

**Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada**

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## Abstract

Recently animated by youth campaigns such as #FridaysforFuture, the climate movement reflects the urgency of the climate crisis in the 21st century. While youth climate activists point to the instability of their own future as a key reason for mobilizing, it is not as clear what catalyzing forces are causing adults to join the climate movement. To investigate, this research explores the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adult activists in Manitoba, Canada, are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis. As such, this work attempts to address a gap in the transformative learning literature by examining the intersection of learning and action, and works to advance knowledge regarding pathways to “learn our way out” of complex socio-ecological problems (e.g., climate change). Data for this qualitative study was comprised of literature and document review, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group session with climate activists in Manitoba. Key findings included observing how multiple types of learning (formal, nonformal, and experiential) led participants to climate activism, as well as how experiences of grief, loss, death, and/or trauma motivated involvement in the climate movement. In regard to learning outcomes, this research adds context to the instrumental, communicative, transformative, and introspective domains of transformative learning and draws conclusions about the learning-to-action process as one of accumulated awareness.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Recently animated by youth campaigns such as #FridaysforFuture, the climate movement reflects the urgency of the climate crisis in the 21st century (Fisher, 2019). The climate crisis is a massive, multi-faceted issue that affects the globe ecologically, socially, and politically (Hampson & Rich-Tolsma, 2015; IPCC 2018; Savo et al., 2016). Indeed, the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report (Summary for Policymakers 2021) concludes that “climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe, with human influence contributing to many observed changes in weather and climate extremes” (p. 10). To mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, the United Nation Climate Change Secretariat (2019) calls for ambitious and effective action. In Manitoba, instances of climate action at the policy level are documented (Boyd, 2015) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have attempted to report on the attitudes and behaviours of Manitobans towards climate change (Manitoba Energy, Science, and Technology, 2005), but less is known about climate activism as a grassroots form of advocacy.

Many individuals have recently become active in collective, grassroots climate activism as a form of climate action (Hale, 2016). Made visible in the form of rallies, blockades, strikes, marches, calls to boycott, and much more, climate activism has captured the attention of governments, the media, and the everyday citizen. While youth climate activists point to the instability of their own future as a key reason for mobilizing (Fisher, 2019; Kowasch et al., 2021), it is not as clear what catalyzing forces are causing adults who had not previously been active to join the climate movement. Scholars have suggested that as a unique and all-encompassing global problem, climate change requires new and widespread assemblages of collective action (Clingerman & O’Brien, 2017; Klein, 2014). In examining the learning

processes of adult climate activists in Manitoba, this research attempts to understand and document the experiences of these activists as they take part in individual and collective action concerning the climate crisis.

Along with observing the ways in which the climate movement is manifested in Manitoba, it is important to note how adult climate activists choose to identify and align themselves with said movement. Though “becoming critically self-reflective can be powerfully facilitated by a relevant social movement” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 188), it may also be the case that critical self-reflection may catalyze and sustain a social movement. For instance, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) recount how activists share stories and reflections which illustrate not only that their work is linked to their passions, but intertwined with their sense of identity (p. 108). As such, individual identity and critical self-reflection can be understood as key elements of the individual experience of activism.

Furthermore, these identities are wound up in both the collective and individual context in which each activist or organizer navigates their experience within the climate movement (Godfrey, 2012). Indeed, Farro and Lustiger-Thaler (2014) suggest that the challenge in observing contemporary collective actions “is to understand how individuals actually create collective action, as that action is re-constituting individuals who can no longer be solely defined by the collective” (p. 2). As such, understanding climate activism and the climate movement also necessitates the study of the activist as an individual, rather than simply as a member of the collective (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

Looking specifically to the learning that motivates individuals to “become” active within the climate movement, then, requires attention to their inner experience as well as their experience within the movement itself. While multiple scholars have documented how

transformative and social learning can be linked to action on sustainability (e.g., Hampson & Rich-Tolsma, 2015; Lange, 2004; Moyer et al., 2016), these theories have yet to be explored in the context of climate activism. Specifically, Hampson and Rich-Tolsma (2015) offer that “the potential usefulness of transformative education in addressing climate change has not been explored sufficiently” (p. 172) and view “transformative learning as one appropriate approach to facilitating the worldview shift required to address this wickedly complex challenge” (p. 172).

In exploring the learning processes of adult climate activists in Manitoba, this research attempts to extend the notion of learning beyond the typical educational settings and into whichever settings, circumstances, and/or spaces a climate activist may have learned about and begun to take action on the climate crisis. As such, this work attempts to offer insight for transformative learning theory in regard to the introspective domain (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016), which “comprises learning that is personal and internal, and that discovers, develops, and defines one’s self-understanding” (p. 48). Importantly, this inwardly-focused study of the adult climate activist may find resonance with the introspective domain and thus has the potential to contribute to the further engagement of transformative learning in the philosophical, ethical, religious, and spiritual components of sustainability dilemmas (p. 49).

## **1.2 Transformative learning: Overview and potential uses**

As proposed by theorist Jack Mezirow (1994), transformative learning theory “is intended to be a comprehensive, idealized, and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning” (p. 222). Within this theory, learning is defined as “the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (p. 223). Furthermore, Mezirow suggests

that “the most significant learning involves critical premise reflection of premises about oneself” (p. 224). This can be seen through these following phases:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
11. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective. (p. 168-169)

Since “transformative learning also involves very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, grounded in a more intuitive and emotional sense of our experiences” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 80), my research necessarily seeks to understand the personal experiences of climate activists, in how their learnings concerning the climate crisis have led them to become activists. Indeed, Mezirow (1991) suggests that “identifying with a social movement provides perhaps the most powerful reinforcement of a new way of seeing our own dilemma” (p. 188). Likewise, as a component of transformative learning theory which seeks to understand how adult learners transform their learnings into action, the learning-action nexus provides a useful avenue through which this interplay can be understood (Moyer et al., 2016).

Given its seemingly narrow focus on the individual, critics of transformative learning theory have commented that it does not adequately theorize social change and places “an inordinate emphasis on the psychological and the individual at the expense of the social and the collective” (Mezirow, 1989, p. 169). In examining how transformative learning may occur within

the climate movement, however, I engage with this very critique by being attentive to the relationship between the situated experience of each activist and the collective context of activism and organizing work. Underscoring this direction, Hampson and Rich-Tolsma (2015) state that “transformative learning is a useful signifier to encompass the cluster of various processes – able to be used in a variety of individual and collective contexts – which adequately enable such transformations at both individual and collective levels” (p. 172). Though I have employed transformative learning as a theory which provides helpful insight on organizing themes for this qualitative research, my approach is primarily inductive in nature.

### **1.3 Purpose and objectives**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adult activists in Manitoba are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis and thus “become” activists. As such, this study attempted to contribute to the knowledge gap in transformative learning regarding the learning-action nexus (Collard & Law, 1989; Moyer et al., 2016) as well as shed further light on the role of adults in climate activism. My research objectives were to:

- (1) Understand the political, social, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba;
- (2) Examine the relationships between learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement;
- (3) Consider the impacts of youth climate activism on adult activists; and
- (4) Explore the actions of adult climate activists in relation to the learning-action nexus in the context of the climate crisis.

### **1.4 Summary of methods**

I approached this research with a worldview which aligns most strongly with social constructivist and transformative assumptions, as I have attempted to understand how climate activists- as learners- create subjective meaning from and through their experiences (Creswell,

2014, p. 8). I address how this meaning-making is informed by and negotiated within the participants' social, historical, and political context (p. 8). As the researcher and inquirer, I have also necessarily played a role in the generation of meaning (p. 9); therefore, I have openly acknowledged and been attentive to the ways in which my own worldview and background influences how I interpret and collect data within this research context. Perhaps most significantly, I have remained aware of the fact that I was involved with the community of adult climate activists/organizers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, before and during my research period.

In order to ensure a clear focus on the learning processes and motivations of adult climate activists in Manitoba, I employed a qualitative approach informed by hermeneutical phenomenology (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Crawford & Wilkinson, 2019; Ho et al., 2017). Given that hermeneutical phenomenology is “oriented towards lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting the “texts” of life (hermeneutics)” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 77), it lends itself well to an exploration of “the essence” of how these adults learn about the climate crisis and subsequently become active within the climate movement.

Moreover, the philosophical assumptions associated with phenomenological inquiry (such as its rejection of a single, observable, and objective truth and its theorization of the individual as functioning within a subjective, interpreted world) (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 7) are especially appropriate to my research design given that I have worked to understand *how* climate activists/organizers learn, and *why* they have become socially active. Ultimately, utilizing hermeneutical phenomenology as my strategy of inquiry helped me explore the learning processes of adult climate activists as lived experience and storied phenomena. To continue this focus, I employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)- an approach conducive to

phenomenological research and concerned with understanding ‘persons-in-context’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Zahavi, 2019).

Given that “researchers employing hermeneutic phenomenology primarily draw meanings from transcribed interviews as data” (Ho et al., 2017, p. 1759), I conducted semi-structured interviews to understand the learning experiences of adult climate activists. In brief, semi-structured interviews employ an interview guide to ask participants questions which relate directly to the research objectives of a given study (Dunn, 2005, p. 88). As a method of interviewing, the semi-structured interview has the advantage of being both ordered and flexible; depending on the specific interview, it requires at times that the researcher (re)direct the interview towards the research topics, and at others times that the researcher let the interview unfold organically (p. 88). Given these benefits, semi-structured interviews offer adaptability regarding how adult climate activists choose to share their experience, making it a useful interviewing technique for this research.

Moving forward with hermeneutical phenomenology as the strategy of inquiry in order to focus effectively on the learning processes of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Phase 1 of this research involved an extensive review of academic literature, news articles, and other documentation regarding climate activism/organizing and the climate movement in Manitoba, as well as transformative learning theory and other useful theoretical areas. In Phase 2, Manitoban grassroots climate action and/or justice individuals and groups identified in Phase 1 were contacted and individual participants were selected for semi-structured interviews (and offered the option of also participating in a focus group at a later date, which occurred with 8 participants). These methods focus on examining the learning processes of adult climate activists in their differing levels of experience and engagement. Data were collected in the form of audio

recordings, written notes, and photographs. In Phase 3, qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed with NVivo Pro. My approach is further detailed in Chapter 3.

### **1.5 Contributions to research**

In the field of adult learning, this research attempts to address a gap in the transformative learning literature by examining the intersection of learning and action (e.g., Moyer et al., 2016), and works to advance knowledge in the environmental management field regarding pathways to “learn our way out” of complex socio-ecological problems (Finger & Asún, 2001), such as the climate crisis. Likewise, by examining the inner workings of activists in relation to learning, this study provides some potentially useful substance to the freshly theorized introspective domain within the transformative learning framework, newly proposed by Moyer and Sinclair (2016) “to capture personal learning about beliefs, values, and identity and explore the interrelated nature of the domains” (p. 51). Lastly, this work has also produced a small-scale examination of the history and context of climate activism in Manitoba. In its broadest scope, my work examines the learning processes of adult climate activists in Manitoba as they take part in the climate movement in order to add contextualized knowledge on how individuals “become” activists.

### **1.6 Organization of the thesis**

This thesis contains 6 chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, with four interrelated but distinct foci: (i) climate activism, (ii) the individual experience of activism, (iii), transformative learning, and (iv) learning and action. Chapter 3 include a detailed account of my research approach, as well as the specific data collection and analysis methods employed in the research process, while Chapters 4 and 5 contain results and discussion. Specifically, Chapter 4 delves into the stories and experiences of the 12 participants within the climate movement and highlights the many facets of their identities and reflections. Employing the framework of transformative learning more explicitly to the



analysis of the interviews and the focus group data, Chapter 5 focuses on piecing together the motivations, actions, and learning outcomes of the 12 climate activists and offers insights on the learning-action nexus. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a review and summary of the research project, drawing conclusions in conversation with each set research objective. This chapter also offers recommendations for future research and practice concerning transformative learning and climate activism.

## **Chapter 2: Climate Activism and Individual Learning**

### **2.1 Climate activism in Manitoba and in Canada: An overview**

As climate change is increasingly understood as a socio-ecological issue (Boström et al., 2018; Hampson & Rich-Tolsma, 2015; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; IPCC 2018; Savo et al., 2016), a plethora of groups, government structures, and individuals are seeking multiple pathways out of this crisis. As proposed by Bomberg (2012), “climate change is not like most other policy domains [but is] characterized by compelling urgency, complexity, long- term effects, and considerable up-front costs” (p. 408). As such, some scholars have suggested that “activists with ambitious plans must work across levels of government and across institutions to shift policy in a particular direction” (Bomberg, 2012, p. 411; Ternes et al., 2020). This has resulted in actions at the transnational level (e.g., climate activists speaking at the United Nations and the Conference of the Parties (COP)) (Moor, 2018) and at the grassroots-level through citizen-led engagement and public pressure regarding climate change (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014).

In the context of this research, however, I sought mainly to understand the experience of individuals operating at the grassroots-level of climate activism, defined for the purpose of this research as “citizen political engagement around climate change” (Feldman & Hart, 2016, p. 100). Rather than state-led initiatives which seek to address climate change (which may be better understood as ‘climate action’, rather than ‘climate activism’), I chose to focus on grassroots expressions of climate activism. In brief, grassroots climate activists employ a variety of strategies and tactics, including actions such as “contacting elected representatives; supporting organizations working on the issue; and attending climate change rallies or meetings” (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014, p. 163). Roser-Renouf et al. (2014) demarcate grassroots activists as “individuals who have taken any of [these] three forms of climate action in the past year at least once” (p. 172), while Bomberg (2012) suggests that climate activists are more broadly

“politically engaged actors seeking to achieve climate policy goals” (p. 412). As such, the defining characteristics of ‘grassroots climate activism and activists’ can indeed be discerned from the broader category of ‘climate activism’.

While Greta Thunberg and much of the climate movement demand unity under the findings of climate science (Thunberg, 2019), tensions exist within and between the diversity of peoples and groups involved; the perspectives and identities held within the climate movement are multiple and the question of legitimacy (i.e., whose perspective is given weight) remains a significant one (Montenegro De Wit & Iles, 2016; Yates-Doerr, 2019). Investigating the work of anti-racist, immigrant justice, and climate justice advocates in the United States, Black et al. (2016) suggest that paying attention to “geographically situated particularities provides opportunities for activists to imagine and articulate climate justice narratives that can overcome what seem to be trenchant obstacles to such movement building when it is imagined at global scales only” (p. 285). In examining how climate activists of Manitoba pay heed to their specific individual, geographical, political, and social context, I was required to examine whether the issue of climate change similarly became more localized and thus tangible.

In sum, achieving varying degrees of climate action and justice in Canada has included grassroots activism and organizing work, as well as efforts from broader community, municipal, provincial, and national levels of decision-making and governance processes. Focusing on the climate change work undertaken by a wide variety of individuals and bodies in Canada is a considerable task given that “jurisdiction over climate change is generally accepted to be shared and in some cases split between the federal and provincial governments” (Doelle et al., 2011, p. 526). Just as climate change spans these multiple contexts, so does grassroots climate activism—as an active, ground-up response to the climate crisis. As such, my consideration of the literature

incorporates certain state-led instances of climate action, in order to broadly understand the historical, social, and political context of climate activism in Manitoba.

### ***2.1.1 The impact of youth climate activism on adult activists***

In the last decade, youth climate activists in particular have sounded the alarm on climate change in a way that has drawn global attention. Speaking to the National Assembly in Paris on July 23, 2019, 17-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg made a poignant statement concerning the crisis of climate change: “The science is clear and all we children are doing is communicating and acting on that united science” (Thunberg, 2019, para. 15). Most widely recognized for her Friday schools strikes and subsequently launching the #FridaysforFuture movement (Fisher, 2019; Larbalestier, 2020), Thunberg has inspired climate action and justice work across the globe, including the creation of Climate Strike Canada (<https://climatestrikecanada.org/en/home>). Thunberg’s ‘*Skolstrejk för klimatet*’ (*School strike for the climate*) now comprises “millions who have taken to the streets to demand a livable future” (Larbalestier, 2020, para. 2), both youth and adults alike. This movement remains active, as per the observations of Kowasch et al. (2021): “despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fridays for Future movement continues to strike, though with a lower number of participants” (p. 2).

Of course, Greta Thunberg is not the only youth climate activist catalyzing mobilization on climate change (Parker, 2020). Notably, two youth environmental activists living and/or working from Canada have been influential in both the Canadian and global environmental and climate movements. At the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 12-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki challenged decision-makers to consider the well-being of future generations and later became known as “the girl who silenced the world for six minutes” (Parker,

2020). At that time, she intertwined her own experience, identity, and reality with that of the globe regarding climate justice (American Rhetoric, 1992):

I'm only a child, yet I know we are all part of a family -- five billion strong; in fact 30 million species strong -- and borders and governments will never change that. I'm only a child, yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world towards one single goal. (para. 8)

Another youth environmental activist, Indigenous water protector Autumn Peltier from Wikwemikong First Nation in northern Ontario, is an active and passionate advocate for clean water and environmental justice (Kelo, 2019). In 2018, she addressed the UN General Assembly on the topic of water rights, stating that “water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth” (para. 14). In a Maclean’s interview in 2021, Peltier reflected on confronting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at an Assembly of First Nation events about the dismal state of water protection and Indigenous communities in Canada (Smith, 2021, para. 22). Sharing that Trudeau promised her then that “[he] would protect the water”, she stated the following: “I was 12 at the time, I am 17 years old now, and I’m still holding him accountable to that promise” (para. 27). Bringing together her identity as an Indigenous youth and as a water protector acting on “environmental and equity issues connected to water in Canada and the number of boil water advisories in Indigenous communities” (Raby & Shepphard, 2021, p. 390), her work has been internationally recognized and valued within the climate movement.

The efforts of these three youth activists fleshes out a statement made by the United Nations in the 2003 World Youth Report: “young people will be compelled to engage in new forms of action and activism in response to the growing environmental and ecological concerns as they will be inheriting environmental challenges” (Dryzek 2003, as cited in Hood et al., 2011, p. 617). Indeed, Conner (2014) describes “youth organizing [as] action oriented, [...] whether [it involves] protests and marches, press releases, creative performances such as street theater or

poetry slams, or speeches in front of city council and local school boards” (p. 451). As youth rise up to protest the climate crisis, they are doing so in unique and self-empowering ways.

Indeed, in their paper which examines climate change learning with young people in Brazil, Trajber et al. (2019:2) note that “young people should not be regarded solely as victims of climate change [...]: they [also] hold unique perspectives on its manifestations and potential responses” (Trajber et al. also cite Corner et al., 2015; Haynes & Tanner, 2015; and Tanner, 2010 in this regard). Yet, the needs, experiences, and knowledges of youth are often neglected due to their social and legal position (Trajber et al., 2019, p. 3); though the UN Climate Change Summit also usually includes a youth summit component, it is “often rendered tokenistic by insufficient formal mechanisms to incorporate young people’s perspectives into policy” (p. 3). Interestingly, Trajber et al. also found that “young people were clear that, despite their generational positioning, they are not the only stakeholders and should not carry sole responsibility for disseminating and acting on knowledge [regarding climate change]” (p. 16). In their study, youth were central to the climate justice narrative but also self-indicated their limits to responsibility over and in the climate crisis (p. 16).

As energized as youth climate activism may seem, it has its own challenges and should not be taken for granted as a steady catalyst and/or means of climate action work in Canada. In a study which explores the perspectives of youth in Northern Newfoundland on environmental stewardship, Hood et al. (2011) share that many of the youth indicated that while they greatly valued the natural environment, “very few efforts [were] being made to ensure that these desires were met with action” (p. 622). However, these researchers also affirm that though this finding may be interpreted as disengagement from environmental stewardship, it is likely that other

factors (social, economic, political, and/or industrial) may influence the abilities of youth to take environmental action (p. 622).

Studying the experience, identity, and achievements of college student activists in the United States, Conner (2020) claims that “because so much social change in the United States has depended on the deep involvement and even the leadership of young people, it is critical to understand how and why young people become involved in these causes, what they actually do as activists, and what they achieve through their efforts” (p. 1-2). Employing a mixed-methods study comprised of 237 surveys and 40 interviews with a diverse group of college student activists (p. 2), Conner examines “the turn towards activism as a developmental process that is shaped by both the immediate institutional context and the broader societal context” (p. 2). Conner’s questions concerning why certain college students become politicized while others do not and how youth “negotiate their identities as activists” (p. 3) can be transposed (and are highly relevant) to the involvement of adults in climate activism in Canada.

### ***2.1.2 The Canadian context***

As a global issue approached and internalized by a multitude of actors, creating effective climate change action is fraught and complex. Grasswick (2014) suggests that the stakes for trust and distrust in relation to climate change science are quite high given that “our beliefs about climate change shape both our behaviour and policy development, and those beliefs are formed in part by the degree of trust we place in climate change science” (p. 541). Moreover, if “effective global cooperation on climate change is ultimately about motivating nation states to take action beyond what they would consider to be in their national interest” (Doelle, 2016, p. 2), understanding the role that Canada has had in addressing climate change helps situate the context of climate activists working within its borders. Broadly, climate change “has gradually emerged

as *the* environmental issue in the eyes of the public in Canada over the past decade” (Doelle et al., 2011, p. 525).

After withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol (Doelle, 2016), Canada has more recently made other efforts at policy-level climate action (e.g., the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement). However, it is important to clarify that though climate action and grassroots climate activism are linked, they are also distinct: grassroots climate activism seeks to bring about climate action through citizen-led strategy and tactics, while governments and organizations usually pursue climate action through judicial or institutional means (i.e., “top-down” approaches, rather than “ground-up”). As such, climate action (with its “main objective [focused on] [minimizing] GHG emissions that aggravate global warming and address the disruptions caused by climate change impacts”) (UNFCCC 1992, as cited in Mbeva & Makomere, 2019, p. 1) can be pursued by grassroots or state actors, employing very different tactics (and achieving different levels of success).

As one example of climate action pursued within Canada at the governmental level, however, Doelle (2016) speaks to the Paris Outcome as fundamentally different in approach from the Kyoto Protocol given its “idea that self imposed, voluntary commitments are more likely to be met than those imposed by the global community” (p. 2). Conversely, Nugent (2011) argues that both sets of policies exist within the same neoliberal framework: “climate-change policy in Canada over the past two decades can be interpreted as a planned, coordinated, neoliberal project by the state and capital” (p. 61). Put simply, working towards genuine climate action is inherently political. Speaking to this, Trajber et al. (2019) offer the following statement:

Genuinely sustainable climate change adaptation is a political process that involves generations working together to overcome feelings of alienation, apathy or powerlessness in order to articulate knowledge and action for the transformation of complex and unsustainable socio-environmental arrangements. (p. 4)



In addition, Kahane (2018) argues that “the dominant frame for climate responses in Canada treats climate responsibility as congruent with an advanced capitalist economy and with economic growth” (p. 198). This can be exemplified when despite proclaiming to be a climate-forward government, in 2016 Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government approved the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain and the Alberta-to-Wisconsin Line 3 pipeline (the latter of which passed through Manitoba), in order to “significantly increase the quantity of oil Alberta could export daily, both to the US and to the Pacific west coast” (Winfield & Macdonald, 2020, p. 372). While climate change action and policy at the national level in the Canadian context has not been nonexistent, it leaves much room for improvement (Murphy & Lawless, 2020).

Grassroots climate activism in Canada, rather than state-led climate action, is elusive in documentation. Indeed, scholars have examined certain expressions of climate activism work- including Indigenous and ally resistance to energy projects (such as the Keystone XL and TMX pipelines) (Lequesne, 2019; Ternes et al., 2020) and students advocating for fossil fuel divestment at Canadian universities (McGray & Turcotte-Summers, 2017)- but much of the literature surrounding climate activism is written in the context of the United States and the United Kingdom (Bomberg, 2012; Black et al., 2016; McAdam, 2017; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014). However, Barr and Pollard (2017) have generally argued that the 2010s have seen a “new form of environmental activism, which is neither characterized by the politics of protest nor by the passivity of the Neo-liberal citizen-consumer” (p. 48), but has “become focused on the idea of transition to a low carbon economy” (p. 48). This shift may represent a broader shift towards climate activism within the environmental movement, both globally and within Canada.

Perhaps one reason for the scarcity of literature regarding grassroots-level climate activism in Canada is because the climate movement itself is younger than many other social

movements in Canada. However, the contributions to the climate movement in Canada that have been documented are significant and include localized Indigenous resistance and knowledges (Smith & Sharp, 2012), non-Indigenous ally-ship in these struggles (Lequesne, 2019), NGO support (such as the resources provided by organizations such as 350.org, The David Suzuki Foundation, etc.) (Greenberg et al., 2011) and individual and community organizing (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014). In part, this research attempts to understand the localized experiences of climate activists in Manitoba and provide further insight to the make-up of the climate movement in Canada.

### ***2.1.3 The Manitoban context***

As with the climate movement in Canada, exploring climate activism in Manitoba involves paying attention to the specific social, political, and historical context(s) of Manitoba. As a province, Manitoba has implemented several governmental-led climate action and/or mitigation strategies. Boyd (2015) notes that Manitoba is particularly well suited to address climate change (mainly due to its small level of greenhouse gas emissions, comparative to the rest of Canada). Indeed, “Manitoba was one of only two provinces, along with Quebec to support the Canadian federal government’s decision to ratify the Kyoto protocol” (p. 157). Furthermore, Doelle et al. (2011) emphasize that “to date, most of the noteworthy climate legislation and regulations have been passed by provincial governments” (p. 526), so a focus on the provincial context of climate action is highly valuable for understanding the political and social context in which climate activists in Manitoba are situated.

When the Government of Manitoba released its “Beyond Kyoto” climate change plan (or the *Climate Change and Emissions Reduction Act*) in the spring of 2008, provincially-based environmental groups were vocal about their disappointment concerning the insufficiency of this

plan (Boyd, 2015, p. 162). Though the government committed to updating the Beyond Kyoto plan to include new targets, provincial-wide emissions continued to rise: “in 2012 the province’s emissions were 10 per cent above 1990 levels” (Environment Canada 2015, as cited in Boyd, 2015, p. 166). Additionally, Manitoba (along with its neighbouring prairie province Saskatchewan) failed to sign onto the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change (PCF) in 2016 and chose not to implement provincial carbon pricing in 2018, which required Manitoba to pay the federal carbon tax instead (Winfield & Macdonald, 2020, p. 372). In 2018, Manitoba Progressive Conservative premier Brian Pallister joined the PCF and “began planning to introduce carbon pricing [but] abruptly cancelled those plans later in the year” (Lambert 2018, in Winfield & MacDonald, 2020, p. 375). Though Boyd (2015) argues that Manitoba has taken a leadership role on climate change in comparison with most other provinces and territories in Canada, this is not a shared perspective within the province (p. 162). Moreover, there remains a need for documentation of policy-based climate action in the Manitoban context, considering that “Manitoba and other provinces have been understudied in the Canadian climate change literature” (p. 166).

At the grassroots level, climate change has and continues to be actively addressed by citizen organizing and NGO work in Manitoba. As compiled by the Manitoba Eco-Network, an organization which provides environmental information, education, and opportunities to Manitobans (<https://mbeconetwork.org/about/what-we-do/>), groups and collectives working for climate action and/or climate justice in Manitoba include (but are not limited to) The Wilderness Committee (<https://www.wildernesscommittee.org/mbclimate>), the Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition (<https://www.mbenergyjustice.org/>), Manitoba Youth for Climate Action (<https://www.mbyouthforclimateaction.org/>), Our Time (<https://our-time.ca/>), and the Green

Action Centre (<https://www.greenactioncentre.ca>). The Eco Journal, an online newsletter-type journal produced by the Manitoba Eco-Network, provides a key source of province-wide grassroots climate action/justice work and advocates for climate-related issues such as energy justice ([https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Eco\\_Journal-Spring20\\_online\\_4C-1.pdf](https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Eco_Journal-Spring20_online_4C-1.pdf)), solidarity with Indigenous land resistance ([https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Eco\\_Journal-Spring20\\_online\\_4C-1.pdf](https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Eco_Journal-Spring20_online_4C-1.pdf)), and sustainable food projects ([https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/eco-journal\\_summer-2013\\_online.pdf](https://mbeconetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/eco-journal_summer-2013_online.pdf)).

Taking into consideration that “climate-change politics is undoubtedly an important site of ideological struggle where status quo political arrangements have been called into question” (Nugent, 2011, p. 60), the presence and actions of these activism/organizing groups carries significant weight. With the ability and drive to take climate action ‘outside the system’ (or in direct opposition to the system), individuals involved in climate activism provide a critical eye to the inadequacies of the current system and offer alternatives to the status quo (Pötz, 2019). The climate movement may also provide an ‘umbrella’ under which a multitude of social issues can be addressed; indeed, “some Leftist activists argue that the urgency and scope of climate change politics provides a unique opportunity for building broad-scale alliances aimed at realizing social and environmental justice” (Nugent, 2011, p. 59).

The climate movement in Manitoba has presented itself in multifarious expressions throughout the province. As its most highly populated (and capital) city, Winnipeg houses the provincial legislature and thus finds itself the epicenter of documented climate activism in Manitoba. For instance, climate activists in Manitoba acted in solidarity with Standing Rock in 2016 by blocking a major intersection in Winnipeg during rush hour (Canning, 2018; CBC,

2016), thousands gathered at the Manitoba legislature grounds for the 2019 Climate Strike (CBC, 2019a), and led by youth climate activists from Manitoba Youth for Climate Action (MYCA), hundreds participated in a “die-in” in front of Winnipeg’s Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CBC, 2019b). 2020, which saw several waves of the global COVID-19 pandemic, also saw climate activists in Manitoba get creative: in April of that year, Manitoba Youth for Climate Action organized a climate strike via radio, asking Winnipeggers to “turn their radio to the city’s two campus radio stations [at a specific time] and make some noise to draw attention to climate change” (CBC, 2020). In 2021, individuals living in Manitoba attended the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, including farmers taking part in the agriculture delegation (CBC, 2021a) and Indigenous peoples speaking on behalf of their communities (CBC, 2021b). In early 2022, a rally took place in front of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in support of a “transition away from fossil fuel reliance [...] guided by Indigenous knowledge, climate science and a commitment to leave no one behind” (CBC, 2022a). Additionally, the short film *The Dream House* was released in 2022 documenting four young Winnipeg activists in their work and a temporary art installation focused on climate hope and “[bringing] people together to imagine the world that they want” (CBC, 2022b).

Many of the above climate events take place in or have strong connections to Manitoba’s capital city, Winnipeg. Indeed, many climate change-focused organizations have their headquarters in Winnipeg, such as environmental NGO The Green Action Centre (<https://greenactioncentre.ca/>), the Manitoba Eco-Network (<https://mbeconetwork.org/>), climate research NGO the Prairie Climate Center (<http://prairieclimatecentre.ca/>), and an alliance of hydro-impacted communities Wa Ni Ska Tan (<http://hydroimpacted.ca/>). My own experience of climate activism in Manitoba has also been mainly centered in Winnipeg, as the organizing

group I was involved with before and during my research process (the Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition, or MEJC) has its weekly meetings in Winnipeg (though its concern for climate justice is province-wide). So, while Winnipeg certainly cannot represent Manitoba, I have seen firsthand how quickly media and news representatives are able to show up and document climate activism in Winnipeg (be it a die-in, a rally, a protest, an occupation, or a march). Climate activism in Manitoba is not centered on Winnipeg, but the capital city plays a key role as a known place for climate activists to meet, gather, and take action.

## **2.2 The individual experience of activism**

In her 2014 book, *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein argues that the urgent and unique context of climate change calls for an alternative worldview to the one at the heart of the climate crisis (p. 462). Citing Hulme (2009), Murphy and Lawless (2020) posit climate change as a “wicked problem [which] provides us with an opportunity to raise fundamental questions about our values and political-economic power structures, and to think imaginatively about our future” (p. 196). In light of this, climate activism can be seen not only as an external positioning (focused on reconfiguring our collective worldview), but also as an inner one (requiring us to revisit our personal worldview). In the process and outcome of asking such questions and imagining alternatives, the individual activist is then required to look inwardly and recognize their personal experience within activism work. For the purposes of this research, this inward focus is referred to as ‘the individual experience of activism’ and its multi-faceted importance is explored in the following subsections and in further chapters.

### ***2.2.1 Identities of the activist***

While identity does not constitute the entirety of individual experience, it comprises a main component and much of the literature regarding the individual experience of activism

centers on identity studies and/or politics (e.g., Conner, 2020; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). Indeed, education scholar Jerusha Conner (2020) states that “identity is heavily implicated in activism” (p. 33) and “although there is a rich literature on civic identity development and political identity development, activist identity development has received relatively little attention from theorists” (p. 77). In a recent book on student activism, Conner (2020) notes that it is crucial to ask how activists believe their identities shape their work:

Although some identity categories certainly remain salient in moving people to call for change, particularly those categories that are linked directly to experiences of discrimination or injustice, these experiences alone fail to explain why some people with that identity choose to act and others do not. They also fail to account for the involvement of people in the movement who do not hold that identity (p. 46).

Importantly, Conner also notes that “identity is not simply a matter of self-perception [but] also a function of social ascriptions and assumptions based on a person’s appearance and the privileges or disadvantages that society accordingly dispenses” (p. 49).

As such, identity is not only a psychological construct but a social one (Conner, 2020, p. 49). Regarding the identity of activists in particular, Conner emphasizes that though activists’ definitions of activism have “coalesced around particular themes—taking action, effecting change, and targeting oppression and injustice—differences emerged in how the student activists have negotiated their identities as activists” (p. 53). Having read and reflected upon the literature, it seems that two broad categories of ‘identity’ remain resonant when seeking to understand the individual experience of the activist: (1) the identities relating to an activist’s personal background (such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, ability, etc.) and (2) their activist identity (i.e., how they choose to define themselves within activism work and/or circles).

Personal identities, as the first component of the individual experience of the activist, are multifaceted and intersecting (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). In a study seeking to “understand the experience of self-identified women of colour student activists on a large, predominantly White college campus” (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 384), the multiple identities of the activist are explored through narrative inquiry. This study not only offers an in-depth discussion on the concept of identity within activism, but argues that the individual experience of an activist-holding a wide range of identities- affects and influences their organizing work.

To further accentuate their argument, Linder and Rodriguez cite a study by Jones and McEwan (2000) to discuss a (woman) activist’s core identity as comprised of their “inner identity” or “inside self” (p. 384). In the case of these women activists, they describe their core identity as “having multiple intersections, [where] the salience of each identity depended on the context in which it was experienced” (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 384) and emphasize “how dissonance occurred between how [the activists] see themselves, or their internal selves, versus the projected external expectations based on perceived identity from others” (p. 391). In sum, through the use of intersectionality theory and model of multiple dimensions of identity theory, this study posits the identities of these activists “as intertwined rather than [separated]” (p. 394).

Regarding the second broad component of the individual experience of activism, ‘the activist identity’, Conner (2020) suggests that “the central work of the turn toward activism is building a practice in which one’s behaviour or engagement in activism not only reflects but also deepens one’s social analysis and vice versa” (p. 79). As such, navigating the activist identity is a juggling act: it requires both an inward focus on the self and an outward attention paid to the causes or issues one is taking action on.



In this sense, Conner's (2020) study found that "activism is both selfless and self-full" (p. 390). It is "closely aligned with one's personal values, beliefs, and morals" (p. 390), it does not adhere to one sole ideology and can "take many forms, large and small, traditional and nontraditional" (p. 390). Interestingly, Conner notes that "those who embrace their identities as activists will certainly continue to refine and strengthen their activist practice" (p. 79) and "without at least the rudiments of such practice established, any claims to an activist identity would be tenuous at best" (p. 79). Indeed, Roser-Renouf et al. (2014) found that 'the activist identity' itself was an obstacle to social action: "identity was the largest [barrier], with a third of [their] respondents (33 %) saying they were not activists" (p. 176). As such, the activist identity may not be an appealing identity for certain organizers or people involved in social change work; this insight has been important to keep in mind when analysing how the identities of adult climate activists in Manitoba are implicated in their learning-to-action processes.

### **2.3 Transformative learning**

First created by theorist Jack Mezirow (1994), transformative learning (TL) theory is a "comprehensive, idealized, and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning" (p. 222). Within TL, learning is understood as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order guide future action" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). In suggesting that "the most significant learning involves critical premise reflection of premises about oneself" (p. 224), Mezirow outlines 11 phases of learning (1994):

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
11. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 168-169)

In addition to these phases of learning, Dirkx (1997) adds that transformative learning attempts to make sense of the personal, imaginative, intuitive, and emotional senses of our experiences (p. 80). As such, TL is better conceptualized as a holistic process which involves “inner work” (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 125), rather than a determined, inflexible, and linear process. As such, although TL is influenced by exterior forces, it occurs within an individual's frame of reference (p. 124). A frame of reference constitutes that “through which individuals filter their incoming sense impressions of the world” (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 818).

However, critics of transformative learning theory have posited that such a focus on the individual places a disproportionate emphasis on the individual and psychological in comparison to the social and the collective (Mezirow, 1989, p. 169) and does not give sufficient weight to theorizing social change (Cox & John, 2016; Soulard & McGehee, 2022). Insofar as instances or ‘journeys’ of TL are always social in nature, Nohl (2009) notes that “transformative learning processes can also fail due to a lack of social recognition [though] this failure cannot [...] be blamed entirely on society but is attributed to the communication that takes place between the learners and society” (p. 297). As outlined in the previous section regarding the intersection of the individual and the climate movement, this research remains attentive to the relationship between the situated experience of each activist and the collective context of activism and organizing work.

Importantly, Hampson and Rich-Tolsma (2015) offer that TL is capable of acknowledging both the individual and collective elements of learning. In light of this interplay of the individual and the broader societal context, Moyer et al. (2016) note that TL has been employed to study the learning and actions of individuals in a variety of sustainability-related contexts, such as sustainable life choices, formal environmental and adult education, natural resource governance, and participatory conservation and development. They suggest that learning becomes transformative when it produces:

A holistic and enduring change in how a person affectively experiences and conceptually frames [their] experience of the world in order to apply new actions in life contexts that are personally developmental, socially controversial, or require personal or social healing. (Kasl & Yorks, 2012, p. 509, as cited in Moyer et al., 2016, p. 314)

This understanding of TL is essentially holistic and acknowledges both the individual frame and societal influences; it weaves together the individual and collective, the internal and external. In this sense, O'Brien (2013) and Pisters et al. (2020) suggest transformative learning as a concept provides a helpful structure for considering “the role consciousness plays in our individual and collective approaches to climate change [in that it] involves amongst other things to reflect upon our identities and upon the grounds which they are built and confront our fear of change” (O'Brien, 2013, in Pisters et al., 2020, p. 397).

### ***2.3.1 The domains of transformative learning***

Within transformative learning theory, there exists different domains of learning which constitute and categorize an individual's learning: the transformative, instrumental, and communicative domains. Mezirow developed the concept of domains through engagement with Habermas's work and “the theory now describes transformations in meaning perspectives as occurring in either the instrumental domain or the communicative domain” (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 819).

Briefly, the instrumental domain captures individual learning or knowledge that “is seen as involving an understanding of how things work” (p. 819) while “the communicative domain is seen as involving relationships between people: how people communicate together” (p. 819). For instance, instrumental learning is that which allows us to understand “the environment, predict observable physical and social events, and take appropriate actions” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 88); this type of learning is task-oriented and can be linked to some of the philosophical assumptions of empirical scientific methodologies (i.e., objective truth, the ‘scientific method’, etc.) (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Moyer et al., 2016). On the other hand, Cranton and Roy (2003) note that there are no scientific laws which govern communicative knowledge: this type of learning is “based on our need to understand each other through language” (p. 89). As such, communicative learning involves our subjective interpretations of our individual and/or shared experiences as “we come to agree on how things should be and are in reference to standards and values, moral and political issues, educational and social systems, and government actions” (p. 89).

Third, the transformative domain describes the inner awakening which ultimately “[drives] a person to enlarge their understanding and appreciation of life” (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 825). This domain of learning is characterized by “the modification of premises, assumptions and deep meaning structures that result from evaluating the outcomes of instrumental and communicative learning, which ideally should result in a transformation of action and behaviour” (Moyer et al., 2016, p. 41). In this sense, the transformative domain is distinct from but also encompasses the instrumental and communicative domain (Moyer et al., 2016), and is concerned with ‘learning-to-action’ as a phenomenon.

Created by Moyer et al. (2016) to address a gap regarding the categorization of data in the previously existing domains of TL, the introspective domain (or subdomain) seeks to “capture personal learning about beliefs, values, and identity and explored the interrelated nature of the domains” (p. 51). They note that TL “emphasizes reflection on worldviews, beliefs, and values, but from our perspective, the existing domains do not provide a clear space for such learning outcomes in a personal, internal fashion” (p. 49). This proposed domain “comprises learning that is personal and internal, and that discovers, develops, and defines one’s self-understanding” (p. 48) and can “occur through reflection, discourse, and embodied experience, as well as reading, skill-building, and many other activities” (p. 48).

The creation of the introspective domain, which can house certain internal aspects of the learning process and “[highlight] the interconnected nature of the learning process” (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016, p. 52), may be of particular value to this research. Indeed, collecting data focused on the personal experience of the adult climate activist within the broader social movement has the potential to uncover learning which fits within the introspective domain. In this way, this research contributes to the further engagement of transformative learning in the philosophical, ethical, religious, and spiritual components of sustainability dilemmas.

## **2.4 Learning and action**

“What if we assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating and sleeping, that it is both life- sustaining and inevitable? And what if, in addition, we assumed that learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing?” -Etienne Wenger. (1998, p. 3)

Writing as a social and environmental activist of two decades, Aziz Choudry (2012) posits that “although there is a considerable body of scholarly literature on adult education and learning, thus far relatively few attempts have been made to theorize informal learning and knowledge production through involvement in social action” (p. 8). Indeed, what learning

processes do individuals undertake or engage in (whether consciously or subconsciously) to become socially active (and thus, become activists or organizers)? Mezirow (1991) suggests that “identifying with a social movement provides perhaps the most powerful reinforcement of a new way of seeing our own dilemma” (p. 188)- a step which links learning to action. Key to understanding this learning-to-action phenomenon within activism is to recognize the catalyzing feature(s) of this learning process, as well as the characteristics of the learning process itself (in addition to outcomes).

This learning-to-action phenomenon can be examined in relationship to personal transformation outcomes, as explored in Moyer and Sinclair’s (2020) work on learning and sustainability. Drawing from Cranton (2006) and Mezirow (1991), they suggest that personal transformation “occurs when learning processes involve reflective evaluation and result in profound change in an individual’s framework for understanding themselves and the world” (p. 9). By examining instances of personal transformation within the action-related data of 15 different studies (p. 10), the authors note that personal transformation outcomes are difficult to identify in a consistent manner. Framing the learning-to-action phenomenon from a different angle, Moyer et al. (2016) systematically characterize action itself, distinguishing between three types of social action:

1. Individual action: “A single person acting on something they learned. Although this type of social action is executed by individuals, they are not necessarily acting in isolation” (Moyer et al., 2016, p. 317-318).
2. Interpersonal action: “A single person acting in a way that transfers what he or she had learned to other people” (Moyer et al., 2016, p. 318).
3. Collective action: “Action taken by groups of people applying learning together” (Moyer et al., 2016 p. 319-320)”. (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020)

These categorizations of action feed into an understanding of personal learning-to-action instances within climate activism in that they offer potentially useful “boxes” for sorting the

different ways in which individuals learn about climate change and become involved in the movement. For instance, these “boxes” may help determine which components of their experience of this phenomenon is mainly composed of ‘individual action’ versus ‘collective action’. These broad but specific categories may prove helpful for understanding the action outcomes of climate activists, as they share their experience of the learning-to-action phenomenon regarding their own involvement in the climate movement.

#### ***2.4.1 The internal “turn” towards activism: The catalyzing force of learning***

What catalyzes one’s “turn”- a shift or behavioural change- towards activism? Describing the story of Blake, a self-identified student activist, Conner (2020) asserts that “there was no singular moment that defined Blake’s becoming-an-activist story, and they attribute their journey into activism to a “pretty unlikely course of events”” (p. 57). Studying activists such as Blake, Conner discovered that while activists could recall “memorable moments” (p. 59) within their activist trajectory, “rarely was the birth of their activist identity or their journey into activism clearly demarcated by a galvanizing moment or realization [and] many respondents, in fact, struggled to pinpoint when, where, and how their journeys as activists began” (p. 59).

The catalyzing force linked to an individual’s learning-to-action process mirrors a poignant discussion within the transformative learning literature concerning the “disorienting dilemma” (or, the catalyst for the learning) (Mezirow, 1994). Originally conceptualized as “a single, dramatic happening” or a “triggering event” (Baumgarner, 2001, p. 81), scholars have been discussing how this phenomenon may also be a cumulative or drawn-out process (Cranton, 2013; Taylor, 2000). Conner (2020) gives a name to this catalyzing force- the “turn” towards activism- and fleshes out its three salient features:

First, [the turn towards activism] typically has an imperceptible rather than a distinctive beginning. [...] Second, the turn can proceed swiftly, slowly, or in fits and starts, but it

usually does not advance in a steady, cumulative fashion. [...] Third, the turn implicates action and cognition, as youth develop their practice and align their worldview and social analysis with their behaviour. As they turn toward activism, youth engage in active experimentation, ample reflection, and knowledge accumulation. (p. 59)

While Conner is referring to student and youth activists, this understanding of the “turn” towards activism may also resonate with the experiences of adult activists as they learn about climate change and decide to become socially active within the climate movement. Specifically, as “each student [became] engaged in learning, reflection, and analysis that would prove relevant to their later activism” (Conner, 2020, p. 72), adults may undergo similar catalyzing forces in their orientation towards activism.

Given the question of motivation and role of emotion in the experiences of individual activists, it is of import to draw attention to the social movement literature and its contributors that have attempted to bring clarity to this very area. In research work on the role of emotion in AIDS activism and protest, Gould (2003) argues that a focus on emotions in social movements research “encourages investigations of human behavior that are not bound by rational actor assumptions, providing greater insight into people's motivations for participating in movements” (p. 157). To be clear, Gould does not suggest that the rationale and rationality of those involved in activism is unimportant but rather that the influence of emotions on involvement is understudied. This is key to Gould, who states that “emotions shape people's notions of what is politically possible and desirable” (p. 162). In relation to my study, then, emotion as a component of one’s motivation towards involvement in the climate movement may appear as a relevant factor to be considered.

Also speaking from the discipline of social movements studies, Pinard (2011) posits that “deprivations and grievances are among the most important motivational components that need to be considered in the analysis of contentious collective action” (p. 4). As motivation for



involvement in climate activism is unpacked in the stories of participants, I have not used the language of ‘deprivations’ and ‘grievances’, but I hold the meaning and sentiment of these terms as pieces of understanding motivation in this context. More broadly speaking, though social movement studies and its closely-wound areas of literature were not the lens through which this research was undertaken (given the choice to use transformative learning theory as the framework and the individual experience of activism as the subject), they present, however, significant knowledge about motivation and action, which relate to this work as is, thereby presenting channels for deeper connection between literatures (such as social movement studies and transformative learning studies) in further research.

In Linder and Rodriguez’s (2012) study on the experiences of self-identified women of colour activists, they discuss how activists develop a path increasingly inclined towards involvement in social issues and through their learning become active. Particularly, they note how “each participant shared a specific instance when she discovered activism through one of her marginalized identities, including race, gender, sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, or a combination of several identities” (p. 389). Interestingly, they also note that “as activists for social change, [these participants] had spent considerable time reflecting on ways oppression and marginalization influence their experiences, providing a deep understanding and description of marginalization in their lives” (p. 389). Some activists in their study expressed that their activism was not a choice, but “a responsibility and form of survival” as a woman of colour (p. 390). As such, their inner experience is not abstracted from their activism work, but provides a catalyzing force to undertake and sustain said work.

### *2.4.2 Exterior influences and characteristics of the learning process*

Though a certain force, event, or series of events may “kick-start” an individual’s active engagement with socio-ecological issues such as climate change, the learning process may continue to unfold and develop. Indeed, exterior acts (such as collective or individual acts of uprising or resistance) may play a role in both the catalyzing moment(s)/process(es) and in the continuation of an individual’s activism (Conway, 2003). Though certainly imbued with value in their own right, these exterior acts or influences also provide key channels through which a shift to inner work can be experienced by the self within a social movement (Dirkx & Kovan, 2003).

To draw attention to the need for ongoing critical awareness (as a form of inner work) regarding the issue of climate change, Pelling (2011, as cited in Trajber et al., 2019) notes: “without a critical awareness, adaptation [to climate change] is [...] limited to efforts that promote action to survive better with, rather than seek change to, the social and political structures that shape life chances” (p. 4). To contribute to this holistic and inclusive work, Trajber et al. (2019) offer “emerging looping methodology [which] may advance research and contribute urgently needed transformative change processes to the complex challenges linked to climate change” (p. 6). These ‘transformative change processes’ connote a significant reframing of the self and of society. According to Dirkx and Kovan (2003), “deep, profound form of ongoing learning appears to be at the core of sustained commitment [to activism]” (p. 101).

Regarding the notion of learning within social movements, Finger (1989) suggests that “whether by means of “future workshops” (Jungk, 1983), “social learning environments,” or “learning communities,” the new movements are both the catalyst of a person’s transformation and the main environment in which this transformation takes place” (p. 20). As “new movements have a conception of adult learning whose main emphasis is on the reestablishment of a link

between the person and the society” (p. 20), it may not be accurate to understand the climate movement as a new movement. However, recognizing the individual transformation which is catalyzed within a new movement offers insight to the intersection of learning and activism, as experienced by the individual activist.

Speaking to the context of white adults in the United States becoming active against racial injustice, Warren (2010) observes the following:

I found little evidence from my research that knowledge alone moves many whites to caring and action. Hardly anyone I interviewed said anything like: “I read about racism in a book and decided to do something about it.” Rather, I found knowledge to play a supportive role in the development of white people’s commitment. Knowledge about racism is critically important for determining how to combat it. But it does not provide the motivation to do it in the first place. (p. 13)

In other words, knowledge does not inherently stir up the motivation to act. Similarly, Conner (2014) distinguishes clearly between learning outcomes (critical social analysis, interpersonal skills, communication and public speaking skills, introspection and reflection skills, and self-knowledge) (p. 461) and learning environment (relevant material, open environment, and peer education) (p. 461). This is relevant to the intersection of learning and action in that it points to the (often) informal circumstances in which activists learn and which outcomes (as one measurement of action) come to fruition.

Another external facet to consider regarding how individuals learn and later become active for social change involves the influence of social ties, such as pre-existing organizational ties (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993, p. 641). McAdam and Paulsen are careful to point out that “social ties may constrain as well as encourage activism” (p. 645). These authors further propose that “without structural factors that expose the individual to participation opportunities or pull them into activity, the individual will remain inactive” (p. 644). This idea builds on Conner’s (2014) focus on the learning environment (asking questions such as ‘What is the influence of an

activist's environment and structural circumstances on their ability to learn to become active?'), a notion which may prove useful in the consideration of how individuals may be externally 'drawn' by learning towards social action.

### ***2.4.3 The learning-action nexus***

The learning-action nexus is a recently introduced concept which seeks to address a gap regarding the learning-to-action component of transformative learning (see Mezirow, 1989). In his work, Mezirow (2012) does address the link between learning and action to a certain extent, describing learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 74). Building on this, Moyer et al. (2016) explore the learning-action cycle; specifically, they note how Mezirow contends that "action and learning are inextricably bound, with the ultimate goal of learning being to guide action" (p. 314). Speaking to the intersection of learning and action, Moyer et al. assert that Mezirow argues both that "a true transformation of the meaning an individual makes of the world should eventually result in an outward change in action and behaviour" (p. 315) and that "social action should not be the singular focus of adult education, as this constitutes indoctrination" (p. 315). This is indeed congruent with (one of) Mezirow's definition(s) of transformative learning in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* (2012):

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference [...] to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 77)

Within their paper, Moyer et al. (2016) also explore which variables, as indicated by Mezirow, may hinder an individual's participation in social action: "situational constraints, psychological factors and a lack of knowledge or skills" (p. 315). Further, they point to Mezirow's outline of a three-phase process of adult education regarding social action (1993):

(1) Creating an awareness of the need for change by critical reflection and the introduction of new perspectives, (2) encouraging affective learning leading to a feeling of solidarity with others committed to change and (3) facilitating instrumental learning about how to overcome situational, emotional or knowledge constraints on action” (p. 189).

With Mezirow’s three-phase process in mind, Moyer et al. (2016) utilize their findings to further express how action is intertwined with learning: “first, action was part of embodied learning processes, as experiential, hands-on activities” (p. 323) and secondly, “action that expresses something learned can help solidify, intensify or extend a learning process” (p. 323). These findings present a grounded, fleshed out understanding of how action contributes to learning and how learning contributes to action; in this sense, the learning-action nexus is not a one-way cycle, but a pattern of exchange between both components.

Though broadly applicable, not all learning will or should fit within the learning-action nexus; “given the broad expressions of learning (e.g., psychic, epistemic and socio-linguistic perspective transformations) and the existence of barriers, Mezirow (1991, 1994) argued that not all learning can be expected to result in action” (Moyer et al., 2016, p. 324). This understanding of learning and action is neither universal nor without obstacles, but Moyer et al. discuss that the learning behaviours and outcomes that do fall within the framework of the learning-action nexus can be highly influential for “transformation in sustainability work and lifeways” (p. 323).

Lastly, in their examination of learning outcomes, Moyer et al. (2016) posit that “the crux of our transition to sustainability lies in societal change, which can only be accomplished through individual and collective action on sustainability” (p. 314). Given the aim of this research on the learning processes of climate activism as having overt action outcomes, the learning-action nexus may provide a particularly well-suited frame for understanding the interplay between learning and action in the lives of climate activists.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

It is clear that climate change, as a socio-ecological issue, is both urgent and complex in nature (Boström et al., 2018; Hampson & Rich-Tolsma, 2015; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Savo et al., 2016). Fundamentally, it demands immediate and collective action (Klein, 2014). In response to this urgency, expressions of climate action have arisen from multiple actors and sources, including but not limited to state-led climate change initiatives (Boyd, 2015) and grassroots organizing for climate action and/or justice (Hale, 2016). In the last decade, youth climate activism has garnered significant global attention (Fisher, 2019), with youth climate and environmental activists such as Greta Thunberg, Severn Cullis-Suzuki, and Autumn Peltier speaking out on the need for urgent climate action (Parker, 2020). While these individuals, along with other groups, organizations, and governmental bodies have and continue to address the climate crisis (to varying levels of success), it does not suffice: humanity is far from “solving” climate change (United Nation Climate Change Secretariat, 2019) and there remains much work to be done.

Yet, the rise of grassroots climate activism as an expression of climate action and climate justice offers hope. As the most effective (and often, accessible) means of enacting emission reductions (Ockwell et al., 2009; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014), grassroots climate activism can be seen as central to encouraging lasting change and action regarding the climate crisis. In Canada, this has taken on forms such as Indigenous and ally resistance to energy projects (Lequesne, 2019; Ternes et al., 2020) and students advocating for fossil fuel divestment at Canadian universities (McGray & Turcotte-Summers, 2017). In Manitoba more specifically, the work of climate activists has been most highly documented in Winnipeg, where strikes and protests have brought thousands of supporters to the Legislature grounds (Canning, 2018; CBC 2016, CBC,

2019a; CBC, 2019b). Yet, other than these reports (and in spite of the potentiality of grassroots climate activism for social change), there is little literature written on climate activism and the motivations of Manitobans for becoming involved in the climate movement.

One lens for understanding these motivations is that of learning. Transformative learning (TL), as a body of literature which theorizes how individuals undergo personal transformative change through learning (Mezirow, 1989; Mezirow, 1991), provides a helpful foundation for understanding how individuals in Manitoba learn about the climate crisis and subsequently put their learnings into action. This learning-to-action phenomenon is given further grounding in the concept of the learning-action nexus within TL (Moyer et al., 2016). Likewise, given this research's focus on the inner experience of climate activists, the recently introduced introspective domain of TL may be used to better comprehend the personal learnings of activists (related specifically to their beliefs, values, and identity) (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016, p. 51).

Following insights from the literature while also remaining inductive in nature, this research will seek to understand the learning-action phenomenon as it relates to the experiences of adult climate activists in Manitoba. Though this research is focused on the individual experience of these activists (and thus involves bodies of literature which attempt to document personal understandings and interpretations of the world), the social constructionist and transformative philosophical underpinnings of this work also ask that the broader societal, political, and historical context are not neglected (Creswell, 2014); understanding how climate activists in Manitoba are situated and how they interpret their world is crucial to seeking insight concerning their inner experience and their "turn" towards climate action and/or justice organizing.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

For my research into the learning processes of adult climate activists in Manitoba, I followed a qualitative research design informed by hermeneutical phenomenology (Crawford & Wilkinson, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Ho et al., 2017). In order to achieve my research objectives, I conducted an extensive review of literature and other documentation, employing semi-structured interviews and participant observation to collect primary data in the form of audio recordings, written notes, and photographs. All qualitative data were transcribed and coded with Nvivo Pro to facilitate interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This chapter explores in more detail the elements of my research design, including research approach, strategy of inquiry, data collection procedures, data analysis and dissemination, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. In this chapter, I also flesh out key details about the activists interviewed, in order to lay the groundwork for critical discussion regarding the influence (or lack of influence) of these details in their climate activism work and stories. These details include sharing brief demographic information about participants, such as their age category (3.3.4.1), length of residence in the province of Manitoba (3.3.4.1), and causes/issues worked on other than climate action and/or justice (3.3.4.1).

### **3.2 Research approach and personal worldview**

Within a given research paradigm there exists both the research approach itself and the researcher's own approach (i.e., their personal worldview). As the researcher, I acknowledge that this research was conducted through a social constructivist and transformative worldview; these dual research stances resonate with the proposed work and my personal worldview (Creswell, 2014).



Firstly, having approached this research with social constructivism as a component of my worldview entails that I am interested in meaning-making, lived experience, and how these two concepts are intertwined (i.e., how the meaning-making shared by the research participants is informed by and negotiated within their social, historical, and political context) (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). The transformative worldview, as another set of philosophical assumptions under which I operated as a researcher, “holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs” (Mertens, 2010 as cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 9). I state my worldview alongside my research approach in order to enact reflexivity: as the primary inquirer in this work and given the aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis, I have necessarily played a role in the generation of meaning regarding the data collected (Creswell, 2014, p. 9), in both abstract and concrete ways.

As such, it is important that I voice that my identities as a young, white, upper middle-class, cisgender-passing woman who actively organizes for climate justice will influence how I approached this research. Likewise, being raised to think critically about the world and to pursue acts of justice in my personal and vocational life has influenced (and will continue to influence) how I, as an individual and a researcher, perceive and assess my surroundings. As I undertook this research, I acknowledged (and continue to acknowledge) that I did so in part because I see great value in the work of social movements to achieve beneficial change for all peoples, and especially for those who have been marginalized by systemic injustice. In exploring the experiences of climate activists, my hope is that this research will contribute positively to climate justice work, as a socially active approach to the crisis of climate change. Given my intentions and my personal background, I openly recognize that my own perspective has certainly

influenced how I collect, analyze, and write throughout the research process, even while committing myself to remain attentive to my own biases.

Not only does my worldview and background necessarily influence how I interpret and collect data, my current affiliations and ties also require consideration and awareness. Specifically, I have been an organizer for climate justice/action since 2018: I have had multiple organizing roles in Edmonton, Alberta and most recently, I organized with the Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition (MEJC) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As such, I have already been involved and have identified with the community of adult climate activists/organizers in Manitoba. This involvement, which existed before my commitment to this research work, has further motivated me to understand the experiences and learning processes of climate activists.

### **3.3 Strategy of inquiry**

As this research focused on the inner experiences of adult climate activists in Manitoba, I employed a strategy of inquiry informed by hermeneutical phenomenology. Phenomenology has its origins in philosophy and particularly in the writings of German scholar Edmund Husserl, who provided foundational ideas to what is now known as phenomenology of practice, a phrase used to “describe the meaning-given methods of phenomenology” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 75). Along with approaches to qualitative research like postmodernism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism, phenomenology emerged in social science methods to “[question] or [reject] the idea of an observable, independent (singular and universal) reality, with humans understood as *responding to* external and internal influences” [emphasis theirs] (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 7). Phenomenological research theorizes the individual as “operating within a subjective, interpreted world” (p. 7) and phenomenology in qualitative research methods focuses on how a person perceives objects and/or events (p. 175).

Creswell and Creswell (2013) state that “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 75). To conduct a phenomenological study, a researcher must identify a phenomenon (the experience of learning to become an activist, in this particular research), “[collect] data from individuals who have experienced this phenomenon and [develop] a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (p. 75). Data analysis in phenomenological studies usually follows “systematic procedures that move from the narrow units of analysis (e.g., significant statements), and on to broader units (e.g., meaning units), and on to detailed descriptions that summarize two elements: “what” the individuals have experienced and “how” they have experienced it” (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 77).

Furthermore, there exist two distinct phenomenological approaches to qualitative research: hermeneutic phenomenology (which examines lived experience in tandem with interpreting the “texts” of life) (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 77) and empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology (which “is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants”) (p. 78). This latter approach involves epoche or bracketing, a practice “in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under examination” (p. 78). Given that I, as the researcher, have experienced the phenomenon that I am exploring (i.e., the experience of learning to become active within the climate movement), I chose to pursue the hermeneutical phenomenological approach (which does not require bracketing, but involves “an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation on the meaning of the lived experiences”) (p. 78).

Some challenges in employing a phenomenological approach include that (1) the research process may be too structured for some qualitative researchers, (2) it may be difficult to find individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon, and (3) a researcher may struggle with deciding how their own personal understandings will be included in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 80-81). These challenges did not prove to be troublesome in this study, given that: (1) the structure of phenomenological research suited this study well, (2) all individuals participating in this research identified themselves as activists or organizers (or other related terminology), and therefore had already experienced the phenomenon, and (3) I attempted to be as intentional as possible in continuing to include my own understandings within this research in an appropriate and transparent manner. Interestingly, phenomenological projects and their methods often have “transformative effects on the researcher [themselves] [...] [and] is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1990, p. 163, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

All in all, the main purpose of phenomenological research is to “describe the essence of a lived experience” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 80) within its specific context. As such, with this research I have attempted to describe the essence of the experience undergone by individuals as they “learn” to become activists within the climate movement in Manitoba, Canada. Drawing from phenomenology scholars such as van Manen (2014), Creswell and Creswell (2013) offer the following procedures for conducting phenomenological research:

- (1) Identifying a *phenomenon of interest* to study and describe
- (2) Distinguishing and specifying the *broad philosophical assumptions* of phenomenology
- (3) Collecting data from *individuals who have experienced* the phenomenon by using interviews
- (4) Generating themes from the analysis of *significant statements*

- (5) Developing *textural and structural descriptions*
- (6) Reporting the “essence” of the phenomenon by using a *composite description*
- (7) Presenting the understanding of the essence of the experience in *written form*. (p. 81)

While most of these steps are fairly self-explanatory, a few specific terms require further definition. Within hermeneutical phenomenology, significant statements refer to “sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 79).

Ultimately, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) suggest that “phenomenology ends with the essence of the experience” (p. 43). As such, I chose to pursue a phenomenological strategy of inquiry in order to understand the learning processes of adult climate activists primarily as storied ‘essences’ of phenomena (Moustakas, 1990). This research design is appropriate to this research context given its focus on understanding *how* climate activists/organizers learn and become socially active specifically within the climate movement. In sum, phenomenological inquiry has significantly shaped the design process, both in its creation and its application, and especially in how I documented the experiences which have brought participants to activism or organizing work.

### **3.4 Data collection procedures**

While employing phenomenological inquiry to explore in depth the learning processes and motivations of adult climate activists in Manitoba, I continued to review academic literature, news articles, and other documentation which discusses and/or analyzes climate activism and the climate movement in Manitoba, as well as transformative learning theory and other useful theoretical areas. Combining three qualitative data collection methods (document review, semi-structured interviews, and a group workshop) helped me to examine the learning processes of adult climate activists in their differing expressions of experience and engagement. As such, data was collected in the form of audio recordings (which were then transcribed) and handwritten

notes from interviews (also transcribed). Outlined below is a further discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures and process employed during this research work.

### ***3.4.1 Document review***

Document review, or the collection of qualitative documents, involves collecting “public documents (e.g., newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports) or private documents (e.g., personal journals and diaries, letters, e-mails)” (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). For this research, I reviewed public documents such as news articles and newsletters pertaining to climate activism in Manitoba, as well as kept a website record of the various climate action and/or justice groups and organizations in the province. I bounded this document review by only including articles and newsletters which explicitly focused on the climate movement (rather than related social movements such as the environmental movement or global justice movement, for example) and which featured the work of individuals and groups based in Manitoba. Information from these documents served mainly to provide background on the social, political, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba, which (especially during interviews) deepened my understanding as the researcher of the context in which these individuals are taking action. It also allowed me to keep track of news events concerning climate change and activism that occurred while I conducted interviews.

### ***3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews***

Broadly, the qualitative interview “is a research method that gives a privileged access to people’s basic experience of the lived world” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 32). Semi-structured interviews, as one form of qualitative interviews, are “organized around ordered but flexible questioning” (Dunn, 2005, p. 88) where the interviewer directs the interview more than they would during an unstructured interview. Using interviewing as a method of data collection

is particularly suited for this project given its ability to document an individual's personal experience in a given situation. Hartman (2015) suggests that "the more fully we can understand the potential meanings implicit in how people represent their experience, the better equipped we will be to understand the implications of their self-presentations, and the more resonant will be the theories we construct of those accounts" (p. 22). A specific advantage of utilizing semi-structured interviews is that participants are able to provide experiential historical information (Creswell, 2014, p. 191) highly valuable for determining the "essence" of how individuals learn about climate change, become active in the climate movement, and express what they have learned through participation.

However, De Fina and Perrino (2011) claim that a potential disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is that "they produce "unnatural" data since the interviewer influences their production (through questions, interruptions, silences, etc.), and offers ad hoc interpretations through the use of etic (i.e., non participant generated) and not emic categories of analysis" (p. 5). Addressing this, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) propose that the constructionist interview "[advocates] a view of the subject that is locally produced in and through the social practice of interviewing" (p. 172) and the transformative interview functions as "a site where people can get together and create new possibilities for subjectivity and action" (p. 173). As such, these philosophical worldviews provide a foundation for conducting semi-structured interviews which seek to understand transformative meaning-making.

#### *3.4.2.1 Interview recruitment process*

Utilizing semi-structured interviews in this study provided a helpful means of gathering and organizing the storied experiences of adult climate activists in Manitoba. Given the focused scope of phenomenological research, I interviewed a total of 12 participants. I had set out to

interview between 12-15 participants total, but COVID made recruitment very difficult as I was required to use Zoom as in-person interviews were not allowed. To recruit participants, I implemented a purposeful sampling technique composed of the following selection criteria: (i) direct involvement, impact, and/or expertise in the climate movement in Manitoba and (ii) willingness to participate in the research. I identified these participants through contact with climate action or justice organizations, the networks of my advisor, and my own personal network. A list of potential participants was also identified through the document review process, where contact information was publicly available through the reviewed website or document. For these two channels of recruitment, I used the recruitment scripts in Appendices V and VIII. I also asked climate organizations to circulate a recruitment script (Appendix VI) via email to their membership base. With these organizations, I indicated that I was also interested in speaking to a staff or volunteer, in addition/in place of having the organization circulate the recruitment flyer to their members via email (whichever they deemed a more appropriate and well-suited option).

However, given that my goal was to interview grassroots climate activists/organizers (rather than paid staff at an organization), I also found it necessary to approach individuals themselves (who were not already associated with a group or organization but were important knowledge-holders for this research). Because I was already connected within the climate activism/organizing community in Manitoba, I made careful use of my personal network and my supervisor's network to contact potential participants. As one approach to ensuring participants did not feel obliged to participate, I did not offer incentives or compensation to participants. Otherwise, I strongly emphasized at multiple points in each interview and in the focus group session that participants were not required to share any information that they did not want to



share. This was well-received by participants and I have not been made aware of any significant implications of this approach for results and findings.

#### *3.4.2.2 Conducting the semi-structured interviews*

In accordance with safety regulations concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews via Zoom rather than in-person, employing a laptop, notepad, pen, and glass of water to do so. In part, I am regretful that I was unable to conduct interviews in person and develop a more genuine rapport and comfortability with participants. However, conducting interviews virtually via Zoom proved to be beneficial in that participants were located in various cities and areas across Manitoba and without a virtual interviewing method, I may not have been able to travel and interview them. Additionally, I am pleased to say that there was good rapport between participants and myself even in our virtual interviews, partially because online communication became the standard mode during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted with one participant at a time and ranged from an hour to one hour and 45 minutes in length. I began the interview stage of this study in November 2020 and finished in May 2021. This fieldwork took longer than expected due to factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and a general difficulty in finding participants (in a timely manner).

Before the interview, I sent a research participant information and consent form (Appendix III, or Appendix IV for verbal consent) via email, which each participant was required to read, sign, and return to me before the interview (or during the interview, if they had any questions about the form). Before beginning the interview, I also asked participants to ensure they were located in a private, quiet location (such as a home office) and that their Internet connection and Zoom application were working properly. In regard to the interview process itself, I utilized the same interview schedule (Appendix I) for each participant and went through

questions in a semi-structured manner. The questions in this interview schedule focused on the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. More specifically, I designed this interview schedule to focus on the dual phenomena of (1) the learning-to-action process and (2) climate activism (as explored in related literature), as well as taking into account the appropriate structures of hermeneutical phenomenology as a research approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Likewise, in order to be mindful of the energy and rapport between interviewer and interviewee, the interview schedule begins with shorter demographic questions before proceeding to broader descriptive questions and other questions which require more personal reflection.

My main techniques for recording the interviews were audio recording using Zoom's 'local recording feature' (which recorded directly to my laptop) and handwritten notes (to supplement the audio recording, for my own listening and analysis process, and in case the recording failed). These notes supplemented the transcriptions derived from these interviews, which served as primary data in my analysis. After the interview was complete, I transcribed each audio recording near verbatim (removing only repeated words and fixing only areas that required clarification). Participants were given the choice of whether they wanted a copy of the completed transcript (either to review or for their own personal records), and if they indicated they wanted a copy, I sent one via email once it was completed.

### ***3.4.3 Focus group***

In order to further understand the common threads of the learning-to-action phenomenon and involve participants in the data analysis process, I organized a focus group with participants who indicated interest. Taking inspiration from Kovan and Dirkx's (2003) study on transformative learning and environmental activists, this focus group session included knowledge-sharing via a semi-structured group interview (in response to my shared observations

regarding individual learning and climate activism). This combination of activities within the workshop was organized to verify the trustworthiness of the data and to benefit participants as they take part in knowledge exchange, data interpretation, and individual and group reflection (p. 104). Likewise, this focus group also allowed me to gain further accuracy and depth of data was established through the feedback provided by participants in the group interview (including any additional “sparked” insights which participants may have overlooked or forgotten during individual interviews).

Along with being an effective method for clarifying and gathering data, focus groups can have a positive, synergistic effect (Cameron, 2005) and have the potential to create a rich and inviting space to share about one’s experience(s). The focus group was organized after individual interviews were completed, in order to allow me time to transcribe and read through the raw interview data for gaps (which were then asked about in the focus group session). Participants were informed that by taking part in the focus group, they would necessarily compromise their anonymity from other participants.

Similar to the interviews, the focus group took place virtually over Zoom and the audio was also recorded using Zoom’s ‘local recording feature’. It was two hours in length and 8 participants took part. I brought in a fellow graduate student to take handwritten notes as I facilitated the session. I had multiple intentions for this focus group: (a) to share my observations regarding individual learning and climate activism in the form of 5 main themes, (b) to ask for participant comments and insight on these 5 themes, and (c) to facilitate reflection time for the participants. I prepared Powerpoint slides to guide the focus group participants through discussion around 5 themes (found in my preliminary review of interview data). After introductions, we spent between 15 to 20 minutes discussing each theme.

#### ***3.4.4 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection***

In addition to the aforementioned impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the interview and focus group process (i.e., shifting to a virtual setting), several other components of the pandemic influenced how this research unfolded (or did not unfold). For one, this study was originally intended to include participant observation of climate activism spaces and events as the fourth method of data collection. However, due to the necessary restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting this sort of in-person data collection was (rightly) prohibited by university regulations. Through conversations with my supervisor, we came to the conclusion that the other three methods of data collection in this project (i.e., document review, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group session) were sufficient for my research purposes. Thus, this project trekked onwards, changes and all.

Another less tangible (but equally important) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this study was the challenge of carrying out research work during a global health crisis. In many ways, continuing on with academic work during the beginning and ongoing reality of this pandemic produced a fair amount of uncertainty of focus and future possibilities for myself (and for some of my participants). What is certain is that I struggled to find my footing in this work while also being affronted by drastic illness and death tolls across the world. Additionally, the loss of familiar forms of togetherness with others, such as shared meals with friends and neighbours, presented for me (as for many others) a drastic shift in support systems. Completing this work during this time in history was bizarre, confusing, and difficult. Near the end of writing this thesis, I contracted the virus myself. There was something surreal yet darkly fitting about working on thesis edits during my quarantine isolation period, given the way that the COVID-19 pandemic event was embedded in my experience of this work and in the reflections of my

participants. To share the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research process is my attempt to be reflexive regarding my whole self as researcher and as individual.

### **3.5 Demographics of participants**

#### ***3.5.1 Age category***

In this study, I asked each of the 12 participants about which age category they would place themselves in: 18-35, 36-55, or 56+. Of these participants, 3 participants identified their age as being between 18-35, 1 participant in the category of 36-55, and 8 participants in that of 56+. I asked about age categories in order to have a record of the approximate ages of each participant, as well as to observe the possible differences between age groups. I chose these specific age categories both for their maintenance of privacy (i.e., offering 3 broad age categories did not require participants to share their exact age), brevity, and because these age groups roughly follow the broad generational categories of millennial (18-35), gen(eration) X (36-55), and baby boomer (and beyond) (56+).

In my recruitment process, I did not intentionally select for age, so these categories cannot be considered representative of the age division of activists within the climate movement. Indeed, because my recruitment process was carried out entirely over email communication, I was not able to gauge the age of each participant before meeting them for a Zoom interview. However, it is interesting to note that it was mostly individuals aged 56+ who responded to the recruitment flyer. As such, I found myself interviewing many individuals who could be considered elders of the climate movement in Manitoba. Often, these individuals were involved in the broader Canadian and/or American environmental movement before shifting their engagement to climate change and its related issues. Because this study contains more information, ideas, and stories from those aged 56+ (in comparison to the other two age

categories represented), the data may have a bias/focus towards the perspectives offered by those who have certain life experiences related to their age. However, age is but one component of the self; looking through an intersectional lens, age cannot be considered a complete factor on its own, but is also influenced, bolstered, and/or shifted by other identities held by the participants.

### *3.5.2 Pseudonyms, pronouns, and other word choices*

For this research, participants were given the option to waive their anonymity (or not) in the interview consent form. This option was given in order to allow those who wished to have their name kept attached, rather than removed, from the knowledge, experiences, and stories they shared in interviews (and in the focus group session, for those who participated). For those participants who did not choose to waive their anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned.

Additionally, because this study does not attempt to analyze gender as a factor of participant experience in climate activism and in order to prevent identification, all participants are referred to by the singular ‘they/them’ pronouns. This is not to diminish the importance of considering gender in transformative learning and social action research; rather, it was out of the scope of this project to analyze gender well as a factor (or many other identity-related factors, besides age and rural/urban livelihood). Thus, reference to gender is excluded in order to respect the complexity of the subject area and ensure that an attempt to include this factor (or other important demographic factors) is not left wanting.

Additionally, this work makes use of the terms *formal*, *nonformal*, and *experiential* when referring to different categories of learning experiences shared by participants. The terms *formal* and *nonformal* do carry particular meaning in learning theory, but the choice to use these specific words was not based in the literature. Instead, these terms corresponded best with the description participants gave regarding their own learning experience. As such, my use of these terms is not

an attempt to add to specific previous theorization of formal and nonformal learning, but to represent as accurately as possible how participants explained and explored their own learning within and to climate activism. As such, the discussion of formal (p. 118), nonformal (p. 118), and experiential learning (p. 117) in this work offers broader overview of the learning experience which may be applicable to other disciplines and areas of literature, rather than corresponding only to aforementioned theorization in learning theory literature.

### *3.5.3 Length of residence in Manitoba*

As one of the opening questions for each interview, I asked participants to share their length of residence in Manitoba in order to contextualize their personal history of activism in the province. I asked about how many years each participant had lived in Manitoba, and whether they had lived mostly in an urban or rural setting within the province. Most participants in this study (7 out of 12) had lived most or all of their life in an urban setting (specifically Winnipeg, Manitoba). Conversely, 3 participants had experienced both rural and urban in their life, and 1 participant had lived mostly or completely in a rural setting. As such, the participant group was mainly composed of individuals whose climate activism work existed and operated in the urban context. This matters because a portion of participants in the study distinguished differences between climate activism work ‘in the city’ versus ‘in the country’.

### *3.5.4 Affiliation with community groups, NGOs, & ENGOS*

Every participant in this study had been involved with either a community group, NGO, or ENGO working on the issue of climate change (often, along with other environmental issues). During the time of the study, 10 out of 12 participants identified themselves as belonging in or to an environmentally focused community organizing group, NGO, or ENGO. The other 2 participants had long lists of previous involvements with environmental groups, NGOs, or

ENGOS. Most participants mainly spoke about their experience in community organizing, but several participants also mentioned roles in which they were paid for environmental and/or climate advocacy work. 9 out of 10 participants stated that they supported one or more environmental community organizing group, NGO, or ENGO. Some clarified that their support was financial (e.g., a monthly donation) and others stated that they had attended actions or events held by a specific group/NGO/ENGO, but had not been one of the organizers for said event or action. Asking about affiliation as both ‘belonging’ and ‘supporting’ was helpful in that it allowed me to understand the organizing and/or work history of each participant, as well as their current level of involvement within a climate organizing group.

### *3.5.5 Causes/issues worked on other than climate action and/or justice*

In order to gain an overview of each participant’s journey towards and within the climate movement, I asked participants in interviews to share about which causes and issues they have been involved in (other than climate justice and action). Some participants answered mainly with their own personal activism history, while others focused on current involvements. Table 1 illustrates which issues/causes were most represented per number of participants engaged and per number of references in interviews.

**Table 1: Issues/causes worked on within climate activism**

Issue/cause	Number of participants engaged
Indigenous issues and concerns	9
Food and agriculture	6
Support for community services and anti-austerity work	6
Water issues	5
Waste and pollution	4
Mining	4
Energy (hydro, nuclear, etc.)	3
Forestry and deforestation	3
Anti-poverty	2
Anti-racism work	2
Biodiversity and animal habitats	2



Children, childcare, and family	2
Economic and labour justice	2
Education	2
International justice and development	2
Mental health supports	2
Money and finance	2
Concerns about police and police abolition	2
Gender issues	1
Grassroots networks	1
Youth	1
Consumption	1
Environmental impact assessment	1
Healthcare	1
Housing	1
Student advocacy	1
The land	1
Transportation	1

As shown in the table, the three issues/causes most engaged in by participants were (1) Indigenous issues and concerns, (2) food and agriculture, and (3) support for community services and anti-austerity work. This was closely followed by involvement in (4) water issues, (5) waste and pollution, and (6) mining. Many other issues were also mentioned by individual activists, but not collectively (i.e., becoming a theme). However, it is important to note that these issues were mentioned and that participants had or were involved with so many issues/causes other than climate action or climate justice. It would suggest that climate activism work is not unattached from other issues and that movements (such as the climate movement and the Land Back movement, or the climate movement and (the) local food movement(s)) intersect greatly.

This finding resonates with a pattern also apparent in the global climate justice movement, in which distinct social movements come together in conversation and/or action concerning climate justice (Claeys & Delgado Pugley, 2017). One example of this phenomenon is the integration of discourse and struggle concerning climate change from La Via Campesina (a transnational network of agrarian and peasant organizations) and the International Indigenous

Peoples Forum on Climate Change (a group which advocates for the rights of Indigenous peoples at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings). Though different in focus, Claeys and Delgado Pugley (2017) illustrate “peasant and indigenous movements organized at the transnational level have, each in their own way, developed their own global framing of the climate issue” (p. 326) and thus, are amongst scholars investigating the coming-together of multiple movements under the “umbrella issue” of climate change.

### **3.6 Data analysis and dissemination**

Before beginning analysis, I transcribed all interview data, typed up my handwritten field notes, and read through the raw data in order to familiarize myself with all gathered information. After this initial process, I made use of NVivo (qualitative data organizing software) to organize my data and conduct an analysis containing elements of both thematic analysis (coding for major themes and ideas) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Broadly, IPA is contextualist (concerned with ‘persons-in-contexts’) and allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences and meaning-making approaches of those persons (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Zahavi, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2013) note that IPA is a method which was born from and remains highly conducive to a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach; IPA “is phenomenological because it is concerned with how people make sense of their lived experience [...] [and] it is interpretative because understanding how people make sense of experience is achieved through interpretative activity of the part of the researcher” (p. 175).

Moreover, Smith and Eatough (2007) maintain that IPA contains a two-stage interpretation process, or a ‘double hermeneutic’: “the participant is trying to make sense of [their] world and the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participant is trying to make sense of [their] world” (p. 3). Given this double hermeneutic, the researcher’s role is two-fold:

they must (1) understand and represent a participant's experience in a manner which the participant deems 'true' and (2) analyze the participants' accounts with a critical lens to understand which assumptions underpin their experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 181). As an approach which encompasses thematic analysis, IPA allows the researcher to examine and discover themes across smaller groups of participants (p. 175), such as a small group of climate activists. As with most qualitative analytic approaches, IPA is a wholesale approach, rather than simply an analytic method (p. 180). Thus, I implemented the structure and guidance of IPA in this research in order to understand the learning processes of adult climate activists as lived experience and as storied essence.

Drawing from both the literature and from emerging themes in the data, I coded the interview data and the focus group data for major themes. Citing Van Manen (2014), Ho et al. (2017) emphasize that within hermeneutic phenomenology, "the identification of themes is not about revealing repeating patterns (themes), but about recovering the structure of meanings embodied in human experiences in text" (p. 1760). Certain major themes from bodies of literature such as transformative learning aided me in creating an outline for my coding matrix, which allowed me to begin the thematic analysis component of IPA while leaving room for significant patterns and commonalities to materialize from the interview data itself.

Examples of themes in my coding matrix that I borrowed from bodies of literature include four learning domains from transformative learning theory literature (i.e., the communicative, instrumental, transformative, and the newly introduced introspective domain) (Mezirow, 2012; Moyer & Sinclair, 2016; Moyer, Sinclair, & Diduck, 2014), the notion of the activist identity (Conner, 2020; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003), and the learning-action nexus (Moyer et al., 2016).

Regarding research dissemination, I shared my research findings with participants in the form of a short report. In order to also make my findings accessible and beneficial to other interested parties, I created a document and/or presentation that can be easily understood and distributed to various audiences, while maintaining participant confidentiality. This research was also presented at academic conferences (such as those held by the Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC) and the Canadian Sociology Association (CSA), and may be presented at other conferences after publication of the thesis. Additionally, I will publish a journal paper from my work.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

As it pertains to the ethics of data collection and dissemination, this research had a low risk of harm for the participants involved. Participants were given discretion concerning what topics they were comfortable discussing and were informed that they reserved the right to withdraw from the study without consequence at any time during the research process. In further effort to ensure a low risk level for participants involved in this research, they had the option to request that data be removed from the coding process at any point before or during analysis. Sensitive information has only been included when relevant, and participants were ensured confidentiality and/or anonymity (whichever the participant indicated as their preference). Data was only collected after this project received approval from the University of Manitoba's REB.

### **3.8 Ensuring trustworthiness**

While validity and reliability are typical measures through which a researcher may achieve academic rigor, they were originally developed for quantitative studies (Maher et al., 2018). As such, Maher et al. (2018) suggest that "trustworthiness is considered a more appropriate criterion for evaluating qualitative studies" (p. 3). Given that trustworthiness is

necessary to ensure that the collection and analysis of qualitative data is authentic (Creswell, 2014, p. 201), for this study I followed the suggestions of authors such as Creswell (2014), Braun and Clarke (2013), and Maher et al. (2018) regarding rigor in qualitative research. These four following techniques were implemented throughout the entirety of the research process:

*Triangulation:* According to Creswell (2014), triangulation is a helpful technique by which a researcher can increase authenticity of their work by collecting and combining data from multiple sources and “using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 201). Because I did not assume with this research a single, objective, and knowable truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 286), triangulation as a measure of validity and reliability served to bring together multiple lenses and sets of information on a similar subject (rather than attempting to hone my findings into a single truth). To implement triangulation, I utilized three different data collection methods: literature and document review, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The combination of these three techniques provided a broader range of data related to the learning processes and motivations of adult climate activists.

*Rich or thick description:* Braun and Clarke (2013) state that “description [is] ‘thick’ when contexts of behaviour [are] described; it [is] ‘thin’ when context [is] excluded” (p. 24). As such, including thick, contextual descriptions of meaning and experience in the research analysis enhance the validity of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 24). When a researcher or reader can glean sufficient information about the background and context of a given study, they have a better ability to decipher what components may be applicable to their own situation and/or research process (Maher et al., 2018, p. 3). As such, my use of rich description in this work hopefully increases its usefulness to other research settings and contexts.

*Peer debriefing:* Another technique has been utilized to bolster the trustworthiness of this research is that of peer debriefing (or peer scrutiny). According to Creswell (2014), “this process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (p. 202). My thesis supervisor and a member of my committee (Joanne Moyer) provided peer debriefing throughout the research process. My supervisor, in particular, diligently read my drafts and offered his critiques, feedback, and suggestions.

*Reflection on bias:* Creswell (2014) notes that “good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, cultural, history, and socioeconomic origin” (p. 203). As such, I committed myself to reflexivity during, before, and after the research process by remaining attentive to my biases and discussing their influence on my work. I did so by reflecting on my side of the conversation after each interview and while reviewing the transcript, as well as discussing my biases and their possible affects on my research work with my supervisor and with fellow graduate students (while keeping participant confidentiality).

## **Chapter 4: Journeys towards and within climate activism: The stories and experiences of 12 climate activists in Manitoba**

For a winter-to-spring season during the global COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews over Zoom from a room of my own in a bustling community house. On certain days, the day's light shone steadily through my window and I laughed along with participants as they answered my interview questions with insight, awareness, and depth. On other days, with my window clouded and my Internet bandwidth low, there was a somberness to the experience of sitting (virtually) with participants and listening to their recounting of the realities of climate change and climate activism, shared with weight and with suspended hope. Given the unique coming-together of myself (as researcher and knowledge-seeker) and each individual participant (as story-teller and knowledge-sharer) in conversation, the results from this study exist both as clear, logically formed answers to the questions I posed in interviews, and as unexpected tales and reflections which emerged from our discussion. Both are meaningful and both have been included.

In this chapter, I describe the themes and stories that emerged from my interviews and focus group with these 12 climate activists. First, I outline the experience of climate activism, as elaborated on by participants (4.1): this includes discussion of what climate activism itself entails (4.1.1), influences which lead to this understanding of climate activism (4.1.2), the internal and external “turns” towards involvement in climate activism (4.1.3), the role of identity in climate activism (4.1.4), and barriers to climate activism (4.1.5). Additionally, section 4.2 contains data and discussion on the impact of youth activism on adult activism (outlining the various critical, neutral, and positive opinions of participants concerning youth activism), while section 4.3 introduces the emerging themes of grief, loss, and/or death as a component of the learning-action process (4.3.1), ‘accumulated awareness’ as learning process (4.3.2.), and the link between self-

reflection/introspection and climate-related learning (4.3.3). In summary, this chapter contains the weaving-together of participants' experiences, as I seek to understand the learning-to-action phenomenon that occurs when (adult) activists learn about the climate crisis and are motivated to become active in the climate movement. Basing my analysis and interpretations of the data gathered, I attempt to present the words and experiences of these activists as respectfully and authentically as possible.

#### 4.1 Experiences of climate activism

##### *4.1.1 What does climate activism entail? Broad definitions from participants*

This question was asked of participants at the start of each interview (following the few questions related to demographics) as an attempt to glean a broad overview response of what immediately came to mind for participants when they thought about climate activism. The most mentioned themes included collective system change (mentioned by 7 participants), creative grassroots actions (also mentioned by 7 participants), education and awareness (5 participants), political involvement (5 participants), and personal or individual changes (3 participants). As shown by how many participants discussed each of these themes, they were not only the most discussed themes of the interviews, but were also mentioned in at least half of the 12 interviews. Additionally, of interest and of import, participants articulated many more ideas of what to them makes up climate activism, as shown in the following table:

**Table 2: What does climate activism entail?**

Climate activism entails...	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
Collective system change	7
Creative grassroots actions	7
Education and awareness	5
Political involvement	5
Actions, protests, and rallies	4
Challenging conversations	4
Organizing together on the climate crisis	4



Whatever action necessary	4
Writing letters and/or articles	4
Personal or individual changes	3
Critiquing dominant worldview paradigm	3
Figuring out the nuance between climate action and climate justice	2
Ground-up work	2
Signing petitions	2
Solving human behaviour problems	2
Panic about the state of the environment	2
Land learnings	1
Making phone calls	1
Semantics	1

#### *4.1.1.1 Collective system change*

In interviews, participants very often (i.e., mentioned most frequently, in comparison to all other themes) named collective system change as a key component of climate activism. The thoughts and ideas that were coded under this theme were those that included a coming-together of individuals or groups in order to enact system-wide change. For instance, in Sawyer’s interview they addressed collective system change as integral to climate activism, stating that:

Climate activism involves a lot of different tactics, but the main thing is trying to get governments and other people to come together and create better systems that put a stop to runaway climate change (Sawyer).

Similarly, Blake named climate activism as a “collective sort of engagement” and Don proposed that as a ground-up process, climate activism involves:

The ability to mobilize people around an issue, because you can have all the science and you can have all the money and you can have all sorts of things. But if you don’t have the people behind you and supporting your efforts, then, really, you’re not coming in with the stick (Don).

Other participants specified which parts of the system should be subject to change in order to achieve climate action and/or justice. These included the current economic structure (Elliot), issue of colonization (Elliot), education (Anne), and the myth of green capitalism (Sawyer). Regarding

the last example, Sawyer elaborated on their rejection of green capitalism as a system and embracing instead the pathway of climate justice:

I think over time, I have also realized that the climate justice piece of climate activism is integral and is not something that is or can be separated. I now firmly believe- whereas previously, I might have had some qualms or not been sure- that green capitalism is not a thing that is gonna help in the way that we need to be helped, or in the way that we need to change together as a community (Sawyer).

Michael articulated similar ideas, suggesting that “the main principle of climate activism to me is that it needs to be strength in numbers of people building movements together” (Michael).

#### *4.1.1.2 Creative grassroots actions*

7 out of the 12 participants in this study discussed that climate activism entails some form of creative grassroots action(s). Participants both stated this theme broadly or in passing, and quite specifically. Speaking broadly, Sawyer reflected that climate activism often entails “figuring out other creative actions” and Elliot offered that climate activism involves practical and on-the-ground action (“not waiting for government to do it, or for corporations to change [...] but to roll up our sleeves and whatever- build solar panels, form social enterprises to renovate housing”) (Elliot).

Meanwhile, other participants pointed to specific grassroots actions as examples of climate activism in Manitoba and spoke at length about these actions. Drey, an Indigenous participant described the specific grassroots action of setting up a camp to occupy their traditional territory in order to protect it from private natural resource extraction activities. Another participant described a grassroots climate action event that took place at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, which was deeply meaningful for them to witness and participate in as a climate activist. Similarly, many participants discussed their involvement in the September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 climate strike

in Winnipeg (whether as an involved organizer or attendee) as a key recent event for the climate movement in Manitoba.

#### *4.1.1.3 Education and awareness*

The next most mentioned theme was education and awareness work, as participants explained that which they understand climate activism to be composed of. Sawyer expressed that climate activism involves “connecting with people, drawing linkages for people between climate change and other things: other social issues, other things going on in our world” (Sawyer). Elliot specifically discussed public education and awareness in their response which, from their perspective, includes a “critique of Western industrial revolution assumptions” (Elliot). Meanwhile, Anne described one essential component of climate activism broadly as “education”. Delving deeper into the idea, Michael elaborated on the specifics of seeing education and awareness at the core of climate activism:

Climate activism, I guess, would be the principle of people coming together to do education work, to get more people invested in caring about the climate crisis and being excited about the solutions or ideas (like how we can work on it) (Michael).

Other participants spoke about educational tasks they had participated in or enacted in their own climate activism. For instance, Steve described an article they had written as a component of environmental education- both their own education and for the (environmental) education of others. Similarly, Elliot hosted webinars which explored humankind’s relationship to the natural world, a practice done in order to educate and bring about awareness on how “the climate crisis is a symptom of a broader malaise, a broad problem [...] fundamentally about our whole basic worldview” (Elliot).

#### *4.1.1.3 Political involvement*

Similar to other themes, the notion of political involvement was quite broadly defined and named by participants. In general, many discussed the importance of intentional engagement in

political strategies, structures, or systems as a component of their climate activism. Participants mentioned partaking in or understanding citizen engagement in the political system as part of climate activism, such as “writing a letter to your elected official about a policy issue” (Robin), meeting with one’s MP (Virginia, Esther), and/or lobbying (Virginia, Elliot, Esther, and Anne). Ideas and examples coded under political involvement were those which specifically were able to operate within current political systems and structures. The reality that participants in this study discussed this type of political involvement as part of their climate activism reflects the multifaceted approaches of many of these activists (i.e., attempting to enact change both outside and inside regimented political processes).

#### *4.1.1.5 Personal or individual changes*

In addition to what could be called the “large scale” components of climate activism, many participants also mentioned individual or personal lifestyle changes as a component of climate activism. Blake proposed that the term activism could include “the individual actions that you can take to react to or respond to a governmental or political direction which opposes your own beliefs on climate change” (Blake), while also remaining critical that climate activism cannot only be an individual practice. Virginia mentioned that climate activism “could involve changing how you live your life. It could involve going outside your comfort zone and pushing yourself to do things you wouldn’t have otherwise thought to do” (Virginia), which alludes to individual choice and changes. Esther harkened back to the early feminist phrase “the political is personal”, stating that for them, the personal is “where it has to start” (Esther).

#### *4.1.2 Influences and experiences leading to an understanding of climate activism*

When describing influences and experiences leading to the development of participants’ understanding of climate activism, it became clear that adults can catalyze their involvement in climate activism (or, have their involvement catalyzed) through many different channels.

Participants described their climate activism work as being catalyzed through early engagement, personal environmental behaviour, the built environment, faith, family and/or friends, through grade school, land experience, literature, organizing, retirement, university, and volunteering and/or committing to an organization. Within these categories of experiences, three categories resonated with the greatest number of participants: early engagement (with environmental issues/environmentalism, which eventually led to climate activism), involvement facilitated through organizing, and personal environmental behaviour.

In the context of answers provided by participants, early engagement can be defined broadly as an involvement with environmental work, either from a young age or regarding previous involvement within the environment movement which transitioned organically into engagement in the climate movement. Nine participants spoke to a sort of early engagement in environmental work as a catalyst for their climate activism. Sawyer shared that their concern for environmental and sustainability issues began in high school (early engagement as a youth) and Michael describes learning about issues of climate change “at a very young age [...], growing up in suburban Winnipeg” (Michael), while Robin discussed their pre-climate activism involvement in hydro and water issues (early engagement in the environmental movement). Specifically, Robin highlighted how they brought the issue of climate change into their environment activism roster:

My first involvement would be in the environmental assessment process. So through that process, you always bring to the table, ‘well, how is this project going to impact the climate’ and ‘how has the changing climate going to impact this project?’ So hydro is a key study and we could go into these, these longer drought periods in our whole water regime can be impacted (Robin).

Blake also described their early environmental engagement, and the shift between broader environmental activism and climate activism in particular:

I have been sort of drawn by my own experiences to sort of realize that activism does have a less specific definition, or climate activism is less specific; there is a broad variety of different ways that you can become involved or engaged with sort of social or political or any other issue. But I would say that it is something that is less informed by other people's opinions now, but more informed by, I would say, experiences and organizations that I have been involved with (Blake).

In Elliot's interview, they brought to light both sides of early engagement (early engagement as a youth, as well as early engagement in environmental issues):

I guess, I've been aware and concerned about sustainability. You know, from Limits to Growth- when was that published? 1970s? And 80s. So, the awareness was there. And then the destruction of the environment, environmental destruction through colonialization and other economic systems. So that's been kind of a constant (Elliot).

Engagement? I'd have to locate it coinciding with "my retirement". So, my Aboriginal community development took me up north a lot. So, I didn't have a lot of time for local involvement in issues. So, when I decided it was time to cut back on that northern travel and northern work, I kind of thought: oh, well, this is like a kid in a candy store. All these important issues and a multitude of organizations I could get involved with (Elliot).

Esther also reflected on early engagement, but focused also on the urgency of climate activism as something new to their environmentalism:

I can't remember a time when I didn't know about human effects on the climate. Probably in the 70s, we started talking about this. Not certainly with the urgency that there is now. And we never used the phrase "Our house is on fire" (Esther).

Similarly, Anne recounts the start of their activism role in the broader environmental movement, before climate activism became a key focus of theirs:

Well, I didn't start out thinking about climate change, I came to the environmental movement, if you like through... actually initially through the peace movement and nuclear disarmament issues, and then onto nuclear energy and waste issues (Anne).

Involvement facilitated through organizing was another experience that many participants spoke about in interviews. Though related to early engagement, stories coded here were less related to becoming involved though the shift from environmental activism (in its expansion) to climate activism and instead, were focused on how participants were led to climate activism

through general volunteer roles, job opportunities and workplaces, or the practice of organizing itself. For instance, Sawyer found that working within the environmental sector brought about the realization that:

We need much broader change than we're getting from what we're currently doing with the impact in our culture and built environment. Then that, to me, what's left to try and impact those large sweeping changes that are needed is activism and is not just working in the sustainability field or trying to encourage people to be sustainable (Sawyer).

Similarly, Robin shared their experience of working within the environmental sector and becoming involved in more broad scales of environmental activism (and eventually, climate activism) through their workplace, which dealt with issues of recycling and waste management (Robin).

Shawn recounted quite a different story, sharing how they were once invited to participate in leafletting at people's doors to oppose a pipeline project. After that experience, they began attending organizing meetings and the practice of organizing became a passion of theirs. Virginia was also led to climate activism by becoming involved directly in organizing, joining a grassroots climate action group, and part of Steve's path within environmentalism was as a volunteer writer, working on environmental issues.

Personal environmental behaviour was another common theme amongst participants and their stories, as they spoke about the experiences which helped them form their understanding of climate activism. Participants spoke easily and candidly about coming to an understanding of climate activism by "just by living my life" (Sawyer) and/or choosing to use the time that comes with a personal lifestyle change (such as children leaving home (Virginia) or retirement (Elliot)) to become involved in climate activism through personal activities and choices (such choosing not to own a car in order to reduce one's carbon footprint (Esther)). As such, one way in which participants came to their understanding of climate activism was through personal, on-the-ground

actions that helped inform and/or became part of their work within the climate movement.

In addition to these most frequently and deeply shared influences leading to developing an understanding of climate activism, it is notable that many participants shared a wide variety of respective influences, often running through a list of the various spaces in which they first began to understand climate activism. For instance, some participants cited formal learning settings such as university or grade school as arenas where they were able to develop this knowledge. In fact, attending university was mentioned as an influence for 6 out of 12 participants' journeys towards climate activism. For instance, Robin shared about how being an undergraduate student interested in geography and climatology was their "first experience with climate change" (Robin) as an issue, and one that played a role in kick starting their work in environmental and climate advocacy. Alternatively, Drey spoke passionately about coming to an understanding of climate action and activism through their experience on the land:

I'm a commercial fisherman, too, right? So, I've seen the lake changing, the fishes changing. The lake is dirty, it's really dirty. Seasons are starting to change, you know? [...] So, it's not just people that are feeling the effects of climate change, too: It's the animals. It's the trees. It's everything. The trees are working probably a hundred times harder now than they were 20 years ago, with trying to get all the carbon and everything out of the air (Drey).

After asking generally about influences and experiences that brought participants to develop their understanding of climate activism, I asked more specifically about how they "built" (i.e., developed) their knowledge base about the climate crisis as an issue. Answers ranged from personal research, podcasts, "listening to people around the table" (Shawn), reading books on climate change (Virginia), classroom lessons on waste reduction (Michael), and time spent writing on the topic of climate change (Steve). In general, asking this question did not yield meaningfully different results in comparison to asking generally about how participants developed their understanding of climate activism. This could be in part because the question



about developing one's knowledge base about the climate crisis was employed on my part as a prompt, rather than a separate question. However, it may be that the process of developing an understanding of the climate crisis and of climate activism itself are fairly intertwined (amongst these activists) and not necessarily in need of separate investigations.

### ***4.1.3 Internal and external “turns” towards activism: Coming to involvement in climate activism***

#### *4.1.3.1 Intention*

When discussing how participants came to be involved in climate activism, I asked them to distinguish (if possible) whether they came to the work of their own accord or if they were ‘brought to the work’ (by someone, by another movement, an opportunity which came to them, etc.). Though this question was presented as fairly dualistic, many participants answered that both components of intention played a role in their involvement in climate activism.

Regarding their initial involvement, Sawyer offered a diplomatic answer which illustrated how they saw both sides at play in their original intention of coming to climate activism:

No, I feel like I became involved of my own accord. That being said, I don't want to take away from the important work that a lot of people have done with me to help me get to that place. I definitely felt at the time that I was really seeking things out. I tried a couple different things before finding a place to spend my energy, I would say (Sawyer).

Drey also shared a story containing elements from both intentions:

Where [my community was] moved, we were *removed* from our original homeland and we were placed on land that the government designated as reserved land, right? So, those were my ancestors that went through that stuff. So, when that happened to me (like, growing up and going through the things that I went through and seeing the things that I've seen) you know, it wasn't by coincidence all of that happened. It was all happening because of who I am as an Indigenous person (Drey).

Furthermore, Drey shared that it was their child and an ancestor that led them to the work of land and climate awareness. Drey had been employed by a natural resource extraction company, and their child (having grown up spending time on the land and in the bush) confronted them about

their work. This moment was a turn-around-point for Drey, causing them to quit their job and take action (specifically, founding a camp on their ancestral lands). Additionally, Drey shared that it was through their ancestor's guidance that they were able to find the energy and will to do so. As such, they established that they were brought to the work by both through the influence of their family members and by their own volition.

Blake described themselves as impressionable in their youth and shared that they originally became involved in advocacy work in grade school, but that they made the intentional choice to become involved in activism in addition to extracurricular activities in school. Michael also reflected on the two sides of intention regarding climate activism, stating they were "brought to it because it was something that concerned [them]" (Michael). Elliot had a philosophical reflection for this question, asking:

Do we come to anything on our own? Or is the question about, well, my friends are doing it so I'd better, too? Or my church is doing it, so I'll get involved? It's both, it's both. Yes, it probably wouldn't happen for me if people weren't involved. But often, I feel like I'm a campaign of one in some areas (Elliot).

The stories of some participants contained a more obvious leaning toward the intention for becoming involved being of their own accord. From an email newsletter, Virginia became informed about the intersection of food issues and climate change, began looking into climate activism work, and intentionally chose a group to become a member of (Virginia). Steve also stated that their own accord was the stronger intention, seeing that they "were already an environmentalist at the time" (Steve). Likewise, Don described how the natural flow of their accord shifted from the broader environmental movement work to the inclusion and addition of climate activism work, as a personal choice to include 'climate change' in their roster of environmental activism.

#### 4.1.3.2 Motivation

There were also a wide range of factors that motivated participants' to initially become involved in climate activism (which differs from 'intention' in that motivation focuses on the external events which would lead to an inner choice (i.e., intention) to become involved). One of those factors was a sense of concern and/or panic about climate change as an issue. Michael discussed the notion of fear coming to light in the face of the 2018 IPCC report and also shared about experiencing guilt as a motivating force. My interview with Michael illustrates this factor as follows:

Michael: But a motivating factor, for better or worse, was also guilt. Partly that was also like seeing friends, who were sort of doing other organizing or like doing a little bit of organizing, and seeing how much work they were putting in. So I mean, that's like a funny motivator, but also like, if I can frame that positively, it's also more of like accountability too. There's like people in my community doing a lot of work and feeling like I should be, too.

CB: Like wanting to like pull your fair share.

Michael: Yeah. Definitely.

Similar to Michael and their ponderings about the flipside of guilt as accountability, Steve discussed the shifts between panic about the environment and problem-solving in their own climate activism. Reflecting that "most activity in environmental organizations tend to burn people out over time" (Steve), Steve argued that:

We're not at a place of stopping bad things from happening, we have to be at a place of making good things happen. And the enormity of the bad things and the energy that goes into it needs to be shifted towards more positive thinking (Steve).

As such, though Steve articulated a recognition of panic and fear in activism work, he also highlighted the importance of a counterbalance of positive thinking and inspiration (while remaining honest that he himself goes "back and forth" between inspiration and burn-out) (Steve). Robin, more generally, discussed the reality of climate change as "the biggest issue right

now facing humanity” which “one doesn’t have to have children to be scared about the future of humanity” (Robin).

Another factor of motivation was what participants named as engagement activities which ‘came naturally’ to them. Robin described being involved in the environmental issue of climate change as “the whole sort of livelihood package” (Robin):

I mean, I’ve been doing environmental work since the late eighties. And so, you know, climate change is an issue with all the other issues, you know, impacts to biodiversity, poverty, um, you know, et cetera, et cetera, the list goes on and on (Robin).

Don reflected similarly, stating that involvement in climate activism:

...came naturally. Yeah. I mean, prior to being a so-called environmentalist, I was involved and, you know, all sorts of things: the fight against Apartheid, I was involved in the whole Nicaraguan issue. So, you know, it’s just who I am politically. I get involved in all the struggles. I seem to be on the losing end of things. But I generally am a person who doesn’t lose (Don).

The second most common motivating factor that participants discussed regarding their climate activism journey was a sense of responsibility to others (mentioned by 6 out of 12 participants). Drey, for example, spoke about this in relation to their recognition that their career was keeping them from living out their values (including living up to the responsibilities, values, and culture they had taught their children). Virginia also described a work-related situation, where a sense of responsibility to the communities they work with who were experiencing poverty and food insecurity arose and they began to see the link between healthy, accessible food and addressing climate change (Virginia). Sawyer, Drey, Esther, Anne, and Elliot expressed a sense of responsibility towards future generations (including their own children and/or grandchildren) in light of the findings of the IPCC 2018 report. Mentioning the IPCC 2018 report as a particular influence, Elliot stated their personal philosophy regarding their involvement in climate work:

We never know. We don't know outcomes. But we can try to figure out the most helpful thing we can contribute. It can be very tiny. But a million tiny contributions can add up. (Elliot)

Esther also shared about feeling a responsibility towards their child regarding climate activism, stating that “the choices that my generation made affect her greatly” (Esther). And it was a broader sense of responsibility that motivated Anne to become involved in climate activism. They shared their story:

I had little children and I saw the film, *If You Love This Planet* by Helen Caldicott. She was a physician who [...] made quite an important film back then, which really focused on nuclear weapons and disarmament stuff. But it really had a profound impact on me and it was kind of at that point that I made a decision I needed to become more involved in, you know, the political side of life, if you like, and not so much academics. So, I actually shifted my whole focus to start working on what I saw as environment and peace issues as being the most key things for the future. And I was motivated a lot by having two small children, and then subsequently also picking up on the fact that there were all these international development issues that were really critical. So, kind of putting all those things together (Anne).

It was in asking about motivation for climate activism involvement that most participants first began to share about the influence (and motivating factor for climate activism involvement) of death, grief, and/or loss. To my surprise as the researcher (given that I had not prompted this topic area), death, grief, and/or loss was the most common motivation for involvement in climate activism (mentioned as influential by 7 out of 12 participants). With great depth and clarity, participants shared stories and experiences containing these heavy themes. Sawyer chose to share a story of coming to greater clarity after experiencing the loss of a step-parent:

When the generation above you dies and then you realize ‘Oh yeah, I’m the adult! I am no longer the child’ I mean, I am the child of this person, but the person who took care of me can no longer take care of me and make the changes that need to be made. And so, I need to really stand up and do the work (Sawyer).

Another participant (Shawn) recounted how the potential loss of familiar natural space in the Whiteshell (a large provincial park area in the province of Manitoba) brought them to

eventually become involved in climate activism. They shared that spending a lot of time at a cottage near an area threatened by the Energy East pipeline project and becoming aware of the potential damage to the watershed in that area was a key component of their turn toward climate activism. Similarly, Don shared about their early dismay at the threat of clearcutting in a provincial park, a key moment of potential loss which brought them to become involved in an environmental campaign.

Esther also shared about how their grief about climate change had partially manifested in eco-anxiety. This overwhelming sense of lament and anxiousness about the realities of climate change led them to dark places. Along with moving to a small town, becoming involved in climate activism helped them recover. Becoming involved in a local climate action group had the following influence on them:

My anxiety decreased remarkably. It now motivates me to be extremely conscious of my decisions and my choices. Like, when my hand reaches out for plastic, that kind of thing. So, that was kind of a watershed for me in some ways (Esther).

#### ***4.1.4 Role of identity in climate activism***

As a key component of the individual experience of activism, recognizing one's identity within any role is central to understanding how the two intersect. Climate activism is no exception. In interviews and in the focus group, I asked about how participants saw the identity of activist and/or organizer, for themselves and for others. In addition to 'activist' and 'organizer', terms used by participants included 'lobbyist' and 'advocate'. The reflection most discussed by participants was the activist identity as family, togetherness, and/or community. For instance, Shawn expressed their experience of activism as one of familial togetherness:

By identifying as an organizer or an activist, it's opened up my position within a new... I guess it's almost like family? Because I've gotten to know these people that I work with. And it's a large community and it feels like an extended family, in that we're all caring for each other and helping to support each other through these very, very difficult times

and working together to make a better future (which is what this is all about) for each other and for our offspring and for generations to come (Shawn).

They elaborated that this support of the community of activism was particularly affirming in the face of opposition and helped them to wear the identity of ‘activist’ proudly. Esther echoed the pushback that they have gotten for being an activist (both within the women’s and climate movement) and how “at some level that was OK because I made sure that I built up a level of building community and trust within there, so that if someone needed to talk with me about something, that was there, that trust was there” (Esther). These two activists shared a common sentiment about feeling proud about their activist identity. Speaking to this notion of community, Blake also discussed why they prefer the term ‘organizer’ over ‘activist’:

I more tend to now use the term ‘organizer’, not necessarily to state that I am a personal organizer of others, but that many have indicated that I think that it implies a larger community being involved or having been involved in affecting the change that the group or community seeks. Whereas, I think at least some people believe now that ‘activist’ is reliant more on an individual’s ability to change something (Blake).

Agreeing with this point in the focus group, Don added some commentary regarding the terminology of ‘activist’ versus ‘organizer’ and the division that can be caused by identity, suggesting that they try not to “buttonhole” themselves in their climate activism work. They offered that “to [them], it’s not how you identify yourself. It’s what you do” (Don). For Steve, they stated that “becoming an activist was the day that I said, “the narrative I’m being fed is not the one that is true for me”. Virginia discussed coming into their identity as a climate lobbyist, rather than a climate activist:

I just had to write an article for the paper and I titled it initially: ‘What I Learned the Year I Became A Climate Activist’. Then we had a meeting with our MP actually, and he was the one who said, “I really object to all this emotional talk about the planet burning, we’re fine, we’re going to be okay! Don’t talk about yourself as a climate activist, you’re a climate lobbyist. And my job is to be meet with lobbyists, I do it all the time”. Okay, I am a climate lobbyist, then. Because I want to stay in relationship with you. So, I changed

the title of my article, I called it: ‘What I Learned the Year I Became a Climate Lobbyist’ (Virginia).

When Elliot reflected on the role of identity in activism, they stated that it was not a topic which came to the forefront for them:

I think what comes to me, first, is grasping at a sense of my own personal effectiveness or rather whether I have anything concrete to contribute that might make a difference; that might support the movement and what those things are. Perhaps a sense of a meaning or purpose rather than identity (Elliot).

This focus on effectiveness in activism, over identity itself, was an intriguing one that Elliot also found themselves thinking about: “ego plays a role and gets in the way of effective work, effective activism” (Elliot). Similarly, Blake made the comment that identity can cause cleavages between groups and in community, and expressed their belief that “the aim of identity should be to address positionality”. Don had a similar reflection, discussing the overemphasis on identity. Other points discussed regarding activist identity were that of being boxed into the identity of ‘activist’ and ally-ship between the climate movements and other social movements.

#### ***4.1.5 Barriers to climate activism***

In the original interview schedule for this study, a question about barriers to climate activism did not exist. Instead, this area of inquiry was suggested by my first participant, upon asking them at the end of the interview whether there was anything missing. They immediately indicated the following:

I guess the one thing that we haven’t talked about that much, which maybe you don’t want to be focusing on (which is totally legit) is: barriers to action. And I think for someone who has been involved in sustainability and felt like the environment is really important for what’s felt like the majority of my life, that some barriers to activism are just not knowing what to do. Not knowing where to start. And just the enormity of the issue, I think, can feel really disempowering and knowing how to be effective for me—those were all things that I’m like, ‘I don’t even know what to do, I don’t want...’. And I think for me, part of getting over that hump was like, well, I have to do something and things are so devastating that something needs to happen. And I’m just going to try and find people to do whatever it is that we can try and figure out to do (Sawyer).



Drawing my attention to the factor of barriers when it comes to motivation and involvement in climate activism, I was intrigued to ask this question of other participants. After a discussion with my supervisor, I added the topic of barriers to climate activism (whether societal or personal, as two broad categories) to my interview guide. This turned out to be a relevant area of insight within this study; in short, participants indicated a surprising variety of barriers which kept them (i.e., personal barriers) or individuals in general (i.e., societal barriers) from climate activism work. The following table explores these findings.

**Table 3: Barriers to climate activism**

General and/or societal barriers	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
Low energy, time, and/or resources	7
Questioning the effectiveness of collective work	6
Rural-urban divide	4
Hyperconnectivity of economic system	4
Capitalism and other oppressive systems	3
Online activism as draining or problematic	3
Detachment from community	3
Denialism	3
Problematic philosophies or exclusivity in organizing	2
Low or no earnings	2
Fear	2
Energy going elsewhere	2
Ignorance	2
Consumerism and greed	2
Trying to care for community well	2
Us and them dynamic	2
Privilege	1
Individualism	1
Spiritual crisis	1
Poverty	1

  

Personal barriers	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
Oppressive political and social climate	4
Questions of effectiveness	3
Enormity of climate change as an issue	3
Finances	2

Being known and tagged in the environmental movement	1
Personal conduct at meetings	1

#### 4.1.5.1 General and/or societal barriers

As shown in the above table, low energy, time, and/or resources was a much-mentioned general barrier to climate activism. Participants spoke about this barrier in a multitude of ways:

I think there are major systemic barriers. And also then on a more policy or activist kind of level, I just see time and time again, it's really hard for... like, people don't have the time to go on a government website and spend an hour digging through the website and clicking and clicking to find the piece of information that they need that's relevant to them, right? (Anne).

I would say, even as I continue to organize, I am constantly thinking: is this worthwhile? Is this the best use of my energy? How do we make sure that we're doing things that will have some impact? And so that continues to be a threat to involvement, honestly (Sawyer).

Additionally, Robin shared about the lack of stable provincial funding for environmental organizations and groups to be a significant general barrier to climate activism work and Michael pointed to the significant commitment of attending organizing meetings as a barrier to involvement.

Another barrier which is highly related to the previous barrier, which was also significantly mentioned by activists, was questioning the efficacy of collective work. Sawyer spoke to this barrier in relation to having limited time, energy, and/or resources, stating that:

It's the thing I continue to think about and wrestle with. Which is good and important, right? Like, to make sure that I'm trying to make the work that I do as effective as possible, I think that's important. But also when that question of like 'How effective is this really?' is always so close to the surface, it can easily feel like, well, maybe it's not that effective and then what-am-I-doing-with-my-time kind of a thing (Sawyer).

Shawn spoke about community training and planning sessions taking place but not necessarily being carried through to fruition and Don had a stronger resistance to certain types of collective work given its tendency to become "an us-and-them situation":

I sort of find that difficult; it's like there's a strong right-and-wrong, the good guys and bad guys... but not a humanitarian 'that we're all good guys and we're in it together and let's figure it out together (Don).

Another barrier linked to a distinction between two groups was that of the rural-urban divide, which was discussed by 4 participants. Don spoke to this as well:

Generally, where I live and in other rural places and in Manitoba, there is that disconnect between the urban centers and activism, and activism in rural centers. And, yeah, out here, I don't see a lot of youth organizing around some of these issues when they could be. And I don't know why it is; I haven't taken the time to figure out the dynamics. But certainly I think that thinking outside of urban centers is an important when to organizing and being an activist (Don).

Robin mentioned the challenges that urban centres provide for those attempting to connect themselves in everyday life to environmental concerns, stating that "80% of us live in cities and are so disconnected with how we grow our food and wilderness" (Robin). Blake shared in depth about the urban-rural divide as well:

I know that a lot of my Indigenous contemporaries that I've either gone to school with or now am sort of meeting up with, they either see a barrier, a perceived barrier, or they have experienced a barrier in moving to the city so they would never be able to get involved with a lot of the organizations that I do try to work with. Or they've never had a steady job that was at least financially supportive to them enough so that they didn't have to have two or three jobs or something like that.

And I mean, it's certainly much less of a barrier for me, but I also see on the flip side, that being if someone wants to go have an understanding of the land or like a worldview that is based on land governance and land experience, people in the city quite often don't. I know a lot of urban Indigenous peoples that are not able to even get out to their reservation or the place that their family is historically from. So, I think that those are also barriers that very well are connected to climate action and climate justice, but that perhaps are maybe even a step away (Blake).

Attempting to find a solution to this divide, Don shared the following work of connection:

So how do you connect urban people to that campaign of somewhere else-ness, right? I'm a jack of all trades and one of them is being a professional landscape photographer. So, I did a landscape photography book about that area and all of it now. So, when you open up the pages of the book and you see the picture and people go, "where did you take that"? Then the dialogue starts, right? And you say, "Oh, I was taken here. And this is

this...”. And then you can have a conversation about the place. So, you get people engaged about the place. Very important. People don’t take ownership over something if they’re not invested in it (Don).

Hyperconnectivity of the economic system and capitalism itself as an economic system were two other general barriers mentioned by participants in interviews. Speaking to hyperconnectivity within the economic system, Elliot shared that:

Instead of having more leisure hours, you have more and more overtime and working from home. Connectedness, like cyber-connectedness, social media connectedness: it may have elements of community but mostly not? Mostly, it’s more likely to be an addiction (Elliot).

Speaking to capitalism as an economic system, Don offered their perspective that “the capitalist system, the market economy is what’s creating the exploitation of our environment and of workers, so that’s the root problem” (Don). Taking a broad approach, Blake pointed to an issue they see with the governmental system:

In my mind, I see community response and community driven action and change being really the only way to combat climate change. No matter what happens, governments are going to continue to keep things the same, in my understanding. The changes that are offered are always going to be less than what is necessary (Blake).

#### *4.1.5.2 Personal and/or individual barriers*

When asking about barriers to climate activism in interviews, I also asked participants about personal or individual barriers. The use of the word “personal” in this context refers to barriers that participants themselves have experienced (in contrast to barriers to climate activism that participants would name for the broader society, or in general) or that apply most significantly to the individual (rather than society more broadly). For those who shared about personal barriers to involvement in the climate movement, a highly discussed barrier was that of the challenging political climate and social systems at play.

Regarding this barrier, Anne pointed to the existential overwhelm that many can feel when it comes to climate change and taking climate action:

On climate change there's the added piece that it is existential and it's sometimes just too big for people to think "I make a difference on this. What I do makes a difference". I think sometimes that just causes people to shut down any concept of being engaged. It's just too big, and depressing. So, it takes a sort of an optimistic outlook in some ways, a hopeful outlook, to be able to get past some of that stuff and say "yeah, it's worth my getting involved and doing this". But I think that's a pretty big level of commitment for a lot of people to take and so I'm completely sympathetic to folks (Anne).

Questions of effectiveness also came up when participants shared about their personal barriers regarding climate activism. Sawyer spoke eloquently on this topic:

I think one of the things that helps to keep me doing that work even though I'm not always as sure how effective it is, is still just feeling like at least I'm doing something. And also having built relationships with people who are also doing things and trying to answer those questions for themselves and are continuing to wrestle with that and to also make sure that the work that we're doing is not harmful in terms of anti-racism and Indigenous solidarity (Sawyer).

Robin shared about their own struggle with the question of effectiveness in climate work:

I took some time off and I felt that I had to come back and do some more work in this field. Because you know, the stuff you read and hear... we're in a terrible mess right now on Planet Earth. I mean, the planet will survive, but you know, there's going to be lots of different life forms that will, will suffer (Robin).

Another personal barrier, mentioned by Sawyer, Robin, and Anne, was that of the enormity of climate change as an issue. Though these participants shared their unique experiences, the common thread was uncertainty on where to begin to tackle climate change and make a tangible difference.

As pointed out by Sawyer, who drew my attention to the importance of including discussion about barriers to climate activism in this work, personal and/or individual barriers to activism cause activists to ask questions such as "How effective is [this work] really?" (Sawyer). Conversely, sharing about general and/or societal barriers requires activists to point to the larger

picture and comment on their observations regarding places of resistance to climate work.

Bringing the topic of barriers into this work on adult involvement in the climate movement heeds the reality that climate activism is not without obstacles to involvement and continued work. As participants shared about both facets of barriers in climate activism, it was clear that the themes of experiencing a lack (of resources, energy, time, affirmed effectiveness, etc.) under the current economic system and governmental structures were deeply intertwined. Similarly, the observations that participants disclosed regarding collective work (specifically, its effectiveness and the risk of creating ‘us-and-them’ dichotomies) is significant to scholarship about climate activism in that it provides a critique of collectivity (a topic which at times is passed over as one for rigorous discussion). However, participants also pointed to the barrier of the focus on the individual (such as that required by capitalism, as an economic system) as a hindrance to facilitating climate activism work. Certainly, the barriers to climate work are highly varied and as this research did not set out to clarify its nuances, no clear conclusion can be made other than this: understanding barriers to climate activism seems to be a key component of tracing out the journeys of adult climate activists in Manitoba.

#### **4.2 Impact of youth activism on adult activism**

As an area of much attention within the climate movement, youth activism has and continues to be a visibly defining piece of climate activism as a whole. Given its visible nature, I asked participants in this study whether the rise of youth climate activism affected their own climate activism. Asking about youth activism matters because this study seeks to understand the motivations of adults for becoming involved in the climate movement, and understanding how those adults think of younger generations of activists is helpful for finding both differences and commonalities between the two groups. There was a wide range of opinions from the

participants on youth activism and activists, which have been divided below into the three broad categories of neutral, critical, and positive (in order to gather a sense of the reasons for each opinion).

#### ***4.2.1 Neutral opinions about youth activism***

Amongst participants, many shared perspectives on youth climate activism that were neither inherently positive or negative, but observational in a neutral (as possible) manner. Most mentioned (by 6 participants) was the observation that youth climate activism brings about a sense of responsibility in adults to also take steps towards mitigating climate change. Shawn reflected on their own experience as a youth and seeing elders active in protests against the Vietnam War; they described “one of the driving forces behind [their] current involvement [as] to be able to hopefully inspire and encourage people to take up the fight”. Speaking directly to adult responsibility as it relates to youth climate activism, Sawyer shared the following:

Just hearing from youth activists saying like, ‘Please do your job-as adults, as governments- to provide a good future for your children and for future generations!’... That, to me, is very powerful and I don’t want youth climate activists to feel as though they’re the only ones doing this work and taking this seriously. I feel like the least I can do is show up and provide support to them. And even more so, work alongside and try and work together to push things further. Or take on some of the work so that they don’t have to do as much of the work or have to feel as burdened with that work (Sawyer).

This reflection illustrates one way in which adult climate activists feel responsible to participate and lessen the burden of climate activism work on youth. Similarly, Blake described their attempt to “always [try] to live in a way that is supportive of future generations”. Furthermore, in specifying that youth are now getting quite involved with climate activism, Blake asks: “why can’t I do the same? Why can’t I push for the same?”. This sentiment of desire to participate and be accountable to the youth was echoed by other participants (Anne and Michael). As a former youth climate activist, Blake had an awareness of what it looks like to be a young person

involved in the climate movement- and now, also holds the experience of an adult involved.

Anne spoke about the other side of adult responsibility in climate activism: providing knowledge about what has worked in the past and what has not. Specifically, Anne mentioned how this knowledge:

...might be useful to a young person [...] studying it to say, you know, this is what's already happening in the Manitoba networks and environment and stuff. Because it seems to me, we go around in these circles and things that we thought we dealt with a long time ago come back to haunt us (Anne).

Similarly, Don shares about “the passing of the guard” between elder and younger activists:

The old folks need to mentor. You have to spend a lot more time mentoring and parting their knowledge on to younger folks. And younger folks need to respect their elders, which does not occur. And so, unlike the First Nations, where they respect their elders, who have lots of knowledge. And why would you want to reinvent the wheel when the wheel has already been invented? You just sit down and listen. So there needs to be a dialogue between the youth and the elders, so that the mentoring process can happen and the transition can occur. And like everything else, those two are alienated from each other. Right? (Don).

Another theme discussed related to a neutral opinion about youth activism was the notion that everyone is implicated in climate change, as an issue. Anne exemplified this concern in a nutshell by stating that “everybody says it's their future, but it's our future too, and our kids and grandkids and so forth”. Don discussed this theme in a bleaker way, suggesting that “we're about to wipe out humanity [...], that's what we're doing to the planet” (which, according to Don, is tied to humanity's practice of unlimited growth and consumption). Three other participants discussed the implication of all peoples through the growing nature of the climate movement (e.g., seeing more attendees at climate rallies and in organizing spaces).

Two other themes mentioned by 4 participants each were the need to better support youth and loss of youth innocence/childhood. These themes were quite intertwined, in that many participants discussed the (potential) loss of youth innocence/childhood as a key reason for the



need to better support youth. For instance, Sawyer discussed the need to show up, provide support, and work alongside youth in order that they “don’t have to do as much of the work or have to feel as burdened with that work”. Don spoke to the importance of arming youth with “the tools necessary to do things and let them do the campaigning work”. Similarly, Drey expressed their passion for supporting youth, by “inspiring and educating and making sure that a lot of these youth, Indigenous youth, don’t step down for nobody”. Speaking more specifically to Indigenous youth, Drey discussed the importance of support:

A lot of people tend to not pay attention to youth or they don’t care about what they have to say. They don’t listen to them. But what the youth have: they’re young, they have a lot of energy, somewhat time, because a lot of them are going through school and trying to finish their school and all that stuff. But, you know, they do need help sometimes to help organize. And a lot of them don’t have proper connections. A lot of them don’t know how which way to turn and how to do things. And it’s a good, healthy working relationship because a lot of them don’t understand their culture either. So, it’s an awesome collaboration because they get to learn their culture (Drey).

To the loss of youth innocence/childhood, Shawn stated that “the depression and anxieties [related to climate change] is so overwhelming and we see that rise in our youth. It’s way too common and sad”. Indeed, Sawyer articulated how youth climate activists involve themselves in the movement, despite the negative emotional effects:

I mean, when you see kids- like a lot of them are kids- taking on these huge problems because they just feel like it’s so important, I think it’s really moving in a lot of ways. Like, saddening? And there’s grief around that as well: the loss of their innocence and childhood by feeling like they need to take on these actions (Sawyer).

Combining the need for support and the loss of innocence for youth climate activists (and the challenges of youth activist-adult activist dynamics), Shawn discussed the following:

Even the climate activists that have ended up in legal battles and have ended up with financial burdens. It’s just like ugh, and we haven’t quite been there as much as we should have been for them. Yeah, like that’s a huge responsibility for somebody so young to take on, you know? And to be so brave at that point in their lives. I mean, some of them were not even 18 and they were taking on the court system. So you know, it’s been

huge to watch. I mean, they took the lead for the climate strike but being able to work together and finding a way is a real challenge (Shawn).

Other themes mentioned by 2 or less participants included discussion of: youth mental health and emotions, political narrative, no effect, and rural-urban difference. Regarding youth mental health and emotions, Steve and Shawn shared about how they are seeing youth experiencing heightened challenging emotions (such as sadness and hurt) when it comes to climate change as an issue. Steve also suggested, however, that this emotional experience is a strength and one that can challenge the dominating political narrative in climate work: “I think one of the things that the youth have brought is some emotional content to the discussion [of climate change]”. Sharing an anecdote about their time working with a youth organization, Shawn discussed the challenge of feeling hopeless in one’s youth:

I would go and help when they were first starting to do their organizing and helping to mentor a little bit or doing what I could with bringing arts supplies and watching these young people. And there would be 20 or 25 of them sitting around the table and you’re going, like [sighs] and listening to their stories and their fears and their hope for their future and their anxiety about growing up and having families and bothering going to school and their lack of being able to see a good future for themselves. And the amount of depression and mental stress and is, I found, mind-boggling (Shawn).

Briefly, under “no effect” as a theme, I coded comments from 2 participants who shared that they were neither motivated nor dissuaded from climate activism by youth activists. Drey’s perspective was more focused on the reciprocal relationship between adults and youth being one of mutual inspiration (in their experience), and therefore having a net effect on their climate involvement being informed by youth. Virginia discussed this “no effect” perspective in simpler terms:

I don’t think that children being involved has spurred me anymore necessarily than just my own convictions (Virginia).

Lastly, to rural-urban difference, one participant who lives rurally shared that they do not see rural youth organizing (or potentially, with access to organizing) in comparison to their observation on youth in rural settings. In speaking to this, they highlighted the need to pay attention to “thinking outside of urban centers”.

#### ***4.2.2 Critical opinions about youth activism***

Some participants shared about some critical opinions about youth activism, when asked about its influence on their own activism. The most mentioned opinion (by 2 participants) was the concern about youth arrogance within youth climate activism. Specifically, participants discussed some of the complicated dynamics between different generations, including the idea of youth blaming the older generations for their inaction on climate. One participant made the following comment regarding the complexity of taking meaningful steps towards mitigating climate change:

I think I can see both sides. I can see how youth, someone like Greta is a good example, are just fed up with hearing ‘Turn off the tap, turn off the lights, take care of your personal actions’. But the leaders aren’t taking action where it needs to happen. And it’s a little bit like, yeah, she’s right! And yet, I can also see how people are critical about children speaking out that way. Having our youth think that they can do better, I can see how they think that that’s arrogant. ‘Well, you get involved in politics then, and see if you can make it better!’. It might not be as simple as you think, and I think that’s one of the things I learned about this last year, that it’s not simple.

Another participant spoke more broadly about the attitude of youth as one that can lean towards arrogance and contempt regarding older generations. The perspective of these two participants can be summarized in a quote from their interview: “It’s fine to point fingers and say you’re doing it wrong, but let’s work together to try and fix it here”.

Other critical opinions on youth climate activism included one participant’s reflections on the necessity of urgent, radical change on the part of younger generations to combat continued accelerated climate change. Similarly, two participants addressed the skewed media coverage of

youth climate activists, both mentioning Greta Thunberg by name. One participant stated doubt regarding Greta Thunberg's authenticity and suggested that she is being used by "so-called green capitalists". Steve, however, shared a different perspective on youth activism, Greta Thunberg, and media coverage:

See, this is what Greta Thunberg does: she states the case as black-and-white. And it kind of is. Either we're going to have an earth or we're not going to have an earth, right? That's what climate change feels like sometimes. But if we're going to have an earth, it's not black-and-white. It's multi-coloured. And it's going to be a celebration of wonder and joy and inspiration. And there's going to be all sorts of other things that go along with it, like some struggle and difficulty and stuff. But it's going to have to be based on human beings being able to not rise to the occasion of bad, but to rise to the occasion of celebration and good. And much of what we do does that, and we do spend a lot of time as a part of the environmental food movement, or environmental restoration, or walking around the block and seeing a rainbow.

That's the characterization of life that can exist for us; if we create our environments that way, we can treat each other more that way. Those kinds of things. And that doesn't enter the media's mind; they're very focused on the moment of crisis. And it's that focus that is a dangerous focus (Steve).

#### ***4.2.3 Positive opinions about youth activism***

Overwhelmingly, participants spoke positively about youth climate activism and several participants pointed to youth climate activism as influential in their own activism work. The most discussed positive opinion amongst participants (discussed by 8 participants: Shawn, Esther, Drey, Anne, Sawyer, Robin, Blake, and Michael) was that of actively supporting and/or working alongside youth climate activists. These participants were clear that they not only stood on the side of youth climate activists, but that they have taken steps to support their work or work with them. Shawn discussed how in their experience, youth and adult climate activists worked alongside one another to coordinate actions and organizing around climate change, and many participants more broadly shared that they have and continue to support youth climate activists in any way they can (e.g., Esther, Drey, Sawyer, Robin, Blake, Shawn, Anne, and Michael).

More specifically, within this positive and supportive opinion of youth climate activism, 7 participants shared that they found youth climate activism *hopeful*. For instance, Anne described youth climate activism as “heartening” and as providing them with a “hopeful feeling”, while Shawn suggested that the way in which youth organize and have chosen to take action in Manitoba in recent years “has become hopeful”. Cheekily, Elliot shared that youth climate activism makes them “very happy: I hear the challenge: ‘come on folks, get with it, you old people’. Yeah, it makes me feel hopeful.”

Closely related to hope, 6 participants also described being inspired by and/or learning from youth climate activists. Sawyer articulated this clearly by drawing a comparison between their experience with adult-led versus youth-led organizing:

I learned so much from the youth, right? And it’s so different the way they approach organizing and working together and their meeting structures is just so much more inclusive. And I find that so fascinating. I mean, the way we run our meetings are so different from the way... any of the meetings; all the boards and the parent councils and all... it was a very different world and it’s exciting to see (Sawyer).

Drey experienced inspiration as a two-way street, expressing that they felt both inspired by and that they have inspired youth in taking a stand against oppressive systems and people:

That was a really heart felt connection to have inspired young people. You know, they can’t just sit around anymore and be dictated by their leadership or dictated by anybody.

Speaking to their years working in the climate movement, Anne also discussed the reciprocal inspiration and learning she has experienced with youth activists:

I had the privilege of working with much younger people for many years, and I learned so much from them. So, I think that is a two-way street and getting more young people involved is a fantastic learning opportunity for everybody across the board because we all learn from each other (Anne).

Robin, Michael, Anne, and Shawn discussed being inspired by youth-led direct actions and climate rallies, and many participants pointed to the September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, climate strike in

Winnipeg (organized by youth and Indigenous activists) as a key event in Manitoba's climate movement. Speaking to their experience organizing and attending this strike, Shawn shared the following reflection:

The September 27<sup>th</sup> climate strike in 2019 was really important and fundamental for me. I see that as a direct result of youth climate activism- I mean, right? Greta Thunberg started this student climate strike movement and I think honestly that a lot of the traction that we got in Winnipeg for the climate strike was not just as a result of the organizing that happened in Winnipeg or Manitoba but was a result of the international action taking place and the media attention as a result of the international action. I think that played a huge role in the numbers that we saw on September 27<sup>th</sup> here in Winnipeg (Shawn).

Robin had the following to share regarding the September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 climate strike:

You know, when you see 15,000 people march on the street too, it's gratifying. And just to see how that movement started in Manitoba? You know, the first event was like, I don't know, a couple of hundred people, and then it just grew and grew and grew. So that's gratifying. And I guess Greta Thunberg had a lot to do about that. I don't follow her or anything, but some of the clips I've seen, she's an amazing spokesperson for youth in the world; she's a leader. And the more that youth can get involved, you know, on the streets and any other way they can, the better (Robin).

As such, youth climate activism as catalyzing was another positive opinion much discussed by participants. Some participants answered this of their own accord in interviews, and others responded to my prompting question in the focus group ("Why does/did it matter that climate action or justice events were catalyzed by youth climate activists?"). Duly, Esther responded with why she believes youth-catalyzed climate activism matters:

I think that with the youth energy and their ability and willingness to take risks to do this; I think of Greta Thunberg and the great risks that she has taken. And this is a really wonderful thing, to step off the abyss and hope that there is a path, an invisible path there that you can't see (Esther).

Likewise, Shawn shared a reflection on the catalyzing force of youth climate activism in Winnipeg:

I just think that over the years that I've been working at this and I guess it's only been about five years that there's been a lot of organizing and there's been some actions happening. But it wasn't until the youth got involved that we were able to mobilize large groups of people and to get more media coverage. Somehow it kind of connected across the generations and also started moving on social media in a way that I don't think it was when it was just people that weren't quite as old, particularly like the very first youth action at the [Legislature] when the first strike action that was instigated by the students at Ecole River Heights. Right from that moment on, it just seemed to explode. And now we're sort of moving back to a lot more organizing. But now there's youth involved in the organizing as well (Shawn).

Blake echoed the observation of seeing “widespread engagement by youth through things like social media”, while Anne discussed an anecdote about showing up to support a youth-led climate rally and attending “organizing meetings where some of the adults who were engaged were trying to just be in the background and trying to support the leadership of the youth”.

Blake's comment was one of four regarding the topic of youth climate activism and its use of media in organizing tactics. They shared their reflections on the uprising of this channel of action:

It feels like there is more, I think, or a growth of this sort of engagement in youth, because even in the years that I've been active, sort of trying to make a difference, it's become, I would say, more normalized for younger people to get involved in more serious ways. Whereas I think quite a few years ago, it felt as though it was more of an adult issue, like only adults could speak on it; only adults could be some of the participants and drivers of change (Blake).

Don shared a similar observation, discussing more specifically the types of social media mediums:

I think the advent of a broader access to various mediums such as social media, people can do videos now and we don't have to rely on mainstream media to project whatever we're supposed to be projecting. So, the access and the ability to communicate has gotten a lot easier. And the ability of the youth to engage in that and also be able to use that technology to its advantage has given me hope in terms of the ability to communicate to a broader section of people and not just through mainstream media (Don).

Other topics discussed by participants regarding youth climate activism includes adults as mentors (mentioned by 2 participants) and youth upholding climate activism when current adults

are gone. Regarding the discussion of adults as mentors, Shawn reflected on their experience of having adult activists to look up to as role models in their youth. Drey offered a reflection on their Indigenous identity and the role of elders as mentors in their cultural tradition:

I looked up to, you know... like looking up to a group of activists, like older activists, I guess, it taught me to a lot of knowledge that I never knew. So, it's almost like looking up to the elders of my community, teaching me the history and everything like that. So, I think it's really important that a lot of students and not just students, but youth get to hear these things and experience these things. Like everybody says, they all offer you perspectives on everything, on what they're capable of doing and how they're capable of doing it (Drey).

With the topic of youth upholding climate activism when current adults are gone, Sawyer was one participant who shared their thoughts about the necessity for youth to take on climate activism work, as well as the necessity for adults to do so and to take responsibility for past climate harms. Anne discussed the idea of future generations taking on climate activism, as the youth today are taking it on:

It's just very gratifying to see that it's not just a bunch of us old folks doing this thing, but it's crossing generations and that people are excited about it. So, I think for me, it provided a hopeful feeling and also a feeling that this is activism and the awareness is going to continue, even if some of us have to retire or whatever happens to us (Anne).

Responding to my prompt in interviews about whether participants had been influenced in their own activism and involvement by specific youth climate activists such as Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, or other youth activists (local or globally known), there were many comments about influential figures in the youth climate movement. Shawn, in particular, clearly stated the strong influence of Greta Thunberg and of local youth climate activists:

Yes, absolutely, because they were the wake-up call. They really were. I mean, it wasn't until they started their work that we stepped up our work. But more so the youth here in the city. You know, there's some young leaders that just blew me away. Like I was just so impressed with their knowledge and their understanding of the issues and their commitment to fighting for their future (Shawn).



Virginia shared about the inspiration of Greta Thunberg as helpful, but not a main motivator for their own activism journey. Another participant also expressed awareness of Greta Thunberg's role, but shared doubts about her effectiveness as an activist during our interview:

Steve: What's the name of that kid who gets all the prizes and everybody talks about?

CB: Oh, Greta Thunberg?

Steve: Yeah. Her tone is that way. And you know, I can understand it from her perspective: as a kid who's angry and stuff? I don't think it's a mature tone. But I don't like the way the media covers that. They've made her into a big hero and person and leader and stuff. And this is the question that says "there's no such thing as leaders who are better people and worse people, those who know and those who don't". It's the situation that we're all in together. So, I don't like- and the media is problematic in that way, very problematic- and again, part of the psychological contribution to our ability to engage in denial about what's going on and what we can do about it. It's very superficial and surface-looking. And I think it needs greater depth on our part.

Don also expressed concern about the power behind Greta Thunberg and the possibility that she is being used as a public relations campaign tool for corporations.

Conversely, other participants made use of Greta Thunberg's actions and stories to share their own activism journey. Elliot quoted Greta Thunberg's 'the house is on fire' statement to explain some of their own conclusions about the issue of climate change, as did Esther:

I think Greta Thunberg has it right: "Our house is on fire. Don't just sit there". And she's telling this to the UN. And they all applaud and then you just go back and do the same thing. So, I think that I'll go back to my comment that nobody's going to get out of this unscathed and we better all be working towards this (Esther).

### **4.3 Emerging Themes**

During my conversation with participants in interviews, three unexpected but considerable themes emerged from the data. That is to say, in interviews, participants spoke about these themes to some extent, though they were not something I anticipated when designing my interview schedule. These three themes were as follows: (1) grief, loss, trauma, and/or death as a catalyzing experience in one's journey towards climate activism, (2) 'accumulated awareness' as

the predominant shape of participants' learning processes, and (3) the link between self-reflection/introspection and climate-related learning. Given the prevalence of these themes in the interviews, I devoted much of the focus group to asking participants more about each theme and why they think it may have factored into their answers. Below I bring together thoughts from the interviews and focus group discussion, one theme at a time.

#### *4.3.1 Grief, loss, and/or death as part of the learning-to-action process*

Though a natural and inevitable component of human existence, I did not expect the experience of grief, loss, and/or death to feature in every interview as a catalyzing force for motivating or strengthening one's path to climate activism. For example, some participants shared about the death of a loved one, others the loss of a connection to a natural place or land, and all expressed grief in some way about the state of the planet and all its inhabitants due to climate change and environmental degradation. Sharing their own story, Don offered the following reflection on loss in our interview:

Let me see, what motivated mostly for me was, you know, being out in the bush a lot and canoeing a lot, and then five or six years later, going back to the same place and seeing the loss and the destruction of places that I used to go to. Which led to anger, which to me is a great motivator to do things. I always say anger is a good thing if used right. So yeah, loss is what it is, but it's how you deal with it... how you deal with it in a constructive way may lead to change, but certainly as a photographer, I photographed a lot of places that are no longer what they used to be, and it certainly led to me being motivated to take action (Don).

Related to grief and loss, Anne spoke about their concern for young people and climate change, stating that "it's very hard for young people who have gotten very knowledgeable about it and have to face the very real inevitabilities of it". They stated how in their previous work going into schools to talk to children about environmental issues, they would be careful to present the information in such a manner that did not "give false hope, but [...] to present things in a way

that people felt not just totally depressed about it, and go and crawl into a hole, but in a way that felt they could engage in some way”.

Another participant recounted their own experience with eco-anxiety, after retiring from their full-time work:

My life had slowed down dramatically. At that time, climate change predictions were ramping up and it seemed that all the news everywhere described a world of flames and hellfire. Since I lived alone in quite a remote area, my brain now had time to focus. And focus it did. When I woke in the morning, I knew that I had about 1 to 2 seconds of peace before it started: the rat [of eco-anxiety] gnawing at my guts (Esther).

Speaking about fighting austerity measures in Manitoba along with climate activism, Shawn shared about the loss of family members being at the heart of their motivation:

Education’s very close to my heart. But so is healthcare. And our homecare facilities are- I mean, I’ve just lost the last of the four parents- you know, having had parents in care facilities. Including my mom during the COVID time period. So, I would say that all of my commitments to action have always come from the heart. There’s something that hits my gut and my heart and that compels me to say yes, and not no when there’s something I can do to do some little bit and help (Shawn).

Sawyer also shared about how the death of their step-parent influenced and motivated their climate activism:

When the generation above you dies and then you realize ‘Oh yeah, I’m the adult! I am no longer the child’ I mean, I am the child of this person, but the person who took care of me can no longer take care of me and make the changes that need to be made. And so I need to really stand up and do the work. As well as also I think a more intimate relationship with grief and a willingness to step into the grief related to my step-parent’s death, which allowed me to step into the grief of climate change. And just be in that grief. You know, in my life with my family, I was in that grief, and I also realized that I needed to still do things and do the work of my life- like, take care of my family and those kinds of things. And also related to climate, realizing that I can feel grief around climate change and all the devastating impacts that are happening to my world but that I also need to continue to do the work even through that grief, in that avenue as well as my own intimate personal family avenue. So, I think it was those two things for the climate activism that I’ve done in that time (Sawyer).

Robin spoke about frustration and climate grief in recognizing the state of the planet as dire (due to climate change). Yet, they also spoke about the powerful impact of the youth-led die-in at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, stating how they “actually had tears in [their] eyes because that’s how it impacted [them]”.

To delve into this topic further, I asked the following question of the 8 participants who attended the focus group: “Collectively, what is your reaction to the theme of loss and grief, death leading to action on climate being so prominent in my results?”. In response to this prompt, Drey shared how the loss of a close person in their life- who had similar values and beliefs- brought their awareness of their present people and their past ancestors in sharper relief, which informed and informs their activism work. Adding to the theme of grief, loss, and death, Blake (an Indigenous participant) spoke about the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada and explained the connection between this grief and climate activism work:

I come from a line that has both depended on the land and resources collected from the land, even up until my parents. And I think that it is something that needs to be addressed within communities, but societally; that the change that is occurring constitutes, I think, a change that is irreversible. But in that way, I think there will be grief associated with any sort of fighting or justice against that change. Of course, there’s going to be some form of grief or loss because there are traditions that will largely not be possible to carry forward. And that’s just something I think that, addressing it as trauma, we see perhaps intergenerationally the effect that it may have for future generations (Blake).

Drey also spoke about trauma in regard to the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada, past and present, as a continued personal and collective experience of grief and loss.

Other participants, such as Elliot, discussed grief in the focus group in regard to the natural presence of grief in human existence:

The grief, the massive suffering of populations (whether human or otherwise) have been around as long as I’ve been on the Earth. And I’ve been sensitive to that. So, I don’t find myself in a period of experiencing undue grief or loss. Sadness, certainly, sadness... Our grandchildren won’t have the same experience and privileges that we’ve had, but I don’t know. Life is always a challenge, life is always a struggle. And that hasn’t changed. [...]

The grief I experienced these days because of, well, because of the death and suffering going on around us. But I'm at the stage where friends are departing this life. And so I experience that. And I grieve their loss, I grieve their death. And I understand that is part of life. And I cherish that I've been able to feel connected enough to the people that I grieve that are no longer being here. So, grief and climate change? No, it's not a dominant theme for me (Elliot).

Don also reflected on grief in a similar manner, noting its inherent presence in life and its connection to activism work:

From my perspective, living here in Canada, you know, the real issue around that is, is this whole alienation from nature, you know? We're just wired to be alienated based on the economic system on which we operate under. We're designed to be little cogs in the wheel. And so, yes, that divide between the haves and have nots and how you approach activism or organizing is different depending on your socioeconomic status and where you live and the color of your skin. And for some people, grief is a daily exercise. Just surviving can be a grieving thing (Don).

Furthermore, Don clarified that "for a lot of people other than those that live in the Western world, it is a matter of survival to be an activist. It's a matter of life and death".

Speaking to the prevalent presence of grief, Anne commented that "you can't really be engaged in [climate activism] and ignore the fact that grief will be there for you, because it is it's such a dire situation".

Shawn spoke to a recent experience of grief related to their climate activism work and aging:

I always say that's one of the things about getting older: that I'm so acutely aware of so many things that are different and not to the better. I'm also acutely aware of how omnipresent grief and loss is in my life. It's always kind of there, even when you're having a good time, which is hard to kind of let go of the fear of the future.

Just last week I was with a group of friends, none of them activists, but people my age and older, 10 of us from across the country. And when one of the women said, "Well, the pandemic is just a warmup for what's about to come" and everybody referring to climate change, everybody nodded their heads. It's just like everyone's feeling this sense of fear and loss for what we had (Shawn).

Shawn further shared about the "fairly carefree life" that their generation was able to live through and the present fragility of our current time period and the omnipresence of climate

grief. Steve's words echoed this question of inequality, but speaking instead to disproportionate experiences of grief across the globe:

It's part of a long-time narrative, the grief, the loss... like, the white privilege man might not experience it as much as others. But it's been the case for people forever who are part of the world majority (the white privilege man is part of the world minority) (Steve).

#### **4.3.2 'Accumulated awareness' as learning process**

As I paid attention in interviews to participants' descriptions of the learning to action process regarding climate activism (i.e., learning about the climate crisis to taking part in the climate movement), I saw that a considerable portion of participants experienced a "building-up" of awareness when it came to the issue of climate change, whether informed by experiential learning (e.g., nature based or land based experiences, etc.), formal learning (e.g., grade school, university workshops, talks, etc.), or nonformal learning (e.g., community gatherings, protests and grassroots actions, etc.). In other words, for many (but not all) participants, there was no singular specific point (e.g., a moment in time, one experience, etc.) where learning about climate change began to take form into action. Instead, many experienced an accumulated awareness concerning the climate crisis that facilitated involvement in climate activism. To understand this process as best as I could, I asked those participants who participated in the focus group to elaborate on whether my observation of an "accumulated awareness" learning process resonated with them or not.

It was Virginia who named their learning-to-action process "an awareness, or a discovery", rather than an event. Indeed, for Robin as well, there was no singular "magical moment" regarding their learning-to-action process for climate activism:

For me, it's that whole sort of livelihood package. I mean, I've been doing environmental work since the late eighties. And, you know, climate change is an issue with all the other issues: impacts to biodiversity, poverty, et cetera, et cetera. The list goes on and on (Robin).

Blake also described the multiple influences of grade school clubs, community-based organizations focused on “getting people out on the land” and “understanding the direct impact of humans on the Earth” and cultivating a “land-based understanding of the world”, rooted in their Indigenous identity and community. Don also reflected on how the accumulation of different types of learning shaped their activism work: they shared how their trajectory moved from spending time outdoors as a youth (where experiential learning about the land took place), to university (as a formal learning space where they were able to “convey to the public what [their] thoughts were and [put] a theoretical framework around that”), to campaigning work on environmental issues (where they described nonformal learning organically occurred between those involved). Additionally, Don’s trajectory from learning-to-action did not take place linearly (as it is summarized above), but was one that included these shifts between learning to action and back again. For instance, they describe participating in campaigns both at the beginning and current stage of their environmental care work; these instances were multiple and contained learning and action outcomes both.

In the focus group session, Shawn shared about how their learning-to-action process was one of accumulation and spark:

There was this accumulative experience or gathering of knowledge that I heard about things. But I don’t come to this through the science, I don’t come to this through my schooling; I was in the art world, in the theater world, and I was in a very different environment [...] it wasn’t until something happened to trigger my concern for my immediate home, right? I was worried about the Energy East pipeline coming through and coming close to Falcon Lake. And Falcon Lake is close and dear to my heart; I’ve been going there since I was a baby. And when that happened, when it hit the point where it was going to affect me, and then all of a sudden my eyes were opened and then I was beginning to hear the stories of other people and what was happening to their homes and their environments. And that was that was the difference for me. That’s when it was like, OK, now it’s time for me to get involved (Shawn).

Anne reflected on the spark-like effect of a personal impact on one’s activism:

It often takes a personal thing to kick people in the next stage of being active, and that's when all [...] the things you might have heard before, through your education maybe or through reading or art or a talk that you went to way back when; it's when it all starts to click and you suddenly go, "oh, right".

For me, I'm not sure if it was exactly that, but yeah, maybe it was- because I think my initial beginning in any kind of activism had to do with thinking about impact for my children (Anne).

Regarding the process of learning, Don proposed the need to pay attention to the role of cultural and societal values:

Certainly how you've been brought up in a society and those cultural values certainly play a big part in how one learns to actually come to understanding their role within that society and what is important and in terms of their environmental activism (Don).

From hearing these experiences of learning-to-action, it became clear that participants often experienced many different pathways and types of learning coming together to draw linkages within their activism work, with some participants also experiencing a "spark"/turning point. The accumulation of awareness about the climate crisis, then, often involved shifting or solidifying previous knowledge through culminating learning experiences. Indeed, this "built" awareness did not remain abstract, but through its accumulated nature, became concrete and offered participants the opportunity to become involved in climate work.

#### ***4.3.3 Link between self-reflection/introspection and climate-related learning***

Another theme which emerged from interviews and as a result, was further discussed in the focus group, was a link between self-reflection and/or introspection and climate-related learning. Though I did not ask a question in the interviews about this specifically, many participants discussed how their learning and awareness about the climate crisis is deeply connected to self-reflection on their own worldview, values, and/or beliefs.



Here, Steve described facilitating this type of reflection in others by spending time in different outdoor spaces, and Esther and Blake described similarly how introspection helped them to develop their values, on climate and on social issues:

Introspection has always been a big part of my life and part of my upbringing. So how have I served my neighbor today? And related to climate change: What has been my carbon footprint and what can I do to mitigate that? So, I've made some fairly big changes in my life, including deciding not to have a car or any kind of vehicle. And that is part of what I need to do and always to be questioning myself: Is this meaningful? Is this serving? Is this serving my neighbor? And always mindful that the political is the personal (Esther).

I think that the link between that introspective self and perhaps relating it to climate and environment, at least for me has been largely gaining a material understanding of things and gaining an understanding of the underlying relationships of people and individuals and communities to land and to each other (Blake).

In components of interviews and the focus group relating to this theme, considerable attention was paid to the ways cultural background and values shape one's introspective process. Don addressed this most fervently:

When we're talking about learning, I think it's important that it depends on what cultural lens you're looking through it when you're learning as well. Different people have different cultural values and how those values are projected also determines (to a certain degree, I don't think it's a determinant) but it certainly plays a factor in how you learn, how you come to learn about something. So, you know, your cultural values and as a society does play a big part on how when it comes to taking action or inaction on something. So, it's important to recognize how folks come to take a certain perspective or world view, is culturally based (Don).

A settler person, Elliot reflected on how Indigenous-settler relations within the Canadian cultural landscape and their own relationships with Indigenous communities have been the driving force of their learning about climate:

I'd say my primary source [of learning] has been the privilege of being able to be around Indigenous people in Canada, in the north mostly, and just being with them and seeing how they react; what is their relationship with the with the living world, with the plants and animals. More than verbal instruction or teaching, it has been very informative. [...]

Our assumptions about reality are so much embedded in the cultural realm. Which makes me hopeful, first of all, that there are the remnants, but it's very real of an alternative worldview. Sure, it's anti-capitalist, but it's deeper than that. It has to do with who we are as humans and what is our relationship to life, to other life forms on this planet. That is embedded in culture and absolutely in Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous life. And it hasn't been lost. And that's kind of amazing that that is still there. And I'm grateful for it because, as I say, that has informed my personal reflection and had brought me to a sense of peace and comfort and deep satisfaction and acceptance. And knowing that I'm part of something larger and deeper (Elliot).

These stories and reflections are intriguing in their own right. Yet in addition, my mind was drawn to their relevance to transformative learning's introspective domain, in its focus on personal learning about beliefs, values, and identity. This link between self-introspection and climate-related learning fits clearly within this domain, given the self-awareness and critical thought exhibited by participants when it came to their journey towards climate activism.

#### **4.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter examined the experiences and stories of these 12 climate activists about their understanding of and involvement in the climate movement, including the impact of youth climate activism on their activism and the variety of experiences involved in their learning-to-action process (e.g., grief, loss, and death as a catalyzing force). Taking inspiration from Kovan and Dirkx's (2003) study on environmental activists and the role of transformative learning in their work, I asked questions not only about how participants learned but what their learning was. For instance, in asking participants about what they believe climate activism entails, the wide range of topics in their answers (e.g., collective system change, creative grassroots action, and education and awareness, etc.). Having an understanding of how climate activists conceptualize climate activism matters because it points us to the learning they have either prioritized or that has been accessible to them (in relation to the climate crisis as an issue).

In interviews with activists about their “turns” towards climate activism (i.e., how they became involved in the climate movement), we discussed both their intention (e.g., whether they came to climate activism of their own accord or if they were brought to the work by someone else, another movement, etc.) and their motivation for involvement (defined here as the choice to become involved based on external events). Many participants had a layered view of their intention towards involvement in climate activism, pointing at the way they had both acted of their own accord and were brought to involvement. Elliot summed it up this mix of intentions well by pointing out their interwovenness: “Do we come to anything on our own?” (Elliot). Also of consequence was the prevalence of the IPCC 2018 report as a source of motivation for involvement in the climate movement; many participants pointed to the release, reading, and/or media circulation about this report as a “wake-up call” to climate action in their own lives.

This chapter also highlighted three key themes which were not originally included in the objectives of this study, but their prevalence in participant interviews necessitates consideration. These three themes -grief, loss, and/or death as a component of the learning-action process, the link between self-reflection/introspection and climate related learning, accumulated awareness as learning process- were elaborated on in the focus group session. All the participants in the study mentioned grief, loss, trauma, and/or death as part of their climate activism journey (and this theme was especially present in the stories of Don, Esther, Anne, Shawn, Sawyer, Robin, Drey, Blake, Elliot, and Steve). The other emerging themes (accumulated awareness in the learning process, and the link between introspection and climate learning) also featured as unexpected but intriguing components in the journey towards climate activism (this is elaborated on in Chapter 6).

In summary, the reflections and stories shared by my 12 participants illustrated how these participants came to learn about the climate crisis and how they found themselves “turning” towards involvement in climate activism, as a result of both intention and motivation.

Participants also shared how their perspective on the identity of the climate activist, organizer, and/or lobbyist itself was shaped. The inquiry into these topic areas provides a foundation for further inspection of the learning process in light of transformative learning theory and the learning-action nexus, as discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Understanding the Motivations, Actions, and Learning Outcomes for Adult Climate Activists**

Using a transformative learning framework, this chapter addresses the relationships amongst learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement. As such, I explore specific actions and stories from climate activists in Manitoba in dialogue with transformative learning. This includes a characterization and discussion of the various types of learning outcomes experienced by participants (5.1) and offers pertinent examples of each from interview and focus group data. The types of learning, informed by literature and the data itself, include experiential learning (5.1.1), nonformal learning (5.1.2), and formal learning (5.1.3). In order to ground this work theoretically, I analyse how different components of participants' stories may be said to fit within four domains of transformative learning (5.2): introspective (5.2.1), transformative (5.2.2), communicative (5.2.3), and instrumental (5.2.4). Additionally, this chapter brings the data of this study into conversation with the learning-action nexus (5.3) and the climate crisis as an issue.

### **5.1 Types of learning**

In interviews and in the focus group, participants shared about the many different types of learning that led to their involvement in the climate movement. During the coding process, I divided these experiences and descriptions of learning into three broad categories. Though some of the category names are used in transformative learning literature and other bodies of literature, here they are used as grounded terms which reflect the nuances of experiences shared by participants in this study, as explained in Chapter 3. The first of these categories is experiential learning, which includes learning outcomes relating to a participant's direct experience of a phenomenon, whether internal or external (rather than studying or interacting with the concept of a phenomenon). For instance, learning about the issue of climate change through spending time

in a forest and seeing the changes over 30 (plus) years would be considered a form of experiential learning. The second broad category is nonformal learning. This category includes any learning outcomes that are organized and ordered in a way that experiential learning is not, while also not being formally organized within an accredited system (e.g., a university course taken in order to fulfill degree requirements). Lastly, formal learning includes experiences which are normally attributed to the process of learning within the education system or other institutional means, such as reading books or attending classes. The following section discuss each of these types of learning at more length, using examples and quotes from participants relating to their climate activism journey.

### ***5.1.1 Experiential learning***

Experiential learning was evident in a large number of participants' stories regarding the learning that led them to involvement in the climate movement. Participants shared many different types of experiential learning, but among the most mentioned were as follows:

**Table 4: Experiential learning themes**

Types of experiential learning	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
Land and nature experiences	10
Indigenous ways of knowing	6
Conversations with like-minded people	4
Meeting with others across difference	4
Perspective change	4
Spiritual elements	4
Personal steps	3

These experiential learning themes are discussed below in detail, in order of most to least mentioned.

### *5.1.1.1 Land and nature experiences*

When I asked participants about how they came to climate activism in the first place, the most mentioned learning experiences were those that took place on the land and/or in nature settings. For instance, Don shared an experience of living in a sailboat and how it influenced their learning related to the natural environment:

You get an appreciation to the awe-ness of nature when you're in a little thirty-five-foot sailboat in the middle of the ocean. You come to understand nature pretty quickly. [...] Of course, there's reading and reading other people's words, but also very in person is the experiential thing, right? You've got experience.

It's like any campaign that I do. I must insist people go and experience what we're doing as a campaign [...]. You got to go there. So it's an experience. Because once you've experienced something, then you take ownership over it. Right? You feel connected to it. (Don)

Similarly, Steve shared how their early nature experiences influences their later environmental work. Regarding this link, they noted:

My initial learning of what meaning nature has for me underpins any of my environment work. And that occurred when I was a young person and started going on backpacking trips in the mountains (Steve).

Steve then described a hiking trip which had a profound effect on them:

So, there was a moment where we were walking along a river called the Tuolumne River, which is a beautiful river and both sides of it have large, granite rock outcroppings that you can walk on. And the river was and this huge granite rock that we walked around, so big that the total noise of the river stopped. And these birds were singing, beautiful songbirds. And I walked up these steps and then we got to the top, and there was this noise of the river roaring over the fall, and a rainbow.

And I was in heaven. I just thought. both of us were. I just sat there, just like in heaven, with these moments of the rushing river and these beautiful songbirds and the rushing fall and the rainbow. It's what I would call an epiphany. And I got up and boy, that backpack didn't weigh a single ounce. [...]. So, I was young, but that was an introduction to me in some way that nature had some meaning, as an internal experience (Steve).

Robin also expressed how hiking and canoeing excursions helped them connect to “the wilderness” and how growing up going to their grandparents’ farm helped form their life, beliefs, and principles. These outdoor experiences can also be compared to Esther’s childhood experience of paying attention to the climate itself through the amount of rain in their area:

One of the things that I’ve noticed is that when I grew up here as a child, I remember having 3-day rains. It didn’t rain; it drizzled, misted, for three days. We haven’t had that for decades. And my mom would say ‘Put your bathing suit on and go and play in the rain! Away you go!’. She’d throw us out and we’d have to. So, we did! But you didn’t say no to my mom. So, that certainly has informed me (Esther).

This personal experience of the difference in rainfall was one nature-based learning experience which informed Esther’s climate activism work in future years. Elliot described their experience of working in their garden and “caring about the soil” as an action. Blake also expressed the importance of land-related learnings in their life, sharing about the relationship between their family and Lake Winnipeg in particular:

I have a very sort of intense relationship, even with specifically Lake Winnipeg in northern Manitoba and the way that a lot of our livelihoods in the past and currently still are dependent on the health of the lake and the ability to harvest these fish. [...] It certainly did involve me sort of having an understanding of the direct outcomes of climate change on individuals and perhaps sectors of the economy or providing harvesting sort of sense (Blake).

Drey echoed this perspective, commenting on how an attentiveness to the natural environment and experiences with nature influenced their learning about climate change:

I’ve learned all that from just living. Like, you know, seeing things and slowing down and reflecting on how things were back then compared to how they are now. And how things changed and, you know, like with the weather, with just like with everything overall: like the animals, the food, the lake, the trees, the earth, the atmosphere, how it's all polluted, everything that's there. Like, you can't find that in a book, because I basically lived it. For thirty-five years, I lived it. (Drey).



### *5.1.1.2 Indigenous ways of knowing*

Many participants spoke about the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing in their interviews and in the focus group. Indigenous participants discussed these ways of knowing as deeply ingrained in their own life; for instance, Drey shared about how elders in their community shared stories about the shifts in the climate over decades and how Drey themselves had grown up valuing land-knowledge:

From when I was a kid, like just knowing the importance of the land and learning how to respect the land? And that's just that's just who I am. That there was built into my DNA. It's just a natural thing, it's a natural occurrence. It's nothing that can be bought or it's nothing that can be downloaded into anybody's brain or anything like that. It's just being one with the land. Like you know, in my culture, it's very important to be connected. (Drey)

You know how a tree is grown, right? And how it connects? The roots run deeply into the earth. That's kind of how an Indigenous person is connected to the land. That's one of the terms, but there is a lot of other terms within our culture: with the water, with the animals, with everything that's living in this earth or on this earth. [It] plays a huge role in our culture. And I think that's why we're so connected with it. And why we respect everything so much (Drey).

Another Indigenous participant, Blake, shared how knowledge from their family and community concerning fishing work in Manitoba was one catalyst for their climate activism work.

Conversely, non-Indigenous participants also discussed how as guests on the land, Indigenous ways of knowing had influenced their own learning processes related to the climate crisis;

Michael recounted how two Indigenous activists “were pretty impactful in [their] learning about activism, but also about climate issues and how it impacts, or is connected, with Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous communities”. Similarly, Don described how they “learned a lot of [their] environmental skills by listening to [Indigenous] elders and their teachings and spending time on the land”, which shaped Don’s activism and work on climate change.

### *5.1.1.3 Conversations with like-minded people*

In interviews, participants mentioned how having conversations with like-minded people facilitated their learning about climate change and/or their involvement in climate activism. Robin shared about how peer-to-peer events and conversations within environmentalist circles helped them gather resources and knowledge about climate change and other environmental issues. Additionally, Robin and Don shared about how having mentor figures to turn to for advice and conversation was a key component of their activism journeys. Virginia shared about how meetings within their organizing group were key to providing them not only with information about climate change, but information and training on how to advocate productively on the issue of climate change.

### *5.1.1.4 Meeting with others (across difference)*

Nearly opposite from the ‘conversations with like-minded people’ as a form of experiential learning, participants also shared that they found that their learning related to the climate movement was intertwined with conversations and meetings with those that they did not agree with and/or with which they were considerably different from. For example, Shawn shared about how meeting with Indigenous and settler activists, organizers, and occupiers of a camp in Manitoba allowed them to expand their understanding of climate activism work, including “how to interact with people in a different structure” (Shawn). Michael spoke about how door-knocking exposed them to many different opinions and was at times “demoralizing to hear that a lot of people question climate science” (Michael). However, Michael also described how these door-knocking conversations across difference developed in them a belief about the importance of “[having] hard conversations or trying to relate [climate justice] to people who aren’t speaking the same language metaphorically” (Michael).

#### *5.1.1.5 Perspective change*

Though many instances of learning include a form of perspective change, participants shared about how perspective change, as a process, acted as a form of experiential learning in their climate activism journey. Sawyer discussed how the learning they cultivated through reading the October 2018 IPCC report “was enough of a perspective change that [they could] no longer not give [their] all in as many avenues as [they] can to try and create solutions” (Sawyer). Elliot spoke about how, for them, this shift partially occurred through the process of “somebody [saying] something that is striking and that will lead [them] into exploring and reading and finding out more” (Elliot).

#### *5.1.1.6 Spiritual elements*

Several participants mentioned how their learning was not simply intellectual, but as a process which contained spiritual elements. For instance, Elliot spoke about how a session on climate change and faith triggered questions about the spiritual dimension of being a human being, such as “What’s the purpose of our species” and “Do we think we have a purpose in life and creation?” (Elliot). Esther shared about how their morning meditation (focused on peace and ‘having enough’) was an ongoing learning experience in sustaining their activism work.

#### *5.1.1.7 Personal steps*

A less mentioned form of experiential learning was that of taking personal steps in one’s life which inform and/or lead one towards climate awareness and/or action. That is to say, participants shared about how taking the initiative to slow down and shut off social media (Drey), researching less-carbon intensive lifestyle habits (Virginia, Anne), developing skills for facilitating meetings or speaking to the media about the issue of climate change (Anne), and encouraging others to take personal steps towards more sustainable behaviours. Though each of

these personal steps can be categorized into other forms of learning, the process of taking personal steps towards a more climate-aware life is one which necessitates experiential learning.

### ***5.1.2 Nonformal learning***

Offering a sort of middle ground between experiential learning and formal learning, nonformal learning includes forms of learning more ordered than experiential learning, but not institutionalized or found within accredited (education) systems, as formal learning experiences are. Participant stories and experiences which fit within nonformal learning as a category included the following:

**Table 5: Nonformal learning themes**

Types of nonformal learning	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
Media learning	10
Organizational internal learning	9
Informative books	5
News articles	5
Webinars and seminars	5

#### *5.1.2.1 Media learning*

In interviews, participants shared about a variety of informal media formats which facilitated their learning about climate change and climate activism. These included podcasts, radio programs, email newsletters from environmental organizations, documentaries, films, and other forms of media which allowed them to glean knowledge and insight about climate change as an issue. Sawyer spoke broadly about documentaries and “things like that” being one source of learning about climate change, while Robin discussed being “heavily into podcasts, so that’s where I get a lot of my information these days” (Robin). Blake and Anne spoke about environmental films being influential early on in their climate journeys: Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* (for Blake) and Helen Caldicott’s *If You Love This Planet* (for Anne). Virginia, Elliot and Anne mentioned taking some of their climate-related learning from radio

programs, such as *Summer with Greta* (Virginia) and Elliot and Anne from programs on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio.

#### *5.1.2.2 Organizational internal learning*

Organizational internal learning refers to experiences of nonformal learning having to do with participants' involvement with activist groups or organizations. As one example of organizational internal learning, Robin shared about their work attempting to enact climate action within policy settings and how the source of funds for this work can limit one's options: "we want to move to do more policy advocacy and if you get government funding that ties you, it binds you a bit" (Robin). Blake spoke about how some of their less formal learning experiences occurred as an off-shoot from their time in the grade school system:

I think that the informal sort of educations that I got started as a branch off of the formal education, I suppose, through my teacher who connected me to community groups and connected me to actual individual issue-based organizations or issue-based causes such as Lake Winnipeg and the Lake Winnipeg watershed (Blake).

Virginia and Esther shared about the learning they have received from the training sessions on climate-related issues within their organizing groups. Anne discussed how embracing using the internet for organizing work was not only a learning process in and of itself, but was one which contributed to their group's increased ability to distinguish validity in online climate information. Additionally, Michael shared about learning how to organize around an issue from a group that was accessed from within the university and Steve spoke about taking part in organizing environmental conferences and how that work taught them about confronting egotism within the environmental movement.

#### *5.1.2.3 Informative books*

As a typical and accepted form of learning, reading informative books is one nonformal learning experience that participants noted had contributed to their climate activism journey. For

instance, Virginia mentioned how the book *How to Stop the Planet From Burning* by George Monbiot helped them “[learn] a little bit about some of the sources of why our planet was getting warmer and warmer” (Virginia). Steve also shared how a George Monbiot book (*Heat*) “panicked [them]” about climate change and influenced them to gather others concerned with climate change to host a press conference advocating for the Manitoban provincial government at the time to address climate change more thoroughly. Steve also named *The Fate of the Earth* by Jonathan Schell as an influential book on their thinking between peace and environment. Elliot mentioned *Limits to Growth* as an informative book which furthered their awareness and concern about sustainability (including climate change).

#### *5.1.2.4 Webinars and seminars*

Seminars and webinars represented another facet of nonformal learning for participants in this study. Specifically, Shawn, Robin, Elliot, Anne, and Michael all mentioned seminars and/or webinars as relevant spaces of climate-related learning. Elliot shared both about attending seminars and webinars, and about hosting a webinar series:

It’s about our relationship to the natural world. So, climate is a part of that. I see the climate crisis as a symptom of a broader malaise, a broader problem. And then, as I’ve said, it’s fundamentally about our whole basic worldview (Elliot).

In general, participants experienced webinars and seminars as opportunities (rather than steady paths of education) to learn more about climate change and involvement in the climate movement.

#### *5.1.3 Formal learning*

The final category of learning is that of formal learning, which includes learning experiences that are facilitated by an educational institution, system, or format. Examples of this form of learning shared by participants include the following:

**Table 6: Formal learning themes**

Types of formal learning	Number of participants who mentioned the respective topic
University	6
Training sessions or workshops	3
Grade school and clubs	1

Though formal learning is perhaps the most well-understood and normalized forms of learning in Canada, it was the least frequently mentioned form of learning by climate activists in this study on the whole. However, participants did still attribute significance to formal learning experiences in shaping their climate activism journey.

#### *5.1.3.1 University*

One of the most mentioned formal learning experiences for participants were those that took place in university (in classes or through other experiences related to involvement in a university degree or program). Specifically, Sawyer, Robin, Virginia, Anne, Michael, and Don spoke about the influence of university classes. Don, shared about the flow of learning catapulted by both university and books as channels:

When you start reading books and you read about philosophy and you read Nietzsche and Karl Marx and all these other folks and you start taking political science courses, it becomes pretty apparent about the connections. And then the ability to write that down on a piece of paper so the outside community (anything outside of your feeling) can understand and relate to it, right? So, you know, that's the beautiful thing about writing in language, is that you're able to get your thought processes out to others. And that came through university (Don).

In sharing about university as a pivotal experience for learning about climate change and climate activism, Michael also critiqued its inaccessibility as a learning space: “that’s so privileged that I did that thinking through paying for a university degree to like spend the time to get to that position?” (Michael). Anne spoke about how the research skills taught in university assisted in their climate-related learning and activism:

I think -although my background was in archaeology and anthropology- that sort of gave me the ability to do research and to ask questions, and to dig deeper into things, so. So that kind of learning has been really important. So when I want to find out about something, I take it on as a research project. So, you know, having access to libraries (Anne).

However, similar to Michael, Anne also critiqued the ways in which the university system facilitated some learning experiences and hindered other forms:

I spent my days going to the library and teaching stuff, and then going to the library and working on my thesis, and I was so deeply embedded in it, and you know, had my fieldwork and everything. I truly hadn't really given a lot of thought to what was going on out in the bigger world, you know, and it was kind of having that time, I think, more to start to see what was happening. And I really felt quite alarmed about what the future might hold (Anne).

Virginia mentioned how their degree in biochemistry facilitated their learning about climate change and activism in that they “have an understanding of how science works” and know that “when there are statements [like the IPCC report] made, that they are not being taken lightly”. Likewise, Robin names their undergraduate degree in geography as “[their] first experience with climate change” and Sawyer shared how their degrees in psychology, environment, and environmental science allowed them to learn about climate change through writing papers on the topic.

#### *5.1.3.2 News articles*

Participants spoke about gleaning their information about climate change and awareness from news articles and other well-researched articles. Robin mentioned the importance of this kind of information for activists and advocated as follows for properly reviewed research:

I believe in strong research and data collection and evidence gathering, because that's really important for the ENGO community to put their views across and in a scientific, but easy-to-read manner. So [I'm] just keeping informed and doing the research and reading the journals (Robin).



Elliot, Esther, Anne, and Steve also brought up news articles as key sources of climate-learning for them. In general, they all spoke about articles being important for keeping informed on how climate science and targets are evolving. This form of formal learning in the lives of these activists can perhaps be seen as a standard or baseline source of climate-related information, rather than as a channel for transformative, action-focused learning.

#### *5.1.3.4 Training and courses*

Training, courses, and clubs represent types of learning which do not necessarily exist within an accredited or official program, but remain formal in their delivery and format. For instance, Virginia described attending a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on food insecurity which informed their understanding of how climate change and food insecurity are linked. Likewise, Esther spoke about the training and guest speaking sessions within their climate organizing group help inform how to “celebrate, learn, practice, and then act” (in relation to climate activism and lobbying). Anne spoke more broadly about training in regard to being intentional about developing skills related to activism work such as “how to talk to the media, how to write a press release, how to write a brief, [and] how to facilitate meetings” (Anne), as well as skills related to aligning one’s climate awareness with one’s behaviours (such as learning how to compost).

#### *5.1.3.5 Grade school and clubs*

One participant, Blake, brought up the influence of grade school and clubs as key to their learning about climate change and about climate activism. Blake shared the following experience and reflection:

An example of formal [learning] would be when I was in high school, I was a part of an environmental club and I joined Envirothon, which was a Manitoba-wide competition.

I remember in high school being shown on a climate denier documentary through my social studies class, which certainly open things up to me because it didn't make me start

doubting that climate change was a real thing, but it made me realize perhaps that there are people who just say “no, the data that shows this actually means something else. We don't know what it is, but it's not what everyone else is saying”. [...]

Though not widely shared with other participants, Blake’s experience of grade school and clubs being a climate-learning space may be important to pay attention to in regard to the factor of age; as the youngest member of this study, Blake’s experience could point to the changing attitude towards teaching climate change as an issue in formal settings, such as a grade school, rather than being considered a fringe or irrelevant issue.

## **5.2 Learning domains**

In order to analyze the transformative nature of an individual’s learning journey into climate activism, this research employed the framework of transformative learning as a learning theory which allows for inquiry into holistic learning processes in adults (see Chapter 2). This section highlights specific examples of participants’ stories can be analyzed through the introspective, transformative, communicative, and/or instrumental domains of transformative learning as established in the literature (Mezirow, 2012; Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). These domains are further explored below in conversation with the experiences of my 12 participants.

### ***5.2.1 Communicative domain***

Referencing Cranton and Roy (2003) and Mezirow (1991, 1997), Moyer and Sinclair (2016) note that “communicative learning involves understanding others and making oneself understood, by navigating language, values, beliefs, and feelings” (p. 41). One of Elliot’s experiences, in which they created and presented a series of learning sessions on climate change at a church, aligns with communicative learning in that it involved direct dialogue with a group around the topic of climate change. Additionally, Steve was involved in lobbying the government regarding climate action. This work can be seen as communicative learning in that it inevitably involved communication between all parties involved, as an attempt to understand

each other's perspectives and commitments. Michael described attending talks featuring Indigenous speakers and activists and how these events helped inform their learning about climate and Indigenous rights. This experience can be seen as communicative in that as the speakers discussed their experiences and perspectives, Michael was able to listen and learn about the issues from one human perspective. Sawyer commented on how conversation with fellow organizers has been central to their learning:

I think that those people that I am having conversations with and am organizing with, those are all important things to move me along. And I feel like I am still continuously learning about what climate justice means and how climate justice can be operationalized (Sawyer).

Speaking to information surrounded climate change and activism, Robin asked an interesting question:

What do you do with all this information? So how do you use it? So, I mean, in the community I work in, we use it different ways. I mean, we share information; we develop campaigns to get more people informed and involved. And we also collaborate with others to make the issue bigger and bigger, et cetera (Robin).

In this statement, Robin brings up the notion of information sharing and collaboration. Indeed, this sort of cross-individual learning is essential in communicative learning, an experience Robin was familiar with. Similarly, Anne brought up the notion of empathy in climate work, stating that “doing things experientially helps, I think, also in having a greater sense of empathy about how it might be possible for other people to participate”. Rather than learning communicatively, this instance shows how an individual can think about how to create spaces and places for communicative learning, through empathy. Shawn echoes this, with an empathetic statement:

We're just people together and we should be able to talk and share and express our concerns and help if we can with things. So, it's learning to break down the 'they and us', 'we and them', and that we're all in this together. So that's been I think an important learning curve (Shawn).

### *5.2.2 Instrumental domain*

Instrumental learning, at its core, is “task-oriented, and facilitates the prediction, manipulation, and control of events and environments” (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Mezirow, 1991, as cited in Sinclair & Moyer, 2016, p. 41). Some ways in which participants discussed their instrumental learning experiences regarding climate change included formal education (e.g., university degrees and classes), nonformal education (e.g., learning about issues from presentations), and experiential learning in organizing for climate action and/or justice). This is to say that these were the types of (instrumental) experiences which helped participants build their knowledge around climate change as an issue and climate activism as a course of action.

Don and Sawyer both shared about their climate learning through attending university, and how these areas of learning allowed them to gain climate-change related “empirical knowledge, cause and effect relationships, problem solving, and [prediction of] observable events” (as instrumental learning outcomes outlined by Moyer & Sinclair, 2016, p. 42). In other words, these learning experiences gave Don and Sawyer instrumental skills regarding the topic of climate change, which allowed them then to apply that knowledge to their professional and organizing work.

Conversely, Anne and Virginia shared about how they were able to gain empirical information about climate change through their organizing work itself, which then further bolstered their climate activism work. Specifically, Virginia discussed learning how to lobby on the issue of climate, which required instrumental learning about the governmental system and climate change, while Anne discussed spending time spent attending nonformal presentations and learning from the processes of environmental activism itself: “it was very seldom in a formal setting, but more so in, you know, a community type setting” (Anne). This was also the case for Sawyer, who discussed both their learning through university degrees and through direct

participation in climate organizing circles, stating that they “have received so much education and skills and relationships and good and powerful things for right now from climate activism” (Sawyer). Blake also offered how their formal education and extracurricular learning work helped equip them with climate change knowledge, which then was instrumentalized as they got more involved in climate activism itself.

### *5.2.3 Introspective domain*

Many learning outcomes shared by participants are grounded into the introspective domain of transformative learning, which categorizes those learning experiences which encompass inner individual work and/or awareness. As this theme came up frequently in interviews, I also decided to ask more explicitly about the link between introspective-self-reflection and climate-related learning. Aptly, Elliot offered the following reflection during the focus group session:

So recently in the last three or four years- it partly has to do with having time to do that introspective, deep reflection. To me, I would use the word spiritual in the sense of a sense of connection to the natural world. To go back to the learning about that, I'd say my primary source has been the privilege of being able to be around Indigenous people in Canada, in the north mostly, and just being with them and seeing how they react; what is their relationship with the with the living world, with the plants and animals. More than verbal instruction or teaching, it has been very informative. That and reading (Elliot).

As such, the outcome of Elliot’s introspection, being heavily influenced by Indigenous knowledge and sharing, was a connection to the natural world which deepened Elliot’s climate awareness. Steve also shared about their experiences with climate/nature-based learning and introspective practices:

Sometimes I run these little experiments, kind of teaching about nature, and I'll go to an area in a city where there is heavy traffic noise, but you're in an area that's beautiful and ask people what their experience is. And they'll talk about the area being sublime and fantastic and wonderful, visually. And then I have a place where I could walk over the hill, and it's the same area with no noise except birds, the wind, whatever natural noises that are. And ask them for words then. And they'll say, calming, peaceful, relaxing,

wonderful, too, but not this wonderful kind of sublime thing where they're not part of it; they start talking about the feelings they're having inside. And those are what I would call our native capacities. We all have those inside. And those are the things that I think can get us to a different place. And I think what we need to be is in a different place so much, if you want to call it change... (Steve)

From these reflections can be gathered the notion that introspective learning can exist as a retrospective process (i.e., reflecting back on one's experiences, as Elliot expressed regarding Indigenous understandings) and/or as an ongoing process (such as Steve's active practice in creating introspective experiences and moments for others).

Esther shared about the active role of introspection in their life, both past and present, commenting that she asks herself questions such as "How have I served my neighbor today?" and "What has been my carbon footprint and what can I do to mitigate that?". Drey also expressed the importance of reflection and living out values, as one way of being attentive to the natural environment. In general, many participants shared how introspection has been an important part of their journey towards climate activism.

These stories of introspection within learning-to-climate activism processes add to the newly proposed introspective domain of transformative learning, which "comprises learning that is personal and internal, and that discovers, develops, and defines one's self-understanding" (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016, p. 48). Moyer and Sinclair (2016) suggest that the introspective domain could encapsulate various processes of reflection, such as worldviews and beliefs, values and attitudes, and personal identity, self-image, and faith (p. 48). Virginia shared about how introspection regarding their values helped them to take climate action regarding personal lifestyle choices. For instance, along with their family, they asked questions such as "Can I help with climate success?" and "Can I make a difference with the choices that I make?". These questions, riddled with concern about environmental values, helped Virginia and their family

understand what changes they could make in their life to be attentive to climate change as an issue (e.g., discussing car options and whether to equip their house with solar panels).

In terms of personal identity, Michael shared some introspection about one of their own identities:

I'm still doing like a lot of trying to figure out like what my role in this work as a white man is. And I think that's also what led me into feeling like that collective work is really important. Allies are important, but like, that's definitely why me going and starting my own new thing can like recreate or continue to produce colonialism, et cetera. So, definitely never a finished process. But like, I would think for white folks, that's a better way, I hope, to support communities who are more impacted by climate change or by our capitalist systems, is to support collective work (Michael).

This thought process concerning identity is certainly introspective and also shows some of the inner workings of their perspective, as they grapple with climate work and the outcome of the introspection. It is this type of reflection that may be best slotted under the learning domain of introspection, rather than transformation, as its pivot point is the necessity of inner thought process (i.e., introspection) rather than transformation (which can include introspection, but can also include external factors).

#### ***5.2.4 Transformative domain***

Citing Cranton (2006) and Mezirow (1991), Moyer and Sinclair (2016) describe the transformative learning domain as “the modification of premises, assumptions, and deep meaning structures which result from evaluating the outcomes of instrumental and communicative learning, which ideally should result in a transformation of action and behaviour” (p. 41). As such, this learning domain exists as one which necessarily builds off other learning domains.

In this sense, Steve’s epiphany experience of being by a river while hiking is transformative as well as introspective, in that it was one of the experiences that led them to

action (i.e., started a backpacking summer camp for youth). The transformative element of this experience is helpfully summarized in their one-sentence description of the event: “that’s a particular kind of moment; that’s a moment that changes you as a person” (Steve). Another transformative learning experience was Anne’s: upon hearing a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) interview about nuclear reactor waste in the Canadian Shield (i.e., instrumental learning), they were provided their entryway to becoming involved in the issue, both at a volunteer and in an employed capacity. Indeed, Anne described that hearing the interview was a learning experience which “snowballed” (Anne) into further engagement with nuclear issues and eventually climate issues. In the way this experience began with instrumental learning and morphed into engagement with nuclear and climate issue, it was transformative (action and behaviour-wise).

In our interview, Esther described how learning about climate change brought them to make a personal, transformative change: to go carless and give their car away. After having their car on layaway for 7 months, they decided they could forgo owning a car in order to lower their own carbon footprint. Drey also described their learning process as one which weighed possibilities given the reality of a frack sand mine company attempting to operate on Indigenous land, and deciding to erect a camp in protest. Many of the reflections shared by Elliot also bank on transformative: they discussed how learning about climate change and its associated issues (through radio, books, and talks) shifted the way they carry out tasks and goals in their life, including their volunteer time and their gardening habits. One of these changed gardening habits was to shift into a way of gardening that “[lives] into a sense of caring for the microorganisms and the earthworm” (Elliot).

Virginia also discussed how their learning about climate led them to become aware of



how they could apply better practices to their garden. This was learned through writing an article on climate lobbying and through watching a documentary about regenerative agriculture.

Certainly, some of this process could be understood as introspective, but it is mainly transformative in the sense that an instrumental and/or communicative element of learning was transformed into action and/or behaviour change. Through learning about regenerative agriculture as a method for mitigating climate change and environmental harm, Virginia resolved not to rototill their garden in the following year. Blake's experience of learning more in depth about their family's relationship with Lake Winnipeg as fishermen was also one of introspection which led them to have "an understanding of the direct outcomes of climate change on individuals and perhaps sectors of the economy" (Blake). Importantly, this anecdote expresses a possible (and subtler) transformative learning experience; this intergenerational knowledge of fishing and Lake Winnipeg has perhaps transformed Blake's understanding of climate throughout their life, acting as a constructive force, rather than an epiphany moment. In summary, all interviewees described experiences which could be identified as being transformative in nature, but the above represent some that stood out as clear (or intriguingly different) transformative learning experiences.

### **5.3 Learning-action nexus**

In their 2016 paper, Moyer, Sinclair, and Quinn examine the learning-action cycle as a theoretical area sometimes neglected within transformative learning theory scholarship. They term this cycle as 'the learning-action nexus', as it focuses both on how individuals undergo learning and the action outcomes which come forth from their learning. One example which illustrates the process of the learning-action nexus can be found in Michael's discussion of climate activism and Indigenous justice. In our interview, Michael described the learning that

occurred when deciding to attend an Indigenous-led direct action event. Their thought process was as follows:

It was maybe just a learning of life, “Oh, I see that thing is happening. I should be there because I have seen in my learning that issues around climate change are so deeply connected with issues of colonialism”. And so that's crucial to be there. Which I think also reflects a change from not seeing climate activism just connected with like, a recycling protest, (whatever that is like!); it's so deeply embedded, especially here in this and in work that's around Indigenous justice. So maybe that's like a learning into practice (Michael).

Michael's experience reflects instrumental and communicative learning about the intersection between climate activism and Indigenous justice, and how these learning outcomes helped bring them to take action (i.e., attend a direct action regarding climate change and Indigenous issues).

Steve discussed ‘becoming an activist’ as a dual learning and action experience:

In my experience, becoming an activist was the day that I said, “the narrative I'm being fed is not the one that is true for me”. And from that point on, everything, whether it was school or experiences that I had, kind of helped me build a picture of not only what I didn't like, but what I was beginning to wish for. And I understood more and more how wishing for that was more meaningful as far as life goes. And that's why at one point I began to promote –I was an anti-nuclear activist- but I began to promote environmental restoration. Because it's an engagement in a process that's not the predominant exploitation style, but it's a process that re-engages us with nature in a way that is more caretaking (Steve).

Additionally, participants such as Sawyer and Drey discussed their journeys from learning to action regarding climate activism having many common factors such as formal education, realizations about the need for broad social change regarding the climate crisis, and for Sawyer uniquely, the way in which a losing a loved one triggered their learning-to-action process. Drey instead quit their job in order to live out their values regarding the climate and their Indigenous ancestry. As such, their learning-to-action process involved learning about the extraction company's insincere and dishonest practices, and Drey was reminded of their values by their children. The action outcome for this participant was their choice to quit working for the

company and instead, start a camp on the site where the company had plans to mine. Drey names this as a “big loss or sacrifice”, but one that was worthwhile.

Robin shared about how they learned about climate change through other environmental issues such as water, hydro, and agriculture, and explained how their climate activism became a response to the ways in which climate change exacerbated the effects of these other environmental issues. Regarding connection between a particular environmental issue and climate change, Blake shares some similarities with Drey. Speaking about their family’s dependence on fishing at Lake Winnipeg and their own experience of fishing with them for a summer season, Blake shared how something “clicked in [their] head” during that experience:

But it wasn’t that something necessarily that was like, “hey, I’m going to go out and teach you about fishing”. It was more, “hey, we’re going to go fishing. Oh, yeah. All of these things are bad”. And in my mind, I was like, yes, climate change is connected to this (Blake).

Virginia explained one of their learning-to-action experiences very succinctly, with the following story:

One of my learnings was I watched the Kiss the Ground movie about regenerative agriculture. But only after I rototilled my garden! Yes, I rototilled my garden because that’s what you do when you have a garden, to get rid of the weeds from before. Okay, so next year, I won’t! (Virginia).

Similarly, Elliot shared a piece of their learning-to-action process regarding climate activism, where learning led to more learning, which then led to climate action:

[My partner and I] become aware of the interconnections and we care about those people. And we said ‘And we care about the soil because soil is habitat of earthworms’. I just love that. And ‘caring about’ is not just a feeling. Caring about the soil is an action. So, over the summer, I’ve changed the way I’ve been doing my garden, to live into a sense of caring for the microorganisms and the earthworm. So that’s the spiritual dimension. It’s kind of triggered by striking things I’ve heard from people and then I begin to explore from the vast amount of literature and wisdom out there (Elliot).

Esther, in regard to learning-transformed-to-action, spoke about their experience with eco-anxiety, which brought them to the point of only eating one sandwich a day:

So, my anxiety decreased remarkably. It now motivates me to be extremely conscious of my decisions and my choices. Like, when my hand reaches out for plastic, that kind of thing. So, that was kind of a watershed for me in some ways (Esther).

Michael also spoke about the importance of creating clear channels for action after a learning-focused event, starting that:

“We know that climate is sort of way more in the media or like in the public space right now than they were 10 years ago. But it's like still really our job to continue those conversations, even if it's not like an immediate, “then this is going to happen afterwards” or like, “then there's this action after”. Cause there's such value to that educational work (Michael).

Don did have a very quick learning-to-action experience regarding the clear-cutting of a forest in his youth. He describes:

Well, [my friend] and I are both outdoors people, so we canoed in there or whatever. And I just finished- like I graduated from university and [my friend] and I went to the same university around the same time. I was involved in the student association, of course. So yeah. I don't know what lead us... just, you know, just thought “Well shit, what are people doing, clearcutting in a provincial park? They're supposed to be protected!”. Yeah. It was just a natural thing (Don).

This experience, along with that of many other participants, shows how the learning-to-action process is an integral part within climate activism; the issue of climate change is complicated enough that it must be learned in some capacity and the action taken to mitigate climate change is usually quite clear, as it is usually also countercultural and/or non-normative.

## **5.4 Chapter summary**

Chapter 5 focused on examining the learning processes of the 12 climate activists in this study through the framework of transformative learning. This included an exploration of the different types of learning experienced and shared by participants, which revealed three broad categories: experiential learning (learning related to a participant's direct experience of a

phenomenon, such as learning about the impacts of climate change through nature and/or land experiences (e.g., backpacking through a forested area)), nonformal learning (learning that is organized and ordered in a way that experiential learning is not, while also not being formally organized within an accredited system, such as learning through various media sources like the radio or documentaries), and formal learning (learning within the education system or within other institutional means, such as a university course).

Another way in which the learning experiences and outcomes of these climate activists can be categorized is through three learning domains in the transformative learning framework (i.e., transformative, communicative, and instrumental domains), along with a proposed fourth domain, the introspective domain (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Learning experiences and stories shared by participants were organized and analyzed using these domains as a guide as outlined in the results above, which allowed for clearer observation of the different forms of learning embedded in the journeys of these 12 climate activists. Though all four learning domains were implicated in the data, many of the learning outcomes fell into the introspective domain. In addition to recognizing the various types of learning in participant experience, this chapter also included an analysis of the way these stories may fit into and provide insight for the introspective, transformative, communicative, and instrumental domains of transformative learning. Lastly, a conversation took place in this chapter concerning the learning-action nexus. Given the frequent critique within transformative learning studies of a neglect of the learning-to-action process, this chapter provides further commentary on how the learning-to-action process takes place within climate activism in Manitoba, such as through learning about how specific components of the human and natural world is impacted by the climate crisis *and* committing to

actively be involved in ceasing this impact (and/or finding an alternative path), through the role of the activist or organizer.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Reflections**

The purpose of the research was to explore the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adult activists in Manitoba are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis and thus “become” activists. To investigate this, I recruited twelve adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada for interviews to discuss their journey towards climate activism. Working with their availability, I interviewed each of the participants virtually over a period of five months throughout fall and early winter 2020-2021 and transcribed each interview recording soon after the interview itself. After a preliminary analysis of data from interviews, I facilitated a focus group with eight of the participants to discuss key and emerging themes further. I then was able to analyze the interview and focus group data with NVivo to find major patterns and themes. The results of this analysis have been presented in Chapters 4 and 5. This chapter draws final conclusions in relation to each objective and offers closing reflection on this research.

### **6.1 Contextual findings: Climate activism in Manitoba**

As my first objective in this research, I set out to understand the political, social, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba. My hope with this objective was to keep my work contextualized in place, resisting the urge to make sweeping claims about the lives of climate activists. As such, I have tried to present the in-place stories and experiences shared with me by climate activists and/or organizers living in Manitoba, Canada. In this sense, I cannot make any conclusions about adult climate activists in general; instead, I would like to offer conclusions clearly set in the tangible context of the political, social, and historical realities of Manitoba and wonder (rather than make claims) about its application in other locales and places.

Many of the participants that I interviewed are paying careful attention to their climate activism or organizing work as situated in the province and/or lands of Manitoba. This was shown in the ways in which participants discussed the influence of settler-colonialism in Canada

and discussed the realities of settler-Indigenous relations within Manitoban climate activism work and circles. In addition, participants described the landscape of Manitoba as one wrought with economic and political strife that affected their climate action, including but not limited to the challenges and barriers presented by a rural-urban divide in Manitoba's population and in its climate activism movement. As noted in Chapter 2, the sluggish and tepid manner in which the provincial government has attempted to address climate change throughout the years has been a challenge for grassroots activists organizing for urgent climate action and justice.

Many participants also named and described many spaces within Manitoba as part of their climate activism journey, usually in regard to their nature-based experiential learning about the climate crisis and/or the importance of climate activism. Some of these areas included the White Shell region, Winnipeg as an urban centre, and various natural places that hold meaningful memories and moments for participants (e.g., personal cottages, the Mantario Trail, etc.). On the scale of grassroots climate activism, the stories and experiences shared by these participants help to flesh out the landscape of climate activism and organizing in Manitoba. Though Doelle et al. (2011) propose that jurisdiction concerning climate change is generally shared and/or split between federal and provincial governments in Canada (p. 526), my findings would suggest that a considerable portion of the call for climate change action in the province of Manitoba is done by those outside of the exercise of any formal jurisdictional power by either level of government (such as through climate activists and organizers). This is significant in that this grassroots climate organizing in Manitoba may appear less visible and less documented than it truly is.

## **6.2 Insights on learning, motivation, and involvement**



My second objective was to examine the relationships among learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement. This includes the inner “turn” required by activists, as they reflect and choose to become involved in an external manner (and social movement). Chapter 4, in particular, focused on the motivations and influences which took place along the journeys of 12 climate activists in Manitoba, toward and within the climate movement. The reflections and stories shared illustrated how these participants came to learn about the climate crisis and how they found themselves “turning” towards involvement in climate activism, as a result of both intention and motivation. As such, the stories of participants in their climate activism journeys add to discussions of the internal and external shifts of the individual learner in transformative learning literature. Stickney and Stillbeck (2020) cite Dirkx et al. (2006) as they recount a discussion which took place at a conference in attempt to hash out the complexities of this topic:

Discussion ensued among transformational education theorists over the relative weight of the inner world of subjectivity and the outer world of crisis-induced change, but they generally agreed on the goal of ‘fostering enhanced awareness and consciousness of one’s being in the world’ (p. 795).

Though the “turn” towards activism offers one way to link internal motivations with external actions, one of the challenging components of pinpointing the link between learning and motivation in this work is to distinguish the role of learning in regard to motivation (for becoming involved in the climate movement, in this case).

Though not initially organized in this manner, three broad but grounded types of learning offered themselves as categories for discussion out of the data. The first of these was experiential learning. This type of learning was often mentioned by participants as highly influential in their climate learning, as experiential learning includes land and nature experiences, learning about Indigenous ways of knowing, conversations with like-minded people, meeting across difference,

perspective change, and spiritual elements. In transformative learning, experiential learning is recognized as a way in which individuals shift their “consciousness” or “habits of mind”, alongside processes such as critical reflection and ideological critique (Washburn, 2021, p. 317). Groulx et al. (2021) share examples of experiential learning (specifically, land and nature experiences) in their study on community science as a space of collective learning. In some of these examples, the authors found that participants’ time spent on the tundra (the biome in which the citizen scientist participants were collecting data) was a catalyst for learning and specifically, for the disorienting dilemma to take place:

The source of this dilemma varied according to the particular relationship each participant developed with this new place. In one instance it was the difference between the rhythms and pace of a life in the city and life on the tundra that gave pause for reflection, but in multiple cases it was simply being caught off guard by the awareness of a growing bond to this new natural environment that became a window to different ways of thinking about how to relate to nature (Groulx et al., 2021, p. 1785).

This reflection parallels some of the ways in which nature and land experiences were transformative in the lives and work of the climate activists in this study; through moments, connection, and/or more immediate awareness of natural spaces and the land, participants in both studies found themselves reflecting and thinking critically about their own relationship to the earth. For the climate activists in this study, this proved to be highly influential in their climate activism journey, as learning about the relationship between humans and the rest of the earth led participants to see cause for concern (and the need for action).

Another important area of experiential learning in this work was that of Indigenous ways of knowing, in the way Indigenous participants highlighted how their Indigeneity informs their climate activism work and how settler and/or non-Indigenous participants learned experientially from Indigenous peoples and practices in their climate activism journey. The prevalence of this

area of experiential learning for these climate activists parallels Kluttz and Walter's (2018) analysis of the climate justice movement, noting that:

At the centre of the movement is the idea that climate change should be fused with social justice concerns, including civil rights and economic, Indigenous and gender justice, and that climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities who have unequal representation in global, national, and local decision-making processes (p. 94).

The Indigenous participants in this study described their activist work as deeply intertwined with their Indigeneity as a catalyzing force for their involvement. Non-Indigenous and/or settler participants mainly reflected on listening to Indigenous elders and peoples, and learning from non-colonial knowledge systems and Indigenous-led activism. Kluttz and Walter offer insight on how learning, social action, and Indigenous ways of knowing (particularly, Indigenous understandings of place) link together in the climate movement (2018):

We further understand that place also means identity, spiritual, and material sustenance, “home” and even survival for many adults—Indigenous and otherwise—involved in social movements, and is thus central to learning and social action as well. That is, place and “all our relations” (human and nonhuman) have affective, material, spiritual, and transformative power for adult learning [...] (p. 97).

Indeed, for many of the participants, learning from Indigeneity and Indigenous peoples was a significant (and often transformative) part of the climate activist journey.

Nonformal learning also contributed a great deal to these participants becoming involved or further their climate activism work. Most mentioned was media learning, in that activists spoke about how podcasts, radio programs, email newsletters from environmental organizations, documentaries, films, and other forms of media allowed them to learn about the climate crisis and/or climate activism. Scholars such as Moyer and Sinclair (2020) and Bush-Gibson and Rinfret (2010) have discussed nonformal learning within environmental and/or sustainability education. Referencing Mezirow (1981, 1994), Bush-Gibson and Rinfret in particular discuss

how the capacities of nonformal environmental education programs at the municipal level (e.g., environmental tours and workshops) can “act as impetus to the transformation, that is, the event that changes our perspectives or allows us to reformulate our thinking” (p. 84). Similarly, the different media learning experiences discussed by participants in this study can be seen as an impetus for transformation, in that participants pointed to specific documentaries, radio shows, podcasts (etc.) as sources of information and inspiration which catalyzed (or furthered) their climate activism knowledge and/or work.

In their work on nonformal environmental education programs, Bush-Gibson and Rinfret (2010) also highlight a similar angle to those which participants in this research experienced: organizational internal learning as a type of informal learning. For participants in this study, organizational internal learning included ongoing learning while participating in the structures and practices of a climate activist group, organization, and/or advocacy network. Many participants highlighted their experiences of nonformal learning (e.g., skill training sessions, learning to use the internet for climate organizing, developing a network relevant to and focused on climate issues through involvement in an organizing group) as unplanned but impactful.

Conversely, the nonformal learning that took place in participants’ climate journeys through informative books was deliberate (i.e., most participants actively chose to read a book relevant to climate change and/or climate activism) and impactful. This area of nonformal learning often played the role of furthering participants’ engagement with climate issues and/or climate activism, rather than being the first introduction to this issue and work. Webinars and/or seminars, as another form of nonformal media learning, were also influential for these participants and their understanding of the climate crisis. Similar to the use of informative books, participants often employed climate-related webinars and seminars as supplementary learning

opportunities rather than an introduction to climate learning. Indeed, Elliot was one participant who hosted a series of webinars themselves, providing climate-relevant reflections informed by their own activism journey.

Formal learning (obtained by these participants mainly through university courses and degrees, news articles, formal training sessions or workshops, and grade school and clubs) was the least mentioned form of learning when it comes to influence on one's climate activism journey. This is intriguing in that climate activism in Manitoba appears to be mainly learned through nonformal and experiential sources, rather than through formal (and more normative for many other areas of learning) means- with the exception of the youngest participant, Blake. This is especially interesting in regard to news articles contributing to formal learning: as popular (and sometimes sensationalized) media, many climate activists certainly pointed to news articles as sources of climate information, but more as a baseline understanding of current climate news (rather than their top sources of information). Instead, many of these climate activists seemed to go "above and beyond" when it came to climate-related information and learning, seeking more hands-on learning (e.g., experiential or nonformal) to inform their climate work. This focus on other-than-formal aligns with Hathaway's (2017) analysis of (transformative) learning being not simply sought or found in formal settings, but as that which can "occur nonverbally (through the body or emotions) and with personal and social change" (p. 301).

Formal training and courses related to climate work fell into much of the same category: these experiences and spaces provided some standard learning about climate change and the climate crisis for some participants, but these were not the experiences which greatly transformed or catalyzed their climate learning. Perhaps this is due to the conservative nature in which climate change is taught in formal learning spaces, in comparison to nonformal and

experiential. For instance, in studying climate science curricula in Canadian secondary schools, Wynes and Nicholas (2019) note that “climate change poses huge risks to humanity and the biosphere which are recognized both by scientists and the Canadian government, and yet survey data show that even those Canadians who have received education on climate change often do not support this scientific consensus” (p. 3).

Of course, recognizing that an understanding of climate activism is constructed requires paying attention to the influences and experiences which became part of the foundation or ongoing construction of said understanding. In this research, paying attention to this area was related both to how these activists developed an understanding of the climate crisis and of climate activism (as intertwined but distinct notions). Referencing Daloz (2004), Pisters et al. (2020) note that the “processes of sustainability do not only require people to think differently, they require as well shifts in ‘being’ and ‘feeling’” (p. 396). In this sense, coming to an understanding of climate activism (as one such “process of sustainability”), as these activists have, is made up of not only experiences which cause an individual to *think* differently, but also by experiences which cause an individual to *be* differently. Participants shared how they came to constructing an understanding of climate action through cognitive and experiential channels related to early engagement (with environmental issues such as climate change), personal environment behaviour, the built environment, faith, family and/or friends, through grade school, land experience, literature, organizing, retirement, university, and volunteering/through an organization.

Early engagement (in other environmental issues and/or movements) as a component of the climate activism journey, in particular, brings up a tautological question: does activism beget activism? In this work, it appears that yes, previous activist/organizing work on issues other than

climate change did allow an individual to be aware and/or attentive to climate activism. The larger intrigue for my work, however, is the learning that takes place within early engagement in other issues that facilitates an individual's journey into climate activism specifically. Though this research did not have the scope to delve fully into participants' life experiences in other social movements there is certainly an opportunity to explore this further.

Regarding motivation, participants described panic, fear, concern, guilt, environmental problem-solving, and a sense of responsibility to others as factors which lead to them choosing to seek involvement in the climate movement. To these emotions and experiences as sources of motivation, Pisters et al. (2020) offer the reflection that:

A prerequisite for moving from complacency to developing and voicing a critical perspective is being mindful of, and having the ability to, let oneself be touched by the suffering one is witnessing in self and others, instead of resorting to emotional 'numbing' (Brown 2012) as a result of feeling powerless or overwhelmed" (p. 404).

Some of these stories of grief were centered on participants' experiences with eco-grief concerning the state of the earth. It might be said that this grief can come about through biophilia, "a deep emotional bond to the Earth" (Hathaway, 2017, p. 301). Other experiences of grief shared were the loss of a close relative, concern about future generations (such as grandchildren), and the trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada in regard to the ongoing colonial attempt to sever their relationship with the land. The breadth and the sharing-without-being-prompted of these stories suggest that grief, loss, trauma, and/or death is a key, if not inextricable, experience in the journey to climate activism.

In paying attention to the link between self-reflection and/or introspection in interviews and asking participants explicitly about this link in the focus group session, there was a clear indication that learning about the climate crisis and involvement is not simply a matter of gathering and processing external information, but of internally reflecting on how that

information applies to oneself and one's surroundings. In this way, self-reflection/introspection share a strong connection to (and is wrapped up in) critical thinking. As proposed by Wang et al. (2019), "there are two conditions conducive to critical thinking, reflection and transformative learning: first and foremost, there must be a climate of safety, and trust, and second, genuine and honest discussion and communication must take place" (p. 240).

In this sense, the introspective process surrounding an individual's journey towards activism may be thought of as an internal critical thinking, in which the self is transformed. Related but distinct, the significance of participants sharing their learning experiences to be that of a process, rather than based on one particular, epiphany-like event or experience, further broadens the understanding of the 'disorienting dilemma' in transformative learning work. This process of 'accumulated awareness' (which I have named to match the description offered by participants) of the climate crisis leading to involvement in climate activism can also be seen, in so many words, in Dirkx and Kovan's (2003) study on transformative learning in the lives of environmental activists:

Similar to Mezirow, the forms of transformative learning reflected in the inner work of these activists reflect a deep shift in their frames of reference. Rather than the dramatic or epiphanic shifts described by Brookfield (2000), however, this process is more gradual and occurs over an extended period of time (p. 114).

This observation of the disorienting dilemma (as one way to conceptualize the catalyzing moment or force which leads to transformative learning) is further supported by Hathaway (2017), referencing Baumgartner (2001) who suggests that "such dilemmas do not always take the form of a single dramatic event but rather result from the accumulation of a number of smaller incidents that converge to initiate a transformative process" (p. 298). Therefore, given that many of the stories of climate activists in this study followed this process of accumulated awareness in their journey from learning about the climate crisis to involvement in the



movement, this may provide further insight on the progression of the learning process within transformative learning studies.

### **6.3 Rising up: The influence of youth climate activism on adult activists in Manitoba**

In this work, much was revealed about the impacts of youth activism on adult activists. Participants brought up a variety of positive, neutral, and critical opinions when asked about youth activism and how it has affected their own climate activism (if at all). Regarding positive opinions, there was a sentiment that youth climate activists are reinvigorating the climate movement and can (and have) inspire(d) adults to either become involved in or continue their own climate activism work (whether that work began in the climate movement itself, or another social movement). Kowasch et al. (2021) offers the following reflection about the learning power of climate activism for youth (which certainly can be applied more broadly to adult learners):

“Climate activism and the ideas and solutions that such engagement, i.e., participation in climate strikes and development of exhibitions, produce and can foster social-ecological transformations that curricula and textbooks do not provide” (p. 19).

In light of this transformative ability of activism, my data appears to show that youth climate activism may act as a catalyst for transformation for adults becoming involved in the climate movement. Perhaps one of its more meaningful influences on these adult activists was the hope invigorated by seeing younger generations take action on the issue of climate change.

Yet, the neutral and critical opinions on youth activism shared by participants add another facet to understanding the relationship between adult and youth climate activism: as two distinct groups within the climate movement, adults in this study were at the very least attentive to the activities of youth climate activism, but some did not view it as a significant influence in their own journey towards involvement in the movement. This is important to note in considering what has been dubbed ‘the Greta Thunberg effect’ (i.e., youth climate activism seen as catalyzed

and amplified in recent years by the fame of Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement) (Feldman, 2021): while there has certainly been more attention and commotion in media and in some parts of the climate movement linked to Greta Thunberg and youth climate activism, it would be remiss to ignore other ‘effects’ that have spurred climate activism work. Specific to the findings of this research, many participants discussed the 2018 IPCC report as incredibly significant in their choice to become or continue to be involved in climate activism.

Amongst the neutral, negative, and positive opinions of youth climate activism, participants had a fair bit to say about the extent of influence of youth climate activism on their own climate activism. In broad strokes, many participants spoke about how the responsibility they felt towards youth climate activists (and youth more broadly) influenced their decision to become involved in climate activism. On the other hand, several participants delved into discussions around the complicated dynamics between generations and critiqued what they saw as a thread of arrogance within youth climate activism. Chazan and Baldwin (2019) address this point in their work, noting that within the climate justice movement:

Youth leaders are frequently described as the “solution” or the “hope,” while older people are represented in opposition as the “problem.” This divisive rhetoric further erases intergenerational dynamics and obscures the roles and relationships of younger and older people within this movement” (p. 246).

Providing another view on youth climate activism, however, is Haugestad et al.’s (2021) study on why youth participate in climate activism, which “found that politicized social identity, perceptions of environmental threat, and shared responsibility (expressed as collective guilt) are important aspects of youths’ decision to participate in environmental protest” (p. 10). I believe these two views found in my data and the literature can be held in conjunction with each other, as they both suggest that youth climate activists and adult climate activists are able to act from their own age-experience, but that each age group also allow the other the space to do the same.

In other words, it seems as though there can be an acceptance of the self and the other age-identity from either group towards one another, without compromising the strength of each group to enact social change in the climate movement.

Regarding participants and their view (if any) on activist/organizer/etc. itself as an identity, it was clear that identifying with this role/work was of strong importance to some participants and tenuous for others. For instance, Shawn, Esther, and Virginia spoke about their identity as an activist (or lobbyist, in Virginia's case) as one of familial and communal refuge from the issues they seek to bring to attention, while Steve, Elliot, and Blake focused their sharing on the divisions that an over-emphasis on identity can create. These varied views may serve as evidence that the conversation around identity in climate activism is as wrought as the term itself. Indeed, identity is an inextricable part of the climate movement in that it is "central to participation in meaningful patterns of social and political action" (Berezin, 2001, p. 84, as cited by Kowasch et al., 2021, p. 2).

The data also show that the 2019 climate strike at the Manitoba Provincial Legislature Building in Winnipeg can be understood as a significant coming-together of youth and adult activists to organize a monumental event which both responded to the global call of youth climate activists, water walkers, and land protectors *and* to the long-time call of the environmental movement to take action on environmental degradation and human rights. Participants in this study shared about their work in organizing and/or attending this strike as pivotal or considerable in their own climate journey. This strike would not have taken place without youth climate activists and movement, but it also constitutes the necessity for active attendees who are *not* its organizers (i.e., adult climate activists, youth and adult activists of related causes, and concerned citizens). In this sense, this strike illustrates the larger picture of

how adult and youth activism in Manitoba are intertwined within this research: youth climate activism, at the very least, activates awareness (if not action) in adult climate activists in Manitoba.

#### **6.4 Pinpointing learning domains and the learning-action nexus within climate activism**

Given the focus of this research on the turn towards activism (as an internal shift and an external reframing of actions), there is considerable data from my participants that supports the presence of the introspective domain alongside the other researched domains. Indeed, reflections and stories which could be categorized under the introspective domain appear of great importance, as they were discussed by most participants regarding their climate activism journeys. Climate activists in this research experienced introspective learning “through reflection, discourse, and embodied experience, as well as reading, skill-building, and many other activities”, as suggested by Moyer and Sinclair (2016, p. 48). In the way that these activists enacted introspection along their journeys, I would propose that introspective learning exists both as a retrospective process (i.e., can consist of reflection on past experiences and circumstances) and/or an ongoing process (i.e., one can enact introspection as an experience unfolds).

Closely related but distinct from the introspective domain is the transformative domain, which was also highly relevant to the experiences of these climate activists. Many participants spoke about moments and series of moments or events which allowed them to internalize learning about the climate crisis and climate activism; this process led to a shift in their behaviour and thus can be categorized under the transformative domain. Yet, the introspective and transformative domain in this work often wove together in the stories of participants, suggesting that while separate, the two domains share significant similarities (such as the necessity of internal reflection leading to an external change). Furthermore, though some

experiences shared by these participants can be situated in relation to the transformative domain, they are not all the result of “disorienting dilemmas” (whether a singular moment or series of events). This distinction matters given that the experience of becoming an activist was transformative (in some way) for all of these participants, but not every participant’s experience can be mapped out along the ‘steps’ of the transformative learning, or exemplified a dramatic perspective transformation for some participants’ framework.

The two other domains which help make sense of participants’ journey towards climate activism are the communicative and the instrumental domains. The communicative domain, as one which requires collective navigation of language and values (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016), was certainly involved in participant stories, especially as they described talks and presentations they attended (or gave themselves). In these experiences, participants pointed to the communal learning that took place around and in climate activism circles (e.g., conversations with fellow organizers, lobbying the government). Though this domain does not encompass the majority of participant experiences, experiences that fit within the communicative domain operated as components of the climate activist journey.

The instrumental domain also played a supporting role, as a category in which some activist experiences took place, but less so than the introspective and transformative domains. In fact, instrumental learning (in its technical elements, especially) tended to parallel with formal learning experiences in this research (in general, the least influential type of learning amongst these activists). Of those participants who discussed instrumental learning as significant in their climate activism journey, they mostly spoke about learning the technicalities about climate change science in a formal setting (e.g., university, formal training and courses). However, some participants shared about instrumental learning they were able to gain regarding technical skills

while participating directly in climate justice and/or action organizing work. In summary, the instrumental domain encompassed parts of the climate activist journey, but was not predominant in its influence.

Lastly, Chapters 4 and 5 presented data on the learning-action nexus in reference to climate activists learning about the climate crisis and being catalyzed to take action (i.e., become involved in the climate movement). Participants' stories were full of learning-to-action situations, where participants pinpointed a specific event or series of events as being the catalyst for their learning which motivated them to take action in the form of climate activism. It is significant that these experiences were brought about by a wide range of influences (including grief about the passing of a loved one, loss of a meaningful place in nature, and learning about regenerative gardening practices) in that it illustrates how the learning-action nexus is not limited to certain experiences or settings but can be enacted widely (in the case of climate activists, at least). The way that participants described their choice to become involved in climate activism as being informed by their learning about the climate crisis through mainly experiential means aligns with findings from Moyer et al. (2016) “[demonstrating] that experiential, active applications of learning are essential to transformation in sustainability work and lifeways” (p. 323).

In addition, observing the learning-action nexus of participants becoming climate activists in this research affirms that “action [is] also a significant expression of, or response to, learning that had been experienced” (Moyer et al., 2016, p. 323). That is, for these climate activists, learning about the climate crisis was not the full expression of their learning; the shift towards action in this context (i.e., taking steps to become involved in climate activism) completed the learning process. In illustrating how the environmental activists in their study

shifted towards action, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) suggest “their transformations can be more thoroughly understood only by considering their active engagement with the outer world” (p. 115). Thus, the learning-action nexus may be a considerable, if not crucial, component of transformation for climate activists given that their engagement with climate change as an issue is necessarily active.

In conclusion, part and parcel of the “turn” towards activism itself is to begin to understand this shift towards becoming involved in climate activism, there must be an expansion of what ‘learning’ and ‘action’ appear to be. For example, learning can be found in grief, and the action that blooms from it is not necessarily visibly or externally “active” (such as attending a climate rally), but can be a shift in perspective and choice (such as Sawyer’s realization upon their stepparents’ death that they themselves were now the next generation of adults, evermore responsible for caring for the earth, which in part motivated them to pursue climate activism).

### **6.5 Future research possibilities**

Though there are many possible trajectories for future research that arise from this work, I cannot help but be curious about the emerging themes within this research (i.e., grief, loss, trauma, and/or death as a catalyzing force for climate work, accumulated awareness as learning process, and the link between self-reflection/introspection and climate-related learning) and how they could be further pursued both in the context of climate activism and elsewhere. While the latter two themes can likely be suitably addressed within the transformative learning framework, the theme of grief, loss, trauma, and/or death as a catalyzing force may call for a broader lens and other insights. For instance, though the topic of eco-anxiety and eco-grief has been significantly explored in psychological studies and literature (Clayton, 2020), it would be intriguing to conduct research which situates grief, loss, trauma, and/or death in a more collective setting (such as in other social movements and/or collective of individuals

experiencing it) given the nature of grief, loss, trauma, and/or death in this study to push individuals towards collective social action such as climate activism.

Further, it is important to note that a more recent IPCC report was released during the course of this research (in 2022, updating the 2018 version which many participants spoke about as deeply influential in catalyzing their involvement in the climate movement). Given the impact of the 2018 IPCC report on these activists as noted in Chapter 4, further research should be conducted which observes and asks about the influence of the 2022 IPCC report on climate engagement (as an even more dire and sober series of facts about anthropocentric climate change). Additionally, studying the effects of the IPCC reports on various non-academic groups and actors in addition to activists (e.g., elementary school teachers, oil workers, municipal politicians, etc.) could be useful in presenting further data on the impact of these reports outside of the academic scientific community.

## **6.6 Concluding comments**

I began this research in part to further investigate climate activism and organizing in Canada, an area I was already fairly familiar with. I was curious about what I did not know about the topic from an academic perspective, which proved, unsurprisingly, to be quite a bit. I found that I was challenged to unfold even that which I thought I knew, in the sense that my own experience in climate activism was truly my own, and other activists (in this case, my participants) had unique and vastly wide-ranging influences, motivations, and catalysts for involvement in the climate movement. I began this research process with a stance of curiosity, and ended it with increased humility and an expanded knowledge of the inner workings of climate activists in Manitoba.



As a research-learning document, the organization of this thesis finds its grounding in the ways in which the participants' stories took form and in how the research process unfolded and my experience of that unfolding, as a learner myself and as someone living through multiple global crises at the time that this work was being done (the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, to name a few). Starting out, I had a clearcut imagined trajectory of how the research process would operate and it was one which included presenting data for the purpose of analyzing it as comprehensively as possible and coming to some sort of solid endpoint regarding my findings. Yet, after thinking about and writing up that which emerged from the stories of participants and as I began to write the 'official' analysis portions of this thesis, I found that I was increasingly asking myself the question, "Who am I to analyze and draw conclusions about these journeys to climate activism?". This questioning tied into the fact that the experiences and learning processes of these 12 climate activists/organizers were incredibly rich and self-propelling and their stories stood alone well beyond their interpretation in this work. Alongside my role as researcher, I began to feel the need to more strongly emphasize and explore my role as witness to the climate activism journeys shared by participants (and which stand as a record of their own accord). Catalyzed both by the shape taken by the written-up data and the research process (including my own commitment to reflexivity), data presentation became a stronger focal point in this work than expected. This was an important discovery and point of reflection for me as a researcher (and as a learner).

My hope is that this research itself is also broad and blooming in its expression, as this study was not created solely as an intellectual exercise or in order to complete a degree (though, that was necessary, of course). Indeed (and perhaps naively), this research seeks to provide some tangible knowledge to activists themselves, in understanding how individuals learn about a

certain issue and are then motivated to become involved. Thus, this work is not neutral or manipulative, but instead attempts to provide possible channels for further productive engagement in socio-ecological issues such as the climate crisis. Just as I read the work of Kovan and Dirkx (2003) and better understood the inner life of environmental activists, I have structured this work to follow suit in offering insight into the learning and motivations of climate activists. And I hope, into the future, that others will continue to add to this stream of insight, as academics and activists alike attempt to understand social change and find hope in climate-chaotic times.

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## Appendix I: Interview Schedule

**Date:**

**Location:**

**Participant:**

**Pseudonym:**

The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of people who become involved in the climate movement in Canada, including *how* they became involved and what sort of learning they have undergone to become socially active within this particular movement. As such, the purpose of this interview today is to discuss your own experience within climate activism and/or organizing work.

Throughout this interview, if you would like me to repeat or clarify anything, please ask. Also, if there are any questions which you would prefer not to answer, let me know and we will skip to the next question. Please feel free to pause and take a moment to think about your answers if you need to. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Interview Questions:

0. Demographic questions:
  - a. How long have you resided in Manitoba? (Objective 1)
  - b. Do you belong to and/or support any non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs)? If so, which ones? (Objective 1)
  - c. (*If relevant:* In your work with \_\_\_\_\_ (name (s) of climate organizing group, ENGO, NGO, etc.), do you organize on causes/issues other than climate action/justice? If so, which ones? (Objective 1 and 2)
  - d. Age: (18-35) (36-55) (56+) (Objective 3)
1. From your own perspective, what does climate activism entail? (Objective 2)
2. How did you come to this understanding of climate activism? (Objective 2 and 4)
  - a. (Prompt) How did you become informed (e.g., build your own knowledge base) about climate change and its related issues?
3. Can you tell me a bit about how you came to be involved in climate activism or organizing work? (Objectives 1, 2, and 4)
  - a. Were you motivated to become involved by a specific event or a series of events? (Objective 2 and 4)
  - b. Do you feel as though you became involved of your own accord or were you “brought” to this work? (Prompt: By someone else or through working on a different issue/cause, etc.) (Objective 2 and 4)
4. Has there been any specific learning (whether formal or informal) that has led you to become involved in the climate movement? (Objective 2 and 4)
  - a. (Prompt): Of course, learning can happen in many ways: learning how to do something, how to relate to something or someone, having a change in perspective, undergoing significant personal transformation, etc. Which, if any, of

these types of learning had an influence in you becoming involved in the climate movement? (Objective 2)

- b. How, if at all, has that learning been “put into action”? What has that looked like for you? (Objective 2 and 4)
5. How, if at all, does your personal identity (or identities) play a role in your activism work? (Objective 2)
6. What do you feel is the most important action(s) you have taken personally, and/or been a part of, in relation to your activism on climate? Was there something in particular (an event, news article, workshop, discussion, something you read) that encouraged you in this (these) direction(s)? (Objective 4)
7. Do you think your experience of climate activism would be different if you did not live in Manitoba? If so, in which way would it be different? (Objective 1)
8. Why climate activism, rather than another area of organizing work? (Objective 1 and 2)
9. What are some barriers, either personal or general, to becoming involved in activism work?
10. Has the rise of youth climate activism affected your own climate activism? (Objective 3)
  - a. (Prompt: Has your own involvement been influenced by youth climate activists such as Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement, or Autumn Peltier and her work on water protection?)
11. Is there anything that I have missed or that you would like to add?

**In Closing:**

Personal inquiries (if appropriate).

Discuss follow-up

- A) Informing them whether they will receive an emailed copy of the interview transcript to review.
- B) Asking them whether they would be willing to participate in a future group workshop (including a group interview) and inform them that their confidentiality amongst other participants would be compromised by doing so.

## Appendix II

### Consent Form for Individual Interviews

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

##### Individual Interview



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**Title of Study:** Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

---

**Purpose of this Study:** My name is Claire Brandenburg, I am a master's student at the University of Manitoba, and I am inviting you to take part in my research. The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adults in Manitoba are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis. The specific objectives are to: (1) understand the political, social, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba, (2)

examine the relationships among learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement, (3) consider the impacts of youth climate activism on adult activists, and (4) explore the actions of adult climate activists and the learning-action phenomenon in the context of the climate crisis.

**Participant Selection:** You are being asked to participate in this study because of your involvement in the climate movement and climate organizing in Manitoba. If you agree to participate in my research, I will ask you to meet with me for an interview.

**Study Procedure:**

- Participation in the study will be for one interview of approximately one hour in length. Individual interviews will be semi-structured and answers will be both audio recorded and recorded as hand-written notes, with your consent. I will be conducting the interview and will be the sole transcriber for this research. We will be doing the interview via Zoom and if so, I will be using Zoom’s “local recording” feature to record directly to my laptop, with your consent. If you prefer not to be recorded, I will take hand-written notes only.
- During the interview, you will be asked some questions about your experience of climate activism/organizing in Manitoba, including the learning about climate change you have undertaken and what has motivated your involvement in climate activism/organizing. These questions will help me to better understand the learning processes and motivations of adult climate activists in Manitoba.
- At the end of the interview, I will ask about your interest in participating in a follow-up focus group with other interview participants to discuss my findings and contribute any further insights you may have. You do not have to be part of the focus group to take part in the interview.

**Data Storage:** All notes and transcripts will be stored in password-protected computer files, and any hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet. The information resulting from this interview will be kept confidential. Only my supervisor and I, and auditors for the University’s ethics review board, will have access to the information you provide. The audio or video (Zoom) recording of the interview will be transcribed into text as soon as possible after each interview. Once transcribed, the audio/video data will be destroyed. This will take place by the end of April 2022. Transcription and notes will be destroyed by December 31, 2023, after conducting the research and allowing for dissemination, journal publications, and public presentations.

**Risks and Benefits:** No information will be used in a way that could put you at risk. You may also choose not to respond to questions if you prefer not to, and you have the freedom to offer only as much information as you are comfortable. When I write or talk about what I learn from working with you, I will not use your name or information that could identify you (unless you

choose to waive your anonymity). Ultimately, risks of participating in this study are no greater than in everyday life. The potential benefits to you include a chance to share and reflect on your own learning and motivations related to your involvement in the climate movement. In sharing the experiences of those who are involved in the climate movement, this study may help bring about further interest in and solidarity for the climate movement. This research may also benefit climate justice/action organizations and leaders by allowing them to better understand how individuals are motivated to support their cause, which in turn may enable more effective public communication and outreach, and thus support learning-based climate action.

**Confidentiality:** I will do everything possible to keep your personal information confidential. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in my study records and in writing and presentations where I discuss this research, and I will not include any information that could connect you with the information you provide, unless you choose to waive your anonymity, in which case you will be identified by your first and last name. A list of names and addresses of participants will be kept in a secure file so I can send you a summary of the results of the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker (unless you choose to waive anonymity), your words may be used to highlight a specific point (via paraphrase or direct quote). To ensure confidentiality on your end, it is important that you participate in the interview from a quiet, private room.

**Expected Outcomes:** A master's thesis (which will later be made publicly available via the University of Manitoba's MSpace) (<https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/>), academic publications and presentations, reports and/or presentations for climate organizations, and research summary materials for participants will result from this study. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings of my research, I will make that available to you.

**Feedback/Debriefing:** I will create a research summary of my work and send that to you, and you also have the opportunity to receive an electronic copy of my thesis if you are interested.

**Withdrawal:** Your decision to take part in this interview is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until March 31, 2021. After that date, it will not be possible to remove your information from my data analysis and research reports. I will destroy all data from participants who withdraw, and there are no negative consequences with withdrawing. To withdraw, please contact me or my advisor by phone or email as listed above.

**Questions:** If you have any questions either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my advisor (contacts are provided on the first page).

---

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject.



In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

---

**Consent Signatures:** Regarding your participation in the interview, please indicate your consent to the following:

1. I give you permission to audio/Zoom record the interview. Yes  No
2. I wish to waive my anonymity and be identified by name with any information I provide in this interview that is included in writing or presentations that result from this research. Yes  No
3. I would like to receive a summary report of this research (by June 1, 2021).  
Yes  No 
  - If yes, please include your email: \_\_\_\_\_  
or mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

4. I would like to be contacted about participating in a focus group session at a later date. Yes  No

**Participant's Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time!

### Appendix III

#### Consent Form for Focus Group

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM Focus Group



#### NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE

70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada. R3T 2N2.

General Office (204) 474-7170

Fax: (204) 261-0038

[http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic/institutes/natural\\_resources](http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic/institutes/natural_resources)

**Title of Study:** Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada

**Principal Researcher:** Claire Brandenburg

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, Sinnott Bldg., 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, R3T 2N2

E-mail: [brandenc@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:brandenc@myumanitoba.ca)

Tel: (780)-729-6399

**Research Supervisor:** Professor A. John Sinclair

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, 306 Sinnott Bldg., 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, R3T 2M6.

Tel: (204)-474-8374 Fax: (204) 2610038

Email: [john.sinclair@umanitoba.ca](mailto:john.sinclair@umanitoba.ca)

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

---

**Purpose of this Study:** My name is Claire Brandenburg, I am a master's student at the University of Manitoba, and I am inviting you to take part in my research. The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adults in Manitoba are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis. The specific objectives are to (1) understand the political, social, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba, (2)

examine the relationships among learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement, (3) consider the impacts of youth climate activism on adult activists, and (4) explore the actions of adult climate activists and the learning-action phenomenon in the context of the climate crisis.

**Participant Selection:** You are being asked to participate in this focus group because of your participation in the interview on [insert date] and the important knowledge you shared about your own experience within the climate movement in Manitoba.

**Study Procedure:**

- The purpose of the focus group is to share my research findings and ask for further participant insights on learning, motivations, and actions within the climate movement in Manitoba.
- Participation for the focus group session will be about 2 hours in length and I expect about 8 people to participate. The group will be asked questions related to each participant's experience as a climate activist or organizer in Manitoba. The focus group will be held on Zoom and it will be recorded by Zoom's "local recording" feature to record directly to my computer.
- I will facilitate the focus group session, taking care to allow all participants to contribute to the discussion. My advisor will also attend the focus group session and will take notes. The session will begin with a sharing of what I have learned so far, then discussion will be framed around key themes. I will collect data in the focus group session through the transcription of the Zoom recording, my hand-written notes, and my advisor's notes.
- At the start of the session, everyone will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. Participants' names will be used in the discussion. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the group discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential.

**Data Storage:** All notes and transcripts will be stored in password-protected, encrypted computer files, and any hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet. I will keep the information resulting from this focus group confidential. Only my supervisor and I, and auditors for the University's ethics review board, will have access to the information you provide. The Zoom video recording of the focus group will be transcribed into text as soon as possible after the session. Once transcribed, the electronic data will be destroyed. This will take place by the end of April 2022. Transcription and notes will be destroyed by December 31, 2023, after conducting the research and allowing for dissemination, journal publications, and public presentations. As the host, only I can record the meeting using Zoom tools, and I ask that you please do not record the meeting via any other means.

**Risks and Benefits:** No information will be used in a way that could put you at risk. You may also choose not to respond to questions if you deem them inappropriate, and you have the freedom to offer only as much information as you are comfortable. Participants in the focus group will be asked to keep the information shared in the focus group session confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that information about you might be discussed outside the group by other participants and be traced back to you. When I write or talk about what I learn from you, I will not use your name or information that could identify you (unless you choose to waive your anonymity). The potential benefits to you include a chance to share and reflect on your own learning and motivations related to your involvement in the climate movement. Research findings and outputs will also result in knowledge which may provide insight on how more individuals might become involved in the climate movement. Ultimately, risks of participating in this study are no greater than in everyday life.

**Confidentiality:** We will do everything possible to keep your personal information confidential. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in my study records and in writing and presentations where I discuss this research, and I will not include any information that could connect you with the information you provide, unless you choose to waive your anonymity, in which case you will be identified by your first and last name. A list of names and addresses of participants will be kept in a secure file so we can send you a summary of the results of the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker, your words may be used to highlight a specific point. As aforementioned, in a focus group setting confidentiality cannot be ensured because other participants will be present in the room. I will ask all participants to respect the confidentiality of others and not to disclose information that was shared during the discussion to others, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed. It is suggested that you do not share ideas that you would not like others, inside and outside of the focus group, to know. To ensure confidentiality on your end, it is important that you participate in the interview from a quiet, private room.

**Expected Outcomes:** A master's thesis (which will later be made publicly available via the University of Manitoba's MSpace) (<https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/>), academic publications and presentations, reports and/or presentations for climate organizations, and research summary materials for participants will result from this study. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings of my research, I will make that available to you.

**Feedback/Debriefing:** I will create a research summary of my work and send that to you if you would like, and you also have the opportunity to receive an electronic copy of my thesis if you are interested.

**Withdrawal:** You are free to withdraw from the study up until the focus group session begins. After the focus group session, it may not be possible to remove your specific input from the focus group data. There are no negative consequences if you withdraw.

**Questions:** If you have any questions either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my advisor (contacts are provided on the first page).

---

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

---

**Consent Signatures:** Regarding your participation in the focus group, please indicate your consent to the following:

1. I give you permission to audio/Zoom record the focus group session. Yes  No
  2. I wish to waive my anonymity and be identified by name with any information I provide in this interview that is included in writing or presentations that result from this research. Yes  No
  3. I would like to receive a summary report of this research (by June 1, 2021).  
Yes  No 
    - If yes, please include your email: \_\_\_\_\_  
or mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- 

**Participant's Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time!

## Appendix IV

### Verbal Consent Oral Script

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Individual Interview and/or Focus Group – Verbal Consent



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

#### NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE

70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada. R3T 2N2.

General Office (204) 474-7170

Fax: (204) 261-0038

[http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic/institutes/natural\\_resources](http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic/institutes/natural_resources)

**Title of Study:** Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada

**Principal Researcher:** Claire Brandenburg

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, Sinnott Bldg., 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, R3T 2N2

E-mail: [brandenc@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:brandenc@myumanitoba.ca)

Tel: (780)-729-6399

**Research Supervisor:** Professor A. John Sinclair

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, 306 Sinnott Bldg., 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, R3T 2M6.

Tel: (204)-474-8374 Fax: (204) 2610038

Email: [john.sinclair@umanitoba.ca](mailto:john.sinclair@umanitoba.ca)

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

---

**Purpose of this Study:** My name is Claire Brandenburg, I am a master's student at the University of Manitoba, and I am inviting you to take part in my research. The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of learning as a catalyzing process through which adults in Manitoba are motivated to take collective action on the climate crisis. The specific objectives are to (1) understand the political, social, and historical context of climate activism in Manitoba, (2)

examine the relationships among learning and the motivations of adult climate activists for participating in the climate movement, (3) consider the impacts of youth climate activism on adult activists, and (4) explore the actions of adult climate activists and the learning-action phenomenon in the context of the climate crisis.

**Participant Selection:** You are being asked to participate in this study because of your involvement in the climate movement and climate organizing in Manitoba.

**Study Procedures:**

- The methods of data collection for this study will be individual interviews (approximately one hour in length) and a focus group. You may choose to participate in the interview only, or both the interview and the focus group. Individual interviews will be semi-structured and answers will be both audio recorded and recorded as hand-written notes, with your consent. I will be conducting the interview and will be the sole transcriber for this research. We will be doing the interview via Zoom and if so, I will be using Zoom's "local recording" feature to record directly to my laptop, with your consent. If you prefer not to be recorded, I will only take hand-written notes.
- During the interview, you will be asked some questions about your experience of climate activism/organizing in Manitoba, including the learning about climate change you have undertaken and what has motivated your involvement in climate activism/organizing. These questions will help me to better understand the learning processes and motivations of adult climate activists in Manitoba.
- The purpose of the focus group is to share my research findings and ask for further participant insights on learning, motivations, and actions within the climate movement in Manitoba.
- Participation for the focus group session will be about 2 hours in length and I expect about 8 people to participate. The group will be asked questions related to each participant's experience as a climate activist or organizer in Manitoba. The focus group will be held on Zoom and it will be recorded by Zoom's "local recording" feature to record directly to my computer.
- I will facilitate the focus group session, taking care to allow all participants to contribute to the discussion. My advisor will also attend the focus group session and will take notes. The session will begin with a sharing of what I have learned so far, then discussion will be framed around key themes. I will collect data in the focus group session through the transcription of the Zoom recording, my hand-written notes, and my advisor's notes. At the start of the session, everyone will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. Names will be used in the focus group session. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential.

**Data Storage:** All notes and transcripts will be stored in password-protected computer files, and any hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet. The information resulting from the interview and focus group session will be kept confidential. Only my supervisor and I, and auditors for the University's ethics review board, will have access to the information you provide. The audio or video (Zoom) recording of the interview will be transcribed into text as soon as possible after each interview. Once transcribed, the electronic data will be destroyed. This will take place by the end of April 2022. Transcription and notes will be destroyed by December 31, 2023, after conducting the research and allowing for dissemination, journal publications, and public presentations.

**Risks and Benefits:** No information will be used in a way that could put you at risk. You may also choose not to respond to questions if you deem them inappropriate, and you have the freedom to offer only as much information as you are comfortable. When I write or talk about what I learn from working with you, I will not use your name or information that could identify you (unless you choose to waive your anonymity). The potential benefits to you include a chance to share and reflect on your own learning and motivations related to your involvement in the climate movement. In addition, this study may broadly benefit the climate movement by contributing knowledge regarding how individuals learn about the climate crisis and become active within the climate movement. Ultimately, risks of participating in this study are no greater than in everyday life.

**Confidentiality:** We will do everything possible to keep your personal information confidential. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in my study records and in writing and presentations where I discuss this research, and I will not include any information that could connect you with the information you provide, unless you choose to waive your anonymity, in which case you will be identified by your first and last name. A list of names and addresses of participants will be kept in a secure file so I can send you a summary of the results of the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker, your words may be used to highlight a specific point. If participating in the focus group) In a focus group setting, confidentiality cannot be ensured because other participants will be present in the room. I will ask all participants to respect the confidentiality of others and not to disclose information that was shared during the discussion to others, but this cannot be guaranteed. It is suggested that you do not share ideas that you would not like others, inside and outside of the focus group, to know. To ensure confidentiality on your end, it is important that you participate in the interview from a quiet, private room.

**Expected Outcomes:** A master's thesis (which will later be made publicly available via the University of Manitoba's MSpace) (<https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/>), academic publications and presentations, reports and/or presentations for climate organizations, and research summary



materials for participants will result from this study. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings of my research, I will make that available to you.

**Feedback/Debriefing:** I will create a research summary of my work and send that to you, and you also have the opportunity to receive an electronic copy of my thesis if you are interested.

**Questions:** If you have any questions either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my advisor (contacts will be provided).

---

Providing verbal consent on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

---

**Consent Signatures:** (If applicable) Regarding your participation in the interview, do you give the researcher your verbal consent to:

1. Audio/Zoom record the interview? Yes  No
2. Waive your anonymity and be identified by name with any information you provide in this interview that is included in writing or presentations that result from this research? Yes  No
3. Send a summary report of this research (by June 1, 2021)? Yes  No 
  - If yes, please include your email: \_\_\_\_\_  
or mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

---



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4. Contact you about participating in a focus group session at a later date? Yes  No

(If applicable) Regarding your participation in the focus group, do you give the researcher your verbal consent to:

1. Audio/Zoom record the focus group session? Yes  No
2. Waive your anonymity and be identified by name with any information you provide in this focus group that is included in writing or presentations that result from this research? Yes  No
3. Send a summary report of this research (by June 1, 2021) Yes  No 
  - If yes, please include your email: \_\_\_\_\_  
or mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Verbal consent by participant** \_\_\_\_\_ **was given on (Date)** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time!

## Appendix V

### Recruitment Script:

#### Recruitment for Individual Interview via Publicly Available Contact Information

Hello [Insert Name]:

My name is Claire Brandenbarg, and I'm a graduate student at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba. I'm contacting you today regarding my master's research titled: "Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada". I have obtained your contact information through [publicly available information on your organization/group's website/directory OR my personal affiliations].

As someone who has been involved in climate activism and/or organizing in Manitoba, I believe that you could bring invaluable knowledge to my research. If you decide to participate in my study, your participation will include a Zoom interview with me at a time and date convenient to you. The interview will take about one hour and questions will pertain to your experience in the climate movement, specifically regarding how you came to be involved and about your own learning process regarding the climate crisis.

You are under no obligation to take part in this research; however, your participation would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to set up an interview, and/or have any questions regarding the research or what may be expected of you, please feel free to contact me by email or phone. The research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board.

Thank you in advance,

Claire Brandenbarg

1-780-729-6399

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba,  
Sinnott Bldg, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg. R3T 2N2

E-mail: brandenc@myumanitoba.ca

## Appendix VI

### Recruitment Script: Recruitment for Individual Interview via Organizations/Groups



**University of Manitoba** | Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of  
Environment, Earth, and Resources

**Natural Resources  
Institute**  
220 Sinnott Building  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2M6  
T (204) 474-8373  
F (204) 261-0038  
E [nriinfo@umanitoba.ca](mailto:nriinfo@umanitoba.ca)

#### **Seeking participants for study on climate activism and learning:**

Are you an organizer/activist for climate justice and/or climate action in Manitoba? I am looking for individuals who have been or are currently climate organizers/activists to participate in a study being conducted through the Natural Resources Institute (University of Manitoba).

The purpose of this study is to understand how individuals learn and are motivated to become active within the climate movement. To gain an understanding of these processes, I will be conducting individual interviews (approximately one hour in length) and an optional focus group session. Questions will pertain to your experience in the climate movement, specifically regarding how you came to be involved and about your own learning process regarding the climate crisis. Interviews and the focus group session will take place over Zoom, in accordance with safety regulations concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you would be interested in being a participant (or if you would like more information), please contact Claire Brandenbarg at: [brandenc@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:brandenc@myumanitoba.ca)

Thank you!

**Appendix VII**  
**Recruitment Script:**  
**Recruitment for Focus Group**

Hello [Insert Name]:

I want to thank you for participating in the interview with me on [insert date]. The knowledge you shared on the topic of climate activism/organizing in Manitoba is invaluable to my research. As a way to ensure that your responses were captured appropriately, I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group to share my preliminary research findings and provide a space for you and the other participants to discuss and offer further insights on learning, motivations, and actions within the climate movement in Manitoba. The focus group will be about 2 hours in length and I expect about 8 people to participate.

To ensure safety for everyone's physical health regarding COVID-19, the focus group session will take place online on Zoom. Participants will be sent a Zoom meeting link in advance. The session will begin with a sharing of my findings and then discussion will be framed around key themes found in the data. From there, I will ask you to share your insights and perspective on the data.

You are under no obligation to take part in this focus group; however, your participation would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the focus group or what may be expected of you, please feel free to contact me by email or phone. The research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board.

Thank you in advance,

Claire Brandenburg

1-780-729-6399

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba,  
Sinnott Bldg, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg. R3T 2N2

E-mail: [brandenc@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:brandenc@myumanitoba.ca)

## **Appendix VIII**

### **Recruitment Script:**

#### **Request to Approach Organization/Group Members without Publicly Available Contact Information**

Hello [Insert Name]:

My name is Claire Brandenbarg, and I'm a graduate student at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba. I am contacting you today regarding my master's research titled: "Climate change, transformative learning, and social action: An exploration of adult climate activists in Manitoba, Canada".

For my research, I am seeking participants who has been involved in climate activism and/or organizing in Manitoba. I believe that individuals in your membership could bring invaluable knowledge to my research, and it is for this reason that I am requesting that you approach your membership about the possibility of participating in my work. If members decide to participate in my study, their participation will involve a Zoom interview with me at a time and date convenient to them. The interview will take about one hour and questions will pertain to their experience in the climate movement, specifically regarding how they came to be involved and about their own learning process regarding the climate crisis.

Your members are under no obligation to take part in this research; however, their participation would be greatly appreciated. As such, please let me know if you would be willing to circulate the attached recruitment flyer [Appendix VI] to your membership. If there are any questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact me by email or phone. The research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board.

Thank you in advance,

Claire Brandenbarg

1-780-729-6399

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba,

Sinnott Bldg, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg. R3T 2N2

E-mail: brandenc@myumanitoba.ca