

Across the chasm?



Image: Times

*Towards intergenerational
empathy & solidarity
on climate change*

Nathan Wiltshire

Centre for Social Research & Methods

Australian National University

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Background

- Climate change a cultural phenomenon (Hulme, 2009)
- Relations at the heart of society (Donati & Archer, 2015)
- Generations as a shared consciousness (Connolly, 2019)
- Generational tensions and shame (Connolly, 2019)
- Climate change and individual morality (Jamieson, 2020)

Sources:

- Hulme, M. (2009). *Why we disagree about climate change: Understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity*: Cambridge University Press.
- Donati, P., & Archer, M. S. (2015). *The Relational Subject*. West Nyack: Cambridge University Press.
- Connolly, J. (2019). Generational conflict and the sociology of generations: Mannheim and Elias reconsidered. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 36(7-8)
- Jamieson, L. (2020). Sociologies of Personal Relationships and the Challenge of Climate Change. *Sociology*, 54(2),

A chasm between generations?

- Youth: innocence, vulnerability, inheriting the issue - alarmist, apathetic, narcissistic - or heroic protagonists (Jones et al, 2023)
- Older generations as contributing to climate change (Ayalon & Roy, 2023)
- Millennial-Boomer animosity (Francioli et al, 2023)

Sources:

- Jones, C. A., Davison, A., & Lucas, C. (2023). Innocent heroes or self-absorbed alarmists? A thematic review of the variety and effects of storylines about young people in climate change discourses. *WIREs Climate Change*, 14(6).
- Ayalon, L., & Roy, S. (2023). The Perceived Contribution of Older People to Climate Change Impact, Mitigation, and Adaptation: Measurement Development and Validation. *Innovation in Aging*, 7(8).
- Francioli, S. P., Danbold, F., & North, M. S. (2023). Millennials Versus Boomers: An Asymmetric Pattern of Realistic and Symbolic Threats Drives Intergenerational Tensions in the United States. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*

Perhaps it's more nuanced

- Youth with mixed concern for climate (Sciberras & Fernando, 2022)
- Age less of a factor in climate attitudes & behaviours (Milfont et al, 2021)
- Generational sustainability attitudes and behaviours cultural, economic, practical (Khorana, 2024)
- Over-simplification and misuse of discourse (Meyer & Sokolíčková, 2024)

Sources:

- Sciberras, E., & Fernando, J. W. (2022). Climate change-related worry among Australian adolescents: an eight-year longitudinal study. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27(1)
- Khorana, S. (2024). Running in the Family: Australian Migrants' Environmental Care as Inter-generational and Domestic Civic Practice. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 1-14.
- Milfont, T. L., Zubielevitch, E., Milojev, P., & Sibley, C. G. (2021). Ten-year panel data confirm generation gap but climate beliefs increase at similar rates across ages. *Nature Communications*, 12(1)
- Meyer, A., & Sokolíčková, Z. (2024). 'Melting Worlds' and 'Climate Myths': Diverging Stories of Climate Change in Longyearbyen, an Arctic 'Frontline Community'. *Ethnos*, 1-18.

Stereotypes, ageism, and fractured relations

- Stereotypes reinforce age-related prejudice for all age groups e.g. (Francioli & North, 2021)
- Perceived moral or competence failure (Fiske, 1998)
- Prejudice supports ‘lesser humanness’ (Karantzas et al, 2023)
- Intergenerational ambivalence, psychological distance, & reduced agency to action

Sources:

- Francioli, S. P., & North, M. S. (2021). Youngism: The content, causes, and consequences of prejudices toward younger adults. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 150(12)2
- Fiske, S. T. (1998). *Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination* [McGraw-Hill].
- Karantzas, G. C., Simpson, J. A., & Haslam, N. (2023). Dehumanization: Beyond the Intergroup to the Interpersonal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 32(6), 501-507. doi:10.1177/09637214231204196

Towards intergenerational solidarity

- Solidarity as mechanical or organic (Gofman, 2014)
- Organic solidarity as ‘empathic solidarity’ (Thijssen, 2012)
- Interpersonal empathy supports humanization across cultural differences (Wiltshire, 2023)
- Understanding everyday lived experiences (Collins, 2005)

Sources:

- Gofman, A. (2014). Durkheim’s Theory of Social Solidarity and Social Rules. In V. Jeffries (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity: Formulating a Field of Study* (pp. 45-69). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Thijssen, P. (2012). From mechanical to organic solidarity, and back: With Honneth beyond Durkheim. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15(4),
- Wiltshire, N. R. J. (2023). Cultivation of identification, solidarity, and empathy through interaction rituals: insights from a cross-cultural program in India. Centre for Cultural Sociology 20th Anniversary Conference, Yale University.
- Collins, R. (2005). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Recommendation 1: Research

- Qualitative research with people across a diverse range of cultural perspectives
- Specific studies on popular characterisations of intergenerational and other groups in relation to climate change
- Seek to understand how people perceive others
- Focus on understanding relations between people – especially across generations

Recommendation 2: Social initiatives

- Personal stories and cultural narratives to dissipate generational categories, overcome stereotypes, and change perceptions on climate change
- Give voice to share real lived experiences
- Empathy-related toolkit for families and communities
- In-person relations e.g. university programs to partner students with their communities



Image: Laura Martin

Nathan Wiltshire

nathan.wiltshire@anu.edu.au

LinkedIn "Nathan Wiltshire"

www.nathanwiltshire.com