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**Embodying ‘the Next Generation’: Children’s Everyday Environmental Activism in
India and England**

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Abstract

The symbolic evocation of ‘the next generation’ might be considered as valuable in buttressing calls for concerted public and political action on climate change, whilst assigning to children a unique identity and role in engendering sustainable transitions. Yet does an identity that is in essence equated with futurity stifle possibilities for children’s own actions in the present, and conflict with policy expectations that children can be ‘agents of (pro-environmental) change’? Drawing on multi-method doctoral research carried out with children (aged 11-14) and their families in varying socio-economic contexts in India and England, this paper considers the use and utility of generational identities in prompting environmental concern and explores how generationally-framed imaginaries of childhood feature in children’s and family narratives of everyday environmental activism. Building on theoretical arguments of generational interdependence and ethics of care, the paper argues for greater recognition of children’s actual and potential contributions to engendering sustainable futures, whilst drawing attention to the ways in which children’s agency to act on environmental knowledge is supported by – and interdependent with – that of adult actors, not least parents.

Keywords: Childhood, agency, interdependence, generation, climate change.

Introduction

In recent years, everyday household practices have become a new arena for the performance of morality, as policies lead individuals to consider these practices in relation to concerns about the planet and its present and future residents (Agrawal, 2005; Boddy et al., 2016; Hobson, 2013; Miller, 2012). Across global settings, environmental policies are increasingly premised on the idea of individuals taking on the role of the ‘environmental subject [...] for whom the environment constitutes a critical domain of thought and action’ (Agrawal, 2005, p. 16), although it is notable that understandings of ‘environmentally friendly’ behaviours are contextually-situated rather than universally understood (Boddy et al., 2016; Guha, 2006; Shiva, 1993). The role of the ‘environmental subject’ materialises as everyday practices become associated with contextually-situated understandings of environmental ‘friendliness’ or harm, and as understandings resonate with individuals’ concerns about valued aspects of their environments (Agrawal, 2005; Beck, 2010).

Taking on of the role of the ‘environmental subject’ in and through one’s everyday practices constitutes what I refer to in this paper as ‘everyday environmental activism’. Such activism might be defined as individual and collective efforts to change, adapt or disrupt one’s own and others’ everyday practices in response to concerns about the negative impact of these practices on the environment as it is known, valued and imagined. Efforts could encompass activities commonly associated with an ‘activist’ lifestyle, for example, attending climate demonstrations or joining an environmental campaigning group; however, the activism defined here is a phenomenological – or lived – form of activism motivated by relationships of concern and materialised through emotions and practices in private as well as public spaces.

This definition of activism is encompassing of human–environmental interdependence, understanding that neither are human beings impervious to the unpredictable effects of nature, nor is the non-human world a passive force supporting human activity (Manuel-Navarrete & Buzinde, 2010; Szerszynski & Urry, 2010). Such activism is grounded theoretically in an ethic of care, premised on understandings of interdependence between humans (and non-humans) across times and spaces (Tronto, 1993). It is also influenced by Horton and Kraftl’s consideration of ‘implicit’ or ‘modest activism’, emerging from individuals’ emotional encounters with the world around them (2009, p. 14), and by Nolas et al.’s experiential exploration of children’s awareness of, access to, orientation towards and

action on ‘issues of common concern’, as a way of extending literatures of childhood, activism and prefiguration (2016, p. 252).

Symbolic evocations of ‘the next generation’ underpin moral arguments for ‘sustainable transitions’ and many policy instruments hinge on the planetary legacy for ‘future generations’ (Renton & Butcher, 2010; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2008; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) UK, 2013). As the present-day embodiment of this symbolic identity, children and young people¹ are often evoked to animate abstract environmental concerns as policy-makers speak of their offspring as a motivator for action.² However, children’s inclusion in environmental policies is not only symbolic. The United Nations’ Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiative, rolled out globally through the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), has sought to ‘integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning’ (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), no date). Through this initiative, children are centrally implicated in policy endeavours to materialise environmental knowledge and cultivate environmental subjectivities as ‘agents of change’, envisaged to influence the practices of those around them through their environmental knowledge and ‘pester power’ (Ballantyne, Connell, & Fien, 1998; Satchwell, 2013; Uzzell et al., 1994; Walker, 2017).

Children’s imagined role as ‘agents of change’ assumes a straightforward crossover between childhood’s symbolic power to influence high-level change and children’s embodied and emotive ‘pester power’ in everyday life. However, this assumption is frequently underexplored in relation to children’s lived experiences in societies that sociologists of childhood have argued are ‘generationally ordered’, making children ‘the less powerful part in an adult world’ (Qvortrup, 2005, p. 20; for discussion, see Alanen, 2009; Mayall, 2002; Punch, 2007). It is therefore pertinent to consider the extent to which the imagined and assigned identities associated with childhood – those mobilised in making the moral case for ‘pro-environmental’ action and in allocating a role for children in such action – translate to

¹ Henceforth in this paper, I use the term ‘children’ to refer to those under the age of 18. This is in keeping with scholars of childhood, whose work has been influential to this paper and who have explored and theorised the ways in which children are generationally positioned vis-à-vis adults. In using the terms ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ in this paper, I refer to the generational positioning of ‘children’ as a societal group distinguished from ‘adults’, whilst acknowledging that many legally and societally-constituted ‘children’ identify as ‘young people’.

² As exemplified in an interview with Christiana Figueres, UN Chief Negotiator on Climate Change, published shortly before the 2015 Paris Summit (see Harvey, 2015).

lived experiences of everyday environmental activism in childhood and if children have anything more than a symbolic role to play in engendering sustainable planetary futures.

Aims and Contribution of this Paper

The above discussion introduces the potential difficulties presented for children in reconciling their assigned, imagined and lived identities as ‘the next generation’. The remainder of the paper aims to tease out the complexities and contradictions inherent in children’s societal positioning as ‘the next generation’ and consider the value of this identity for supporting children’s (and other generations’) everyday environmental activism. The paper considers the following questions:

- How do children make sense of their assigned identity as ‘the next generation’?
- Does an identity that is in essence equated with futurity stifle possibilities for children’s own actions in the present, and conflict with policy expectations that children can be ‘agents of (pro-environmental) change’?
- What contradictions might be raised as children seek to engender and encourage sustainable transitions in contexts where their social influence is frequently lessened by their generational positioning?

The paper draws on the work of sociologists of childhood, who have developed ‘generation’ as a ‘conceptual starting point and an analytical tool for framing the study of childhood’, (Alanen, 2009, p. 163). The paper considers the use and utilities of generational identities – in particular the trope of ‘the next generation’ – in prompting environmental concern and explores how generationally-framed imaginaries of childhood feature in children’s and family narratives of everyday environmental activism.

Assigned, Imagined and Lived Identities: The Trope of ‘the Next Generation’

Across global contexts, the legally and socially-constituted period of childhood is commonly viewed as a transition from dependence and lesser political and moral agency to increased participation, independence and responsibility (Nolas, 2015; Oswell, 2013; Panelli, Punch, & Robson, 2007). The symbolic power of generation to imagine and assign political and social identities for children might be considered amongst what James, using a metaphor of fabric, presents as ‘the commonalities of childhood – social stratification, culture, gender [and]

generational relations' (2010, p. 493). James presents these as 'common threads that permeate the fabric of the social category of childhood, and which are used to define childhood structurally, as a separate generational space'. These are woven through with the 'weft' of lived childhoods across times and spaces, creating the 'detailed patterns [of] childhood' (2010, pp. 493-4).

The vulnerability of children's bodies to climate-related events, the frequent entwinement in the public imagination of childhood and nature and today's children's historical positioning growing up in an age of environmental concern mean that the trope of 'the next generation' is powerfully mobilised in contemporary environmental policy (Renton & Butcher, 2010). Indeed, it is the cross-temporality of childhood that affords its central policy positioning, as policy-makers recognise that 'if practices consistent with sustainable development are to be carried forward through time, then children must be the bridge conveying their value and ways' (Heft & Chawla, 2006, p. 199). Despite this apparent logic, the imagined, assigned and lived identities that cohere in the narrative trope of 'the next generation' present a number of contradictions that children are tasked with negotiating in their everyday lives.

A commonly assigned identity for children in environmental policy is as 'agents of change', acting on the knowledge they receive through environmental education and influencing the practices of their family members through their 'pester power' (Satchwell, 2013). This assigned role maps directly onto what is termed in this paper as children's imagined identity as 'the next generation' – as those who inspire and lead action on issues of common concern, either indirectly through their symbolic positioning in the social imagination or directly by using 'pester power' to influence change. This identity is neatly summed up by Kraftl, who identifies a persistent imaginary of childhood as 'a universalising affective condition [...] characterised by very simplistic, and often problematic, notions of hope, logic and futurity' (2008, p. 82). As Kraftl continues, the persistent attribution of childhood with 'spectacular', future-oriented forms of hope can mean that children's more 'modest' articulations of hope are overlooked, potentially stifling children's agency to achieve their modest hopes in their present-day lives (2008, p. 85; see also Horton & Kraftl, 2009). Kraftl's argument that children become a 'repository for hope in the diverse political agendas of human rights and wellbeing' (2008, p. 83) has resonance with the arguments of other scholars who have identified state agendas (for example, the shaping and governance of 'good citizens') in

children's assigned political and social participation (Aitken, Kjörholt & Lund, 2007; Nolas, 2015).

In an age in which individuals' everyday practices are increasingly scrutinised in relation to 'good' and 'bad' paradigms of environmental behaviour, the making of children as 'environmental subjects' might be seen as one manifestation of what Agrawal (2005) has termed 'environmentality'. In a study of citizen participation in environmental regulation practices in North India, Agrawal develops 'environmentality' as an 'analytical optic' adapted from Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', and defines this as 'the knowledges, politics, institutions and subjectivities that come to be linked together with the emergence of the environment as a domain that requires regulation and protection' (2005, p. 226). Children's assigned environmental subjectivities can be understood as part of this 'analytical optic'. However, children's agency – including their agency to act on environmental knowledge – is indelibly shaped by societal notions of childhood as a time of futurity, learning and 'becoming' (Aitken, Lund, & Kjörholt, 2007; Kraftl, 2008; Lee, 2013). Whilst these notions are to some extent axiomatic – children will, in the main, have longer futures than most adults – a danger is that these notions position children as 'a defective form of adult, social [and political] only in their future potential but not in their present being' (James et al., 1998, p. 6). This understanding is most clearly materialised through age-defined political suffrage; however, sociologists of childhood have identified this in the everyday difficulties encountered by children as they negotiate decisions in adult-dominated worlds (Alanen, 2009; Mayall, 2002; Punch, 2007; Qvortrup, 2005). Thus, in their lived identity as 'the next generation', children must reconcile being 'environmental subjects' with a generational positioning that means they are frequently disadvantaged in their everyday interactions and negotiations.

Methodology

Building on the above framework of assigned, imagined and lived identities, this paper explores the everyday contradictions of embodying 'the next generation' through children's narratives of everyday life and environmental concern in a range of settings.

The narratives presented and analysed in this paper are drawn from multi-method doctoral research with eighteen 11–14-year-old children³ and their families in a variety of socio-economic contexts in India and England, as part of the cross-national study *Family Lives and the Environment* (FLE)⁴. The doctoral research was concerned with children’s everyday experiences, understandings and practices of environment and aimed to critically consider theories of children’s agency to act on expressed environmental concerns by analysing children’s and family narratives of environment and everyday life (Walker, 2016). A second aim of the research, entwined within the first, was to explore the local particularities of how ‘global’ environmental concerns are experienced, understood and narrated by children in different contexts. This aim underpinned the construction of a multiply-varied research sample across two countries and was informed by political ecological literature on the cultural specificity of environmental concern (see, for example, discussions by Guha, 2006; Peet, Robbins, & Watts, 2011; Shiva, 1993), and calls for more critical and globally informed childhood scholarship (Balagopalan, 2011; Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Punch & Tisdall, 2012). For Balagopalan, attending to the ‘multiple modernities’ of childhood may be one way of challenging the ‘discourse of ‘lack’ associated with childhood in the majority world (2011, p. 291). By incorporating intersecting structural varieties into its sample, the research design allowed for attention to how children’s varying exposures to globally-situated environmental hazards are woven into other forms of structural disadvantage, incorporating socio-economic positioning, rural–urban location and gender.

The PhD research and FLE shared a research design and sample. Participants lived in London and Hyderabad, South India (cities of around 8 million people) and two predominantly rural areas in Southern England and Andhra Pradesh. Researchers contacted families through fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools in an aim to recruit a socio-economically varied sample, and worked with an equal number of boys and girls. In total, twenty-four children and families participated in *Family Lives and the Environment*. Eighteen of these children were included in the research sample for the doctoral study. The sample is detailed in Table One.

³ The intention of the research team was to work with a smaller age range (11–12) by presenting the research to children from the same school year (year seven) when visiting schools. However, some schools in India had a high rate of older children in attendance in year seven. In one case this resulted in us working with one fourteen-year-old boy who was in the same school year as the other children in the sample.

⁴ Family Lives and the Environment (FLE) was a constituent project of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods node NOVELLA (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches), which used and developed narrative approaches to analyse everyday family life (see Phoenix, 2011 and www.novella.ac.uk for details).

Table One: Research sample

Type and location of school	Participant pseudonym (gender, age at time of research)
Fee-paying international school, Hyderabad	<i>Amrutha (F, 12), Aamir (M, 12)</i>
Fee-paying private school, Hyderabad	<i>Gomathi (F, 12), Rahul (M, 12)</i>
Non fee-paying government school, Hyderabad	<i>Mamatha (F, 12), Anand (M, 14)</i>
Fee-paying international school, regional city in Andhra Pradesh	<i>Reethika (F, 12), Nageshwar (M, 12)</i>
Fee-paying private school, rural Andhra Pradesh	<i>Chitra (F, 12), Hemant (M, 12)</i>
Non fee-paying government school, rural Andhra Pradesh	<i>Dharani (F, 12), Chandrasekhar (M, 12)</i>
Fee-paying independent school, rural England	<i>Rosie (F, 12)</i>
Non fee-paying state school, rural England	<i>Helena (F, 12), Callum (M, 11)</i>
Fee-paying independent school, London	<i>Humphrey (M, 12)</i>
Non fee-paying state schools, London	<i>Tamsin (F, 12), Solomon (M, 11)</i>

Data were generated through a multi-method research design, incorporating individual interviews with caregivers and children, group interviews with families at home and children in school and a range of multi-sensory activities with children and other family members. These activities included mobile interviews, cognitive mapping, responses to hypothetical vignettes and a photo elicitation activity carried out over approximately one week that culminated in a family discussion of photos taken by different family members. In both countries, the research was carried out in small teams (see acknowledgements for details of researchers). Many of the research activities in India were carried out in translation, with research team member Madhavi Latha interviewing children and families in Telugu and translating responses into English. Using a research design that included group interviews and activities with family members and school peers allowed for consideration of how children's narratives of environmental concern and everyday activism develop in dialogue with other key actors in their lives.

Children's narratives are analysed in this paper using a case-based narrative approach, which attends to how participants construct identities through stories, and considers the ways in which participants exercise 'agentic choice' in how they present themselves across research activities (Phoenix, 2013; Riessman, 2011). Whilst attentive to participants' agency in constructing stories and identities, this analytic approach is cognisant of how narratives are shaped by the social, political and interpersonal contexts in which they are told, as 'events perceived as important are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience' (Riessman, 2008, p. 3).

Although children's narratives were generated across a range of spaces (as detailed above), this paper focuses on children's narratives of attempts to act on environmental knowledge in their homes, often in collaboration with other family members. There are a number of reasons for this focus. Firstly, the home is often cited by scholars as the place where children have the most opportunities – comparative to schools and other public spaces – for reflexive action and negotiation with those around them (Mayall, 2002; Punch, 2007; Valentine, 2004). Secondly, focusing on the home encompasses attention to intergenerational negotiations and, therefore, possibilities for intergenerational action on environmental concerns. Finally, attention to domestic forms of activism might contribute to a broadening of what is considered *as* activism, as explored by a number of scholars (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Horton & Kraftl, 2009; Nolas et al., 2016). I return to these considerations in the closing discussion.

Children's Narratives of Everyday Environmental Activism

Research activities described in the above section were designed to provide children with multiple opportunities to interpret 'big' environmental messages in relation to any concerns about their immediate environments, and to recollect – by telling stories, either individually or jointly with family members or peers – changes they had made to everyday practices in response to their concerns.

Some children's stories presented changes as relatively straightforward to enact. Dharani, living in rural India, recounted the following story in response to a prompt in her school group activity for participants to share examples of environmental messages that had led them to act differently at home:

Dharani: We are cutting trees, we should not do this. The trees are dying because we are felling them. Devoid of trees we will not get any fresh air, and naturally no rains. And so, first of all we should not cut trees but save them and protect them.

Madhavi: How did your family members respond to that? What did your mother tell you?

Dharani: She said ‘we too shall grow trees’. And from that time onwards we started growing plants at home.

Madhavi: What plants?

Dharani: She started growing flowering plants and also our own kitchen garden. And because of that, the environmental pollution also came down and we have fresh air all around us now.

Dharani, 12, school group activity, rural India

Prompted by the researchers’ questions, in Labovian terms⁵, Dharani’s story of how her family began planting at home moves directly from the abstract – ‘*we are cutting trees, we should not do this*’ – to an evaluation of the problem – ‘*devoid of trees we will not get any fresh air*’, a proposed solution – ‘*we should not cut trees but save and protect them*’ – and a resolution, ‘*from that time onwards we started growing plants at home (...) we have fresh air all around us now*’. There is no complicating action in terms of resistance from family members around the value of planting or the practicalities of this activity. It may be notable that Dharani presents her mother as the active agent in the story, whose decision brings about the positive resolution. However, this decision results from Dharani’s expressed concerns about air pollution and her identification of a (partial) solution by drawing on her scientific knowledge. Dharani’s story, which initially appears to read as a template for the assigned role of children as ‘agents of change’ in their families, shows the importance of family support in enabling children’s concerns to be translated into action.

Other children’s narratives of household changes to everyday practices gave insights into the ongoing negotiations that environmental messages prompted in homes. Rosie, living in rural England, gave various examples of attempts to enact her environmental knowledge at home. This included a time when she had tried to remind herself and other family members to turn off lights by sticking ‘post-it’ notes next to light-switches. In another story, the role was

⁵ Labov’s (1972) systematic approach to the interpretation of narratives categorises talk into abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, and result. Occasionally speakers use a coda to ‘sign off’ the narrative and signify that its telling is complete.

reversed as Rosie presented her reaction to her father reminding family members of the need to turn off lights:

Rosie: Certainly lights get left on when no one's using them. And my dad goes round counting how many lights are on in the house. He goes round every morning and goes, 'One, two, three, four, five, six.' I just go, 'Oh, shut up! I'm just trying to get some sleep!'

Rosie, 12, individual interview, rural England

The shifting roles taken by different family members in engaging with and reminding one another of environmental messages were also seen in this family as Rosie's parents alternated in how they presented different generations in their family as more or less aware of environmental problems. At times, they drew on their historical positioning of having seen greater environmental changes over their lifetime to support their environmental concerns, whilst at other times they presented Rosie and her brother as '*more aware*' of these changes, as those growing up in an era when environmental concerns are more commonly vocalised in everyday life.

Some research activities led to *in-situ* negotiations of environmental knowledge, which demonstrated the emotional and imaginative work undertaken by children in their attempts to influence family practices, particularly where the relevance of their messages was contested. A family discussion in Hyderabad, Amrutha's mother's recollection of how Amrutha and her sister often asked her to turn off air-conditioning to 'save polar bears', led to one such negotiation:

Aruna [*mother*]: In what ways you save polar bears by doing that?

Alekhya [*sister*]: By not by not turning on the AC [*air conditioning*]!

Amrutha: By not turning on the AC because it kills a lot of polar bears in the Arctic.

Aruna: Do we see polar bears around us?

Amrutha: Not around us but in the Arctic we can see.

Aruna: How do they affect, ah? How do you save them by turning it off?

Amrutha: We won't get to see, but if you use all the AC then you won't get more AC in the future. It's like that.

Amrutha, 12, and family, group discussion, Hyderabad

The causality between 'AC' and polar bears constructed by Amrutha in this extract demonstrates the power of symbolic images to promote 'pro-environmental' messages. Aruna's scepticism, however, leads Amrutha to call upon another environmental narrative – future resource scarcity – to support her case for the family reducing their use of 'AC'.

Following further discussion, Amrutha's parents conceded that Amrutha's concerns were scientifically grounded and used the opportunity to demonstrate their own environmental knowledge:

Vijay [*father*]: [AC's] use a lot of CFC gases, Amrutha. So those gases kind of impact the ozone layer which in turn is fastening [sic] the melting cycles of the arctic. So no snow, no ice, polar bears are, um (.) going to extinction.

Aruna: Yeah, that is correct.

Family group discussion, Hyderabad

This exchange indicates Amrutha's capacities to influence family understandings of a formerly taken-for-granted practice, later exemplified as Aruna described how she sometimes reminded Amrutha of her own message: '*Whenever she turns on the AC when she wants to sleep, I tell her 'polar bears are crying, why are you switching on the AC?'*'. However, this *in situ* negotiation of everyday practices also shows the difficulties for children (and indeed, all family members) of acting on as-yet temporally and spatially distant concerns. Although Amrutha's parents' ultimately endorsed this particular message, this and other examples illuminate how children's attempts to influence family practices involve negotiations between 'new' knowledge and parents' existing knowledge, which may be supported by parents' claims to authoritative knowledge based on comparatively greater life experience.

Understandings of age-related 'maturity' were vocalised by a number of children and parents in the research, in what might be seen as a refutation of the narrative of 'the next generation' acting as 'agents of change' in lieu of a narrative of parental responsibility to teach children to use resources sustainably. Aamir, living in Hyderabad, spoke in self-deprecating terms of his own attempts at reducing his use of 'gadgets' in response to his knowledge of their environmental impact. In contrast, he presented his parents as 'obviously' better at acting on this knowledge:

Aamir: I actually tried to change some things in my house but then I am lazy enough to just leave it and, like, never mind anything (*Aamir laughs*).

[Discussion ensues about the nature of attempted changes]

Catherine: And when you were trying to make those changes, did you tell your family that that's what you were doing?

Aamir: Yeah. Actually they tried their best and even I did the same, but I ended up doing it for short time whereas they did it for, uh, a longer time.

Catherine: Oh really? Could you tell me who in your family was good at remembering to not use AC so much?

Aamir: Uh, my mother, obviously (...) mother and my father.

Aamir, 12, school group discussion, Hyderabad

Aamir's assessment that his parents were 'obviously' better than he was at remembering to use less 'AC' cohered with a family narrative of responsible resource use as something learned over time and with the help of older family members, vocalised by various members of Aamir's family in research activities. This could be seen in the family discussion of a hypothetical vignette presented by the research team, premised on a child suggesting that the family use less water in response to teaching at school about the threat of regional drought:

Aafiya [*cousin*]: Maybe his mother, she changes her mind and uses less water everywhere, every day.

Aamir: Depends on the mother.

Zoya [*mother*]: If she were a mother like me she would have definitely changed.

Natasha: OK. And why do you think she would change the way she uses her water?

Zoya: Because she is old enough to understand the situation. The child has understood, he has come home fully prepared that this is how he is going to save water, so now it is the mother who has to understand, so being a very mature person in the family she understands and then she cuts down the use of water.

Aamir, 12, and family, group discussion, Hyderabad

Zoya's intervention amidst the boys' responses suggests parental responsiveness to the hypothetical child's concerns, whilst reinforcing a position of parental authority and responsibility for managing household resources. This understanding of parental authority, vocalised by both parents and children in the research, presents a disjunction from simplistic notions of children acting as 'agents of change' and leading family members to 'pro-environmental' practices by their examples.

This observation is not intended to minimise the important role that children have in influencing family attempts to make connections between 'big' environmental concerns and everyday domestic practices, and to adapt these practices accordingly. Indeed, case examples seen above present insights into children's capacities to interpret complex environmental messages, to make moral decisions based on their interpretations and – in Amrutha's case in particular – to use their generational positioning as those who will live with the consequences

of present-day practices to influence the way in which previously taken-for-granted practices are understood. It is important to note, however, that children's attempts to influence practices and the 'new' knowledge used in such attempts must be negotiated alongside parents' own (claims to) authoritative knowledge generated through their greater life experience. Thus, family attempts to adapt practices in 'pro-environmental' ways might be better conceived of as collaborative actions, involving intergenerational negotiations of knowledge and symbolic authority. Within such negotiations, children's symbolic connection to the future is a powerful motivator for action. However, translating future-oriented concerns into action is mediated through prevailing understandings of children's and parents' roles in the home and family members' existing knowledge.

Closing Discussion: What Place for Children in Everyday Environmental Activism?

By critically considering the ways in which the trope of 'the next generation' is used in environmental policies, and in societal framings more broadly, this paper has attended to the assigned, imagined and lived identities that cohere in this generational identity, and has considered the extent to which this identity is useful in prompting children's (and other generations') everyday environmental activism. This was defined as individual and collective efforts to change, adapt or disrupt one's own and others' everyday practices in response to concerns about the negative impact of these practices on the environment as it is known, valued and imagined.

Case examples presented above offer insights into ways in which children in different contexts are responding to their assigned role as 'agents of (pro-environmental) change'. Children's narratives of attempts to adapt their everyday practices and to influence how such practices are understood and engaged in by other family members show their capacities to interpret complex messages and to act reflexively, thus demonstrating what Mayall (2002) terms children's 'moral agency'. Moreover, children's attempts to act on spatially and temporally distant environmental concerns, using their imagination to construct causalities between distant times and spaces, illuminate their capacities to engage in meaningful action motivated by an 'ethic of care' (Tronto, 1993), albeit action of a more modest order than that commonly understood to constitute 'activism'. Such insights support arguments for renewed consideration of what is considered to constitute activism, including where this takes place and who is involved (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Horton & Kraftl, 2009; Nolas et al., 2016). In particular, children's narratives in this paper suggest that ideas that children do not engage in

‘activism’ have less to do with children’s (frequently underexplored) capacities for political action and more to do with the reductive ways in which ‘activism’ is often understood as ‘spectacular’ public action, engaged in by those of voting age and above.

Children’s and family narratives of everyday environmental activism display the symbolic ways that the identity of ‘the next generation’ can prompt present-day action, as children embody the need for action to assure the future security of the planet. In this regard, the close associations between childhood and futurity do not necessarily mean that children’s possibilities for action in the present are stifled. Rather, children’s imagined identity as ‘repositories of hope’ for the future (Kraftl, 2008) can be useful in supporting environmental activism. However, children’s role should not only be viewed as symbolic. The important role that children have in negotiating environmental knowledges and adaptations to everyday practices highlights the need for a reevaluation of the diminished political and social role with which children are imbued in many contexts (James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 2005).

The examples presented above caution against making too straightforward a connection between childhood’s symbolic power and children’s ‘pester power’ to influence change. In particular, children’s narratives show that their possibilities for action – in the home at least – depend to large extent on their proposed actions being taken seriously by other family members. In this way, the potential stifling of children’s possibilities to engage in everyday environmental activism remains a risk where attention is not paid to the ways in which children’s agency and propensity to act is supported by – and interdependent with – that of their parents. Thus, rather than a policy focus on building children’s agency to act as ‘agents of change’, a more helpful and ultimately more sustainable approach might be to focus on the ways in which family members work together to enact changes in their everyday lives, amidst ongoing conflicts and negotiations. This fits with the arguments of scholars who have argued for greater attention to familial interdependence, and to human interdependence in general (Oswell, 2013; Punch, 2007; Richards, Clark, & Boggis, 2015; Tronto, 1993).

An important area of consideration not explored in depth in this paper is the way in which children’s and family agency to act on environmental concerns might be stifled by the structural inadequacies of their environments, particularly for families living in materially poor circumstances. In the research informing this paper, children in low-income settings often expressed concerns and frustrations over environmental problems that they sensed in

their everyday lives but felt unable as individuals to do anything to change (for example, exposed waste, traffic pollution or stagnant water). In contrast to the largely future-oriented concerns seen in this paper, these concerns were part of children's present-day environmental experiences, adding weight to the moral imperative for structural interventions to support children and families in responding to these present-day concerns.

In conclusion, responses to complex environmental and political challenges require interdependent action. Children's identity as 'the next generation' – as those with lives envisaged to cross temporalities and trajectories of planetary degradation – can and should support their contributions to engendering sustainable futures. Indeed, the examples presented above show children's potential to act and influence in ways that are more than symbolic. However, ongoing political work is needed to 'upgrade childhood as social status' (Mayall, 2002, p. 12) so that children's everyday environmental activism, carried out in partnership with other generations, is taken seriously.

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