domination which had caused a legacy of environmental damage, evident in Ruben's perspective of land-grabbing of the British countryside:

*The thing with the climate is that it just unravels into all sorts of areas of life. Historically, as a nation, you and I had our land taken away from us by an act of Parliament, which was passed by people who just wanted to own more. The act of enclosure was basically stealing the land from people, coming up with a story about how commons are a tragedy, and we must get rid of commons, when actually, common land was well managed right across the country! It was the most common way of managing land! And they had all this wildlife, and you just kind of think - that was all taken away from us!*  
(Ruben, two sons aged 6 and 8)

Ruben's quote illustrates his anti-capitalist critique of the stories everyday people are told to deflect attention from oppressive systems of private ownership and social hierarchy. Several other parents spoke of their knowledge of European colonialism, and the fallacy of so-called natural environments in areas which had been deforested and violently de-populated. This history was a crucial component in structuring their view of the current state of nature: they were critical of the Western human desire to control and dominate nature and felt despair at representations of this, identifying aspects of everyday life such as manicured municipal parks and private garden lawns which ostensibly provide social spaces but, in the process, subjugate the lives of wild animals and insects.

### **Lifting the mask of romanticised nature**

Activist parents felt that part of the problem of public apathy towards ecological decline is a misleading assumption that merely being enthralled with the wonder of nature will lead to a desire to protect it. On the contrary, they felt that to create change there was a dire need for sadness, concern, and anger about disappearing and dying nature. This motivated parenting practices which de-romanticised nature and subverted its role as an entity of escapism. From a child wellbeing perspective, parents felt the need for a truer reflection of 'reality' was compounded by their expectation that the next generation of adults will feel great distress as global ecological conditions further deteriorate. For children experiencing anxiety about conditions today, it was felt that it is parents, not teachers, who can best provide emotional support. This then, necessitated parenting to normalise 'hard truths' early on in their child's life.

One area the parents raised regarding younger children was the context of anthropomorphised and sanitised images of animal life in children's books and on TV, which were, at best, seen as unhelpful and at worst, harmfully misleading. Parents aimed to introduce an accompanying narrative of unvarnished reality of humanity's violence against animals because they felt the emotional shielding of children contributed to the wider cultural problem of implicatory denial (Norgaard, 2006). Ryan explained:

*I think it's important that you don't shield children. My daughter is in a class where their mascot is a badger. And so, my first reaction is, but we've got badger culling! And badgers get run over all the time! And I was saying this to my daughter, in a slightly jokey sense, but I also feel that we shouldn't caricature animals in this way. There's a reality to that situation, and even at the age of 5 I think it's something they should be exposed to. [...] my sense is that part of the problem, why society hasn't shifted in as much as we need to, is because we shield certain groups, and we shield children. And you have to expose people to the reality of the situation in order to effect a change. I feel like they need to know, and by knowing that will actually make them happy and better. By knowing more, it can only be a good thing. Not knowing about something is the problem! (Ryan, two daughters aged 3 and 5)*

In this quote, Ryan was recognising and problematising UK societal constructions of childhood that assume children are always vulnerable and in need of protection (Hill & Tisdall, 1997). His comment about the 'need' to know mirrors child development research suggesting that shielding children from adversities may inhibit development of their self-confidence to deal with them (Cribari-Assali, 2018). In a similar vein, Sophia, whose daughter is of mixed ethnic heritage, had told me she likened it to difficult conversations she would need to have with her daughter about racism in British society. She explained it in terms of 'hard truths':

*You're breaking hard truths to them, but you don't want it to be a big shock, you just want it to be in their conscience that these things are happening. So, I think it's important from this (young) age to start addressing it. I don't want to give her this fabricated vision of the world that's not real. You see all these books with exotic animals, they must think there's loads of terrain out there, and that half the world is covered with these wonderful animals! Or even, I remember George Monbiot's documentary about farm animals, and how they are depicted with all these happy animals, but really, livestock is just taking over the whole planet because of us! (Sophia, one daughter aged 3)*

Sophia's quote illustrates both her critique of media romanticisation of animals which Ryan had touched upon, and her desire to develop her daughter's consciousness of her position in relation to the systemic issues at stake. In this way, gradually exposing children to the unvarnished realities of the contemporary human-nature nexus was a child-centric technique, balancing normalised framing of animals [or nature] with awareness-raising about injustices in their treatment. It was felt that

learning about animal injustice in this way would prevent psychological trauma and emotional avoidance of the issue in later life. But exposing children to sad or worrying information about plants and animals was managed carefully, in particular for younger children. Cassie's quote below demonstrates how she tuned herself in to her children's emotional reactions when raising difficult topics and balanced it with actionable steps to take:

*I'm really careful to try and only explain what I think they can handle. So, we'll say, we don't fly because planes and cars make dirty air. But I've told them that because we can do something about it ourselves. And so, I try and only tell them stuff when I think I can provide a thing we can do about it, because what I don't want them to feel is worried and powerless. With HS2 [...] I think it came up organically, we were reading Greta and the Giants, so that was all about the trees being chopped down and things. And I said, this is what's happening for this trainline (HS2)! And although we love trains, and trains are better than planes, this one is going to be really damaging to the wildlife! And they were just really interested. But then I made sure that that bit of learning was followed by all our sign making and letter writing. I don't know whether I'm getting it right or not, but I think I know instinctively what they can handle. (Cassie, one son aged 3, one daughter aged 6)*

In this quote, it is apparent that Cassie's efforts to encourage her children's purposeful action in the form of letters and protest signs were to counter feelings of helplessness. Cassie's uncertainty around whether she was "getting it right or not" about preventing worry and disempowerment reflects the moral expectations on modern, intensive cultures of middle-class parenting which hold ideals of maximising children's self-understanding and confidence (Faircloth et al., 2013).

Most parents with younger children had taken them along to climate marches at some stage, which was seen as essential in developing a political subjectivity. For teenage children, suggested action after uncomfortable conversations was more direct and specific. Alexander's 13-year-old daughter had expressed to her father her horror about fox hunting and asked what she could do about it. Alexander encouraged her to write to her local MP to demand a hunting ban, which was an action able to combat a sense of powerlessness in the face of troubling knowledge. Similarly, Leah told me how her 13-year-old "gets so upset" when seeing images in the recent TV news of animals being injured or dying in the Australian wildfires. I asked Leah how she deals with his distress; she paraphrased her response to her son that glossing over the issue would impede appeals to self-agency and determination to tackle it:

*I just tell him, I talked to him and say, it is upsetting obviously, I'm not going to sugar-coat it, it is horrible! And I say to him, if you're that passionate about it, this is maybe what you need to be trying to do workwise when you*

*get older - to try and help, to help stop this from happening. (Leah, two sons aged 13 and 14)*

This quote demonstrates Leah's aim of using 'tough love' to affirm rather than placate her teenage son's worry. In doing so she aimed to strengthen his ecological self-identity and connection with the natural world. The observation of this parenting approach supports Chawla's (2020) argument that negative affect is a form of nature connection but builds on it by offering an insight into activist parents' recognition of the importance of this link.

### **Disrupting power hierarchies**

Key to promoting their children's critical consciousness and tools for agency was a desire to parent in a way which disrupts some of the hierarchies of power and domination underpinning social and ecological inequalities. This perspective aligns with thinking about utopian ecological futures by social ecological and feminist philosophers such as Bookchin (1980) Merchant (1992), and Plumwood (2002). Most frequently demonstrating this were family practices that intersected with relationships along lines of generation, gender, and species. Parents aimed to introduce their children to an ecological worldview which opposes the Western separation of 'I' from the 'Other' - including people and animals (Sterling, 2007). Weaving one's politics into such realms of the everyday provided opportunities to model a global citizenship and moral ethics of care and justice. Practices not only drew on personal values but were also inspired by wider environmentalist discourses and parenting sub-cultures.

Several parents practiced Gaian, paganism and deep ecology principles which advocate for a de-objectification of, and heterarchical relationship with, animals, land, and the earth. Several parents said they were also inspired by the ethos of Extinction Rebellion which operates as a non-hierarchical, decentralised movement to encourage and empower individuals to collaborate with one another for change. Dee's diary entry described purposeful activities with her young children to foster emotional and literal connection to other living beings:

*Diary - Monday: The idea is to note down (with the children) one thing a day that we have done that contributes to one or more of these four 'areas': Learning, nature, mindfulness, and kindness. Concern for the environment has to be nurtured alongside concern for others – including those we will never meet. Fighting climate change and other environmental challenges requires collaboration with others.*

*Diary - Thursday: Outside with the children collecting winter leaves and berries. Really important to remind*

*children, daily (!) of the natural world that we are part of, are responsible for, are utterly interdependent with [...], my mission of teaching my children about other living things – that we are all of equal value and interdependent. (Dee, son and daughter aged 3 and 6)*

These diary entries illustrate Dee actively encouraging her children to care about distant others and recognising the need to work collaboratively with others to fight climate change and other environmental challenges. Dee's mindful approach to environmental challenges displayed hallmarks of a radical ecological worldview which sees the problem as not something 'out there', but in 'here' within underlying Western cultural beliefs (Sterling, 2007).

There were other ways in which parents aimed to disrupt power hierarchies underpinning climate and ecological change. In the UK, children are socially and democratically marginalised (Ansell et al., 2016) and their rights to a viable future are seldom recognised in environmental or climate decision-making (Gibbons, 2014). Awareness of this meant parents made efforts to undermine the adult-child hierarchy through 'democratic parenting', a contemporary parenting culture which "entails openness to communication, parental warmth, and respect for autonomy" (Bougher, 2018, p. 285). This in turn encourages child orientations towards respect for the rights of others (Miklikowska, 2011). Parents saw their children as citizens in the present rather than mere adults-in-the-making, as childhood is commonly conceived of in western societies (Qvortrup, 1994). The purpose of this ecological democratic parenting style also served two pragmatic purposes: First, by role modelling rather than directing ecologically oriented actions, parents could encourage their children's curiosity for involvement which was more likely to develop into a self-determined identity of global citizenship. Second, democratic parenting was seen to mitigate against rebellion later in adolescence – an outcome which might undermine self-identification with environmental issues. As Cassie explained, "I hope that the values that they're living by now are values that they'll continue to live by. And for that I try and make sure that things are their choice". To give an example, Helen had raised her 16-year-old daughter to accompany her to wildcraft camps and to eco festivals, but insisted that her daughter's current ecological orientation was her own choice:

*Researcher: From your diary I can see your daughter is very engaged [with nature] as well. Did you deliberately try and encourage this?*

*Helen: No. I've been really clear about that. There's a book or a poem I can't remember what it is, about children not being yours. They'll be what they are, and I've always lived by that. Even with vegetarianism, she was brought up vegetarian, but when she was 11, if she'd have said to me, she wanted to try a chicken wing, I would have said go on then, try a chicken wing! [chuckles]. So, I've been really clear that this is what I believe [...] so yeah, she's chosen that herself. (Helen, one daughter aged 17)*

In this quote Helen points out her aversion to the idea of parents owning children, indicating her appreciation of children's self-agency. Helen told me her now teenage daughter is involved in youth climate activism, an outcome which supports other studies' findings that democratic parenting - in this case, parents' respect of their children's own decision-making - can help to foster a warm parent-child relationship which contributes to individual political development (Cashmore & Goodnow, 1985; Wray-Lake & Flanagan, 2012). The parents' democratic values and principles are internalised by the child through non-deliberative, everyday interactions, which may go on to inform their thinking about their wider social worlds (Bougher, 2018).

Although not a focus of the interview questions, efforts to address the Western cultural tendency to gender childhood arose in interviews with three fathers in the sample. Expressing an ecofeminist orientation which places hegemonic masculinities at the heart of environmental domination and damage (e.g., Connell, 2017; Macgregor, 2017), some of the fathers appeared to reflect on the problems of superiorised masculine norms and folded this ethos into a gender-conscious parenting. For example, Ryan told me how, as a parent and activist, he feels he needs to "unpick" the gender differences of environmentally consequential practices:

*Car ownership for example, it's linked to masculinity, it's a very masculine idea to have a car and drive a car. And there's this sense that you're entitled to it. Fewer women own cars, and it's the same reflection in terms of who drives them as well and the gendered behaviour linked to the climate. There's this reluctance of people to give up their cars, and from what I've seen women are far more willing to jump on a bicycle and change behaviour in that sense [...] maybe it is this idea of how you're perceived publicly, or it's felt a weakness to say that you'll do something differently. And diet as well [...], girls are far more willing to say yeah, one day a week without meat, that's fine! [...] but it's been a very male response to be like 'Grr, I need my meat!!' (Ryan, daughters aged 3 and 5)*

Ryan's unpacking of problematic gender hierarchies in this quote led me to ask him whether this affects how he sees the job of raising daughters. He told me it influenced his and his wife's efforts to defeminise their two young daughters' clothes and toys by "avoiding unicorns and pink stuff", and to raise them "in a slightly more gender balanced way". This suggests an agenda of what Deutsch (2007) might call 'undoing gender'; Ryan and his partner were aiming for their daughters to have less

of a gendered identity, accomplished through erasing outward symbols of difference between boys and girls. This works to devalue gender norms (Deutsch, 2007). Another father who felt he was challenging gender was Marc, who drew connections in our interview between his involved fathering and his desire to disrupt the inequalities of gendered parenting roles. He gave this example of his daughter's early years:

*I played a maternal role as a parent [...] I spent a lot of time with [ daughter]. I was fully involved and enjoying all the feeding and waking up at night and just giving into the fact that as a toddler, she would wake and want to talk in the night. And we would have some brilliant conversations, just sort of singing and being playful, basically [...] I just found it all magical! (Marc, one daughter aged 16)*

This role modelling of gender egalitarian parenting and Ryan's efforts to undo childhood gender were part of the wider climate justice activist goal of bringing about a fairer and more sustainable world. This way of family life offers the opportunity for children's subjective experience of normalised masculinities in other cultural settings to be recognised by them as problematic, and hopefully rejected. However, there is perhaps some way to go in fathers' evaluation of how to fully confront harmful masculinities in that the separate concepts of sex roles and gender were often discussed as if these terms were interchangeable.

### **Resisting consumerism as encouraging a pro-nature politics**

Drawing attention to the embeddedness of human social practices in the natural world (Adams, 2016) and aligning with an ethic that we do not have an automatic right to commodify, use and consume nature (Macnaghten & Urry, 1995; Hall, 2011), parents resisted the pressure they felt to buy and consume excessively for an acceptable standard of capitalist-produced family living, preferring to practice material frugality at home and in leisure time. Acknowledging the role of industrialised human consumption of animals in the climate and ecological crisis (de Bakker & Dagevos, 2012), all but one of the parents interviewed had plant-based diets, and many encouraged their children to follow suit - although in several cases, children had initiated this themselves as they intuitively made the connection between eating meat and harm to animals. Children's toys and clothes were mainly sourced second-hand, and – perhaps somewhat contradicting the democratic parenting model – the family's television exposure was minimised by parents of younger children due to its perceived influence of consumerism-encouraging advertising. Several parents talked of an

ethos of earth custodianship, and of wanting to normalise passing possessions on to others to “teach [children] guardianship rather than ownership”. This quote from Dee illustrates this ethic:

*Not chucking stuff in the bin is the easiest way to explain to a young child why it's important not to be wasteful. Not to buy more than you need. And obviously ocean pollution [...], that if it ends up in the sea, it can hurt wildlife. That seems to be something kids can handle [...] and it's a real opportunity for them to see all of the practical things that you're doing behind the scenes. Like when you're buying second-hand, to really explain it, and buying from small independent companies that have a really great track record on workers' rights. It's just slowly, slowly explaining those things. (Dee, son and daughter aged 3 and 6)*

The above quote from Dee represents the majority of parents in this study in that they wanted to make toy swapping and used clothing ‘normal’ to their children, but crucially it was felt important to explain to children the reasons for this if they were to understand the relationship between their own lives and those of other life and lives.

Parents used opportunities in local spaces to connect children to how consumption impacts wildlife, such as by picking up litter incidentally and explaining the harms of discarded plastics. Often this provided a route into discussing bigger issues, as Charlotte explained:

*We did a lot of litter picking and saying this is plastic and it's bad for baby animals. That kind of stuff. From quite young [...] So we'd talk about that a little bit. And climate change came up quite a bit, I think I'm a bit too brutally honest with them, I think I talk about it a bit too much. (Charlotte, four children aged 3 to 8)*

Charlotte’s quote reiterates the connections parents were making between nature and wider environmental issues, and the desire to tell the truth about these. But perhaps again relating to societal constructions of ‘normal’ childhood as being a time of play and innocence which limits engagement with constructive forms of worry (Ojala, 2016), Charlotte was expressing concerns about where to draw the line with being “brutally honest”.

Less visible to children but still part of parents’ strategy for a pro-nature politics within family living, parents felt it necessary to remove or limit access to technology and other material items. When I asked them whether this gets compromised by the influence of social media or offline realms, several parents referred to tensions and “crunch points” with extended family members, for example if grandparents spent leisure time with grandchildren in shopping malls rather than playing

with them outside. Ryan told me that he hoped that by limiting his children's exposure to TV and electrical devices they would maintain their interest in the natural world, which spoke to parenting fears over the perils of attention-dominating technologies for children's wellbeing (e.g., Louv, 2005). However, in the context of our interview, Ryan's narrative suggested his concerns were a lot to do with his anti-capitalist critique of consumerist influences online and on TV. For teenage children, family conversations around capitalism and consumerism were a practice encouraged by parents to raise awareness of the influence of mainstream media. Helen and her partner have always kept her away from TVs, advertising, and consumerist fashion. Helen told me that in her early teens her daughter was embarrassed in front of friends by her mum's activist identity and style and protested not having a TV in the house. Helen told me with a sense of relief that now her daughter is into late teenage she has "bought into" environmentalism, seeing it as now part of her own identity, and actively seeks conversations with friends about climate and ecological issues.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This article offers significant insights into how parents and other adults might support children's connection to nature in ways which foster a critical consciousness and undermine the interlinked unequal social and socio-ecological relations which have brought about, and perpetuate, environmental decline. The activist parents studied in this paper demonstrated counter-cultural parenting to speak honestly about climate and ecological change to children, equipping them with the critical tools for agency in an unjust world with an uncertain ecological future. This is significant because if we are to change the currently dysfunctional human-nature relationship and simultaneously address the twin concern of enduring social inequalities, we need to envision nature not as a restorative space to be saved, but as a web of interconnected ethical and social relationships, replete with power relations.

The study found that activist parents' own conceptions of the state of nature and environmental loss – albeit from a privileged, global north perspective - shaped their ecological parenting and desire to bring about intergenerational change. Parenting included unvarnished truth-telling but also countering narratives and practices of child empowerment; democratic parenting and parental role modelling sought to deconstruct problematic generational, species and gender-based hierarchies, with the aim of encouraging children to self-identify with an egalitarian perspective and develop an ability to resist systems of inequality. Children were also reconnected to nature through the

everyday practices of anti-consumerism by drawing critical attention to the ways in which nature is embedded in everyday life. Taken together, critical consciousness-raising of children connected them to nature in a plurality of socioecological forms, beyond merely those relating to positive experiences in green spaces. For parents who had teenage children, this awareness had already born fruit in their children's developing ecological self-identity and motivation to change the world through their own actions and activism. This suggests that critical consciousness-raising of nature and environmental issues can support children's wellbeing not only through action-oriented coping with environmental loss, but also through a wider activist goal of creating a collectively brighter future for all children.

The study also found that raising children in these ways was not without tensions and contradictions. Fathers did not specifically discuss the role of their own masculine identities in parenting, and often conflated childhood gendering with the problem of inequitable gender roles. The power of cultural norms was also evident elsewhere; trying to reduce the burden on nature within everyday practices was often a challenge for parents colliding with the prevailing cultural current of electronic media usage. Fighting such outside influences often undermined ideals of democratic parenting because it entailed control of children's exposure. But perhaps this is unavoidable; as Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) have argued, living as an activist under capitalism while trying to build an alternative, hoped-for future in the present is an experimental process which is necessarily contingent and messy. From a sociological perspective, this contradiction is an example of the ways in which the circulations of neoliberal power to generate desire – in this case, the flow of the media through the many spaces of social life, can work their way through to children, despite parents' resistant efforts (Foucault, 1978 in Taylor, 2017).

Further, the ability to think about and build hope for the future requires a reflexive subjectivity and level of material security which reflects a demographic which is more educated and economically comfortable (Neundorf & Smets, 2016). This supports the findings of Grimwood (2017) on intentional nature connection requiring a good level of social and cultural capital and has implications for politicised self-identification with nature beyond environmental activist circles. Parent-child transmission of political values is often contingent on a parenting style which promotes children's autonomy within an emotionally supportive parent-child relationship, itself more often an outcome of relative privilege (Murray & Mulvaney, 2012). A further classed and raced dimension was that all the families in my sample had access to gardens, parks, or other green spaces within which to connect the dots between nature and self with their children. Access to green spaces tends

to be enjoyed by relatively wealthier groups (Haluza-Delay, 2013), which complicates a collective activist quest for environmental justice for all.

The paper contributes to critiques of the nature deficit thesis and other post-political perspectives on nature connection by re-emphasising that nature is a contested concept, illuminating the ways in which advocates of socioecological justice attempt to re-embed social, political, and collective issues into children's experiences of nature, both in terms of what nature means, and in the family practices which create these meanings. Conventional connection to nature interventions (see Barrable & Booth (2020) for a literature overview) align with an atomistic 'behaviour change' model, which do little to confront the structural and justice issues of nature and environment disconnection and damage (Jackson, 2005; Feygina, 2013). Research outputs in the behaviour change field are preferred by incumbent policymakers who might view a politicisation of nature as a potentially disruptive threat wielded by the hands of collective people power (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2022). But connecting children to nature in embedded, holistic, political ecological ways holds more potential if we are to avoid a 'tame repetition of the present' (Freire, 1970, p. 41).

The findings raise some further questions which are beyond the scope of this study, but which invite future research. Firstly, the perspective of children themselves. This paper does not rest of the assumption that children are passive recipients of parents' values and teachings; there is much research on the upwards intergenerational transmission of environmental values and knowledge. Further research could build on this to explore with children whether and how their own radical self-identities with, and constructions of, nature and environmental problems are conveyed to their parents. Second, how do children of families experiencing oppressions and social disadvantage along lines of ability and sexuality, as well as race and class, identify with alternative representations of nature? These research avenues would further support understanding of the converging hierarchies that shape everyday experiences and motivations in engagement with nature.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### 5.1. Revisiting the research questions

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise the key findings of the thesis found in the four research papers and to use these insights to build on and develop a theoretical account of collective parental action on the climate and ecological crisis.

To remind the reader, the key aim guiding the research was:

***How do parenting and parenthood interplay with activism for climate and ecological change?***

The four interrelated research questions were drawn from this objective as follows

1. How has engagement with environmental issues occurred within family and personal life?
2. How is action on climate and ecological change practiced within family and personal life?
3. How does being a mother or father play a part in these practices?
4. What have been the relational challenges in tackling climate and ecological change?

### 5.2. Summary of the findings of the four papers

The following briefly summarises the key findings of each journal article as they relate to the above research questions. To avoid repetition, I refer the reader to the articles in the Findings chapter for specific contributions that each article has made to the literature.

***Paper 1 - 'When global problems come home: Engagement with climate change within the intersecting affective spaces of parenting and activism'***

Answering RQs 1, 3 and 4, this paper identified a strong theme that many of the participants were motivated to act collectively on the climate crisis through a constellation of biographical and identity-related emotions. Parenthood was a primary driver in connecting past, present, and future: memories of better ecological conditions, political awareness, and normative caretaking responsibilities for children were key in interpreting and morally framing an uncertain and risky future. The article described how environmental-related emotions needed to be carefully managed to be a 'good' mother, father or relative, finding this could sometimes dampen climate action in

domestic spaces. The interactions of personal relationships were sources of both solidarity and conflict, shaping greater or lesser involvement in climate action beyond the home.

***Paper 2 - (Re)configuring moral boundaries of intergenerational justice: the UK parent-led climate movement***

Answering RQs 3 and 4, and to some extent RQ 2, the paper found that cultural scripts and discourses about children and parenthood were inscribed in the narratives and rhetoric of parent-led climate activism. Connection and politicisation of micro- and macro-level issues were a new way to frame intergenerational climate inequalities, but narratives around morally responsible reproduction and child-rearing constructed exclusionary boundaries along the lines of parental status, generational order, and children's developmental stage. Participants described their organised activism and parenting as interconnected sets of practices, highlighting the ways in which the values of each informed one another.

***Paper 3 - Breaking Climate Justice 'silence' in everyday life: The environmentalist killjoy, negotiation, and relationship risk***

In response to RQs 2 and 4, this article found that the conversations of the participants with their friends and family were crucial to promoting climate justice politics, but the resistance they encountered in such interactions, based on preserving privilege, was fraught with power relations and conflict and posed risks to the stability of these personal relationships. Participants had used various discursive and practical strategies to work around this, with the most radical silence breaking being patterned by gendered performances. The paper drew connections with broader public discourse on environmentalist identities and the role that this 'soft repression' plays in obstructing moral engagement with climate change.

***Paper 4 – Re-thinking children's connection to nature: Parenting an ethic of truth-telling and socio-ecological justice***

Answering RQs 1, 2, 3 and 4, this article found that a sense of having had innocent experiences of the natural world in childhood shaped participants' critical engagement with environmental issues in adulthood, and this was a strong motivator for collective political action on these issues. The understanding of environmental issues of the participants also shaped their child-rearing practices; children were socialised in nature in ways that promoted an awareness of historical and current injustices, with the aim of imparting political agency to children. Participants felt that parents, rather

than formal educators, were a key source of telling an unvarnished 'truth' about nature and unjust human systems. The article also discussed the tensions and contradictions of radical eco-parenting, centred on gender, class privilege, and the context of consumerism's influence on children.

In these four papers I have illustrated the extent to which people and the planet mattered deeply to the participants and the practical and political steps they felt were important to take in their daily lives to protect who and what they cared about. The relational sociological lens used throughout has uncovered many examples of how these ways of ethical living toward a collective politics are complex and often features tensions and challenges.

In synthesising the four papers, the picture that emerges in these concerns, motivations, actions, and tensions is one of macro-micro level entanglements of power and permeable boundaries between personal and public spheres: parenting as a political project enfolds the emotional dimensions and conduct of family life and connects these with global environmental issues. Climate politics and parenting inform one another leading to radical changes in ways of living and relating across generations within their own families. This supports the study by McComiskey (2001) on peace activist parenting which found that the integration of emotionality, politicised family life, and collective action within and beyond the home were the foundations of long-term engagement and habitual practice in the movement. McComiskey argued that the interplay of social activism and parenting, operating on a public-private realm continuum, led participants to live their values in all aspects of daily life, creating routinised activities that were ongoing and reflexive. My findings have built upon this illumination by identifying that political awareness in thinking about a sustainable future entails not just transitions in routinised family consumption practices, but crucially a shift in the identities and moral meaning-making around these practices. This makes family-activist intersections and practices an important site in the study of social change. I term these ways of living and relating 'radical eco-parenting': the radical care practices that occupy a 'space in between' macro and micro worlds. This space is generative and holistically productive for sustainability, yet it is not without its challenges. I will now elaborate further by addressing the relational possibilities and problems of this space by putting to use theories of social practice, emotions, and relational feminist care ethics.

### 5.3. Developing a social practice approach by incorporating affective life

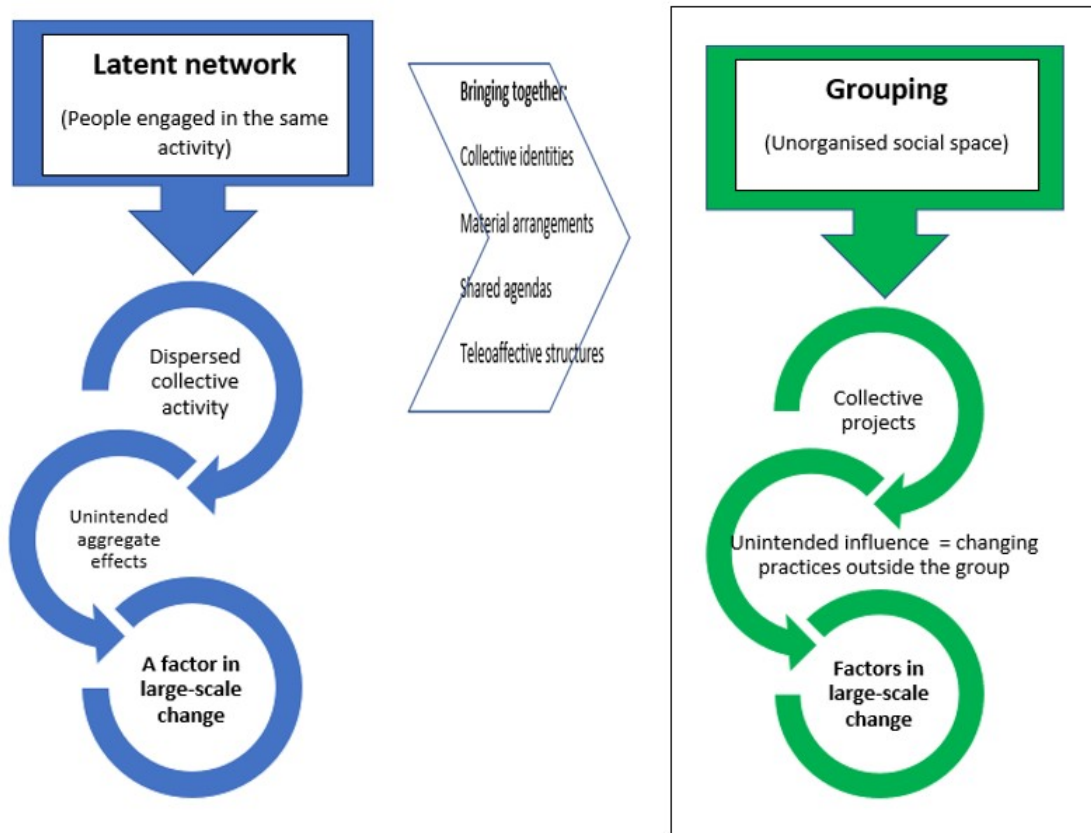
In the literature review, I discussed the contributions of social practice theory for understanding sustainable family living. I presented my position that emotions are a social, embodied meaning-making and practical engagement with the world (Scheer, 2012), and suggested that a conventional social practice approach does not adequately account for emotional life and the generative potential of affective relationships. In the synthesis of the findings in this 'Discussion' chapter, I have presented my idea of the relational 'space in between' of radical eco-parenting, which connects micro- and macro-level social relations within and through affective relationships. On this basis, a practice theoretical ontology that lends affective, purposive collective activity a greater degree of agency in processes of change may help us think through the forces that carry family sustainability practices.

Welch and Yates (2018) focused on the ways in which people in various types of collective activity think together about their practices to theoretically and conceptually develop Schatzki's notion of agency as an effect of practices. The authors contended that their developed theory of practice accounts for routine and rules-based explanations of human activities, as well as purposive action, collective agency, and social struggles. This development had been built upon Yates (2015) earlier study of autonomous political spaces in Barcelona, in which members of a social movement circulated, finding that "what people do and why in the everyday is important to understand how politics and ideas inhere in the activities – tactical or everyday - carried out by movements" (p.243).

The authors began by rethinking Schatzki's concepts of 'general understandings' and 'teleoaffective structures' of practices. General understandings are one component of a practice 'that are common to many practices and condition the manner in which practices are carried out, as well as being expressed in their performance' (Schatzki, 2002, p.86). Welch and Yates take this further to suggest that these can be both discursive and nondiscursive, prereflexive, tacit, or affective, and can relate to political and cultural identities, or even concepts, such as sustainability. They argued that general understandings can include goals and beliefs that shape the way multiple practices are carried out; a general understanding of an issue helps organise the sense of purpose and emotional engagement in individual cultural and material practices, which are then integrated with other practices through group processes of identity formation, values, and organising concepts (Welch & Yates, 2018). Teleoaffective structures, the main axis of activity, link the doings and sayings of practices, ordering them through normativised emotions and affects (Reckwitz, 2002; Welch & Yates, 2018). Welch and

Yates used these developed concepts to argue for the importance of three modes of collective activity in sustainable transitions: bureaucratic organisations; groupings; and latent networks.

Most relevant to this study of the parent climate movement are the latter two. Welch and Yates (2018) described dispersed collective activity as a 'socially, spatially, and temporally patterned character of practices and arrangements that give rise to aggregate effects' arising from a latent network of people engaged in the same activities (p.298). The authors argue that this tends to be the non-purposive activity of everyday life that has consequences for sustainability, for example, 'peak loads' of energy usage. For Welch and Yates, non-purposive activity has no group motive, tending instead have its own meanings and purposes. The authors give examples of 'getting to work, making a living, feeding a family' (p.298). Welch and Yates suggest these aggregate effects are consequential for sustainability but are unintended consequences that are rarely given much thought on the part of practitioners. A more purposive type of collective action arises when shared understandings and agendas, identities, material arrangements, and teleeffective structures come together to form 'groupings'. The diagram (**Figure 1**) below is my visual representation of these processes to allow me to explain how the findings from my study challenge particular elements of Welch and Yates' theorisation.

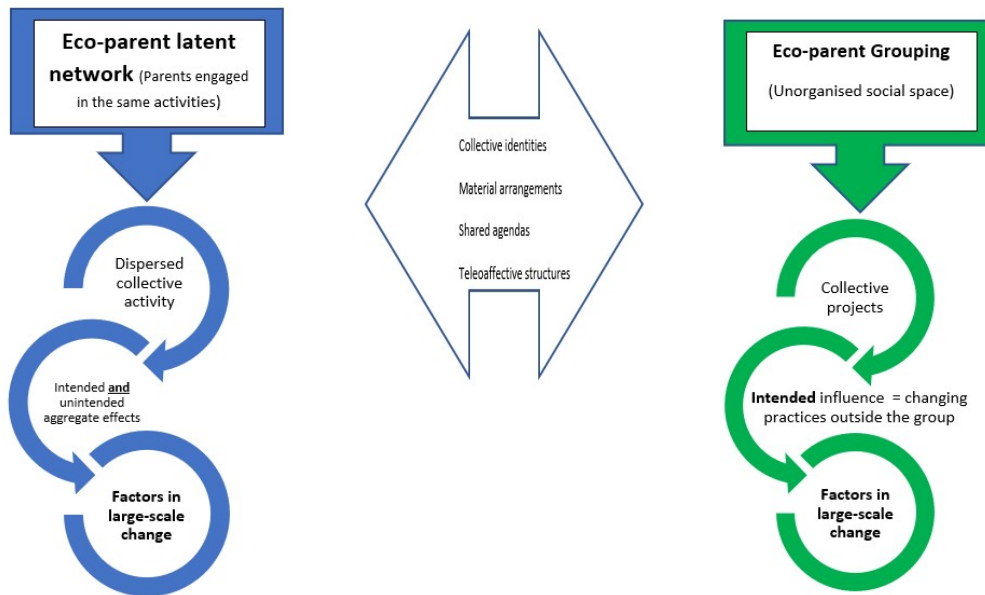


**Figure 1: Schematic interpretation of dispersed collective activity (arising from a 'latent network') and its formation into a grouping (content adapted from Welch & Yates, 2018)**

In contrast to Welch and Yates, my findings have shown that the everyday, dispersed activities of the 'latent network' are *not* 'non-purposive'. I have shown that the purposes of those engaged in everyday activities are relationally purposive, for example, providing the best care possible for children and other relatives. This care work involves consumption which may or may not be sustainable, because it is the interests of one's affective relationships that most often take priority.

Eco-parenting, as described in my study, is the alignment of relational purposes with sustainability goals. The activities of eco-parenting, for example, cooking vegetarian family meals to reduce ecological impacts, avoiding flying, and cycling instead of owning a car, and raising children to be critically engaged with environmental problems, are very much purposive and oriented toward the protection of children's future through the *intended* aggregate effects of sustainable consumption. These activities do not need to be performed as part of a grouping (the next stage in collective activity as theorised by Welch and Yates) to be consequential for the collective project of

sustainability. A teleoffective regime that is aligned by a general understanding of sustainable living means that other dispersed activities can also be shaped purposively, for example the politicised, environment-oriented conversations with friends and extended family members. The understandings, identities, and teleoffective regimes together augment the aggregate outcomes of eco-parenting dispersed activities and reaffirm activist parents' commitment to the collective projects of the eco-parent grouping. In other words, eco-parents understand through a collective politics that they are making a difference to sustainability, and this motivates them to continue in these activities. Therefore, my study has shown that the elements that help to form a grouping (the middle arrow in the above diagram) are not part of a uni-directional process as depicted in **Figure 1** above. Rather, this is a bi-directional process in dialogue with the 'latent network' phase; the common 'recognition' of threats and opportunities that Welch and Yates discussed – in my study, the threat of climate change and the opportunities to collectively act on it in family life, can transform everyday dispersed activities into purposive moments. Below in **Figure 2** is my updated schematic to depict this bi-directional process.



**Figure 2: My revised version of the collective processes of eco-parenting**

In this diagram I also show my development of Welch and Yates' unintended aggregate effects, located in the middle crescents. These effects are always a result of purposive activity, whether

oriented toward care for others or care for the environment, or both. These collective activities and their aggregate environmental effects are agentic in that they have consequences for large-scale change. This is one example of how eco-parenting occupies a 'space in between' connecting micro- and macro-levels of social relations.

Imagining and trying to shape a better future plays a crucial role in both social movements and contemporary minority parenting cultures. In more recent work on agency in practices, the concept of teleoaffectivity once again takes the stage in emotionally engaging with the prospect of an environmentally endangered world. Welch, Mandich, and Keller (2020) have argued that a reflexive future-building challenge the tendency of practice approaches to decentre human reflexivity, evaluation, and critical perspectives. These scholars have brought together theory on social futures with their conceptual development of teleoaffectivity, that is, the emotional regimes of engagement with practices. The authors argued that 'the future' should not be seen as a given outcome of present structures, but as a reflexively and culturally produced projectivity manifested in particular practices and suggested that this future orientation in practices involves a 'complex entwining of emotional commitment and motivational orientation toward goals' (p.449). They contend that this is not well explained by Schatzki's non-reflexive teleoaffectivity. The findings of my study support the development of future-oriented practices by these authors: that general understandings of a different practice (given the example of political activism) can be 'transposed' into other everyday practices (given the example of communal forms of provisioning) to produce new future-oriented social norms (Welch et al., 2020).

In this thesis, I have shown how an ecological teleoaffectivity can operate to link the discourses and activities of sustainable practices: normative parental scripts derived from intensive parenting cultures (for example, responsibilities to safeguard children's future and provide them with emotional and material resources) are integrated into a grouping of critical environmentalists who recognise the politics of the environment and the interdependency of human life with healthy ecosystems. The emotional regime this constructs, what Lupton (2013) might conceive of as culturally-derived 'emotion-risk assemblage', along with a critical awareness of the socio-political systems driving ecological decline, leads to parent activists striving for and committing to a more just and sustainable future through ecological and political practices; this 'heterogeneous configuration of ideational and material, human, and non-human elements' (p.634) fits with a social practice ontology to articulate the complexity of 'general understandings' first theorised by Schatzki (2001).

In its attention to the agency of collectivised affective practice, this thesis has provided empirical material for a rethink of how emotions support a social movement. Whereas social movement theory has presented the importance of intense emotions of moral indignation and group solidarity in igniting and sustaining a movement (Jasper, 2011), the findings in paper 1 demonstrate that movement participation can be sustained with more mundane, practice-based emotions of an ecological teleoaffectivity: the general understandings combining 'good' parenting with an ecopolitical ethos sustain engagement in the routineness of everyday green practices and activist work which help sustain the climate justice movement. This finding helps to elevate the significance of studying everyday submerged forms of activism to help understand how the politics and emotions of a social movement endure.

The work of Welch and Yates, and Welch et al. has offered useful thinking on the role of collective feeling and action in how practices change, but I suggest that their ontological premise of Schatzki's (2002) 'arrangements' in a practice – 'a nexus of entities, including people' (Welch & Yates, 2018, p. 290), is a somewhat disembodied conceptualisation of people and their daily lives. A feminist contribution that promotes the importance of human relationships in 'arrangements' is warranted to develop a relational theory of sustainable practices more fully. As we have established, practices are anchored by the human bodies that carry them (Reckwitz, 2017), and we must be mindful that these bodies are people who are joined with others through affective relationship bonds. Relationships are consequential for practices because social relations are embodied, socio-material and productive (Gherardi, 2017), and are always connected to macro level systems and dynamics. As I have demonstrated in this study, relationships can order the way practices are emotionally engaged with and performed, which a practice ontology would identify as a teleology, including the components of 'motivational knowledge, bodily and mental activities, objects, 'background understanding' and emotion' (Welch & Yates, 2018, p. 293). However, the intimate dimensions of everyday life are not considered in theories of future orientations and purposive action found in Yates (2015), Welch and Yates (2018) and Welch et al (2020). Perhaps owing to the ontological tendency of social practice theory to dismiss the subjective and the personal, the situated and relational interactions within personal life which shape human agency in the carrying of a practice are therefore obscured. Schatzki's theoretical claim about social practice that 'emotions are a medium through which people and practices connect' (Schatzki, 2017, p.33), lamentably leaves out the affective relationships through which emotions arise and practices are carried. However, he notes (but does not fully grasp) the role of personal biography in his statement that there appears to

be an 'organic component' (p. 42) to the phenomenon of strong emotions and moods that do not track practices or external world events. I suggest that the 'organic component' he refers to is intimate and affective relationships, within which responsibilities and care relationships play a crucial role.

Slaby's (2019) concept of 'affective arrangements' is useful here, because in his theoretical development of how emotions unfold within relational settings, he accounts for the modulation of emotions through the recurring social practices that make up daily life. Slaby argued that 'relationality, dynamics, and performativity' (p.3) are crucial elements in affectivity but affect and emotions can be changed through encounters with the materiality of socio-spatial set ups; he gives the example of a workplace office setting in which teamwork structures loyalty and affection between coworkers. Slaby's ontology follows post-humanist perspectives on emotions (e.g., Lupton, 2013; Seyfert, 2012) in which emotions are the result of encounters and relationships between bodies that can be humans, animals, or objects, as well as discourses and materialities. Following, but further developing this complexifying of a socio-emotional setting, my study demonstrates the emotional dynamism of everyday affective life is at once cyclical in its routine family practices, but also responsive to the risks posed by climate change in that participants reflect on ways to make family consumption practices more sustainable. In this way, the purposive aspect of dispersed collective activity that I discussed earlier is made visible: the teleoaffective linkages between routine materiality and the global environment are apparent in the political actions and sustainability activism that these connections engender.

However, it is notable that, while a post-humanist relationality better accounts for the role of environmental factors in the affective arrangements of day-to-day life, a blind spot on power in social relations renders Slaby's (2019) theorisation of relationality a little thin. The loyalty in the office workers he described appears to be free of the social hierarchy that tends to reign in such contexts. Family and personal relationships also harbour power hierarchies, although without the same formality of structure. In Paper 3 of the Findings, I demonstrated how, despite activists holding strong political convictions about sustainable living, the emotional management of protecting affective and personal bonds reflects an imbalance of power and could, in some situations, lead to a deprioritising of sustainability principles and practices. Social ties involve interdependency of social resources (for example, material and financial, or emotional), and hence a balance of power (Crossley, 2016). As shown in Paper 3, the threat to the stability of an interdependent relationship –

whether it is between friends, colleagues, or relatives - can motivate a person to accede to the interests of the other, whether those interests are perceived or real (Crossley, 2016). Returning to Welch and Yates' account of social practices, while their thinking helps us identify the 'power to' in practices in terms of collectivised agency, their work has done less well in accounting for the 'power over' (Hearn, 2017) aspects of social relations that shape or constrain agency. This demonstrates a paradox of personal relationships and warrants a deeper analysis; whichever practice is being carried, relationships can provide the energy and direction for action in some areas of daily life and emotional constraints in others (Jamieson, 1998; Jamieson, 2016).

The omission of gender in teleoaffective arrangements in a practice once again highlights a tendency for a practice theory ontology to overlook power hierarchies (although, more feminist-oriented studies are beginning to explore the gendering of *material* sustainability labour within the home; see Murphy & Parry, 2021 for an overview). Parents, as practitioners of many intersecting practices, often let go of their own needs in order to give their attentive love to their children, which is performed more often by mothers than fathers (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Hochschild, 1979; Molander & Hartmann, 2018). This points us back to Schatzki's concept of teleoaffective structures and suggests that gender identities can recursively order emotions in gendered parenting practices. Phoenix and colleagues (2017), and Murphy & Parry (2021) have noted in their exploration of family everyday environmentalism that gendered and generational responsibilities and care practices can produce tensions and contradictions where environmental and family practices meet, which are regressive for either sustainability or gender justice. As discussed in the section of the Literature Review chapter on intensive parenting culture, the construction of mothering practices by performances and interactions with other mothers may interact with institutional discourses to impose the 'universal surrender' of practice carriers that leads to labour-intensive and emotion-intensive contemporary parenting culture (Molander & Hartmann, 2018, p. 375), suggesting, as discussed earlier, that mothering emotions can interact with sustainable consumption at home. As discussed in Paper 1, Participant Dee reported an environmentalist parenting culture in which mother participants were often made to feel guilty by mothers they knew if they did not feel intense fear at the prospect of a climate-changed future for their children. This 'feeling rule' (Hochschild, 1979) made Dee feel shame and a wish to inflate her concern by reading more about climate disasters. Also discussed in Paper 1 was the finding that one mother participant, Cassie, often had to side-line her climate campaigning to prioritise her children because she felt 'fully responsible' for managing their emotions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, neither Dee nor Cassie, nor any of the other mothers in the study problematised the gendered nature of intensive parenting cultures and ideologies (even when I offered conversation starters on this topic), echoing work on parental narratives finding a conflict between child-centric intensive parenting and discourses of progressive, gender-equal divisions of care in middle class couples (Faircloth, 2021). This 'general understanding' of emotionally engaged eco-parenting illuminates one of the multiple points of connection between macrosocial structures – in this case, gender relations - and the everyday identities and practices of family life. However, a gendered mothering subjectivity was seemingly entangled with, and shrouded by, environmentalist narratives that appeal to panic and alarm, and presents a mothering blind spot in otherwise progressive, radical eco-parenting for social change. This may impede shifts toward gender justice within ecological family practices.

Relationship practices with close friends, neighbours, and colleagues also contain unequal power that can affect the function of a practice that carries the goals and ends of activists. What was striking in my study was the difficulty the participants encountered within their friendship and family circles in negotiating their environmental values and politics. In these contexts, power could manifest itself as part of a group norm of 'going along with' the sense of occasion. As identified in Paper 3, when the sense of occasion enables a resistance to change, it acts as a form of 'soft repression' (Ferree, 2004). The gendered, aged, and culturally defined power in these interactions intersects with group norms, which is consistent with previous research finding that everyday activism encounters can result in interactional conflict due to a perceived threat to the status quo, such as antifeminist backlash (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2022), ableism (Morrison et al., 2022), and hegemonic heteronormativity (Wilkinson, 2009). These relational conflicts and exclusions must be carefully managed by activists in the maintenance of their affective bonds (Scheff, 2006), which may impact the emotional sustainability of activism and trouble the 'general understanding' and teleoaffective structures of collectivised actors striving for sociocultural change. My findings in Paper 3 on climate silence greatly undermine theories of personal relationships in modern societies as increasingly defined by mutual disclosure and understanding and fostering trust and freedom from the strictures of gendered and generational hierarchies (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Thinking through a practice theory lens, a teleoaffective regime associated with, for example, a meal in a restaurant or a group camping trip, was a powerful ordering effect on these practices, and this ordering was particularly influenced by the power relations of gender and generation. The result was a diminishing of the teleoaffective regime of sustainability eco-parent

activism, and, in turn, some of the situated activities this teleoaffective regime was linked to. This finding also undermines Goffman's (1963) contention that one's 'backstage' identity, entailing a relaxation of tact and discretion, can be adopted when with friends and family. Conflicting regimes of emotional engagement required prioritising relationship bonds. My findings support arguments by scholars on the lived reality of unease in relationships (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998), and that the binds of kinship, friendship, and relational obligation are far from being 'transformed' in modern societies (Jamieson, 1999).

That said, power hierarchies and the affective subjectivities they produce, such as the self-confidence associated with being economically secure, white, and middle class (Ford & Norgaard, 2020) can be leveraged to form a collective political consciousness (Scheff, 2006) to challenge higher level power structures and, therefore, forge new practices, such as ways of relating to others. My study found that the participants were from highly educated middle-class backgrounds with a good amount of social and cultural capital. Those in a middle-class position are privileged to be able to think about the future; they are less likely to have to focus their emotional resources on economic survival in the present. They are also more likely to carry over their values of self-direction and agency from their jobs into non-occupational realms (Baker & Barg, 2019). My study revealed that the social capital of the participants allowed them to 'design' their own activism by leveraging their leadership skills and professional connections in collective campaigning projects. In the context of ecological parenting, values of a middle-class parent are more likely to be post-materialist (Baker & Barg, 2019), enabling anti-consumerism to infuse daily practices more readily. This supports other work finding the politicising of care towards non-kin others by anti-austerity everyday activists found in a study by Craddock (2020b), which she argued was resistance to the individualising forces of neoliberal capitalism. The evidence here of the productive, generative, but often challenging social landscape of everyday activism provides a compelling rationale for exploring relationships and their social practices as a site of reimagined futures.

#### 5.4. An expansive ethic of care

As I have demonstrated, a theory of sustainable transitions that combines theories of social practice with social movements is an effective way to connect micro- and macro-worlds, but I suggest that this needs a stronger relational lens on social practices and a feminist approach to better theorise the problems and possibilities of new ways to live and relate within personal life. The practice

approach in this chapter has analysed eco-parenting practices as a diverse set of purposive, eco-political activities that are connected by ecological discourses, understandings, and their related emotions, and crucially, situated relationships. Social practice theory can be brought together with a relational feminist approach to better account for the crucial role that affective care relations play in agency and transitions to sustainable practices. In this section, I will draw on feminist politics of care to explore the material and cultural practices in which eco-parenting, as a care practice, is carried out.

The picture in the four research papers is that through their purposive, dispersed collective activities, eco-activists were enacting of an ethic of care which expanded the boundaries of global north parenting that typically tends to operate separately from collective civic life. This resonates with the work of Fisher and Tronto (1990) and Joan Tronto (1993) and was evident in two principal ways. First, eco-parenting included a felt responsibility to care for, rather than just caring about distant others. This resonates with the wider climate movement, of which some groups, such as Extinction Rebellion, are increasingly invoking ideologies of care for others, regeneration, and relating to fully confront the harms of, but also offer solutions to, the climate crisis (Harms, 2022; Westwell & Bunting, 2020). The care outlined in the findings aligns with values of 'caring-attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, and meeting others' needs' (Tronto, 1993, p.3), and importantly, this went beyond family responsibilities to include people and beings who were distant and unknown: global humanity, future generations, and animals and plants. The participants recognised these diverse others as vulnerable and in need of care. The care practices enacted were collective in that they depended on building relationships within and beyond parent activist circles and took parenting into social spaces beyond the home.

The second form of expanded parenting was seen in the efforts of the participants to politicise care. Eco-parenting sought to publicly extend and broaden the moral gaze of sustainability and climate action beyond the scope of the sustainable consumption, a realm therefore traditionally excluded from public conversations: the campaigning activities in particular were trying to encourage others to think politically about responsibilities towards the vulnerable, and to join the movement in demanding care for those impacted by climate and ecological degradation. In this way, they sought to foreground the ideal as well as the practice of caring (Held, 2006). The message to civic society was that collective action on the climate and ecological crisis is needed to bring about justice for all children and all beings who do not have the power to protect their own future. The politicisation of care was also found in child-rearing ideals and practices that nurture an ecological, political, and

justice consciousness in their children, with the aim of building an intergenerational ethic of care for the world and a political agency to carry forward into adulthood. In this sense, raising ecologically sensitive children was a way to politicise childhood. Although Tronto may have considered eco-parenting as a form of labour, and perhaps then a hallmark of intensive parenting cultures discussed earlier, more recently Held (2006) has argued that nurturing children in the home is more than about parochial care work and offers ways of reimagining pro-social relations, arguing that 'care has the capacity to shape new persons with ever more advanced understandings of culture and society and morality and ever more advanced abilities to live well and cooperatively with others' p.32. This is crucial for a just and sustainable future because, as Lynch and colleagues (2007) have noted, learning how to 'do' global caring, loving, and solidarity is not on the formal education agenda. The enthusiasm of the fathers found in this study to take on equal responsibility to nurture children's ecocritical consciousness through child-rearing practices demonstrates the potential of a gender lens to uncover sites of progressive social change. As Murphy & Parry (2021) have discussed, social action that re-entangles the politics of care and work may offer insights into how shared sustainability practices within personal relationships can simultaneously advance gender and ecological justice.

I mentioned earlier that care was politicised 'to some extent' because it was not without its tensions and blind spots. As Tronto (1993) has noted, care is devalued by society, but its gendered nature can also go unnoticed by women themselves. In my study, although male participants expressed a gender consciousness in their explicit efforts to degender child-rearing practices, the mothers in the study rarely included themselves in their moral and ethical meaning-making around eco-parenting and campaigning. This meant that politicisation of care work quarantined the social identity of motherhood, and the chance to advance a progressive gender politics was missed. Other gender issues were found in the balance of relationship-building work and higher-profile forms of activism. In addition to gendered emotions around eco-parenting, mothers were more likely to carry out relational forms of campaigning and activism, and fathers were more likely to prefer confrontational direct actions. This tendency for women more than men to engage in relational activism is not a new finding, but it has rarely been problematised in the literature. The gendering of quiet, relational forms of activism is heavily based on a care perspective that 'pays more attention to people's needs to how actual relations between people can be maintained or repaired, and values narrative and sensitivity to context in arriving at moral judgments' (Held, 2006, p. 28). This complexified activism with friends and family because it risked the stability of personal relationships more than public-

interfacing activism. The fact that few of the study participants in the study reflected on or disagreed with these gendered patterns of activism highlights how care ideals are more readily adopted by women than men, even within political and everyday actions that incorporate notions of ecological masculinity (Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Aavik, 2021). It has implications for gender justice, particularly in light of women's increased exposure to harsh judgment when measured against expected care standards, and a greater risk than men to social sanctions (Hollander, 2018). The gender issues surfaced again in the stories of fathers raising their children in gender-disrupting ways. Although their accounts demonstrated a recognition of hegemonic masculinities in environmental and social injustices, the father participants appeared not to grasp the difference between gender as an interactional performance and structurally inequitable gender roles. All in all, there is evidently some way to go in a fully gender-just eco-parenting.

The study has also shed light on age-based and generational issues within the conduct of family life, which had implications for confronting unsustainability. Previous studies of generational power and domestic environmentalism have tended not to look at adult-child relationships. My findings in Papers 2 and 3 described how the care and emotional protection of the participants' own parents and other adult elders were frequently prioritised over care for the future of children and the planet. Although this resonates somewhat with previous studies highlighting the relationality and situatedness of family sustainability practices (Henwood et al., 2016; Phoenix et al., 2017), it adds new knowledge on the ways in which generational order structures emotional engagement and interactions in activism and sustainability practices. We might ask how, if responsibilities for building a just and sustainable future are to be defined more broadly, how a collective politics might more readily engage with *all* members of society who enjoy power and privilege.

A final point in critically engaging with eco-parenting as an ethic of care is that in this study, these practices of care were a domain of privilege as well as a site of effortful work. Tronto (1993) notes that caring well involves resources such as time, skills, and material goods. It is significant that the participants in this study were (all but one) white and of educated middle-class backgrounds. Their secure income, well-established social networks, and knowledge capital equipped them with raced and classed privilege and power to politicise care, love, and solidarity with distant others in their eco-parenting practices and distanced them from the concern and survival practices that arise from an economically or socially disadvantaged background and that necessitate the bracketing off of care for distant others.

Despite the relational tensions discussed here in this chapter, the eco-parenting practices explored in this study are radical for two main reasons: First, they represent an innovation in parenting as part of a grassroots-led environmentalist subculture that is shifting norms and the 'general understandings' of 'good' parenting. As previously discussed, the contemporary parenting culture of the richer world tends to promote children's competitive autonomy and individualised notions of wellbeing. Previous research has so far failed to identify the potential of the climate and ecological crisis to reshape meanings around parenting for the future; the findings of this study have shown the ways in which the individualism and competitiveness of a middle-class intensive parenting culture are reimagined in the face of globalised problems that connect the welfare of children to that of distant others. Children's wellbeing was seen as inseparable from the wellbeing of the entire planet, which imbued ideas of 'good' and morally responsible parenting practices. The second radical element is that this eco-parenting was seen as a group endeavour; it was understood that being a 'good' eco-parent and protecting the future could only be achieved by connecting with other activists and realising agency through collective action. This meant that political action and campaigning became as much a routinised set of social practices as the practical and material activities of everyday family life. Participants spoke of their collective political activities (such as campaigning) as being integrated into every corner of their lives; they lived and breathed collective politics and activities primarily to provide for and protect their children and the future.

The potentialities and tensions of radical eco-parenting explored in this chapter make visible the ways in which power, exercised at the micro level is nested within issues of global justice. This notion re-emphasises the relationality of human action and agency, and the ways in which care orientations and practices depend on the specific relationships of the moment. Understanding the situated exercise of power within personal life is crucial if we are to understand transitions to a just and sustainable future. Lynch and colleagues (2021) have argued that a relational lens on social justice enables us to recognise the problems more fully, but also the generative possibilities of 'the production of people in their humanity' (p.53). They argue that a feminist sociological lens has a lot to offer to theorists of justice from other fields, such as mainstream social science, law or philosophy (Lynch et al., 2021).

I have outlined how an expanded notion of parental care – taking responsibility and collective action for children and vulnerable others beyond one's family, can offer steps towards environmental justice. But justice and care are not just about relationships between people. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I have shown the ways in which understandings of nature, a sense of oneness with the

natural world and connection to plants and animals and their peril, shaped the affectivity and emotions around ecological injustice, and therefore parents, as carriers of practices, draw on these understandings in the execution of their daily parenting and activism activities. This echoes the posthumanist thinking of ecofeminist Val Plumwood (1993, 1999), who has warned of blind spots in anthropocentric conceptualisations of justice. Therefore, considering the nonhuman in sustainability research demands a wider epistemology of relationality (Walsh et al., 2021) which is lacking in earlier feminist theorisations of power, privilege, and oppression (Gaard, 2017). Ecofeminism aims to connect feminist and ecological perspectives to understand and oppose all oppressive relationships (Plumwood, 2004), rather than the domination only of women. An ecofeminist revision that includes the day-to-day materiality and care for earth others (Plumwood, 1993) as components of an expanded relational self (Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018), could better account for the array of ethical connections and political quests to change problematic power hierarchies that my findings on radical eco parenting have uncovered. In what follows, I outline the evolution of ecofeminism and connect its principles to my findings, before integrating posthumanist strands of ecofeminism with my developed theory of social practices to theorise radical eco-parenting.

### 5.5. An Ecofeminist account of eco-parenting

An ecofeminist framework provides a less anthropocentric feminist care ethics to theorise the eco-parental action on the climate and ecological crisis found in my study. It also enables an integration of the materiality of everyday eco-parenting included in my use of social practice theory.

Sherilyn MacGregor (2021) has pointed out a lamentable oversight of ecofeminism in her appraisal of the recent turn to the materiality of everyday practices in green political theory and social science studies of sustainability, arguing that ecofeminism can offer insights into the radical potential of sustainable practices. She reminded readers that 'ecofeminist theory has *never not* been grounded in materiality' (p.41) and argued that the politics of everyday living should be an essential dimension in analyses of just and sustainable transitions. Echoing MacGregor, Gough & Whitehouse (2020) add that there is an academic amnesia of ecofeminism and that research on responses to the climate emergency would benefit greatly from bringing feminism and ecofeminism into conversation.

Ecofeminism is a theory and movement that has a long and variegated scholarly history (Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018). Foundational ecofeminist thinking was squarely oriented toward tracing parallels of the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. In 1974, Françoise d'Eaubonne theorised women and 'mother earth' as natural and universal providers and hailed the

potential of women to bring about environmental emancipation (Stearney, 1994). This and subsequent texts such as *Women and Nature* by Susan Griffin (1978), and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) assumed a naturalised association between women and nature, and valorised notions of maternal environmental care. Responses from some feminists were highly critical, suggesting that this ontology promotes harmful gender essentialism (Plumwood, 1994; Sandilands, 1997; Stearney, 1994). As the scholarly profile of ecofeminism continued to divide opinion, cognate terms for feminist political ecology began to emerge, such as 'gender and environment' or 'feminist environmentalism', to dissociate themselves from meanings based on sex (Gaard, 2011). These subfields recast their analytical gaze on the relational connections between environmental degradation and patriarchy, colonialism, racism, classism, and speciesism (Gaard, 2011), offering a holistic and intersectional commentary on environmental injustice (Kirk, 1997). At the same time, critics of early ecofeminism's heteronormative assumptions offered queer politics as a way to undo problematic dualisms (Gaard, 1997).

The 1990s saw further theoretical seams of ecofeminism emerge. A materialist analysis began to take shape in Marxist and socialist thought, linking environment with unsustainable modes of production, and evidencing the role militarism and corporatism play in oppressing natural and human systems (Gaard, 2011). Ecofeminism developed during this time in tandem with the environmental justice movement, although this movement was somewhat reluctant to grasp ecofeminist insights (Gaard, 2011). Since the turn of the twenty first century, a posthumanist feminism in the work of, for example, Alaimo (2008), and de la Bellacasa (2017, 2010) has drawn on the work of Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway to put forward an ontology in which the vitality of our planet is located at the nexus of biological beings and earth systems (Whatmore, 2006). Within this field, relationships between humans, objects, plants, animals, and physical forces involve interdependencies and require ethical and political consideration. This ontology decentres human agencies, and, I suggest, is compatible with the 'nexus of entities', or 'arrangements' of social practice theory (Schatzki, 2001). However, revisiting my critique of the disembodiment of 'arrangements' in conventional practice theory, a post-humanist ecofeminist ontology could provide practice theory with embodied and material human and nonhuman relationships, allowing material agency to arise from the contact zone between human embodied activities and 'more-than-human' nature (Alaimo, 2008).

This hybrid practice theory-ecofeminist ontology fits with my findings of the practical ethics of the parent climate movement: the accounts of the participants of feeling connected to nature, sensing

the climate change, seeing species disappearing locally and globally, hearing predictions of biological and meteorological impacts, and the affective outcomes of these relationships made it apparent that the participants are in a 'naturecultural world' (de la Bellacasa, 2010) in which ethical thinking towards children, the planet and distant others is politicised and actualised, and agency arises from these human-nature relationships (de la Bellacasa, 2010). General understandings of eco-parenting arise from the values and emotions inherent in the relationship of activists with a planet in crisis, and structure further emotional and practical engagement in sustainable and activist practices (the teleoaffective regime) so that the practice(s) becomes routinised (Welch & Warde, 2017). Parents recognised the interconnectedness of life; for them, a safe and flourishing future for their children depended on the wellbeing of all life on earth and that the ways in which family life is conducted have consequences for planetary wellbeing. This resonates with posthumanist ecofeminist theory. De la Bellacasa (2010) argued that within an ecological movement, ethical thinking is itself a collective social practice: it involves a recognition of the sustenance of human life that the earth provides, and a need, in turn, to care for the earth. This 'ethics of collective empowerment...puts caring at the heart of its search for alternatives for hopeful flourishing for all beings' (de la Bellacasa, 2010, p. 151).

An ecofeminist politics and philosophy also enable us to envision the radical, generative potential, as well as delineate the relational tensions, of eco parenting, and the connections between the two. The findings of an intergenerational ethic of teaching children to think about injustice and to care for the world has added to previous scholarship on environmental education in early life experiences, but it has significantly developed it by exploring the eco-politicisation of childcare and the political pedagogy of identifying with nature. Childrearing practices that are geared to making visible the interdependencies of humans and the natural world support a relational approach to climate and environmental education. This perspective rejects the ontological superiorization of humans over non-humans (Kings, 2017) to counter it with ideas of intra-actions in which children's agency emerges through relationships between themselves and their parents, industrialisation, greenhouse gas emissions, institutional (in)action, climatic events, and biosphere metabolisms (Gaard, 2011; Verlie, 2020, p. 1266). Other sites of radical change were found in the care practices performed by the participant fathers. Although research has found that the emotional responsibility of parental protective care is still carried out more by mothers than fathers within a heterosexual parent couple (Doucet, 2018), the study found glimpses of 'ecological masculinities', or ways of being that promote

emotional connection and care for distant others as an alternative model to mainstream masculinities (Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Pulé & Hultman, 2021).

Affective relations with friends and family members were also a rich site of activism. Influencing the practices of those without an ecological 'general understanding' offers the biggest leap of social change, but it was also fraught with risk and conflict. However, de la Bellacasa notes the situated constraints and possibilities of this ethos. It is not about 'choice' when socialising the topic of climate is subject to social structural constraints, around gendered and generational expectations of careful and convivial interaction. This underscores how care is a 'manifold range of doings':

*An understanding of human agencies as immersed in worlds made of heterogeneous but interdependent forms and processes of life and matter, to or not to care about/for something/somebody, inevitably does and undoes relation (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 70).*

De la Bellacasa gave the example of 'affective and material burnout' that arises from an uneven burden of care (p.163). This study has found an inequality in affective engagement with climate change within family life, though this was nuanced, and it is not clear whether this is correlated with gender. Nevertheless, we can still see a picture: on the one hand, nurturing a disposition toward care could undermine the competitiveness and individualizing processes of modern capitalist economic, political, and social systems, and draw attention to the interdependence that shapes all our lives (Cox, 2010), but on the other, as I have already argued earlier in this chapter, feminists (including De la Bellacasa) have warned against idealising care. Although in this study care is action for the collective good, it involves labour, which is undervalued, in particular, where women are concerned. In relation to this study, this insight using a care lens enables us to see that the tendency of the more explicitly relationship-building aspect of eco-parenting tends to be performed more by mothers than fathers, yet this notion has failed to attract scholarly attention to the parent climate movement which suggests there is gendered hierarchy of activism types: the high-profile, heroic direct actions of movements are more interesting to researchers than the quieter, behind-the-scenes relational activism. We could conclude that this is symptomatic of the more general devaluing of care in contemporary neoliberal societies, particularly when care is seen as a naturalised, family-centric parental ethic.

Relating to this point and highlighting a final tension of eco-parenting, a moralised parental ethic sometimes created boundaries between parenting for the future and the concerns of those without children. Although feminist queer theory might be somewhat damning of such an ethic because it

reproduces a naturalised notion of care (Deutscher, 2017; Edelman, 2004; Munro, 2017; Sandilands, 1997), I believe that this was more about a blind spot in the rhetoric of the emerging parent movement, rather than a value held by an otherwise progressive, ecofeminist parenting ethic. Eco-parenting is very much entangled with cultural repertoires and discourses of the wider climate movement, which, as it develops and enfolds wider sensibilities toward social and ecological justice (Cassegård & Thörn, 2017), may come to recognise the paradox of communicating a moralised parental identity.

## 5.6. Final Conclusions

The overarching question guiding this research was: How do parenthood and parenting interplay with activism for climate and ecological change? The study found that parental identity evoked a fear-driven future orientation and self-responsibilisation to safeguard children's future, but it was participants' political, egalitarian, and ecological values which shaped their understandings of climate and ecological emergency as an urgent issue of global justice requiring collective and systemic social change. Although fear was a driver, it was the emotion of hope in collective action for a better future that sustained practical involvement in the issue. Participants had recognised that building a safe future for their children cannot be achieved alone or purely through ethical consumption. These understandings became generalised to the eco-activist parenting subculture, structuring an affective, politicised response which spanned quotidian practices across all domains of personal life, including in the home, at work, with friends and relatives, and within activist circles. For these participants, the power of parenting was located in a foundational nurturing of care and compassion for the world through the practices of family and personal life. These practices involved both smooth transitions, for example, in the spillover of sustainable consumption to a more radical, political engagement with climate change as a justice consciousness took hold, and to more disruptive kinds, for example, in the conflict interactions with friends, family and colleagues as parents attempted to politicise sustainability. Social movements teach scholars a lot about social processes of change, and I argue that the activism-ecological parenting dialectic relationship and expanded sense of responsibility found in this study are pioneering new ways of living and relating to tackle the political and social aspects of environmental exploitation. Responsibilisation processes driving environmental practices in the home have been lamented by many in the social sciences for the individualisation and depoliticisation of environmental problems and disproportionate

burdening on those whose social roles carry greater expectations to care (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Shirani et al., 2012; Cairns et al., 2013; Sandilands, 1993; Judkins & Presser, 2008). However, as McLeod (2017, p. 45) has argued, 'a sense of responsibility is not the same as techniques of responsabilisation'. The demonstration in this study of how a sense of responsibility for a safe and just future for all can generate collective, progressive practices necessitates a deeper engagement by scholars in the complexities of care politics when analysing environmentalism in everyday life.

The study pointed to an important caveat about the degree of agency in responses to the climate and ecological emergency. To care for others (whether distant or close) through a lens of sustainability is to be attentive to ecological needs, but one must first *know* about those needs (Tronto, 1993). Understanding complex global climate and ecological issues and their human drivers requires a level of educational capital possessed most often by those from privileged backgrounds. Taking action to care for the world was structured along lines of class, and by association, race, and other axes of inequality, suggesting a limit to how current and future understandings of environmental change can motivate affective, political action in *all* strata of society. The relational obligations and practices that have spurred collective political action found in this study provide further evidence that undermines the individualisation thesis, that is, 'a growing fluidity, plasticity and detraditionalisation of contemporary sexual, couple and familial relationships', as argued by Giddens (1990, 1992) and overlapping themes in the work of Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002) and Baumann (Bauman, 1991, 2001, 2005) (Jamieson, 2020, p.222). Attention to structure and political agency in this thesis has provided important insights into shifting norms of parenting and relational commitment in the age of the climate and ecological crisis without resorting to explanations of weakening social ties in processes facilitating human agency.

The thesis has found that a 'deep learning' about climate and ecological issues, that is, understanding meaning, developing critical thinking skills, and making connections between politics, power, and environment (Warburton, 2003, p. 44), supported collective 'general understandings' amongst parent activists and was a driver of everyday climate action. In its attention to the relationality of emotions relating to the climate and ecological crisis, this study has contributed to the emotions in social movements literature which has tended to neglect the mundane and non-linear emotions intersecting with day-to-day personal life. The affective agency of radical eco-parenting occupies a space that connects a global issue with personal life. This 'space in between' involves affective, politicised care activities embedded in everyday practices. This space is a powerful, challenging, but generative entanglement of structures, identities, and political agency,

and, in its attention to the ethical and political, provides important understanding on an under-researched dimension of transitions to sustainability.

Transition studies draw on social practice theories as part of their toolbox because these theories mesh macro and micro level systems (Jamieson, 2020). To adequately tackle climate and ecological demise and injustice, we need an expanded epistemology of care practices, to include affective ways of living and relating that integrate micro- and macro-level issues. Whilst a practice approach is a useful theoretical tool to account for activities at the interface of micro and macro worlds, this thesis has shone a light on how a practice approach needs to encompass affective personal life to better account for general understandings and teleeffectivities around sustainability transitions, as well as the nuances around the practice of care. Analysing the social processes that link macro-and micro-levels is important for understanding social change (Vesely & Smith, 2008), but environmental sociologists would do well to transcend seeing matters of family life as confined to the micro sociological domain.

The relational and ecological feminist framework of this study has illuminated some of the many connections between the conduct of family and personal life and climate change. Both realms share a common history of unequal social and ecological relations. Feminist climate justice scholarship often discusses the gendered, raced, and classed impacts of climate change, but the processes, interactions, and performances of unequal social relations (patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) within personal life are rarely examined as a *driver* of socioecological change, or as offering different modes of being that undermine these drivers. Creating a just and sustainable world will need recognition of these social and ecological inequalities and injustices at the everyday level, as it is within everyday personal relationships that innovation can be fostered, through learning how to make a better world by responding to the needs of others, both close and distant, with care, responsibility, and compassion.

Personal life is sorely missing from the lens on cultural models, practices, and behaviour in the identification of potential sites of disruption in the transition studies field (for example, see an overview by (Kivimaa et al., 2021). Enactments of climate justice within personal life offer important insights if we are to widen the sustainability purview beyond a sociotechnical landscape. An influential article by transition studies scholars in 2019 called for research on nine major themes to advance the field and help move society toward sustainability: 'power, agency and politics; governing transitions; civil society, culture and social movements; businesses and industries; transitions in practice and everyday life; geography of transitions; ethical aspects; and

methodologies' (Köhler et al., 2019, p. 1). To this end, this study is an important contribution toward several of these themes at once, namely power, agency, and politics and its link with the justice-oriented, ethical practices of everyday life, and civil society, social movements, and their interconnections. As a relational dimension nested within these themes, this thesis also responds to appeals to address the blind spot of gender in societal transitions (MacGregor, 2009; Wolfram & Kienesberger, 2023). In its use of a feminist, relational ontology, this thesis has blurred the edges of personal and political, family and civil society, and nature and people, by illuminating analytical linkages between these realms.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information Sheet



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School of Social and  
Political Science

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

##### **Project title:**

##### **Climate Change in the Everyday Lives of Parent Campaigners**

Research carried out by: Lisa Howard, PhD researcher, Department of Sociology, University of Edinburgh

Contact: Tel: 07712 220 358

Thank you very much for your interest in taking part in my study. My PhD project is to investigate the everyday experiences of parents and guardians who are campaigning to fight climate change

- A tick-box sheet to gather your basic details
- Making a short written recording once a day, for the duration of 14 days. This could be using the provided template, or audio/video recorded if you prefer.
- Attending an informal structured conversation by videocall, phone or email (the call would take approx 1 – 1.5 hours)

The daily 'diary' recording is to make a note of everyday climate-related discussions, thoughts, and feelings, for us to chat about in the interview. Diary recordings are useful as it's often difficult to recall everyday moments during an interview. I could send you a text reminder to make the recording once a day if this helps.

The interview will be audio recorded with your permission and typed up by me. The recording and transcription will be stored on a password-protected computer. All your data and input will be confidential and fully anonymised.

I will use the content of our conversation in my analysis and when writing up and disseminating my findings. This might include journal articles, oral presentations, reports, and other types of communication.

**Taking part is voluntary, but as a thank you for your time I will make a £25 donation to a charity of your choice.**

If you agree to take part, you may withdraw from the research without penalty at any time up to four weeks after receiving the transcript of your interview by informing me of your decision to do so. You will of course also be free to decline to answer any questions during the interview whilst still remaining within the process.

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, or would like to ask any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have any further questions about this project, please contact either of my PhD supervisors:

Dr. Rachel Howell  
Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD

Prof. Lynn Jamieson  
Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD

**Thank you,**

Lisa Howard



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## Research project: Climate Change in the Everyday Lives of Parent Campaigners – Consent Form

Research carried out by: Lisa Howard, PhD student, Department of Sociology, University of  
Edinburgh

Contact: Tel: 07712 220 358

Please tick to indicate your agreement with the following:

- I have read the participant information sheet
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details requested
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time up to four weeks after receiving the transcript of my interview, by advising the researcher of this decision
- I understand how the data I provide will be stored and used
- I agree to participate in this study
- I agree for the data I provide to be archived for future use by other researchers who register with the archive
- I do not agree to the archiving of the data

Signed (virtually) by participant..... Date: .....

### Appendix 3: Example Recruitment Advert

## ARE YOU TAKING ACTION TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE BECAUSE YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE?

### LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS FOR A PHD STUDY

If you are a **parent or guardian**, living in the **UK** and **campaigning in any way** to fight climate change, I'd love to hear your experiences for my study looking at climate action and family life.

Participation involves:

- Keeping a brief record of climate-related actions, discussions and thoughts, over the course of 14 days
- A subsequent Zoom or phone call (approx. 1.5 hrs) for a structured, recorded conversation about your story

Your contribution would help us understand the under-explored but **important work that worried parents are doing day-to-day to effect change.**

As a thank you, I will donate £25 to a charity of your choice.

For more info or to get involved, please go to <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/climateactionfamilies/> or contact me at

Thank you,

**Lisa Howard**

PhD student, Sociology, University of Edinburgh



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#### Appendix 4: Diary template

### Instructions for completing the diary exercise

Thank you for taking part in my study. My research looks at the everyday aspect of being a concerned parent in the era of climate change, so my data collection methods need to reflect this. A diary exercise is an established research tool to capture a snapshot of everyday life, including moments that might be forgotten about during the interview discussion.

Over the course of the next 14 days, please could you record in the blank table below **the occasions when the climate crisis or other environmental issue has featured in your thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions during the day**. Please make a note of the time, place, what they were doing, and who with.

You don't have to complete all the days if nothing comes up - this is interesting in itself! And if you forget to make a recording, don't worry.

Once you're done, please return to me at

Your diary will be confidential and kept in a secure server.

Thank you very much!

**Your diary of when the climate crisis or other environmental issue has featured in your thoughts, feelings, actions and interactions during the day**

Date	Time	Where	What	Who with?	Notes

## **Appendix 5: Example Interview Guide**

### **Interview guide**

- Introduce myself
- Purpose of the research
- Consent form; offer charity donation
- Interview will focus on 'how you feel about, and act on, the climate crisis in your everyday life'. Emotions and their social context
- Outline: 1<sup>st</sup> stage – general about how you came to be involved in activism; 2<sup>nd</sup> stage – discuss your diary entries
- I will send you the transcript for you to comment on/add to

#### **Start recording**

Give number of interviewee and date + time

#### **Action**

1. Tell me about when you first started thinking about climate change or other issues to do with human impact on the natural world, and when did you start doing something about this?
2. Was it before you had children, and did having children amplify these concerns?
3. How has it changed the way you live and raise your children?
4. When did you first get involved with organised parent groups/networks, and what motivated you? (cultural context) What is it about parent groups that appeal / work best for you?
5. Do your children get involved in climate campaigning?
6. Do you have a partner? Are they involved in climate campaigning? If not, what is the reason?

#### **Parental identity, responsibility, and the climate crisis**

1. Can you tell me a little about your children, for example how old they are, how many you have, etc?
2. What is their knowledge or awareness of the climate crisis? Do you talk to them about climate change?
3. This is a rather broad question, but can you tell me your thoughts on what makes a 'good' parent? (tease out any gender distinctions they make)
4. Now I want to move more into specific concerns and issues. What does the climate crisis mean to you as a father / mother?
5. What emotions do you feel about environmental issues, and what emotions do you feel about your child in light of these issues?
6. Are there times when you feel you need to manage your emotions? Why is this, tell me about the circumstances?

### **Diary entries**

(pre-recorded, participant was asked to record “occasions when the climate crisis has featured in your thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions during the day. Make a note of the time, place, what they were doing, and who with”)

1. So, let’s look now at your diary entries. How did you find this exercise?
2. Looking at each entry in turn, can you elaborate a little on the situation in which these climate-related thoughts and feelings arose?
3. Can you recall, in which of these situations did it feel appropriate or inappropriate to share thoughts or feelings, and why?

### **How action is affected**

1. How do you find juggling your activism with other responsibilities, for example employment, parenting?
2. What motivates or demotivates you in your fight to address climate change? What are the outcomes?
3. Can you tell me what sort of things would enable / better support you to address climate change?
4. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your daily life? E.g employment, housing, access to outside space?
5. How has it affected how you feel about, and act on, the climate crisis?