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# Old, Yet Green – the Prioritization of the Future of Youth in Older-Age-Based Environmental Movements

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## ABSTRACT

This content-based research examines a) how older-age-based environmental movements position and present themselves in relation to older and younger generations, and b) how they frame issues of capability, responsibility, and social justice within intergenerational dynamics. Based on qualitative content research of the “About Us” webpage and the visual content of seven older-age-based environmental movements, the findings suggest that while the movements exhibited visibility and agency through words and contents related to wisdom, experience, strength, dedication, commitment, and greater notions of social justice, they also simultaneously exhibited lack of self-concern and transparency by focusing on future-oriented concerns, overlooking older persons’ vulnerability to climate change, exhibiting hyper-sense of responsibility, and a secondary positioning in relation to youth environmental movements. The findings are discussed from the prism of intergenerational relations.

## KEYWORDS

Activism; ageism; climate change; intergenerational solidarity; intergenerational conflict

## Introduction

In alignment with political activism, the three main motivations for engaging in environmental activism can be described as having a desire to address injustices, having a strong identification with the cause, and believing in the potential for change (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Whereas the primary goal of environmentalists is to affect a societal change regarding climate change issues, engagement in voluntary community organizations can also enhance individual and communal empowerment by boosting feelings of control, competence, and motivation for future participation (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). This occurs as civic engagement fulfills the human need to feel valued, significant, and meaningful (Jasko et al., 2019) while enhancing one’s sense of belonging and solidarity (Aharoni Lir, 2019, 2023; Okun & Ayalon, 2023).

Solidarity which is defined as having a sort of connection or bond to other people, and to members of a group serves as a key component in social

movements fighting against injustices (Laitinen & Pessi, 2014) and can also be tracked within environmental movements. At the same time, the common division between different generations of environmental activists can result in tension and raise significant questions regarding possible differences in perspectives (Aharoni Lir and Ayalon, [Under review](#)). These questions pertain to the balance of responsibility and the possibility of tensions between generations regarding the planet's condition and how the climate agenda addresses both the immediate risks faced by older adults and the future world left for subsequent generations. Existing tensions are evident in assertions not only by the public, but also by the research community, asserting that "today's elders, more than any other age group, bear responsibility for the threat of global warming and climate change" (Moody, 2017, p. 22). Concurrently, older individuals are often portrayed as lacking awareness, knowledge, and resources in environmental activism (Pillemer et al., 2021), despite being especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Filiberto et al., 2009).

This qualitative content-based research explores two questions: a) how do older-age-based environmental movements position and present themselves in relation to older and younger generations? And b) how do they frame issues of capability, responsibility, and social justice within intergenerational dynamics?

### **Intergenerational relations and environmental activism**

Although the concept of intergenerational relations originated from family studies to describe the relationships that occur among family members of different generations, in this study, it is used to describe the relationships between the generations in non-familial settings. The concept of intergenerational solidarity originally refers to the level of support and intimacy between family members who represent different generations (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). This optimistic and positive term is often contrasted with a more negative term of intergenerational conflict which refers to lower levels of solidarity and animosity between the generations (Antonucci et al., 2007). To supplement the overly optimistic and positive picture of intergenerational solidarity and the bleak view provided via the prism of intergenerational conflict, the concept of intergenerational ambivalence was proposed. The concept of intergenerational ambivalence refers to the simultaneous presence of positive pleasant features of solidarity which co-occur in the presence of negative properties of conflict and strain between the generations (Lowenstein, 2007; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

In recent years, the perspective of intergenerational relations has been applied to explore various instances of societal conflict but also solidarity or ambivalence which characterize the relationships between people of different generations who are not necessarily related within the family. For

instance, intergenerational conflict was portrayed to explain various contemporary world affairs including tension that evolved around the COVID-19 pandemic between people of different generations, when younger persons were required to maintain physical distance to protect older generations (Ayalon, 2020). Likewise, the differential political pattern of votes by generations characterized Brexit, with younger persons being more likely to vote against Brexit, whereas older persons voted in favor (Nouvellet, 2017).

The climate change movement is another area where intergenerational relations have shown prominence (Ayalon et al., 2023). For instance, in a study of 50 internationally influential climate activists, the researchers have found that younger activists often conveyed messages of blame toward older persons, referring to their inaction and to their own exclusion from political power. Older activists, on the other hand, stressed their solidarity with the younger generations and their commitment to mobilizing climate action for the benefit of future generations (Roy & Ayalon, 2022). Others as well have stressed the important role of intergenerational solidarity and compassion in political protests with the goal of ensuring a healthy climate and environment to all ages (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019; Roy et al., 2023).

### **Political activism among older persons**

Political activism, characterized by protests, demonstrations, and signing petitions, is considered highly beneficial because it enhances older persons' sense of self-efficacy and meaning in life (Fox & Quinn, 2012) as well as a sense of voice and belonging (Aharoni Lir, 2023). Moreover, political activism can be seen as a positive way to adjust to retirement years and as an opportunity for older persons to leave a positive legacy of collaboration and solidarity with younger generations (Blanche-T & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2022; Serrat et al., 2023). Engaging in political activism presents older persons with the chance to leverage their capacity, wisdom, and life experience for the betterment of society at large and as an opportunity to showcase intergenerational empathy and unity (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019; Roy et al., 2023; Serrat & Villar, 2016). Moreover, there is plenty of research to show that participating in the climate change movement in the form of environmental volunteerism and activism is highly beneficial for older persons' mental health (J.-C. Chen et al., 2020; Hsiao et al., 2020; Okun & Ayalon, 2024; Pillemer et al., 2010).

Despite its benefits, however, there are multiple barriers faced by older persons who wish to join the climate change movement and engage in environmental volunteerism. According to Pillemer et al. (2021) among the reasons for older persons' limited involvement are attitudes of denial, limited awareness, and perceived lack of knowledge and expertise. Moreover, the dominance of youth climate change movements, some with millions of activists in Europe, and around the world advocating for change (Aharoni Lir and

Ayalon, [Under review](#)), can also deter older persons from joining (Ayalon et al., [2021](#)).

## **The present study**

This qualitative content-based study centers on the manner in which seven older-age-based environmental movements (explicitly defined as movements composed of older persons) view and present themselves on their websites. The study explores two questions: a) how do older-age-based environmental movements position and present themselves in relation to older and younger generations? And b) how do they frame issues of capability, responsibility, and social justice within intergenerational dynamics? These questions were derived from our interest in intergenerational relations as they evolve in the context of older persons' activism. We find these questions particularly intriguing given the significant role given to the youth climate change movement in popular discourse and media.

## **Methods**

This study undertakes a content analysis of older-age-based Western environmental movements, focusing on those significantly emphasizing climate crisis action and an established online presence through a webpage. The research focused on Western movements due to their English language and shared cultural backgrounds, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of older-age-based climate change movements' dynamics within a homogeneous context. Our selection criteria comprised the following key factors: mention of age that assigns the leadership to older persons, a strong commitment to environmental advocacy, use of the English language, and the presence of a dedicated webpage. Our online search for movements was conducted in January 2024; it consisted of searching keywords that combined references to older age and climate crisis activism, with search words and phrases such as: "environment"+"old age"+"activism," "grandparents climate action," and "seniors environmentalism." To ensure comprehensive coverage, our search encompassed national, regional, and local organizations and included umbrella organizations, concluding when saturation in findings was reached. See [Table 1](#) for a comprehensive list of the examined movements, along with their activity base, and website addresses and [Appendix A](#) for a short description of each movement.

**Table 1.** Examined environmental movements.

Name of Movement	Activity's Base	Website Address
For Our Kids	Canada	<a href="https://www.forourkids.ca/">https://www.forourkids.ca/</a>
For Our Grandchildren	Canada	<a href="https://forourgrandchildren.ca/">https://forourgrandchildren.ca/</a>
GASP	Canada	<a href="https://www.gasp4change.org/">https://www.gasp4change.org/</a>
Seniors for Climate	Canada	<a href="https://seniorsforclimateactionnow.org">https://seniorsforclimateactionnow.org</a>
Elders Climate Action	United States	<a href="https://www.eldersclimateaction.org/">https://www.eldersclimateaction.org/</a>
European Grandparents for Climate Action	Europe	<a href="https://grandparentsforclimate.eu/">https://grandparentsforclimate.eu/</a>
Elders Action Network	United States	<a href="https://eldersaction.org/">https://eldersaction.org/</a>

## Examined contents

The data collection approach was designed to examine each movement's focus and how it connects environmental issues to different age groups, given the intergenerational perspective employed by the present study.

## *Analysis of about Us Pages*

We analyzed the “Who We Are”/“About Us” web page of each movement website and the pages that were connected to it. This was done to assess how each movement describes itself. Attention was given both to the content and the specific language used. The study involved analyzing the “Who We Are”/“About Us” web pages of the movements to discern their predominant themes and narratives. The analysis focused on uncovering the frequency of repeated words or meaningful units, as well as delving into the implicit meanings conveyed in the text, following the methodology outlined by Hsieh and Shannon; with the understanding that qualitative content analysis involves a systematic classification process of coding and identifying repetitive themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

## *Images on the movements' websites*

The examination of visuals focused on recurring themes and visual symbolism. We strategically selected samples to scrutinize their portrayal of age, and generation, aiming to extract valuable insights into the movement's reference to younger and the older generations. The visual analysis involved counting the visuals featuring prominent figures on the homepage and the About Us web pages (younger and/or older) and noting their placement on the website (main or secondary) to assess their attributed significance (Bell, 2001). This analysis provided a deeper dive into cultural implications, themes, values, and the latent messages conveyed through visual depictions (Schroeder, 2006)

During the initial phase, the analysis was conducted separately for each movement by thoroughly examining the content and visual data on their respective websites, focusing on identifying the main themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this process, we explored the text from the “About Us”/“Who We

Are” section and additional relevant information from the website: how the group describes itself, how it relates to different age groups, and concerns for greater issues related to social justice. Subsequently, we highlighted descriptions related to these topics. A categorization of related themes and ideas from the different movements came once we conducted a comparison of the main themes across the different movements.

The primary analysis was conducted comprehensively by the first author, who identified all relevant websites, thoroughly screened their contents, and systematically categorized and analyzed the data. The second author then reviewed this analysis, and the classification of themes was discussed between both authors to reach a consensus.

## Findings

The analysis of the web pages and visual content resulted in three overlapping themes related to the self-positioning and sense of responsibility of the examined movements:

**The Future Belongs to the Young:** Aspects that highlight the future as belonging to children, grandchildren, and future generations.

**The Strength of Older Persons:** Aspects that consider the power and means of older people to affect change for the better.

**Considering the Greater Picture:** Aspects of social justice as part of the movements’ perusal of environmentalism.

## Summary tables

Tables 2 and 3 present summaries of key elements from the “About Us” pages and web visuals of each movement:

### The future belongs to the young

One of the notable findings regarding the analysis was the way all movements presented their main concern as the worry for future generations:

Welcome to a community of thousands of elders who are taking action to create a better world for our grandchildren, future generations, and all life. (Elders Action Network)

We are seriously worried about the world we are leaving to future generations. (The European Grandparents for Climate)

We are the elder generations, including grandparents, great aunts, and great uncles who are concerned about the future for all children and all life. (Elders for Climate Action)

GASPs want to . . . look out for the best interests of the next 7 generations. (GASP)

**Table 2.** Summarized analysis of about Us/Who we are page.

Movement's Name	Textual Content	Catchphrase	References to Social Justice
For Our Kids	"Just a world where our kids and grandkids can grow up safe and healthy."	"Families taking action for the climate"	Younger generations; principles of justice; respecting Indigenous rights and sovereignty.
For Our Grandchildren	"Mobilize our community to take effective action to combat climate change."	"Our Legacy their Future"	Connect with other communities.
Grand(m)others Act To Save The Planet/ GASP	"Care deeply about the world our descendants will inherit."	We have an Emergency!	Youth and Indigenous peoples; explicit support of social justice
Seniors for Climate	"Young people are calling on governments to act decisively on the climate emergency. As seniors we will support their lead, amplify their voices, and add our own."	We are Canadian Seniors Compelled to Urgent Action	Social and economic reform; address racism and inequality; future generations and planetary survival.
Elders Climate Action	"End the Climate Crisis and build a just and sustainable future for our children, our grandchildren, and all children."	For our grandchildren, future generations & all life	To protect the well-being of grandchildren, future generations, and all life.
European Grandparents for Climate Action	"We are seriously worried about the world we are leaving to future generations."	For a sustainable and just future	The future of young generations.
Elders Action Network	"We are motivated to initiate a cultural shift wherein we elders reclaim our place in providing education, wisdom, and guidance within our communities."	We're building a movement of elders to address the environmental, governance, and social issues of our time	Create a new elder culture; sustainable world for the generations to come; advocating for ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and peaceful coexistence.

We are in this for the sake of future generations and the survival of life on the planet. (Seniors for Climate)

We are a network of parents and families from diverse backgrounds and levels of experience, united by our concern for our children's future. (For our Kids)

For Our Grandchildren was founded in 2006 in Toronto by a group of grandparents who were deeply concerned that the world was taking inadequate action to prevent the worst effects of the changing climate and that these changes would have serious negative consequences on their grandchildren. (For Our Grandchildren)

The consistent emphasis on future generations (even ones not born yet) across these organizations underscores a shared concern for the legacy they leave behind and the well-being of those who will inherit the planet. It is possible to say that by centering their efforts on the welfare of children, grandchildren, future generations, and all life, these organizations highlight the urgency of addressing pressing issues like climate change and convey a sense of responsibility to protect the planet for the



**Table 3.** Summarized analysis of visual content.

Movement's Name	Main Visual Focus	Activists' Pictures	Main Picture/s	Intergenerational Imagery
For Our Kids	Children	Yes	A large picture focusing on three schoolkids	A video of young and old; an image of three generations
For Our Grandchildren	Environment	Yes	8 small pictures on environmental issues	In the inner pages of the site
GASP	Older persons	Yes	Large picture focusing on older women rally	Picture of young and old protesting
Seniors for Climate	Older persons	Yes	A large picture of older men and women's protest	An image of an old woman giving the planet Earth to a child
Elders Climate Action	Older persons	Yes	Slider: 2 pictures of nature + older adults protest	An older man and a child
European Grandparents for Climate Action	Older persons	Yes	Video of a rally with unintegrated groups of people of different age groups	A video of older and younger people
Elders Action Network	Older persons	Yes	Small pics: elderly, intergenerational protesters; statue of liberty, a tree, book covers	Smaller picture of young adults protesting

benefit of all who call it home as well as solidarity with younger generations.

On top of viewing the activism as targeting the future, with little mention of the present and the current effects of climate change on older persons at the present time, we were also able to locate a sense of self-blame and of being secondary to the young in two of the movements:

It is our generation that has polluted the planet for our convenience and our greed. Our grandchildren will pay the price. They will certainly ask "What did you do, Grandma, when you knew?" (GASP)

Young people are calling on governments to act decisively on the climate emergency. As seniors, we will support their lead, amplify their voices, and add our own to the growing movement for climate action. (Seniors for Climate)

As can be seen, the quote from GASP reflects a sentiment of guilt and accountability, recognizing the role of older persons. This self-blame is further emphasized by the anticipation of future questioning and accountability from younger generations. The sense of responsibility is embedded in the quote from the site of Seniors for Climate which places older persons in a secondary position to the young, in a manner that might cancel the claim that climate change is a matter that affects old persons now. Both quotes reveal intergenerational tension embedded in older climate activists' willingness to take responsibility for past harms.

## The strength of older persons

While all seven movements emphasized taking care of future generations and underscored their responsibility for the younger generations, some of these movements also highlighted the strengths and contributions of older persons. Five of the movements emphasized a strong sense of collective action through the use of inclusive language, referring to themselves as “we” with words that underscore the common belief in the importance of gathering together and acting to promote urgent change:

We work to inform, inspire, and engage others to take action on the climate crisis. (Elders Climate Action)

We’re building a movement of elders to address the environmental, governance, and social issues of our time. (Elders Action Network)

We cooperate with environmental movements in our home countries in order to communicate the urgency of acting now and to initiate new projects tailored to the local situation and local needs. We exchange information on climate change insights and successful national or local projects. And we create motivation for change by showing concrete possibilities for engagement and thus increasing hope and solidarity in our societies (The European Grandparents for Climate)

We can be advocates for the common good: activists for a sustainable world. (GASP)

In relentless pursuit of this mission, we will advocate/enlist support from our local governments and collaborate effectively with like-minded community organizations. (For Our Children)

These five movements emphasized their sense of agency and power to act together toward change through the use of an inviting language, a sense of solidarity and mutual work toward achieving a goal, as well as active verbs that enhance the sense of the ability to act in the world toward a desired goal. The fact that five of the seven movements examined had pictures of older activists enhanced the sense of presence and inner solidarity, working together toward a mutual cause.

Additional significant token of inner strength was found in four of the seven examined movements in language that advocated older persons’ strength associated with their advanced age:

We, women of a certain age, have the benefit of life experience and the time to get things done . . . . GASPs want to model themselves on our indigenous grandmother sisters, the “wisdom carriers.” (GASP)

we move into action, putting to good use our talents, time, resources, and decades of life experience . . . . Elders are 80 million strong in America. We can bring about the changes that are needed. We are motivated to initiate a cultural shift wherein we elders reclaim

our place in providing education, wisdom, and guidance within our communities. (Elders Action Network)

Only a drastic transition towards a sustainable and just society will help avoid a future catastrophe . . . . We, the older generation in Europe, are jointly a strong force. We represent more than 21% of the European population and voting power and we have considerable economic power. (The European Grandparents for Climate)

Each of us has faced a personal reckoning and decided that there is no better use of our wisdom and strength, our time and resources, and our anger and good will, than to join in this struggle . . . . We are dedicated to using the power of our caring, our wisdom and our numbers to push for strong policies that will reduce greenhouse gases in our atmosphere to a level consistent with life thriving on our planet. (Elders for Climate Action)

As can be seen, these movements strategically highlight the distinctive assets older persons bring, including life experience, wisdom, time availability, voting power, economic resources, talents, and sheer numbers. The movements present themselves as uniquely positioned to lead social change efforts. Accordingly, the European Grandparents for Climate Movement emphasizes moral authority and wisdom gained from life experience to advocate for sustainable policies, as their words, portray their obligation to speak out. Similarly, the Elders Action Network calls on their enriched life experience, talents, and economic resources. They promote intergenerational mentorship, positioning retirees as educators imparting wisdom. Through this language and phrasing, these movements present older persons as experienced and wise, and assume respectful and productive self-positionality.

### **Considering the greater picture of social justice**

Another aspect that was especially evident in four of the movements was the place dedicated to the greater sense of social justice:

We embrace the universal narrative that includes all living beings, interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent within the unity of One. We respect and care for this community of life by advocating for ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and peaceful coexistence. (Elders Action Network)

We recognize that climate action is also a demand for social justice and economic transformation—the opportunity, as well as the need, to address racism and economic inequities. We know that Canada was founded on the occupation/invasion/colonization of Indigenous lands . . . . The climate crisis causes disproportionate hardship for poor, marginalized and racialized communities. (Seniors for Climate)

We believe that climate action must be centred on principles of justice and begin with respecting Indigenous rights and Indigenous sovereignty. (For our Kids)

GASP gives voice to a wide variety of issues relating to social and climate justice. Members are invited to take leadership roles on issues that are of particular concern to them. We see ourselves as nimble and quick activists. (GASP)

These examples indicate how these movements interweave their core advocacy focus with broader principles of social justice and systemic change. For instance, Elders Action Network situates ecology alongside economic justice and coexistence, Seniors for Climate declares climate action while also demands justice relating to racism and economic inequities, and For our Kids emphasizes indigenous rights.

Additionally, three movements also emphasized inner diversity and respect for different members within the movement:

A community in which we value each other's knowledge, experience, and views. (Seniors for Climate)

We mean all of us, in all our colors, genders, abilities, origins and political persuasions, poor and rich, young, and old and, most importantly, our most vulnerable. (Elders for Climate Action)

Grand(m)others Act To Save The Planet is a grassroots, non-partisan group of grand-mothers and grand "others" who care deeply about the world our descendants will inherit. (GASP)

These examples indicate a broader sense of justice through the explicit inclusion and validation of diversity across age, race, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, and worldview. By emphasizing "all of us" and "each other's" inherent worth and allowing space for "others" it is possible to claim that these movements challenge norms of exclusion, often faced by marginalized groups. This frames climate justice as an intersectional issue, resisting oppression or marginalization of any person based on their social group membership. The prioritization of "our most vulnerable" also signifies an ethics of care and collective responsibility to those facing the greatest climate injustice. These references also help create a sense of connection to real human lives while advocating for systemic change to protect the planet for all inhabitants.

## Discussion

In this research, we concentrated on older-age-based environmental movements that advocate climate action within the framework of intergenerational relations, acknowledging the simultaneous contradicting aspects of solidarity, conflict, and ambiguity (Lowenstein, 2007; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). The findings suggest that on top of what can be examined in terms of intergenerational solidarity, in the shared concern for future generations and the acknowledgment of the climate crisis as a universal issue across all age groups, there is

a notable ambiguity in the way older individuals perceive themselves in relation to younger generations.

Research on climate change often underscores that older persons are one of the most at-risk groups, facing heightened vulnerability to extreme weather events and environmental hazards such as heatwaves, droughts, poor air quality, and diseases (Gamble et al., 2013; Greenberg, 2014). While the movements we examined were composed of middle-aged and older persons' activists, they showed less solidarity concerning their own age group and more ambiguity. None of them emphasized the need to protect older persons from climate change events, which are already taking place and have a substantial impact on the lives and health of the older population.

Whereas youth climate change movements acknowledge ageism against the young and the fact that young people feel like a marginalized group due to their lack of voting rights and incapacity to express their opinions (Keenan, 2010; Knappe & Renn, 2022), movements of older climate activists did not emphasize care for older persons and did not acknowledge the marginalized place of many older persons socially, culturally, and economically. None of them focused on the rights and needs of older persons for sustainability. Consistent with prior research, they saw others more than they saw themselves, in what can be discussed in terms of self-ageism; that is the internalization of negative self-perceptions associated with age, leading individuals to view themselves as less relevant and put others' needs before their own needs (Aharoni Lir & Ayalon, 2022; Ayalon et al., 2024).

It is possible that the limited acknowledgment of the impact of climate change on their own life stems from the internalization of blame toward older persons given their contribution to the current state of affairs. This sense of blame is prevalent both in research and among youth movements (Moody, 2017; Aharoni Lir and Ayalon, *Under review*); even though climate change issues were not part of the public agenda in the lives of older persons while growing up (Dunlap, 1987). Another explanation could stem from a tendency to "other" vulnerable older persons and view them as non-representative. This reflects a general tendency of older persons to view themselves as not representative of the "typical older persons" and to distance themselves from older age as a form of self-ageism (Okun & Ayalon, 2023).

On the other hand, it is also possible to view care for the younger generation as a virtue, emphasizing interdependence and responsibility for others rather than independence and autonomy. This perspective is part of the ethics of care, which primarily characterizes feminine moral development and centers around these principles (Gilligan, 1993). Likewise, taking Erikson's life stages into account, it is possible that by focusing on future generations, activists exhibit generativity (typical of middle-aged and young-old life stages) by working together toward making a positive impact on future generations (Erikson, 1994).

The findings enrich previous research on intergenerational solidarity among older activists toward younger generations, alongside their nuanced sense of ambiguity toward both younger generations and themselves (Ayalon and Okun, under review). They also establish parallels between the model of intergenerational ambivalence and internal perceptions among older individuals, shaping their identity in relation to different age groups.

Based on these insights, it is plausible to interpret older-age-based environmental movements in terms of intergenerational solidarity, demonstrating agency, capability, and empowerment, juxtaposed with positions of ambiguity and conflict, encompassing aspects of self-blame and feelings of disempowerment

### Strength and intragenerational solidarity

We can interpret care for youth in terms of Intragenerational solidarity and as a manifestation of older persons' capabilities and strength. This is in accordance with agency theories which focus on individuals as having unique traits and mental powers, such as free will, and consciousness that can allow them to act on their goals in meaningful ways, which include deliberation, choice, and evaluation (Fuchs, 2001). The analysis highlights the theme of agency, emphasizing the resilience, determination, and collective strength exhibited by older generations involved in climate action. This portrayal asserts their capability to affect meaningful change in the following ways:

**Wisdom and Experience:** The emphasis on the wealth of experience and wisdom that comes with age, positioning older individuals as valuable sources of knowledge and guidance. Additionally, the mentions of the ability to allocate time and resources to educate and guide others, leveraging older persons' accumulated wisdom for the benefit of future generations.

**Strength and Power:** Recurrent references to the vast percentage of older persons in the population create a sense of collective strength. Some organizations emphasize cooperation and the ability to join forces, harnessing their collective power for a common cause. Additionally, mentions of economic power and softer notions of power through caring further underscore their strength and influence.

**Dedication and Commitment:** As in other cases of activism (Ayalon et al., 2024), across all web pages of the movements reviewed, it was possible to find a strong emphasis on dedication and commitment to effecting cultural shifts and driving urgent change. This enhanced the sense of great motivation to dedicate various resources and collaborate effectively in pursuit of common goals.

**Greater Sense of Social Justice:** The analysis also reveals a heightened concern for social justice aspects within the examined movements, including democracy, marginalized communities, economic transformation, and Indigenous groups. This reflects

a broader awareness and commitment to addressing systemic injustices and advocating for a more equitable society. It is possible to say that having come of age in the 1960s era of civil rights and anti-war activism, many are applying past experiences to today's intersectional injustices. In this manner, these movements break from single-issue advocacy to position their goals within wider struggles for social transformation. This frames specific issues like Indigenous rights as part of broader patterns of environmentalism. In the process, they enact inclusivity, equity, and justice in ways that recognize intricate interconnection.

## Intergenerational ambiguity and conflict

Alongside the sense of inner solidarity, the findings highlight ambiguity regarding the secondary position of older persons compared to youth, reflecting adherence to existing social structures governing the lives of older individuals relative to younger ones. This phenomenon can be read in terms of inner conflict, manifested in the following ways:

**Emphasis on future-oriented concerns:** Across all movements examined, a common theme emerges: an orientation towards future generations, whether it be the future of children, grandchildren, or even unborn generations. This focus underscores the internalization of prevalent social constructions among environmental movements, wherein the future is emphasized over the present, and the importance of the younger generation is prioritized over the older one.

**Overlooked older persons' social positionality:** In all the movements examined, despite the declared care for the future, there is a noticeable absence of acknowledgment regarding the potential social and economic marginalization of older individuals within the broader social order. Moreover, the websites reviewed completely neglect the potential vulnerability of older persons to climate change concerning their health and well-being.

**Taking a positionality of youth protectors:** The prioritization of future generations indicated that older adults-centered organizations view themselves in a protector/supporter role for the younger generations. However, it can also imply that they may be placing older individuals in a secondary role. This is consistent with research that emphasizes that even though older activists may possess perceived benefits, they also view themselves as inadequate or insufficient without the participation of younger individuals. This is reflected in a study that found that younger activists were viewed as vital for their energy, stamina, and symbolic significance, which imbued the protests with meaning, importance, and relevance. (Ayalon and Okun, Under review)

While uniting parents, grandparents, and older individuals under a common environmental cause, older age-based movements provide a platform for collective voice and action. However, this unity paradoxically can be read as disempowering older individuals by placing their concerns in a secondary position relative to those of the younger generation and in asserting a positionality of caring for others without considering the urgency of their own needs. Thus, the imagery of older persons, the strong assertive use of the

collective “we,” and the demonstrated care for the environment, social justice, diversity, and marginalized groups that were found in the examined movements’ websites cannot camouflage the fact that their agenda may neglect to emphasize the importance of protecting adults and older persons from climate change, hereby implying that their lives may matter less than those of future generations.

These conflictual inner tensions can also be analyzed in terms of visibility and transparency. On one hand, older persons lead movements that highlight the presence and significance of old age through various means, such as: referencing their power to gather together and act toward change, paying attention to the wisdom of the old and the time and money they have to dedicate toward change, in a way that is consistent with prior research on older persons’ activism (Aaylon & Okun, under review). Additionally, the imagery of older activists in the movements’ web pages presents a counter-narrative to their symbolic annihilation, defined as the underrepresentation and trivialization of groups in media, in mainstream culture (Tuchman, 1978). Prior research has found that older persons, especially older women, are symbolically annihilated through a lack of meaningful representations (Aharoni Lir & Ayalon, 2023).

By including images of older activists, these social movements challenged their symbolic absence and marginalization, reinforcing their position as valued contributors and leaders for change. This centered on their in-group power and agency, countering stereotypes of passivity or disengagement that can be reinforced through symbolic annihilation (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; McConatha et al., 1999). On the other hand, they concurrently overlook issues of justice specifically concerning older persons, focusing instead on injustices affecting younger generations. This dichotomy inadvertently renders the older demographic invisible within the justice discourse of the movements. This corresponds with research that highlights the transparency of older persons, especially women in the second half of life Aharoni Lir, S., & Ayalon, L. (2024).

In conclusion, this research enabled us to examine age-related inner tensions within older persons’ movements, pointing to the internalization of social structures that favor youth. Through the research it became evident that, much like youth-oriented climate change movements such as Fridays for Future, older-age-based movements are mostly committed to future generations, which is a commendable objective. However, this raises questions about the extent to which these movements address environmentalism as an immediate and pressing issue affecting older adults in the present. Given the societal tendency to prioritize youth, and the tendency to internalize social perspectives, the findings emphasize the imperative to contextualize climate change as a current concern that significantly impacts the lives of older individuals. This approach should be reflected in research, activism, and



media coverage, contributing to a deeper understanding of the immediate costs that climate change imposes on the older population. Hence, a more balanced approach which acknowledges the risks for future generations, but at the same time also recognizes the challenges faced by older persons today is required.

The scope of the present study is limited, as it focused on only seven movements in the United States, Canada, and Europe and did not address important themes such as gender. In this context, it is important to acknowledge KlimaSeniorinnen, an organization of older Swiss women, who successfully sued the state of Switzerland at the European Court of Human Rights for violating the human rights of older women. Hence, they specifically used scientific evidence of their own vulnerability as older women to bring climate justice to all. Nonetheless, they clearly acknowledged their victory as affecting all generations and especially the younger ones.

Our research underscores the necessity of examining environmental movements through the broader lens of social justice and intergenerational dynamics. This approach enhances our understanding of these movements' complex societal impacts and long-term implications.

Additionally, it is understood that the impact of the changing climate is not only significant in the long run but also immediately deadly, as 20% to 25% of heat-related deaths can be attributed to the aging population (Chen et al., 2024). This underscores the need for greater attention to immediate measures to protect the older population, as a target pursued by both young-based and old-based environmental movements.

Subsequent research efforts could broaden the inquiry to additional regions and incorporate additional factors to deepen our understanding of the complexities inherent in environmental activism among older individuals. Furthermore, future studies could explore whether the tendency to prioritize the well-being of offspring over personal interests also characterizes older persons who are not engaged in activism.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Examined Movements

A summary description of the seven older-age-based environmental movements analyzed in this paper.

**For Our Kids** – A Canadian movement that comprises diverse parents and families united in addressing climate change, prioritizing justice, and Indigenous rights. Their goals are impactful action, broader engagement, and embodying desired change. Led by volunteer teams, they

support grassroots initiatives, funded by climate-focused foundations. A National Council provides strategic direction, ensuring alignment with its mission and resources.

**For Our Grandchildren (4RG)** – A Canadian nonprofit founded in Toronto in 2006 to combat climate change through the mission “To Inform, Motivate, and Mobilize” grandparents in Canada about climate change. Originally the movement focused on awareness, and now it emphasizes local action, with activities including online outreach, public events, and lobbying efforts. 4RG has expanded its reach to Peterborough, where it actively engages with the local community through various initiatives, including organizing public events, conducting workshops, and collaborating with local organizations to address climate change issues.

**Grand(m)others Act To Save The Planet (GASP)** – A Canadian grassroots movement of women advocating for climate action and social justice. Inspired by Indigenous wisdom, they recognize the urgency of addressing climate change, driven by the realization that their generation’s actions have jeopardized the future of their grandchildren. Through advocacy, education, and collaboration with various stakeholders, including youth and Indigenous communities, they strive for immediate, drastic action to combat climate change.

**Seniors for Climate Action Now (SCAN)** – A grassroots movement based in Ontario, Canada, dedicated to supporting and amplifying the voices of young people calling for decisive climate action. This group aims to mobilize seniors to prevent further climate catastrophes while recognizing climate action as a demand for social justice and economic transformation. With a focus on Indigenous solidarity and acknowledging Canada’s significant role in global warming, the group advocates for rapid reduction of carbon emissions, restoration of ecological damage, and transition to a sustainable economy. Through various committees and working groups, they actively engage in advocacy, education, and campaigns to address the climate emergency and promote a sustainable future.

**Elders Climate Action** – A non-partisan organization composed of elder climate activists across the United States, united in their commitment to combat the Climate Crisis and advocate for a just and sustainable future for all generations. They emphasize collective action as the most effective means to force policy changes necessary to protect everyone, prioritizing equity, and justice in their objectives. Their priorities include advocating for the phase-out of fossil fuels, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and mobilization of voters, grounded in principles of equity and racial, environmental, and climate justice.

**European Grandparents for Climate Action** – An NGO comprised of national organizations of senior citizens dedicated to advocating for climate justice. Through European collaboration, they aim to amplify their political influence, coordinate campaigns, and push for climate-friendly policies in the European Parliament. They advocate for a system change based on full implementation of the Green Deal to ensure a sustainable and just society and actively engage with governments, decision-makers, and environmental movements to implement the Paris Agreement. With a focus on intergenerational climate justice, they strive to leave a better world for future generations through civil engagement, information exchange, and motivation for change.

**Elders Action Network** – A movement of elders addressing environmental, social, and governance issues. Motivated by a recognition of the Earth’s peril and promise, the movement emphasizes the untapped potential in the talents and experiences of elders within American society. The movement aims to initiate a cultural shift, reclaiming elders’ roles in providing education, wisdom, and guidance, and becoming catalysts for collaboration across generations. Through this, they intend to create a new elder culture, finding meaning in life by advocating for ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and peaceful coexistence.