



Hennessy, L. J. (2021). *'You are stealing our future': towards powerful methodologies to explore youth climate activism*. Paper presented at 7th International Irish Narrative Inquiry Conference, Ireland.

Early version, also known as pre-print

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*'You are Stealing our
Future'*: Towards Powerful
Methodologies to Explore
Youth Climate Activism

Brief Intro

- ▶ Lauren Hennessy, Maths teacher.
- ▶ RA at SoE, working on the Climate Change Education Research Network and the Reimagining the Diary project.
- ▶ MSc dissertation: “ ‘You are stealing our future’: a narrative inquiry into the experiences of Youth Climate Strikers in Bristol, 2020 ”
- ▶ Developing PhD proposal in Climate Change Education

The Question I will address today:

What makes narrative inquiry an appropriate research method for investigating youth climate activism?

This presentation will cover:

- ▶ 1. Framing of youth political participation and implications for research methods
- ▶ 2. Possibilities for new approaches - learnings from my own research

BRISTOL YOUTH STRIKE 4 CLIMATE



Bristol YS4C, taken from <https://www.bristolys4c.org/>

1. Framing of youth political participation and implications for research methods

Youth Political Participation

- ▶ ‘pattern of apathy’ Youniss et al. (2002)
- ▶ the exclusion of youth from decision-making processes can lead to disengagement (O'Brien, et al., 2019)
- ▶ a Western view of children as lacking in political agency has meant that “the power of children has therefore been overlooked” (Holmberg and Alvinus, 2020, p.81)
- ▶ “society tends to perceive young people as subjects of political engagement more than agents of change” (Bowman, 2019, p.299)

Youth Agency in the Literature

At times youth are portrayed
as marginalized (Thew et al.,
2020),

at other times as citizens with
agency (O'Brien, et al., 2019).

vulnerable victims / crucial agents of change
(Holmberg and Alvinus, 2020).

Binaries in Youth Political Participation

Political vs. Non-political

Engaged vs. Disengaged

Instrumental vs. Expressive aims

(Bowman, 2019)

The Problem with this Framing

“the marginalization of the complexity ... coincides with the marginalization of young people as political agents” (Bowman, 2020)

Extant Research on Youth Climate Strikes

- ▶ **Protest for a future:** Composition, mobilization and motives of the participants in Fridays For Future climate protests on 15 March, 2019 in 13 European cities. Edited by Mattias Wahlström, Piotr Kocyba, Michiel De Vydt and Joost de Moor
- ▶ **Protest for a future II:** Composition, mobilization and motives of the participants in Fridays For Future climate protests on 20-27 September, 2019, in 19 cities around the world. Edited by Joost de Moor, Katrin Uba, Mattias Wahlstrom, Magnus Wennerhag, and Michiel De Vydt

Top-down, adult-centric methods

Implications for Research

Binary models inadequate → need for youth-centred, participatory methods

(Bowman, 2019)

Themes

Power

Participation

2. Possibilities for new approaches - learnings from my own research

'You are stealing our future': a narrative inquiry into the experiences of Youth Climate Strikers in Bristol, 2020

Conducted as my MSc dissertation research, during the first Covid-19 lockdown.

My own narrative inquiry study (2020)

1. Developed framework for the Youth Strike 4 Climate (YS4C) meta-narrative
2. Collected narrative data from 5 individuals involved in the Bristol YS4C group
3. Contrasted lived experiences with the meta-narrative

My own narrative inquiry study (2020)

1. Developed framework for the Youth Strike 4 Climate meta-narrative
2. Collected narrative data from 5 individuals involved in the Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate group
3. Contrasted lived experiences with the meta-narrative

My own narrative inquiry study (2020)

1. Developed framework for the Youth Strike 4 Climate meta-narrative
 - to investigate the vital components of the YS4C story
 - to imagine the lifespan of the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Greta's Speech in the House of Commons April 2019

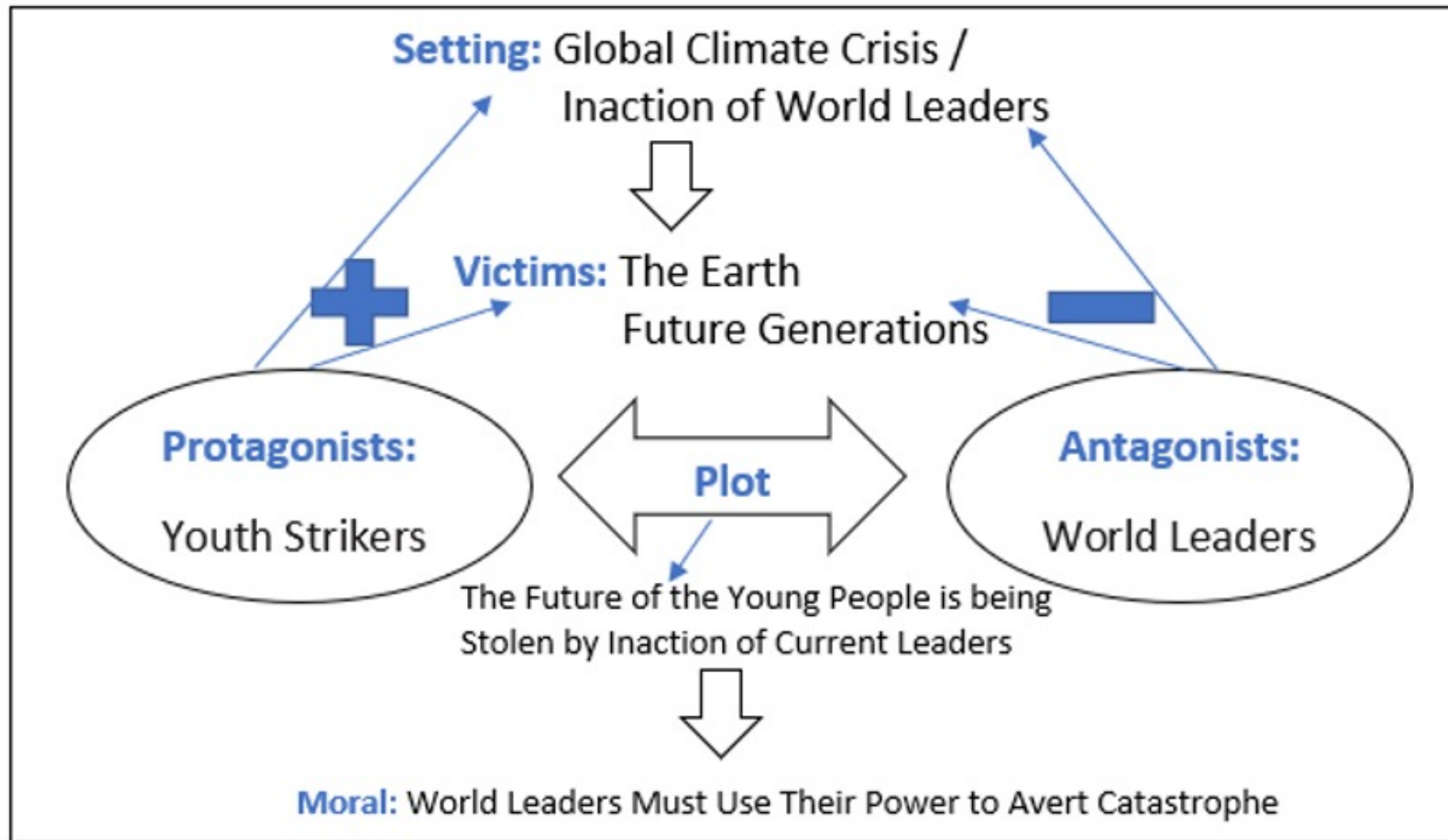
Now we probably don't even have a future any more.

Because that future was sold so that a small number of people could make unimaginable amounts of money. It was stolen from us every time you said that the sky was the limit, and that you only live once.

Taken from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48017083>



Conceptualising the meta-narrative



Adapted from Han and Ahn (2020)

My own narrative inquiry study (2020)

1. Developed framework for the Youth Strike 4 Climate meta-narrative
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Methods and Limitations

Sampling - snowball sampling - self-defining as youth strikers

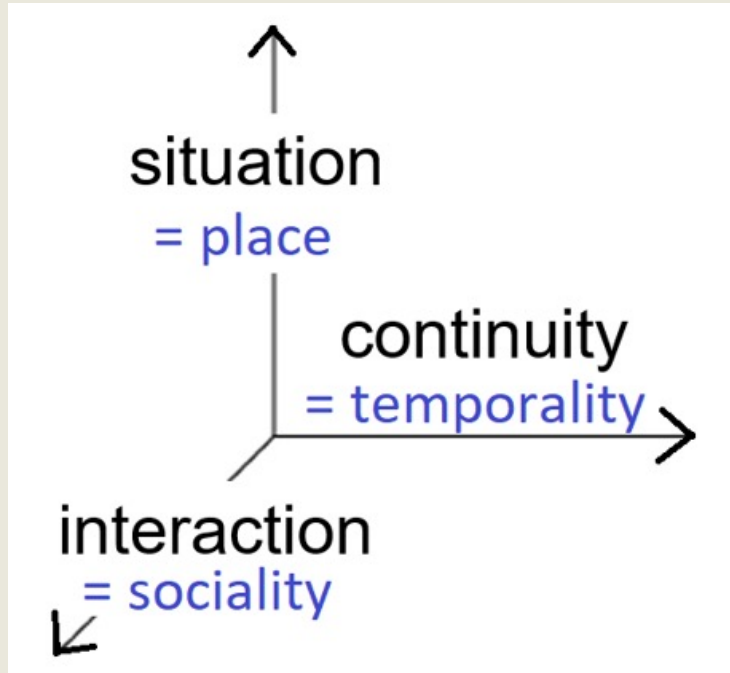
Skype interviews - 'telling' rather than 'living'

Semi-structured interviews, using prompts such as 'describe the scene', 'tell me about your journey'.

My own narrative inquiry study (2020)

1. Developed framework for the Youth Strike 4 Climate meta-narrative
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Attending to the Three Commonplaces



The metaphoric three-dimensional narrative inquiry space
(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006)

Findings



Findings

Context

- ▶ Notions of place, temporality and sociality

Findings

Comparing to the 'stolen future' narrative

- ▶ Individuals' stories both echo and diverge from the meta-narrative

Findings

Narrative Components	Mentions in the Data
Scene setting	Inaction – C, D
Villains	Humanity – C
Victims	Youth (through worry about future) – C & D (initially), A & E (Q.4) Natural world – C
Plotline	Impacts – A, B
Heroes	Greta Thunberg – A, B Strikers as protagonists – D Youth as leaders – A, D

Findings

Fear

- ▶ The fear that drives the 'stolen future' narrative was evident in many of the narratives to varying degrees.
- ▶ **“the fact that we’re ruining that and we’re killing all the animals. It just, it really upsets me.” (Ciaran)**
- ▶ **“I've gone through waves throughout the year of being absolutely terrified and like anxious about the future” (Dayo)**

Findings

Fear

- ▶ **“they really need to get involved because it needs to be happening for them to like be able to have a good future and stuff... I think is quite a common thing that people like talk about” (Eden)**

Findings

Emotional Burden

- ▶ Bobby comments that the BYS4C group is very supportive and a wellbeing lead was recently appointed for “mental health purposes for people”.

Findings

Divergence from 'stolen future' – collective joy

- ▶ Joy and hope - there is a sense of collective identity based on both shared concern for the future and shared positive experiences

Findings

Divergence from 'stolen future' – blame

- ▶ The participants in this study notably avoided assigning blame.
- ▶ The only hint at blame came from Ciaran in the quote shared earlier:

“the fact that we’re ruining that and we’re killing all the animals. It just, it really upsets me.” (Ciaran)

Findings

Divergence from 'stolen future' – inaction

- ▶ The narratives showed more nuance than the hyperbolic messaging of *'nothing is being done'*.

Findings

Contradictions - role of youth

- ▶ Participants portrayed themselves as leaders and agents of change whilst also voicing a sense of powerlessness and need for support.

Findings

Contradictions - role of youth

- ▶ **“it felt like I was part of something that could actually make a difference.” (Amari)**
- ▶ **“In order for our voices to be heard there needs to be someone that's like listening and responding to what we're actually asking because there's only so much we can do” (Dayo)**

Conclusions

- ▶ The lived experiences of individuals provided far richer contextual understandings than the meta-narrative could offer.
- ▶ As researchers, I believe we have a duty to use our positions to amplify youth voice through participatory approaches.
- ▶ This will allow us to collaboratively undertake the task of ‘world-building’ (Bowman, 2019).

Why is Narrative Inquiry appropriate?

- ▶ Through NI and by listening to our participants, we could create the conditions to “change the stories they live by” (Clandinin, 2006, p.52) → we need to allow the young people to participate in the meaning-making process.
- ▶ As Monbiot (2017) advocates, we need to tell a new story to get out of this mess - NI is a first step in that direction.

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Questions



Full dissertation available at:

<https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/persons/lauren-j-hennessy>