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Gen Z Perspectives on Climate Change and the Future: Having the courage to imagine and fight for a better world

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GEN Z PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FUTURE:
Having the courage to imagine and fight for a better world

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ABSTRACT

I conducted 6 interviews with Gen Z students to investigate how they think climate change will impact their future and how they frame the issue in general. I communicate my findings and analysis with visual context through a zine, which is a form of alternative media

created in the 1930s. Today, zines provide a creative approach to exchange ideas and explain contemporary culture (Gisonny and Freedman, 2006, 26). My zine is not meant to be utterly educational but rather it is meant to convey the emotion, confusion, and chaos associated with my findings. The interviews collectively created an image of what climate change could look like in the worst case, how they feel about it, and what they think a solution might be. The common themes generated in these interviews include feelings of uncertainty regarding the future, understanding that there is a disproportionate impact of climate change, shortcomings of electoral politics, discrepancies with sustainability, capitalism as a driver of climate change and individualism, and personal detachment and avoidance of climate change action. I conclude that these students crave a clear image of the future, a clear positive picture for them to manifest in their life. Without this positive hopeful image to inspire them, they are left to feel hopeless and fearful of climate change; impending any action or conversation about the subject.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the most urgent issues of today. January 2020 was the highest global land and ocean surface temperature in the 141-year record and the four warmest Januaries have occurred since 2016 (Sanchez-Lugo 2020); with 2016 being the hottest year on record (NASA 2020). Although climate change has been an issue for decades now, it has recently been striking up much more attention and has had increased engagement with youth. Organizations

like Extinction Rebellion, The Sunrise Movement, and Global Climate Strikes have shown how Generation Z is leading the modern-day environmental movement and they are framing it with environmental justice, a perspective the environmental movement has historically lacked. This study's objective is to gain insight into how Gen Z youth frame climate change in their minds and how the issue makes them feel. I wanted to answer questions such as, "How do Gen Z students feel like their futures will be impacted by climate change?" "What do Gen Z students imagine the climate crisis to look like in 40 years?" It is integral that emotions are included in research regarding Gen Z and climate change because of the severity of the issue. Through these interviews, I was able to collect the thoughts of 6 Gen Z students about climate change, the future, and how to maintain hope. I drew from their words to create a zine displaying my findings from this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many papers and surveys that have assessed how American's feel about climate change and because this issue has been framed differently in media each decade it's important to have recent data to present in this literature review. The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication published a report in February of 2020, "Climate Activism: Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors - November 2019." The report is based on a nationally representative survey of 1,303 adults that were 18 or older. Their objectives were to investigate American's views on "public activists, their sense of efficacy about climate activism, and the activism behaviors they are taking or would consider" (Leiserowitz i.e 2020, 4). They found that more than half of American's "strongly" or "somewhat" support climate activist efforts to get climate change-focused candidates elected into office (Leiserowitz i.e 2020, 4). While a majority of Americans support climate activists and also say they would sign a petition or vote in favor of a pro-climate action candidate, only 3% are currently participating in a political campaign about climate change (Leiserowitz i.e 2020, 5). Further, half of Americans are "moderately confident" that everyday people can influence businesses and the government (Leiserowitz i.e 2020, 5).

Since I am looking into how Gen Z students think about climate change, Robert Brulle's chapter about "U.S Environmental Movements" is an important piece of literature to include. Brulle's chapter analyzes the discursive frames of the U.S environmental movement through history. These discursive frames all facilitate different motives in messaging and portray

different types of environmentalism. One of the most important frames is the environmental justice frame which according to Brulle, emerged in the 1980s in an effort to critique the elitist and racist history of environmentalism. In this new frame, environmental justice highlights the "unequal burden of pollution that was placed on poor and minority communities" (Brulle 2009, 217). With the Green New Deal, School Strikes, and The Sunrise Movement, this frame is becoming the mainstream way to talk about climate change. Brulle's analysis of environmental justice is important to reference when discussing how individuals may describe the issue of climate change.

Shwetha G Y's study, "A Descriptive Study on Attitude of Generation Z towards Green Behaviour" was published in 2018 and delves into how Generation Z feels about the future of sustainability. Since my study incorporates similar themes, it is important to compare my findings to this study because it is more representative of Gen Z a whole. This online study was conducted with a survey of Gen Z in 20 countries, it shows how Gen Z perceives "Green Behavior." Some of the key findings state "Youth say they're doing more than most to be 'green,'" "Education is vital in implementing sustainable practices" (Shwetha 2018, 33). Also, 80% of Gen Z have the belief that present governmental leaders are not doing enough to protect the environment.

In June of 2019, GlobalWebIndex published a report about Gen Z behaviors in the market and some of the findings have connections to the study I have conducted. "The Youth of The Nations: Global Trends Among Gen Z, examining the lifestyles, attitudes, and digital behaviors of Gen Z" presents the research of online internet users aged 16-64, they set quotas for age, gender, and education. Two of the most relevant findings to this study were that 74% believe we "should all strive for equality" and 74% believe "family is the most important thing in my life" (Moussavi and Mander 2019, 15).

Maria Ojala published the paper "Hope and climate change: the importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people" in 2011. The research was conducted with two questionnaires given to 723 teenagers and 381 young adults in Sweden (Ojala, 2011, 625). The study found that "constructive" hope can be a motivational force in terms of environmental issues. Constructive hope includes feelings of influence, trust, awareness, and environmental action (Ojala, 2011, 630). Hope that was rooted in denial of climate change did not prove to be a motivating force, though.

In 2006, Anthony Leiserowitz published the study "Climate Change Risk Perception and Policy Preferences: The Role of Affect, Imagery, and Values. Climatic Change." This study conducted a national, representative survey of the U.S. public to investigate what influences Americans' risk perceptions and support of certain policies. This study found that risk perceptions and policy support are "strongly influences" by affect, imagery, and values. They concluded that the public response to climate change is influenced by both psychological and socio-cultural factors. The most relevant finding to my study's analysis is that policy preferences for climate policies were most strongly influenced by value commitments such as pro-egalitarian values, opposition to these policies were heavily associated with "antiegalitarian, pro-individualistic and pro-heirarchist values" (Leiserowitz, 2006, 63). This finding is extremely significant for my analysis.

The paper "Zines in Libraries: how, what and why?" by Karen Gisonny and Jenna Freedman highlights the history of zines and why they are so important in society. This is an important paper to discuss since I have chosen to display my findings with a zine. By collecting the work of authors and others who presented at the 12th National ACRL conference in Minneapolis, Gisonny and Freedman conclude that zines are an important form of media that document contemporary culture and should be collected by libraries in order to "ensure balanced and diverse collections, as well as securing primary source material for scholars today and in the future" (Gisonny and Freedman, 2006, 26).

METHODS & ETHICS

The method for this study was open-ended interviews. I conducted 6 interviews with Generation Z students, aged 20-21. I reached out to Gen Z colleagues of mine on a one-to-one basis, to ask if they would be interested in partaking in my study. After individuals expressed interest I emailed them an informed consent document for them to read through before following through with my study. In the document, I presented the research questions, objectives of my study, any possible risks or benefits of participating, and that they will be given pseudonyms or an identifying number. I also made clear that participation is 100% voluntary, that they can decide not to participate at any point before, during, or after the interviews. After this process was over, and the participants reported back that they read the form and wanted to participate, we scheduled the interview. All 6 interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Due to the open-ended

nature of the interview, the length depended on how much the interviewee was willing to share. I did not push any of the interviewees to share more than they were comfortable with. These interviews were done through Zoom and were recorded through that platform. All respondents reported being okay with the interview being recorded. I transcribed each interview using the recordings and re-read the transcriptions to look for common themes. I color-coded each transcription based on 5 questions: feelings associated with climate change, description of what climate change looks like, what they dream to have in their future, what they worry about in general, and their thoughts on sustainability. With drafted concepts to look for, I generated common themes among the 6 interviewees and outlined my zine. One of the most overarching themes within these interviews were fragmented uncertain thoughts about the future. I chose to make a Sine because I thought it would be a creative way to provide visuals to the thoughts and words of these 6 Gen Z students. I knew the Zine could be messy and perhaps confusing at times but that is all in an effort to show that the idea of climate change feels messy and confusing to these students. The future is a collection of fragmented thoughts and themes that run through our present life. I was hoping that with a Zine and contextualized quotes, I would be able to convey those themes. The interviews collectively created an image of what climate change could look like in the worst case, how they feel about it, and what they think a solution might be.

FINDINGS

How do these Gen Z Students feel about climate change?

Climate change to them seems ominous; many compared the crisis to a sort of impending, inevitable doom floating in the back of their minds. When asked about how climate change makes her feel, Student 3 said, "I feel sad for our generation that we are having to plan with this inevitable doom in the back of our minds and we're like 'is it gonna happen to us is it going to happen to our kids, to our grandkids?' We just don't know when it will happen, we just know that it will." Student 1 responded to the same question by saying, "[...] the word that comes to mind is anxiety, definitely makes me anxious thinking about impending doom." Student 2 responded by saying it is "a grueling thought," "messy," and "exhausting." This type of avoidant thinking was present in Student 4 as well, she says that the reality of climate change often makes her feel "powerless and helpless" which forces her to avoid the topic in general; when asked about what feelings she associated with climate change she says "Honestly, I just want to change

the subject, I want to change the channel in my brain." Student 3 touches more deeply on her emotional response of fear and deep sadness by saying "Fear that no one with power will do anything and sadness that we'd let it happen." These feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about how climate change will manifest breeds avoidance of the topic of climate change in general. Student 4 says "It's like what can I do about it right now, nothing [...] if people come together then maybe something can be done." Many people used the familiar theme of an apocalypse (familiar due to dystopian movies and books we have all grown up watching and reading) to compare the climate crisis to.

> "[...] I feel like places will be shut down [...] I'm imagining just a lot of death and fire burning, that's what comes to mind. Just like apocalyptic vibes you know? Like SpaceX finally gets off to mars [...] You just imagine people running and screaming and fire everywhere" (Student 1).
> "What everything's pointing to is a sort of a mad max apocalyptic scenario where its like scavenging [...]" (Student 4)

How do these Gen Z students describe and imagine climate change?

An expected common theme when asked to describe their future, specifically regarding climate change, was uncertainty. Uncertainty about the timeline of climate change and how it would impact them directly or change their lives. Student 4 used the coronavirus as an analogy to explain why it is difficult for her to imagine how climate change could change her life,

> "You're kind of aware that there could be an infectious disease that could become a pandemic like you're always aware that that could happen but then all of a sudden everything shut down [...] I had plans when I was in London and I wouldn't have guessed they would be disrupted so it [climate change] will change everything and where I'll be when everything changes, I don't know. I don't know what's going to be destroyed personally in my life or what's going to be completely altered but I know it will."

Another participant had a hard time explaining in words what climate change would look like, "I don't know any of the terms but I have an idea I think." Student 5 has a picture in her head with key themes that people will be killed because of climate change and we should stop polluting the planet, but she does not have the words to explain what that could look like in her life. Half of the participants acknowledged that financial stability is something that could protect them or others from material harm caused by climate change.

> "I can't imagine it having a direct impact on me, like a direct impact, I'm trying to imagine how that would manifest but I feel like because I'm like upper-middle class, any impact that I would have I could negate with you know financial security and comfort and all that" (Student 1)

> "I think living here is definitely a luxury because I don't have to deal with what people who are maybe getting hurt more from climate change and feeling more of those injustices" (Student 6)
> "Say things continue economically as it is, super-super-rich people are gonna build big bonkers and towers [...] nothing is an equalizer if everything about your world is inherently unequal" (Student 4)

Two of the students used the familiar theme of an apocalypse (familiar due to dystopian movies and books we have all grown up watching and reading) to compare the climate crisis to.

> "[...] I feel like places will be shut down [...] I'm imagining just a lot of death and fire burning, that's what comes to mind. Just like apocalyptic vibes you know? Like SpaceX finally gets off to mars [...] You just imagine people running and screaming and fire everywhere" (Student 1).
> "What everything's pointing to is a sort of a mad max apocalyptic scenario where it's like scavenging and natural disasters often" (Student 4)

Some drew on examples of what climate change could do, "Peoples homes being ruined and people being forced out of places where they have lived for so long" (Student 6), "Places on Earth literally going underwater" (Student 2). Other responses included themes of death, "Oil is killing people" (Student 3), "I'm just imagining a lot of death and fire burning" (Student 1). A few respondents touched on the concept that everyday life could be different. Without getting too detailed Student 5 also noted that we may have to "do things completely differently." Student 3 brought up the questions, "Will we have to wear face masks all the time because of smog? Will we have restrictions on meeting because of another pandemic?"

Student 3 brought up a very important point that "we'll have a lot of climate refugees." Student 3 brought up this point to note that this could ignite a war, "I feel like we are going to have World War III because of climate change." The idea of war was mentioned by Student 5 as well when she was asked what worries she has about the future. She said, "I guess there being like a world war, that would be quite concerning." The only other time the idea of war was brought up was in regards to class war.

Is sustainability a solution?

In half of the interviews, the idea of sustainability came up. The most common sentiment being that, although it can be part of the solution it is not the whole solution to climate change and that there are a lot of problems that exist within the modern-day sustainability movement. Student 6 mentions the irony of eco-consumerism in the face of the climate crisis, "It's easy to

come up with solutions like eco-consumerism and think that's a good enough solution but like just because my toothpaste comes in a glass bottle and it's little chewy tablets, I've not saved anyone from being forced out of their homes because of hurricanes [...] like no, my chewable toothpaste is not the solution."

When I asked Student 3 what she believes the future of sustainability looks like she mentioned the limited nature of the movement, "Right now it's only a personal level like companies aren't genuinely being that sustainable. I think we have a lot of organic like recycled clothing lines but then the rest of the, you know 99% of the other companies' clothes are still like new material [...] I just see it more of a personal fault like 'why aren't you using a tote bag' and I would hope that it could be on a large scale." The first fallacy of the sustainability movement is that it focuses on the individual rather than the industries causing harm. This focus on consumer habits and changing your personal lifestyle takes away the responsibility of corporations to make big changes because all they have to do is deceive their consumers through marketing. Student 3 goes on to mention how "capitalism is driving the individual sustainability movement" through greenwashing, "Are you willing to not consume in order to be sustainable or are you going to be like a 'sustainable capitalistic consumer' and have like 20 things that people told you were good for the Earth that you bought from like a huge organization." Student 2 also mentions that the solutions need to be bigger than individual sustainability efforts, "The metal straw thing isn't gonna do anything for us, like it's really good and all but [...] the leaders have to make literal changes to the oil companies [...] Everybody should do their part but it's like we need to make bigger changes than just everybody recycling every day, it needs to be way bigger than that." Student 2 goes on to highlight that sustainability efforts do not work for everyone in this society, "People who do not have money to feed their kids do not have time to worry about recycling and I totally understand that, they're just trying to keep their kids alive." Student 3 notes that her sustainable lifestyle is privileged, "[...] we grow our own vegetables because we have this space and my parents have the time on the weekends and I'm an only child [...]." The main idea here is that those who can participate in a culture of sustainability have privileges that allow the lifestyle to be easier, such as free time or financial stability.

Are electoral politics the solution?

Many students felt like solutions need to be made on a large scale, with leaders making regulations. However, the bulk of conversations included a sentiment of disappointment in

electoral politics and how it has failed to make any real progress against climate change. When asked if there is a way to solve the climate crisis Student 3 responded saying she felt pessimistic because "politically it will take so much more time. We'd have to get a president like Bernie or Jay Inslee, they were the only candidates that were going to be extremely radical about making climate change measures fit into every sector of our life, I just don't see someone like that getting elected anytime soon and even if they were to get elected we'd have to have super blue everything and we just don't so getting his policies passed would have required compromise and then it wouldn't have been as effective." Student 3 is bringing up a few different ideas with this quote, that a) electoral politics takes a long time to get things done b) it is unlikely that an anti-establishment candidate will ever get elected and c) bi-partisan support for action against climate change is not expected. In addition, Student 3 brings up notions of corruption in the U.S. government, "We've had presidents, vice presidents, huge people in the U.S. Government that are just supporting oil and that's why they will never vote for restrictions on oil because that's how they make their money. They are not rich because they are President they are rich because they are being funded by and supporting oil and that's just insane to me, how intrinsically tied our government is to capitalism. Like all the worst companies are just buddies with the US government." Aside from these structural critiques of our political system and government, at the very least, electoral politics is not an agent of hope or inspiration for these gen z students,

> "The 2020 election candidates [Biden vs. Trump] do not give me a lot of hope" (Student 6).
> "What are we going to do about it cause it's not like Biden is going to help create the future we want, if he's even elected, Trump certainly isn't, so yeah it's just like frustrating and it's like you want to be able to do something about it but at the same time you feel so powerless and helpless" (Student 4).

What is causing climate change? Capitalism and Individualism

When I asked these Gen S students to explain why we are seeing climate change many named the basics such as, "Clearly because of human pollution and stuff like human effect on planet earth, like landfills, dumping, mining, fracking, cars, obviously the effects of quarantine clearly shows the effect humans have" (Student 1). Half of the students included capitalism in their answers, here are two of their answers:

> "Umm, I think we industrialized too quickly we asked too much of our natural resources,

um capitalism for sure being that main driver [...] now that's our norm and it's impossible to go back now that we expect to have clothes whenever we want and we expect huge factories making us things and one-day amazon shipping and stuff like that" (Student 3) "I think that it's very difficult to have grown up in the US and say capitalism is the problem but definitely capitalism as the root of that being the issue" (Student 6).

Student 4 brought up a very significant point that capitalism is more than just an economic system, it promotes a certain mindset and can influence how we deal with issues like climate change. "Capitalism breeds not only like all the actual structural problems and material harm to people -and actually necessitates because like if you're gonna be at the top someone has to be at the bottom so all of that of course, and that's not to be underestimated or downplayed- but also an entire attitude of okay well I need to look after myself because there is no safety net. So it's me completely looking after myself and I don't care about anyone else, which you condemn obviously, but it does come from a real place of no one is going to look after you, so you do have to watch your own back basically and I just feel like that entire mindset is toxic." The notion that capitalism promotes a "toxic" mindset was brought up by Student 6 as well, "I think it's really easy to lose yourself in, basically, capitalism and being able to get everything you want and that's a really dangerous mentality." This sort of individualistic mindset leads to detachment from society and speaks to the fact that many people feel like they do not have to or cannot do anything to stop climate change.

"I think people exclude themselves from the general population and it's like my actions aren't gonna make that much of a difference." (Student 2)
"I see elements of climate change as a mindset as well, like people being detached from everything that goes into society and everything that goes into the way we live and how that detachment causes misfortune to other people that they don't know and probably never will." (Student 6)

While half of the students consider capitalism the problem, Student 1 is the only student who believes he could make millions in the sustainable energy industry while benefitting people and the Earth, "I want to be at the top but I also want to make every cent I make 100% honestly [...] That's why sustainable energy intrigues me because I feel like its an industry with potentially so many money gains to be made but every cent you make can help the earth survive a little bit longer. I'm hoping to align the interests in everyone with my own interests." Student 1 believes that capitalism can be an agent of change with the right people in charge, "I think in my

position it's best I work within the system and, uh, make money with the people who already run everything because I have an appreciation for the creatives and the people who can make real change." Although this was not a common theme among the students it was a relevant narrative throughout his interview.

The Importance of Imagination

As mentioned before, a common difficulty among participants during the interview was envisioning what the future might look like. I asked questions like, what do you think your life will be like in 10 years, and then I asked on a scale of 50 years; I asked what their personal lives might look like and what they think the world might be like. These are some of the responses given when asked different questions about their futures and the future of the world:

> "I feel like the future is just widely unpredictable [...] I can't even begin to imagine what it's going to look like 'cause look at where we are now, we are literally quarantined in our houses, Donald Trump is the president [...]" (Student 4).
> "Oof that's a loaded question. It's pretty hard to gauge what it would look like because this time last year was a completely different world, you know what I mean?" Student 1
> "That's a loaded question [laughs] umm I don't, I guess I don't have a super clear exact path of what I want to do" (Student 6).
> "I honestly have no idea and it's really freaky" (Student 2).
> "I really don't know, I teeter between the political climate right now either shifting toward better like in our next election for America specifically and then I also think that this could shift it to the completely opposite we could live in a dictatorship" (Student 3).
> "I feel like it will probably be better than it is now. I think so, I don't know" (Student 5).

When we started talking about the future in terms of climate change, the idea of visualizing our future and legitimizing a positive image was key. When I asked Student 1 if he believes climate change will have an impact on his plans for the future, he said "Um yeah I guess there's no direct impact right now. My day to day is definitely not dictated by climate change, my week to week is not dictated by climate change, it's more a visionary problem." He later goes onto say that in order to solve climate change "we need people with vision" and that "fighting the battle in the subtext of media and film and TV is also a great way to change perceptions." The idea that we need to change perspectives was brought up by other students as well. In conversation about capitalism and the concept of money Student 4 noted, "The crazy thing is everything is imaginary and it's like we just need to figure out better ways of imagining. We just

need to be able to be like what would a world look like if it was like this, and then work out the details and then convince enough people, and then that's what the world will be." Student 4 and Student 1's statements collectively explain that if we can imagine the details of a world worth fighting for and spread that message to enough people, then that's what our world could be. Student 3's thoughts reflect this idea, "How do we get people to be like yes I do want to live communally with my neighbors [laughs] [...] I think we need a literal vision to be fighting for." How do you cultivate this type of imagination? It seemed like conversation and reflection within the interview alone was fostering a degree of speculation and imagination. Students 1, 2, and 3 all mention how just the interview and conversation about this topic had started to develop their thoughts about it.

> "There's a lot of things you don't know that you feel until someone asks me" (Student 1).
> "Honestly this whole conversation I'm rethinking how I'm acting" (Student 2).
> "I am so into this, I am thinking so deep right now" (Student 3).

What gives these Gen Z students hope?

Student 4 reflects on her avoidant feelings about climate change by referencing the Blind Boy Podcast's episode on climate anxiety, she says "When I was little I would get so anxious about it [climate change] like wouldn't be able to sleep that type of thing but he was talking about it like that's the type of fear that is paralyzing isn't helping anybody." She goes on to clarify that she believes climate change is something to worry about, but losing sleep won't help anyone, "I don't think it's like 'don't worry it's fine like chill' I think it's more like 'do what you can and don't let the fear be in your way of doing anything, don't freeze up.'" Student 3 brought up a concern about strictly positive or inspirational framing of climate change, "I think I lean towards positive but I think that's dangerous because I think a lot super-duper positive climate activists are like girls on Instagram who don't actually know anything and are just doing it to get followers. And it's just like reusable straws like that makes everyone feel good and that's positive but it doesn't do sh**t." She, like Student 4, believes there is a balance to be struck between fear and positivity regarding climate change, "Positive for people who are already educated and motivated to work and negative for people who don't see why its a big deal yet. I think fear will honestly be a bigger motivation for those types of people but it's tough because you don't want to be too positive because it's not really a cheery subject but it's important to keep hope otherwise no one is going to do anything."

Student 6 said that in normal life as a student, she is easily overwhelmed but when it comes to climate change she is more removed from that feeling because she feels like "there isn't time for it." Student 6 says, "[...] over the years I've found that the most useful emotions are not ones of anger and frustration even though I still feel those and express those, I think I try to dominate my thoughts about it with hope [...]" She mentioned that when we talked about The Sunrise Movement, a climate justice movement we are both participants in, "I just get filled with like pride, excitement, hope [...]." Student 6 says her energy is better spent with people who are really passionate about change, rather than "fighting people who deny it [climate change] and people who just don't give us the time of day." Student 6 and Student 3 both feel the most hope and inspiration when they are working with climate activists,

> "I do feel inspirational when I'm working with people for sure because I feel like something is being done" (Student 3).
> "Being part of young people getting excited about change has also made me more hopeful [...] The feeling of being overwhelmed is not really an emotion I should have because there are things I can do" (Student 6).

Each student had different visions of what action might look like, here are some quotes from them about the topic of how to make change:

> "We still have the people power" (Student 6).
> "We need to destroy a lot of things [...] I guess we should just start a class war now." (Student 4).
> "Political activism and fighting the battle of the subtext, not just fill that space with logic [...] I think we should put most of our money into education" (Student 1).
> "People who run these companies and who are making the most impact they would need to have some huge spiritual awakening decide to run their companies differently [...] We need either, the government makes a huge shift to prioritize climate change or we have some like revolution" (Student 3).

With a variety of different answers, the idea that we as people must collectively force action was the most common theme and is pretty telling of the Gen Z population as a whole, in the United States.

ANALYSIS

Many of the themes I found in my study are similar to the themes divulged in the studies I presented in my literature review. As found in the Yale study, only a few of the students were currently partaking in any climate activism despite thinking activism is a good method for change (Leiserowitz i.e. 2020, 5). The idea that wealth is something that can protect you in the

climate crisis is within the frame of environmental justice. As Brulle said, environmental issues disproportionately impact low-income communities of color (Brulle 2009, 217). There is no surprise that many of the Gen Z students I interviewed could not imagine exactly how the climate crisis would impact them, because 5/7 Gen Z students are white and all 7 are from middle to middle upper-class families. Like presented in the study about Gen Z's perspective on Green Behavior, many of the students I interviewed did not think the government is going enough to stop climate change (Shwetha 2018, 33). In addition, the theme of education as a way to bring change was something brought up by a few students. My Zine presents the theme of hope as a useful motivational tactic and this is affirmed with Maria Ojala's paper about constructive hope (Ojala, 2011, 630). Anthony Leiserowitz's study about pro-egalitarian values align more with pro-climate policy people has important implications for my analysis as well. As I present in my zine -with the statements from the participants- capitalism produces an individualistic mindset and this causes detachment from society. Leiserowitz's conclusion that "antiegalitarian, pro-individualistic and pro-heirarchist values" correlate with being against climate policy enforced the idea in my zine that capitalism's individualistic and heirachist structure is bad for climate action (Leiserowitz, 2006, 63).

The findings from this study present the fragmented nature of thoughts regarding climate change. The issue elicited a significant amount of uncertainty among my respondents. My Zine is meant to convey the messy reality of climate change and how these 6 Generation Z students think about the topic. I used clippings from magazines, google images, and my own handwriting to put together the Zine. All the visuals are meant to provide an imaginative setting for the words of my respondents and also make the viewer feel the emotions conveyed in their quotes. I purposefully did not include any of my own thoughts about the topic, I wanted to portray the themes that my respondents talked most about. I used my own handwriting to carry the message that these are simply the unedited thoughts of 6, 20 something-year-olds. I am going to break down the pages of the zine and the symbolism that I cultivated.

What feelings do you associate with climate change?

The visual is meant to convey the anxiety and uncertainty that is at the foundation of an approaching climate crisis. I placed a man laying on his bed being awoken by some sort of dark angel telling him that he should be cautious, there is a really big problem. The dark angel represents climate anxiety and fear. The man sleeping is not meant to see the words climate

change because the issue, as framed by my respondents, has uncertain impacts. They can't put together exactly what will happen but they know it is something bad. Among the things they can name are fires and sea-level rise which is why I included those. The word "helpless" is references by the fact that this dark angel is hovering over him in bed, he is subject to his anxiety. The ticking time bomb is the only reference to a real concept of climate change, 2 degrees of warming. The 2 degrees of warming is placed on the bomb to convey the idea that they know it would be catastrophic for the Earth to warm but that they don't know exactly when the bomb will go off.

How do you describe the climate crisis?

These two pages are meant to convey the disparity between who will be impacted by climate change. This left side is meant to convey fear, anxiety, death, disaster, scavaging, and survival. While there are signs of crisis, struggle, and 2.2 billion deaths, there is a advertising reusable straws. This is meant to show the irony of eco-consumer solutions within sustainability that many of the respondents called out. The irony is even starker when you look to the page on the right. While there is massive conflict and trauma on the left side, the right side represents how the rich will be protected by their money. I placed Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates in a castle-like setting above an underwater city to reference Student 4's quote that the rich will build towers. Student 1's predications of Space X and technological advancements are referenced by Elon Musk going up in his rocket to Marks, escaping the U.S. Climate Catastrophe. His quotes are also referenced by Jeff Bezo's thumbs up to his robot Amazon workers. Lastly, the "rich side" is accepting no climate refugees, a likely scenario in our future that was mentioned by Student 3. The tabs that include the quotes are meant to reference that places will be underwater.

Is sustainability the solution?

There are less striking visuals on this page, I wanted to remind the viewer that these are the thoughts of students by writing the quotes on lined paper. I used purple because it is a comely color and meant to deceive the viewer on what the page is about, sort of like greenwashing. As mentioned by the respondents, eco-consumerism and sustainability can look and feel nice but it is not the solution to this crisis. In smaller handwriting, you can read the critiques from the students. This page is meant to continue to ironic symbolism of the Reusable Straw Sign a page before.

Is electoral politics the solution?

This page is meant to draw on the failures of electoral politics and convey the disappointment that these students feel in the system. I placed the 100 dollar bill to match up with the body of one of our Presidents to show that this is a bipartisan problem and reference the respondent's thoughts about how our government is tied to money and corruption. The quotes are sort of hard to see over the white and red stripes, alluding to the fact that these truths about the electoral system are hidden and hard to see.

What is the root cause of climate change?

Although the title might make you think this page will be about fossil fuels and greenhouse gases, it is actually about what encourages us to use fossil fuels and emit greenhouse gas: capitalism. The page on the left is meant to reference the notion that is it hard to identify capitalism as the problem while growing up in America. That is why I have the image of two children watching T.V. with the subconscious lesson to "Enjoy Capitalism." Surrounding them are words we have all seen growing up and continue to see every day, our existence has been framed as the consumer since we were children. The stick figure in the middle is a reference to the American phrase "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" which promotes the idea that if you work hard enough you will benefit and that you are responsible for yourself and should not seek help; when life gets hard, just pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get back to work. Although this phrase was not directly mentioned by the respondents, its message was prevalent. The page on the right includes only quotes regarding this topic, the quotes show how capitalism breeds "toxic" mindsets. I wrote the quotes in red, white (grey), and blue to solidify that these are American ideals.

The importance of having a brave imagination

I used blue for this page to suggest the topic of dreams and imagination. On this page, there is a person with their eyes closed, inside their thought bubble is a sign with different directions; this is symbolic of the many directions we could imagine our future going in. Over the thought bubble is a blue net and this is just to signify that the future is blurry and as you imagine a different life it might not look completely clear. The idea of options is drawn from the fact that respondents framed their futures in two paths, a negative and positive one. Drawing from the quotes on the page, the visual is meant to make the viewer see that we can actually choose to imagine a positive future and encourage them to do so. This page is meant to say that we can step out of the status quo that has been displayed on the pages before.

I used orange and yellow on the page on the right to grab the attention of the viewer. Since many of the pages throughout the booklet have been chaotic, this page was meant to be simpler and bring the viewer a sense of composure. Even so, the bright colors maintain some amount of turbulence. I chose two clippings of women talking to each other with the two quotes surrounding them to suggest that talking to your peers is one step in imagining a different future. The two other quotes are meant to suggest that Zine is heading into a more positive direction.

What gives you hope?

Just before we get to embrace the positive image of the future these two pages are meant to draw on the chaos that might ensue in the transition to this newly imagined future. The quotes on the right are things that respondents said could make change and things that bring them hope and inspiration. The graphic collage draws on action, song, creativity, education, and unity. Through conversation, teach-ins, protests, and art we can not only imagine a better future but fight to make it our present reality. The last page of the zine is the only time I reference my own personal thoughts. It is a demonstration of the day we become carbon neutral. There is a ribbon-cutting ceremony to embrace the accomplishment and we are one with our neighbors and the Earth. I wanted to end of this note, with no quotes, to encourage the viewer to imagine what the future could look like in their own mind.

CONCLUSION

The 6 Gen Z students I interviewed are uncertain about the future ahead of them. Their feelings about climate change are centered in anxiety, frustration, and vague images of the climate crisis. When they described what the climate crisis might look like, they drew on themes they understood like the idea of an apocalypse. They also mentioned key aspects of climate change such as, sea-level rise and natural disasters like forest fires or hurricanes. They could conceive how destructive the crisis could be without knowing how it would impact their daily lives. The structure of our economy provides a dichotomy between those who are rich and those who are poor, this structure is maintained in their image of the climate crisis; those who are rich will be protected. These Gen Z students see through greenwashing and eco-consumerism; even though many of them do live "sustainable lifestyles" they do not support the prioritization of eco-consumer solutions over climate policy because access to sustainable alternatives are not where they should be. Further, consumers can be deceived into buying more than they need or

products that are not really that different from plastics. These Gen Z students feel a sense of disappointment and anxiety surrounding the presidential election and politics in general. Politics does not provide them with hope for the future because of its ties to capitalism and its lack of urgency when it comes to climate action. Many of the Gen Z students named capitalism as part of the problem for manifesting a mindset of individualism and consumerism. These students recognize that identifying capitalism as the problem can be difficult. The mindset that you should only look out for yourself because there is no social safety net can cause a feeling of detachment like you are not part of a collective society. These student's depictions of the climate crisis and themes that surround the topic crave a clear image of positive change and a future in which people care about one another and the Earth. Through my zine, I convey all the emotions and discrepancies portrayed by these Gen Z students. These results communicate a need for personal connection and conversation among peers about climate change. If values are heavily influencing climate policy, as described by Leiserowitz (2006), then starting conversations about these topics and asking hypothetical questions like "what would a world look like without money?" can facilitate reflection and move your mind out of the status quo way of thinking.

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