

Childfreedom as Climate Action

Experiences of Pronatalist Pressures and
Gendered Expectations Among Members of the BirthStrike Movement

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ABSTRACT

Childfreedom is becoming an increasingly important topic of research worldwide, particularly since it is understood as a deviation from dominant pronatalist culture. Still, childfree choices related to climate change remains under-researched. When the BirthStrike movement was launched in 2018 by climate activist Blythe Pepino, it connected the issues of climate change to reproductive matters, as arguments for childfreedom as alleviating climate change were made. The thesis presents a phenomenological study of seven members of the BirthStrike movement's childfree choice. Specifically, the research objectives include exploring members of BirthStrike's understanding of childfreedom as climate action, and the motivations for and experiences leading to their childfree choice. Furthermore, the study explores how life purpose and meaning is constructed in pronatalist surroundings framing parenthood as the meaning of life. Lastly, the study explores how participants understand and do gender through renegotiating links between parenthood and gender expression. Using a qualitative methodology, participants were interviewed in-depth. Data generated was coded and interpreted inductively, with using theories of doing and undoing gender as well as the concepts of reproductive governance, intimate citizenship, and everyday resistance.

Findings include a reframing of parenthood as constraining and having children as, considering the climate crisis, irresponsible. Furthermore, participants value agency, autonomy, and self-actualisation, preferring to question rather than conform to pronatalist norms. BirthStrike provided people anxious about climate change comfort by confirming that like-minded individuals validated their reluctance to procreate.

The study concludes that participants present an alternative moral regime to that of pronatalism, wherein childfreedom is viewed as responsible and morally justified compared to parenthood if presented in relation to the climate crisis. Climate change fosters climate anxieties, but the participants' childfree choice provides a way of mitigating negative emotions as it gives them time and ability to focus on what is meaningful and purposeful to them.

Key words: *childfreedom, climate change, climate action, reproductive choices, family planning, BirthStrike, pro-natalist norms, SRHR*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CONTENTS	iv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Context and Definitions	2
1.3 Purpose of the Project and Contribution to Development and Gender Studies	3
1.4 Research Objectives and Thesis Outline	4
2 Literature Review	5
2.1 The Childfree Position, Pronatalism and Ideas on the Meaning of Life	5
2.2 Emotional Impacts of Climate Change and Pro-Environmental Lifestyle Changes	7
2.3 Linking Childfreedom and Climate Change	8
2.4 Contribution of Thesis	9
3 Theoretical Framework	10
3.1 Doing and Undoing Gender in Heteronormative Structures	10
3.2 Governmentality	11
3.2.1 Reproductive Governance	11
3.2.2 Intimate Citizenship	12
3.2.3 Everyday Resistance	12
3.3 Application of Theoretical Concepts	13
4 Methodology	14
4.1 Research Design and Epistemological Basis for the Study	14
4.2 Recruitment and Presentation of Participants	14
4.3 Methods of Data Collection	16
4.3.1 Challenges During Data Collection and Participant Recruitment	17
4.4 Data Management and Analysis	18
4.5 Trustworthiness of the Study	19
4.5.1 Role of Researcher	19
4.6 Ethical Considerations and Institutional Clearances	21
5 Findings	22
5.1 Making and Facing the Choice	22
5.1.1 The Two Aspects of Childfreedom as Climate Action	22

5.1.2	Climate Anxieties and Their Impact on Choices to be Childfree	23
5.1.3	Further Considerations Impacting the Childfree Choice	25
5.1.4	Reactions to and Implications of Childfreedom in Pronatalist Surroundings	27
5.1.5	BirthStrike as a Useful Venue for Support, Action, and Inspiration	30
5.2	Defining a Meaningful and Purposeful Life	32
5.2.1	Fulfilment through Work, Activism or Self-Actualisation	33
5.2.2	The Outcast Revolutionary: On Accepting and Navigating Stigma	35
5.3	Gender in a Pronatalist Gender Regime: Expectations and Responsibility	36
5.3.1	Renegotiations of Norms and Gendered Expectations	37
5.3.2	Disconnecting Ideas of Womanhood as Motherhood (or Otherhood)	40
5.4	Summary of Findings	42
6	Discussion	43
6.1	Competing Intimate Citizenship Regimes	43
6.1.1	The Mechanisms of and Responses to Reproductive Governance	43
6.1.2	Gender Disconnected from Parenthood	48
6.2	Summary of Discussion	51
7	Concluding Remarks	52
7.1	Recommendations for Future Research	53
8	References	55
	APPENDICES	60
	Appendix 1: Interview Guide	60
	Appendix 2: Revised Interview Guide	62
	Appendix 3: Information Letter and Consent Form	65
	Appendix 4: NSD Letter of Approval and Assessment of Application for Extension	66

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Whether or not to have children is at once a deeply intimate decision and an increasingly prevalent public debate, as climate change exemplifies an imperative crisis which prompts individual responses – also in terms of reproductive matters. The urgency of the climate crisis has encouraged a number of people to consider the decision to have children in light of climate change. This thesis will illustrate ways in which climate change affects individual reproductive choices and gendered practices by exploring childfreedom as a form of individual climate action. Grounded in BirthStrike, an environmentally focused group presenting childfreedom as a viable individual response to the climate emergency, the thesis presents a qualitative analysis of the reasoning and understandings of seven members making the choice not to have children in a time of environmental instability. Our conversations revealed worries and grief concerning the effects of the climate crisis, but also showed optimism and comfort found in alternative lifestyles to one affected by pronatalist narrative.

The intersection of climate action and population matters is difficult to discuss due to contested debates of population control and restrictions on reproductive rights. Yet there is a call for engagement and explorations of dynamics of reproduction and climate change (Palmer, 2019), as it is well established that larger populations generally increase consumption, which in turn impacts climate change and emissions. Arguments presenting childfreedom or a reduction in the number of children one has as environmentally beneficent have been made in research (Wynes & Nicholas, 2017) and news articles (Carrington, 2017). Furthermore, it is argued that having children impacts the climate more negatively than a number of other actions causing emissions and that therefore having children will lead to more emission than not having them (Murtaugh & Schlax, 2009). Another argument for childfreedom includes the focus on fear of what kind of future children are born into, as climate change represents detrimental, planet-altering effects, including but not limited to extreme weather, mass extinction, and global warming.

The project focuses on the choice to adopt a childfree lifestyle as a way of mitigating climate change and alleviate personal impact on the climate crisis. Childfreedom is accepted as a form of climate action by the participants in this study and their childfree choice is affected by the climate crisis, its impact on the perceived future of our planet, and participants' sense of responsibility in connection to reproductive issues. Additionally, I may mention that an aim of

the study is to facilitate more dialogue on the topic of childfreedom, usually reserved for “intimate relationships” (Palmer, 2019, p. 2) or rarely discussed at all.

1.2 Context and Definitions

The BirthStrike movement¹ was established at the end of 2018 by Blythe Pepino (Bailey, 2019) and its Facebook group steadily gained members, reaching up to its current 934 members from various countries and contexts. The movement protested “the current inaction of governing forces” towards the “ecological disaster altering the way we imagine our future” promoting (anti-capitalist) policy and “system change” as well as raising awareness (Pepino, Johannesson, & Bonita, 2018). Members raised questions of morality concerning the effect of modern lifestyles on the climate crisis, whilst creating a venue for discussions on childfreedom, but the group stated its intention not being to “judge anyone intending to bear children” (Pepino et al., 2018). Members would frequently share articles or anecdotes related to BirthStrike and initiate and partake in discussion in the Facebook group, and topics would range from climate change to the stigma surrounding non-conforming lifestyles in a pronatalist environment. Oftentimes, such discussion could be interpreted as a form of renegotiation of social norms through the creation of gendered identities separated from notions of parenthood. Furthermore, Pepino stated in posts that the Facebook group was intended as a “space to grieve and share feelings”², alluding to the grief connected to giving up parenthood by joining the BirthStrike.

On August 31st 2020 the group was closed by administrators, and BirthStrike’s online presence, including their website and YouTube-content, was largely removed. In a statement shared with group members³, the administrators explained their reasoning for shutting the movement down entirely. The decision to shut BirthStrike down was taken after the movement was increasingly associated with anti-natalist and population control rhetoric despite the founders’ wishes and continual dismissal of views promoting reproductive injustice; in the #BirthStrike Facebook group they explicitly recognised “the colonial violence of such measures having been proposed in the past and present” (Pepino et al., 2018). Their Facebook group still exists as a private group wherein you can view posts, but you cannot create one or add new members.

For this study, I have operated with a distinction between the concepts of childfreedom and childlessness. Childlessness implies a passivity or lack of ability to have children rather than an active choice being made, in addition to a sense of missing out on the experience of

¹ BirthStrike is one of several movements focusing on the reproduction and climate emergency nexus. See for example the US-based Conceivable Future or the UK-based charity Population Matters.

² See Facebook post from February 4th 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/674131032989428/posts/955371678198694>

³ The statement was explicitly not made available to share outside of the Facebook group, which is why I have not quoted or referenced it, but merely described its contents.

having children (Doyle, Pooley, & Breen, 2013; Gietel-Basten, 2021). Childfreedom, on the other hand, is concerned with the specific choice to not procreate and the freedom within that choice (Palmer, 2019, p. 6). Furthermore, the concept of pronatalism features heavily in this study, warranting a definition. Bhambhani and Inbanathan (2020) understand pronatalism as an ideology promoting “procreation for the well-being of the individual, family and society (p. 1), which frames having children and the role of parenthood as “deeply fulfilling, as essential for human happiness and a meaningful life, and as a marker of successful adulthood” (Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, & Braun, 2021, p. 29). Pronatalist norms are expressed through parenthood- or procreation-norms, but also heteronormativity and gender norms, based on two distinct, opposite, and relational genders wherein reproduction is the domain of opposite-sex relationships. As such, cultural norms are in pronatalist societies built upon the conventional, nuclear family, although norms regarding what for instance families look like are expanding. However, pronatalism still complicates the childfree lifestyle, by rendering it difficult to have one’s childfree choice accepted by society.

1.3 Purpose of the Project and Contribution to Development and Gender Studies

This project seeks to add to the important body of studies on climate change and gender. The thesis presents a phenomenological study of the choices to adapt a childfree lifestyle as a means of climate change mitigation, based on participants’ descriptions of their experiences with and understandings of the choice. Davis, Arnocky, and Stroink (2019) point to a gap in research on discussions facilitated (for example among members of BirthStrike) by the link between population growth and environmental concerns which this project addresses, as it explores various impacts of climate change on lifestyle choices. Studying the accounts of participants’ experiences provides a holistic overview of the motivations leading them to childfree lifestyles, as well as their understandings of societal norms, climate change and climate action. Additionally, Djoudi et al. (2016) calls for qualitative studies focusing on “emancipatory trajectories” (2016, p. 257) shaped by climate change, and the social and political dynamics behind them. The findings indicate that BirthStrike provides its members with a platform to renegotiate societal norms connected to gender performance and reproduction, which for some participants had an emancipatory effect. As climate change and gender focused research previously have described women’s vulnerability in relation to climate change (Djoudi et al., 2016, p. 249), this project will highlight the agency of members of the BirthStrike movement and the effect of climate change on the worldviews of childfree people, as well as the possible transformations of social norms in a pronatalist society in times of a climate crisis.

Climate change can be argued to affect all facets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), but I will argue for this thesis' particular relevance on some. The thesis, while not focusing primarily on the climate crisis itself, reflects on how individuals' actions are influenced by knowledge of it. In this regard, SDG 13 on *Climate Action* is addressed, by exploring the participants' relationship with it, fostering new understandings of gendered climate action. The participants also advocate for SDG 5 on *Gender Equality* when critiquing how responsibility associated with reproductive matters primarily befalls women. Findings also indicate how lacking the opportunity to make decisions like staying childfree would negatively impact participants' *Good Health and Well-Being*, the subject of SDG 3. In this sense, exploring the themes of this thesis can easily be connected to numerous SDGs.

1.4 Research Objectives and Thesis Outline

The main research objective of this project is as follows: *to explore members of the BirthStrike movement's understanding of childfreedom as climate action and the experiences and motivations leading to their childfree choice.*

Two sub-objectives are included:

- I. Explore how members of BirthStrike navigate and critique pronatalist pressures and norms, and understand and construct life purpose and meaning.
- II. Explore how members of BirthStrike renegotiate the links between parenthood and gender expression.

The thesis is organised in several chapters, starting with an introductory one. Chapter two consist of a focused literature review, followed by chapter three, an overview of theoretical concepts utilised. Chapter four outlines the methodological approaches used and ethical considerations taken in this project, before findings are presented in chapter five and discussed in chapter six. Chapter seven closes the thesis and consists of concluding statements, summarising the findings and discussions in relation to the research objectives presented.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will address the academic background for the study through an examination of empirical research relevant for my research objectives. Research articles were found using search engines Oria and Google Scholar and a range of key words⁴ including BirthStrike, pronatalism, childfreedom, meaning of life and climate change, anxiety, and action. Some articles found through these searches referenced research which in turn I reviewed in this chapter. Importantly, the review is not a comprehensive summary of all literature on the subjects touched upon, but rather a framework for understanding the findings presented in chapter five.

Research on climate change has exploded in recent times (Rodgers, 2021), and so narrowing the scope of the literature review is essential. As my thesis explores motivations behind childfreedom as climate action, this chapter will outline previous research I have grouped into distinct categories: the first includes research on *The Childfree Position in pronatalist societies* and *Ideas on the Meaning of Life*, the second *Emotional Impacts of Climate Change* and *Pro-Environmental Lifestyle Changes*, in which I link *Childfreedom and Climate Change*. Finally, the significance of the study and research gaps will be addressed.

Research from the past decade reveals an upsurge in childlessness, childfreedom and delayed parenthood (Cummins, 2021; Settle & Brumley, 2014; Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010), all topics related to declining rates of childbirth in most “developed” countries (Panu, 2020). This may explain why most studies presented in this chapter were conducted in Western contexts, such as Europe, Australia, or the US. Moreover, most articles reviewed are based on qualitative studies, while eight present quantitative studies. Finally, most studies focus on women as procreators, with a few focusing on both women and men. Only two articles reviewed, written by Smith, Knight, Fletcher, and Macdonald (2020) and Terry and Braun (2012), pay exclusive focus to men’s experiences.

2.1 The Childfree Position, Pronatalism and Ideas on the Meaning of Life

Multiple studies position parenthood normatively in the Euro-American context, pointing to society being structured around family life and pronatalist ideas which place having children as the central way to experience fulfilment through for instance well-being (Umberson et al., 2010) or a sense of meaning (Bahtiyar-Saygan & Sakalli-Uğurlu, 2019) or reward (Hansen, 2012, p. 2). Still, a large quantitative study by Stanca (2012) focused on 90 countries worldwide found that parenthood, particularly for women (pp. 746-747), negatively affects individuals’ well-being (pp. 743, 749) and happiness (p. 746), except in the case of widowers and the older

⁴ Search words also included interchangeable terms such as environmental change and action, eco-anxiety, childlessness, voluntary childlessness, nonparents, antinatalism, reproduction, and eco-friendly lifestyles.

population (see Dykstra & Wagner, 2007 for further exploration). This may be explained by the financial burden of having children (Dykstra & Wagner, 2007; Stanca, 2012, p. 747), or societal expectations, parental stress, marital tension and time strains associated with parenthood (Hansen, 2012; Koropecj-Cox, Çopur, Romano, & Cody-Rydzewski, 2018), particularly felt by mothers (Settle & Brumley, 2014; Umberson et al., 2010, pp. 8, 11). In this sense, childfreedom may be viewed as advantageous, such as in the study of childfree women in Sweden, where Peterson (2015) finds that they associate raising children with an inability to prioritise time as they please, rather valuing the independence childfreedom affords them. In his review of research on childlessness and well-being, Hansen (2020, p. 4) suggests that nonparents establish meaning in other arenas than parenthood, such work, (larger) social networks, volunteering and community engagement (see also Clarke et al., 2021). Still, several studies on reproductive choices point to disadvantages associated with childfreedom, for instance as childfree choices may be viewed as “quietly controversial” (Palmer, 2019, p. 1) or outright disapproved of, which increases emotional distress for nonparents (Huijts, Kraaykamp, & Subramanian, 2013). By extension of parenthood being the expected choice, nonparents are experiencing being positioned outside the realms of normalcy (Archetti, 2020), and childfree individuals are expected to regret childfreedom (Gietel-Basten, 2021; Patel, 2021, p. 168) and change their minds about it (Rodgers, 2021, p. 14). Further literature on pronatalism illustrate how nonparents are rendered invisible from external viewpoints (Upton, 2010). By implication, invisibility may contribute to experiences of shame, infantilization and invalidation for nonparents, which establishes a need for community and support by those not conforming to pronatalist expectations (Archetti, 2020). Moore (2021) explores participation in an online forum for childfreedom, highlighting individuals’ efforts to reframe the childfree subjectivity and sterilisation – the ultimate commitment to nonparenthood – as “positive and autonomous” (p. 4) expressions of authenticity, challenging pronatalist narratives of remorseful nonparents missing out on “the ultimate life achievement” (p. 8).

Though recent research points to a decline in stigma (Gietel-Basten, 2021, p. 74; Hansen, 2020, p. 2), studies reveal that nonparents face stigmatization on personal and societal levels in form of sanctions which affects their notions of life satisfaction (Tanaka & Johnson, 2016) as they deviate from societal expectations (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Coffey, 2005; Ingalls, 2016; Koropecj-Cox et al., 2018; Peterson, 2015) or are labelled “selfish and immature” (Cummins, 2021, p. 5; see also Downing, 2019; Dykstra & Wagner, 2007; Rich, Taket, Graham, & Shelley, 2011; Settle & Brumley, 2014). The study by Terry and Braun (2012) focusing on men’s pre-emptive vasectomies highlight gendered dimensions as they themselves frame their

childfree position as selfish (pp. 213-214), likely with more ease than women would, as womanhood is culturally tied to feminine characteristics of nurture and connectedness. Men rejecting parenthood may demonstrate independence and self-sufficiency, typically considered masculine traits (pp. 215-216). Research in this sense tie perspectives on childfreedom to societies' gendered norms and expectations, as childfreedom remains controversial due to the strength of pronatalist social norms linking the feminine identity and motherhood (Corbett, 2018; Doyle et al., 2013; Hansen, 2020; Palmer, 2019). Studies find that childless women are depicted negatively when compared to mothers, as their choice is deemed less valid and normal (Downing, 2019; Harrington, 2019; Patel, 2021), likely due to expectations that women experience parenthood as more fulfilling than men (Hansen, 2020), societal ideals of the "good mother" (Settle & Brumley, 2014), or assumptions about childfree women disliking children (Peterson, 2015). An Australian study presented the experiences of five women who reframed their childfreedom as a responsible choice (Rich et al., 2011, pp. 237-240) and preferred language which does not imply a deficiency associated with leading childfree lives. In her review of literature on childfreedom as counter-normative to pronatalist society, Patel (2021) explores the motherhood -womanhood link (p. 165), and advocates for supporting childfree individuals through being judgement-free and aware of "prevailing pronatalism" and hegemonic parenthood (p. 174).

Several studies also point out that making the childfree choice is an ongoing *process* (Blackstone & Stewart, 2016; Patel, 2021; Settle & Brumley, 2014) rather than a singular event. Furthermore, the study by Blackstone and Stewart (2016), focused on gendered aspects and social implications of childfree choices, reveals the careful consideration childfree individuals undertake when making their choice, as well as their considerations of others' needs and desires, which can be attributed to the socialisation of women as caregivers (see also Patel, 2021, p. 171). Another study found that the choice was made with more ease by white women than women of colour, who were more likely to passively consider themselves childfree (Settle & Brumley, 2014), much like the voluntary childless men interviewed by Smith et al. (2020), who show reluctance to "closing the door" on fatherhood (p. 377). Cultural expectations may impact reproductive decisions, as evident in the comparative study of Canadian and Indian couples' childfree choices by Bhambhani and Inbanathan (2020) where Canadians were exposed to discourses on childfreedom earlier than the Indian couples (p. 20).

2.2 Emotional Impacts of Climate Change and Pro-Environmental Lifestyle Changes

As noted by Caniglia, Brulle, and Szasz (2015) the environmental movement is diverse in its discourses and foci when framing "the problems, perpetrators and solutions to global climate

change” (p. 9). One such problem pertains to emotional distress brought on by the climate crisis, which Stanley, Hogg, Leviston, and Walker (2021) examine in relation to pro-environmental behaviour, finding that experiencing eco-emotions in general lowered well-being (p. 4), and that eco-depression and -anxiety specifically could lead to disengagement, whereas eco-frustration and -anger enabled higher efforts to find climate-friendly solutions. Doherty and Clayton (2011) found that eco-depression and -anxiety are found to be worsened if the surrounding people appear apathetic or disinterested toward eco-worries (Panu, 2020). A study based on parents’ experiences raising children during a climate crisis illustrates feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, inadequacy, and guilt connected to their children’s futures, demonstrating the impact of climate change on emotional well-being, parental worry and feelings of responsibility (Ídíl Gaziulusoy, 2020). On a similar note, a qualitative study of the motivation of sustainability leaders in Australia (Miller & Bentley, 2012) revealed a connection to moral responsibilities towards the environment as well as social networks and previous significant experiences influencing them.

Several articles reviewed focus on the link between *gender* and *pro-environmental choices*, an emerging field of study, with one study finding that women express more concern about the consequences of the climate crisis than men (Krkoška Lorencová, Loučková, & Vačkářů, 2019, p. 5), and two studies linking sustainable behaviour with perceptions of femininity (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016; Swim, Gillis, & Hamaty, 2020). One study focusing on gendered differences and stereotypes associated with environmentalism and electric vehicles, however, highlighted the “good feeling and experience” both men and women associate with sustainable choices and behaviours (Anfinsen, Lagesen, & Ryghaug, 2019). Gender and pro-environmental choices will be linked to childfreedom in the following section.

2.3 Linking Childfreedom and Climate Change

Per my knowledge, limited research exists on the link between childfree choices and climate action, however, one quantitative study of environmentally conscious Canadians found that childfree choices “may be viewed as pro-environmental behaviour” (Davis et al., 2019, p. 119). Furthermore, both Panu (2020) and Clayton and Karazsia (2020) found that climate anxieties affected people’s reproductive decision-making process, fuelling reluctance to have children.

BirthStrike has generated much media attention (BBC, 2019; Nordvåg & Lilleien, 2021; Wulfsohn, 2019), but I have not been able to find research articles written on BirthStrike. Still, the movement has inspired several master theses. Eckersley (2020) explores the public choice made in joining BirthStrike and media reactions to Blythe Pepino’s founding of BirthStrike, analysing both personal narratives and media clips and articles. The thesis shows the necessity

of BirthStrike, not as a movement, but rather as a support group for women choosing not to have children in validating their choice and womanhood. Media responses to BirthStrike illuminated ways of understanding women's reproductive choices in a political context where birth rates are dropping, which prompted nationalist responses attempting to discredit the childfree choice. A more recent thesis compared interviews with BirthStrike members to official statements on online platforms, arguing that BirthStrike's encouragement of individualistic climate responses (based on feelings of personal obligation and guilt) both placed the burden of the climate crisis on individuals' emissions rather than corporations' and ignored vital aspects of reproductive history and justice, including focus on restriction of rights (Roepke, 2021). The thesis points out that BirthStrike consists of members able to make the childfree choice, a privilege many have been denied, and criticises BirthStrike's lack of attention towards harmful and racist population control narratives associated with reproductive matters, highlighting the movement's lack of focus on reproductive and racial justice.

2.4 Contribution of Thesis

The need for social science research focusing on climate change is widely established (Alston, 2013, p. 175; Connell, 2015, p. 117), for example through qualitative, in-depth research on adaptive strategies to climate change, as requested by Djoudi et al. (2016, p. 257), particularly because climate change may influence societal patterns and relations (see also Connell, 2015, p. 112). Contrasting previous theses, this study is not focused with BirthStrike's political messages, but the "understudied social experience" of childfree individuals (Cummins, 2021, p. 5) leading them to value childfreedom as climate action. My analysis contributes to the existing literature in several ways. Firstly, it is timely as more and more people opt out of parenthood, which warrants exploration (Settle & Brumley, 2014, p. 18). Secondly, the context of the study – opting out of parenthood for climate change related reasons – is largely unresearched. Thirdly, it includes agender analysis related to (non-)parenthood, including perspectives from men who birthstrike, and a specific focus on renegotiations of gender norms and expectations. Price and Bohon (2019) point to needs for further research on gender roles and climate change, and Palmer (2019), noting that not a lot of research has been done on BirthStrike, urges for research to involve male birthstrikers' points of view, similarly to the appeals of Smith et al. (2020), Terry and Braun (2012) and Davies (2015) for research from the perspective of childfree men, something this study provides.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The name *BirthStrike* evokes certain associations and imagery of protests and confrontations, as it points to an act of resistance. Striking involves rejecting and challenging situations or the status quo, something the participants of this study do to a varying degree. Their reproductive autonomy and choice to be childfree for environmental reasons cannot be separated from regulating social contexts, power relations and pronatalist norms, which the participants oppose. Their opposition will be explored through several theoretical concepts linked to Foucault's ideas on *governmentality*. The concepts are as follows: *reproductive governance*, *intimate citizenship*, and *everyday resistance*. In addition, participants' gendered behaviour and expression will be analysed using the theoretical concepts *doing gender*, *undoing gender* and *heteronormativity*. This chapter will outline and explain my understandings and usage of them, starting with gender theories employed.

3.1 Doing and Undoing Gender in Heteronormative Structures

When analysing gender, it is important to clarify one's perspectives. I understand gender not as a fixed entity, but as a relational process which one can analyse on individual and collective levels. Additionally, in line with West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 137), I understand gender as constructed and interactional; socially acted out, and connected to "expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"" (p. 126). Their model of gender contains a distinction between sex, sex category and gender, wherein sex is understood as "a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127) indicating femaleness or maleness. Contrastingly, *gender* is understood as shaped by norms and stereotypes attributed to one's sex category (p. 127) which vary historically and culturally (Connell, 2015, p. 84). In other words, individuals face constraints in that they must consider what behaviour is suitable for the sex category they belong to, based on normative conceptions. One acts with agency but one's conduct cannot be separated from surrounding contexts, norms and expectations upheld in gender structures, such as the concept of heteronormativity (Butler, 1990). Considered a hegemonic discourse in modern Western societies, heteronormativity enforces heterosexuality and having children through established conceptions that are naturalised and culturally accepted through repeatedly performed acts (Butler, 1990). Such acts include the practice of marriage and procreation, regarded as the conventional way of doing gender, which reinforce existing gendered categories.

The approach of researching gender through ways of doing has illustrated the perseverance of gendered norms, behaviours and interactions and can therefore show how gender is enacted and understood by participants, but it has been noted that the concept of *doing*

gender, as applied in numerous research studies, confirms gendered differences rather than disassembling or modifying them (Deutsch, 2007, pp. 108, 122). To remedy this, Deutsch (2007) proposes a framework which allows for dismantling the gender differences through the concept of *undoing gender*. Highlighting “social processes that underlie resistance against conventional gender relations” (p. 107) may illustrate reduced gender differences, which is linked to reduced gender inequality (pp. 107-108). Deviating from the norm, for example by rejecting motherhood, can be viewed as resistance against a societal narrative and an undoing of gender, but in this deviation childfree people risk negative reactions such as pronatalist platitudes or stigma when not complying to expectations of how to do gender.

3.2 Governmentality

Coined by philosopher Michel Foucault who famously explored concepts of power and regulation, *governmentality* “is a process of regulating and disciplining subjects” (Finlay & Hopkins, 2020, p. 562). Governmentality works on two levels; institutional expressions of power (by states for instance) which foster particular behaviours and conducts, and a general level which includes normalised cultural practices and forms of (self-)governing exercised by citizens and society (Huxley, 2008). Potvin (2019) notes that power, according to Foucault, both restricts and compels certain behaviours: “In neo-liberal societies, wherein the state is understood as ensuring our freedom rather than governing our lives, self-governance operates as a particularly salient technology of power” (p. 121). In other words, states may apply control techniques towards its people, who willingly participate. The mechanisms are as such received positively rather than viewed as solely disciplinarian expressions of power (Huxley, 2008).

3.2.1 Reproductive Governance

The framework of *reproductive governance* as presented by Morgan and Roberts (2012) may illuminate the *childfree climate activist* as a new kind of “subject position” (p. 242) and the “changing rationalities of reproduction” (p. 251). Building on *governmentality*, reproductive governance highlights how “different historical configurations of actors ... use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor and control reproductive behaviours and practices” (p. 243). Actors include for instance churches, NGOs, and governments. Additionally, reproductive governance enables a focus on “moral regimes”, understood as “the privileged standards of morality that are used to govern intimate behaviour” (p. 242). Pronatalism functions as a governing force; a moral imperative at odds with moral justification used by childfree climate activists, as moral regimes “are often evaluated in relation to other, supposedly immoral and irrational activities” (p. 242),

such as childfree choices made of consideration of the climate crisis. In this sense, reproductive governance can shed light on moral regimes (p. 244).

3.2.2 *Intimate Citizenship*

While citizenship conventionally has been understood in reference to public arenas of social and political rights, the term *intimate citizenship* refers to the overlapping or connecting of public debate and personal life, and thereby extension of rights and responsibilities of individuals to arenas of bodily, sexual, and reproductive health. Plummer (2005) refers to the concept of *intimacy* as “an array of arenas in which we “do” personal life”, following this up with examples of “doing gender” and “doing identities” (p. 77). Furthermore, intimate citizenship as a concept “sets about analysing a plurality of public discourses and stories about how to live“ (Plummer, 2001, p. 238), allowing for an examination of the rationalities of members of the BirthStrike movement.

According to Plummer (2001), individuals in the 21st century face more acceptance in how they live their intimate lives compared to generations before, impacting their notions of belonging (p. 241), and making the choice to have or not to have children is an example of doing intimacy. He furthermore explores the complexities of such individual ‘choices’, referring to them being “patterned socially” (Plummer, 2005, p. 82). Such social patterns can be linked to norms and climate change discourses focused on the urgency of the climate crisis, what kind of future children will face, and the role of individual versus collective climate action – all of which may impact reproductive decisions – but also pronatalist efforts from governments and citizens. Richardson and Turner (2001) connect intimate citizenship to *governmentality*, pointing to the “modest rates of successful reproduction”, which prompt states to present “fertility and reproduction as a foundation for social participation” and “reproductive citizenship in order to guarantee population growth” (p. 337).

3.2.3 *Everyday Resistance*

As clarified, power compels and fosters behaviours, like forms of *resistance*. Foucault (1978) notes that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” (pp. 95-96), but rather “a practice that is entangled in a dynamic with power” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 17). Resistance refers to actions used by individuals or groups to oppose authorities or power structures which sustain normative gender practices and in which some people are ostracised.

Acts of *everyday resistance* are explored by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013), who describe the acts as “*quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible*” (p. 4, their italics) and thereby place everyday resistance in contrast to “organized, collective or confrontational” kinds such as “rebellions”, “riots” (p. 4) and so on. Whilst BirthStrike

exemplifies an organised and collective platform for resistance, the concept of everyday resistance allows for analysis and exploration of the events, understandings and thought patterns associated with the participants' childfree lifestyles and unconventional choices, as the thesis examines their acts of everyday resistance which leads to a choice to join an organized movement (p. 23). In other words, acts of resistance include several activities and behaviours deviating from, opposing, or counteracting hegemonic systems to which one is expected to conform. Due to the concept's "mundane, repetitive and non-dramatic way of subverting domination" (de Certeau, 1984, p.34 in Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013), everyday resistance may occur in passive, unconscious or unnoticed ways. It is important to note a basic feature of everyday resistance: "it is an everyday *act* [...] done in an oppositional relation to power, which compels power to respond; i.e. being an everyday *interaction*" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 18).

3.3 Application of Theoretical Concepts

The concepts described in this chapter will be applied in chapter six's discussion of the findings. The concept of *doing gender* will illuminate ways in which conventional gendered practices are reproduced or challenged by participants, whereas the concept of *undoing gender* will highlight actions counteracting conventional practices and explore whether aspects of conventional gender norms and expectations are viewed as irrelevant for and by participants. Governmentality, through the concepts *reproductive governance*, *intimate citizenship*, and *everyday resistance*, allows for examining ways in which pronatalist structures function as power expressed by society and by citizens (in forms of self-governing), and how such power is experienced and reacted to by participants. *Reproductive governance* will be used to illuminate the institutional agents working together to form pronatalist discourses on reproduction, such as moral incitements, as well as responses by participants. *Intimate citizenship* will illuminate ways in which participants attempt to form alternative moral regimes to that of pronatalist ideology. Finally, *everyday resistance* will be used to examine individual thought patterns, reactions to and mundane actions against pronatalist structures and gendered expectations.

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodological choices made when planning and completing this project, followed by explorations of the researcher's positionality, ethical considerations made, and challenges met when conducting this research.

4.1 Research Design and Epistemological Basis for the Study

This research aims to explore the experiences of members of BirthStrike when making childfree choices as climate action. When considering the research questions, a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design was deemed appropriate, as this framework allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective realities of participants (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 311) and for “capturing an inside view and providing a detailed account of how the people we study understand events” (Neuman, 2014, p. 218). Furthermore, the interpretivist approach allows for an exploration of the perceptions of individuals, to “discover what actions mean to the people who engage in them” (p. 105). A phenomenological design is justified by the objective of exploring lived experiences and shared sense of meaning associated with the phenomenon that is childfreedom as climate action (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology lets one examine how contexts shape individual experiences through accessing subjective perceptions of situations and realities to re-interpret them (Boeije, 2009, p. 13).

It is important to note that the existing literature on the BirthStrike movement was severely limited when this project was designed, which impacted the planning of the research as it was challenging to assert what theoretical concepts would be suitable to explore findings (Boeije, 2009, p. 23). The flexibility of qualitative and inductive research was therefore suitable, as the design could evolve and be adjusted as the research progressed (Boeije, 2009, pp. 19, 22, 32; Neuman, 2014, p. 172). An inductive logic allows for data to be collected before theoretical points are added as the way the phenomena are viewed and understood might develop (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 21; Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 20). Getting to analyse all data in-depth before settling on appropriate theories allowed me to familiarise myself with it whilst not tailoring my findings by cherry-picking data suited to the theories or risking constricting the data collection process (Boeije, 2009, p. 23). Rather, privileged the experiences of my participants and presented the findings emerging from my data whilst continually re-evaluating what theoretical concepts would best illuminate them (Neuman, 2014, p. 173).

4.2 Recruitment and Presentation of Participants

The study site of this thesis is a digital one, as I aim to explore the experiences leading one to join the BirthStrike movement and its Facebook group. Participants were recruited through a process which could be described as convenience or purposive sampling (Neuman, 2014, pp.

273, 278) due to the closing of BirthStrike's Facebook complicating my recruitment process. I had planned to use the group to recruit participants during the autumn of 2020, but the group closing in August 2020 meant time was an issue. Days before the group shut down, I published a post containing details of my project with an invitation to reach out if interested in joining it. Inclusion criteria included the following: 1) members of BirthStrike, 2) comfortable conversing in English as the data collection would be exclusively in English, and 3) over 20 years old. I hoped for some diversity in the participants' ages, as I wondered if I would find a variation in motivations behind the childfree choice across age groups, as some may have made their choice years before others. Data collection was ultimately conducted with seven members of BirthStrike, five of which were recruited through BirthStrike's Facebook group. Later two more were recruited through a replacement group which followed the closing of the BirthStrike.

Following the initial contact made through the Facebook post, I recruited participants of various genders, ages, and locations. English was the first language of all but two, who may have expressed themselves differently had English been their first language. However, the two participants expressed themselves with ease when speaking English. Participants live in either North America, Western or Eastern Europe, and ranged from their early twenties to mid-forties. As my background questions did not specifically address their level of education, I have limited data on this, but it was clear that participants were articulated, resourceful, knowledgeable, committed to the research, and eager to share their viewpoints. Similarly, I did not ask them to define their sexuality. I had wished to recruit participants of more diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, but as BirthStrike likely consisted of mainly Northern American and European members, a majority of whom are female, the participants in this project may be argued to be representative of the group's members. However, the findings in this thesis do not claim to represent the experiences of all members of BirthStrike, nor all childfree individuals.

The participants I reached out to first were *Mia*, a former climate change researcher now working for a climate change-oriented charity, and *Emma*, an activist, dedicated volunteer-worker, and freelance researcher; both in their thirties. *Linda*, also in her mid-thirties, working for a company helping artists make merch; *Thomas*, a student of agricultural engineering in his early twenties, and *Jenny*, who works in IT and was in her forties, were also recruited through the Facebook post I made. The post asked interested members to contact me or give me their e-mail address in a private message. As BirthStrike contains a relatively small number of members, ensuring participants anonymity was a challenge. Knowing that my name is identifiable in this thesis and through my Facebook profile, someone could find my post and comments made by participants. Therefore, the post was deleted once I had completed the

participant recruitment to protect the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, as BirthStrike is a small movement or group, I have extrapolated many personal details from the data as they, along with participants' names visible through their Facebook accounts, could make participants identifiable. In this regard, the analysis rests on less context-specific information. This may prove a limitation to the study, but I prioritised guaranteeing privacy of participants.

As I completed interviews, I realised that I would prefer to have some members who actively grieved their childfree choice. I therefore joined the aforementioned replacement group on Slack called *Grieving Parenthood in the Climate Crisis*. From there Robert and Hannah, both teachers in their forties and birthstrikers, joined the project. As will be shown in chapter 5, they revealed that they did not express grief or difficulty reaching their choice either.

4.3 Methods of Data Collection

The method chosen for data collection was *semi-structured, in-depth interviews*, through which a researcher may access and interpret descriptions of participants' subjective experiences with or views on phenomena or topics (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018a; Punch, 2013; Rapley, 2012). This method felt fitting as the conversation may be steered by both researcher and participant without being bound to a rigid order of questions (Punch, 2013), allowing for an interaction where the researcher may veer into unexpected subjects brought up by the participant. In this section, I will describe some of the interactional elements in the interviews, to illustrate my efforts "in inciting the trajectory of the talk" (Rapley, 2012, p. 11).

When opening interviews, I attempted to make sure that participants were comfortable. As interviews were done digitally over the platform Zoom, I encouraged participants to get a cup of tea or water as I could not provide one. I introduced myself, and briefed them on the project and their rights to withdraw (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018a, p. 6). I furthermore urged them to ask questions, hoping that the participants would feel respected, and aware of their agency in the interview situation; I clarified that I viewed the interview setting as a space for co-creation of knowledge, in line with the interpretive framework (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 33). My hope was that participants would feel empowered and that a researcher-participant power hierarchy would be somewhat destabilised (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018b).

All interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes, apart from one lasting closer to 45 minutes. The interview guide originally consisted of 22 questions, shaped by my research objectives (see Appendix 1). After having conducted three interviews, I reviewed and edited my interview guide by adding some questions, partly based on the topics entered during the first interviews (see Appendix 2). The modifications included more specific follow-up

questions, but most of the interview guide's questions remained open with the intention of allowing participants to bring up subjects important to them.

During the conversation I was aware of my body language, using techniques such as nodding and smiling when appropriate, and saying acknowledging words such as “right”, “mm-hm” and “yeah” to encourage the participant as they shared their reflections whilst signalling that I was following and appreciative of their responses (Rapley, 2012, pp. 5, 13). In terms of other techniques, I refrained from moving on to another question before asking whether the participant would like to add something, in case their silence was a pause to reflect rather than the end of their answers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018a, p. 15). I believe participants were overall satisfied with the interviews, as several of them mentioned feeling happy about our conversations and their contribution to research on the childfreedom and climate action nexus. Additionally, whilst the subject matter remains a serious one, I found that laughter emerged relatively easily in some interview situations, encouraging the participants to share their viewpoints even through exaggerations and ironic statements (Rapley, 2012, p. 9).

4.3.1 Challenges During Data Collection and Participant Recruitment

During the first stages of planning this project I hoped to collect data face to face, but due to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was done digitally through Zoom. This provided some challenges. Not being able to hold eye contact with one's conversation partner and having their body language be affected by communicating through a computer were drawbacks of digital data collection. Additionally, internet connection was at times unstable, leading one participant to reconnect due to internet connectivity issues, which interrupted the conversation. Generally, communication was also impacted by the audio issues such as lagging, meaning I had to ask participants to repeat themselves. The recorded files would also miss words at times, complicating the transcription process. Furthermore, the data collection process was complicated by my limited experience with interviewing, as I struggled to feel certain that I explored reflections sufficiently. I also worried that seven participants, most of them women, would not be enough but had no chance to recruit more as the Facebook group was closed and none other than Hannah and Robert replied to the post on Slack. I contacted people involved with BirthStrike on an organisational level in hopes that they would partake in the research but received no reply. The number of participants in the study may thus be viewed as a limitation, but as most participants shared and reflected with ease and keenness, the data generated is rich.

One participant was sent the interview guide, as she preferred to write her answers and send them to me. To ensure privacy, I arranged for the reply to be encrypted and password protected. We then arranged an interview in which we explored her answers in depth, allowing

her to elaborate. As the interviews were conducted over Zoom, the participants could be situated wherever they pleased. In this case, the participant was in her living room with her husband, who asked to join our conversation at one point, to share his viewpoints. I thankfully accepted, before making sure to collect his consent to partake in the research through commenting.

4.4 Data Management and Analysis

All data generated, consisting of audio and video files of the Zoom recordings of the interviews, were labelled according to a system devised by myself to ensure confidentiality for participants (Boeije, 2009, p. 46). Data was stored in the University of Bergen's SAFE system, a secure, remote desktop protected by a two-factor login method and a VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection. I transcribed the data, and included hesitations, laughter and pauses (Rapley, 2012, p. 10). Data used in analysis stages were sometimes modified to improve the reading experience and understanding, but not in ways that altered the meaning (Rapley, 2011). Transcripts were completely anonymised as I left out distinctive identifiers (Boeije, 2009, p. 46), ensuring privacy for participants. All data was deleted upon the completion of the research project.

The data collected was rigorously analysed using steps and tools described by Rapley (2011). First, I familiarised myself with the data by revisiting the audio files and notes taken during the interviews. I conducted open coding by re-reading and closely examining the transcribed interviews section for section, looking for striking elements (p. 277). At this stage I reflected whilst labelling words and topics I found interesting, took further notes explaining my reasoning, hunches and associations, and used visual tools such as mind maps and tables to ensure that the labels were sensible (Rapley, 2011). Additionally, I discussed elements of the conversations with peers (Rapley, 2012, p. 18), and established preliminary codes based on similarities and contrasts in the participants' experiences (Neuman, 2014, pp. 478, 481, 484). I also identified pauses and silences, taking notice of topics which were challenging for participants to reflect on (Rapley, 2012, p. 12). Guided by my research questions, I identified links between the codes and organised them into tentative categories and meaning units through which I generated and defined themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Neuman, 2014, pp. 480-482). Codes and themes were reflected on and revisited several times, modified and thus refined (Rapley, 2011, p. 288). An important facet of the research process includes re-interpreting the data collected, whilst conveying the participants' meaning. Data analysis allows the researcher to "reduce, select, interpret and decide" on what to present to the reader in order for this message to be conveyed (Boeije, 2009, p. 14), including detailed descriptions and verbatim quotes (Neuman, 2014, p. 172). The analysis was further developed through writing chapters five and six (Rapley, 2011, p. 287) and, in an attempt to keep a holistic approach toward my participants'

accounts, I wrote up individual longer notes similar to stories based on each interview, which proved useful in assuring that I did not lose track of the participants' context when analysing.

4.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure that the research is trustworthy focus is placed on credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To ensure *credibility*, I worked to make sure that the interpretations of the data accurately corresponded with the participants' meanings (Neuman, 2014, p. 218; Yilmaz, 2013). In addition to attaining verbal verifications of participants' meanings during our conversations, I asked whether they wanted to inspect and comment on the transcripts, which were sent to participants who accepted this offer. Finally, I attempted to ensure credibility through careful examination of the recorded interviews while I transcribed them. I discussed said transcripts and the following findings with my supervisor as well as a fellow students and peers (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 110; Rapley, 2012, p. 18). Consulting others also increases the *confirmability* of my analysis by confirming that data does not reflect my personal bias but the accounts of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 204; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 110). Additionally, I attempted to make the research process reflective, as I re-examined both the interview guide and the research objectives after processing the initial interviews (Boeije, 2009, p. 24). I worked to assure quality in all stages of the research process, recognising the connections between research design, participant recruitment, and data collection, management and analysis (Neuman, 2014, p. 279). I took steps to ensure *transferability* by describing the processes of data collection and analysis in detail (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 110), which indicates whether findings are applicable in similar contexts and settings (Punch, 2013). Moreover, findings include both suitable quotes and detailed descriptions of relevant aspects of participants subjective situations and understandings (Yilmaz, 2013), whilst not compromising privacy and anonymity. To secure *dependability* I attempted to make my research process, logic and considerations transparent by explicitly outlining theoretical concepts and methodological steps used in the research process to support my analysis and explanations for the findings (Neuman, 2014, pp. 478, 480). I described techniques applied during data collection, to demonstrate my reflections and ways of inciting the participants to explore their viewpoints with me (Rapley, 2012, pp. 13-14).

4.5.1 Role of Researcher

Having worked on this thesis for some time, it is clear to me that reflecting on reproductive matters is challenging. One limitation to this study therefore pertains to my difficulties in reaching objectivity, as I am in an age where my surrounding friends make reproductive decisions, and I am expected to do so myself. To contribute to the trustworthiness

of the thesis, I have reflected on my position and its impact on the data collection process, as self-disclosure and “integrity by the individual researcher are central to a qualitative study” (Neuman, 2014, p. 170). In efforts to establish trust and familiarity, participants were made aware of my academic *and* personal interest in the subject of childfreedom. I had discovered and joined BirthStrike prior to deciding on a subject for my thesis as I have a long-standing interest in both climate action and reproductive matters as separate entities and was curious about their connection. For this reason, I consider and acknowledge my position to be biased. Upon evaluation, I believe I am interested in but also distanced from BirthStrike, as I felt a responsibility to practice awareness and self-reflexivity, recognising ways in which my subjectivity may impact the research (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). I further believe that my position within BirthStrike has both complicated and benefitted my data collection process. In one way, I felt as though participants trusted that I could understand their arguments and thoughts as my views were in many ways aligned with theirs. Participants’ expectations concerning my position and familiarity with the subjects touched upon during data collection was made evident by sentences commonly ending with “you know?”, signalling a hope that I knew what point they were making. To ensure my understanding, I would often follow up with an open or clarifying question, leading the participant to further explain or confirm my interpretation. Such follow up questions were also asked as I attempted to extrapolate subtext, here understood as examples of things the participants did not expressly state, but nevertheless was present in points made. Being familiar with BirthStrike allowed me to find a balance of when to ask for clarifications or further explanations, and when to simply listen. The fact that participants were made aware of my insights into BirthStrike, climate change and societal norms on reproduction may have made them comfortable when sharing their feelings and viewpoints with me, but at the same time I felt wary that because of my belonging to BirthStrike participants may have expected my thesis to represent BirthStrike’s goals and arguments. One participant asked me about my stance on having children, and I felt a need to disclose my position as I support the debates BirthStrike facilitates. I answered openly to encourage a connection, incite participants to share their accounts and avoid seeming unnecessarily distant (Rapley, 2012, pp. 8, 12-13).

Importantly, researching reproductive matters forces me to reflect on my position as a white woman in my late twenties, academically trained at a Norwegian institution. As reproduction is a global matter, contexts posing challenges become apparent. Reproductive *justice* is a term coined in and relevant for US debates on historical instances of racial injustice, but it also becomes poignant in a Norwegian context, as instances of forced sterilisation of ethnic groups occurred only some decades ago (Færaas, 2014). Despite my focus not being on

the political agenda of a climate movement, but rather on the individual experiences leading members to join it, I still had to assess my responsibility to the context of reproductive justice. I have decided to refrain from analysing points on reproductive justice, as my data consists of the testimonies of individual members of the BirthStrike movement, and centres on their decision-making journey. I frame reproduction as a choice for the participants of this study, and, in my analysis, acknowledge their position as privileged to make reproduction a choice⁵.

4.6 Ethical Considerations and Institutional Clearances

Ethical responsibility must be taken when conducting research projects, to protect the privacy and rights of participants, but also when dealing with potentially sensitive subjects (Punch, 2013) as matters of reproduction may be. As mentioned, I balanced disclosing my own position and not misleading participants into thinking my thesis would present a pro-argument for birthstriking. I considered being open as a step toward establishing trust between researcher and participant, something I view as crucial for a constructive qualitative interview setting, but also steered clear of highly personal subjects. If a participant brought up a potentially sensitive and issue, I asked for permission to ask follow-up questions if I found it relevant to our discussion. Examples of these situations include participants bringing up topics of abortion or sterilisation.

Ethical considerations were further made in the context of confidentiality. Participants' personal information was anonymised and, when starting the interviews, I asked that no third persons' names would be mentioned to protect their personal information. I assigned numeric codes and pseudonyms to participants early in the process, and thereby avoided using the participant's names. Furthermore, participation was entirely voluntary and based on informed decisions and consent (Neuman, 2014, p. 151). I distributed information letters and consent forms (see Appendix 3) to participants outlining the "nature of the data collection and the purpose for which the data will be used to the people or community being studied in a style and language they can understand" so that participants could fully recognise both the risks and benefits of participating, as well as their right to withdraw from the project (Boeijs, 2009, p. 45). The contents of this letter were repeated by me as I started our interviews, allowing for participants to ask questions or voice concerns.

In line with Norwegian legislation ensuring data protection, the project was registered and authorised by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) before any data was collected (see Appendix 4). Additionally, the project is registered in the University of Bergen's system for research project management, RETTE.

⁵ See critiques of the framing of reproduction as choice (Roepke, 2021).

5 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis of the empirical data collected during the interviews, where discussions centred on the study's participants' motivations for being childfree in relation to climate change and/or parenthood- and procreation-norms, their emotions related to climate change and how climate change impacts understandings of "life purpose" and "meaning of life", as well as how childfreedom is viewed in relation to gender understandings and expressions. Whilst the study does not discuss the *organisation* of BirthStrike, i.e., their political messages, findings also highlight the role BirthStrike plays in the childfree lifestyle of the participants.

5.1 Making and Facing the Choice

Most of the conversations with participants concentrated on their relationship with the BirthStrike movement, the concept of childfreedom and their thoughts on the climate crisis and climate actions. This section presents participants' understanding of childfreedom as a climate mitigating effort and their emotional responses to the climate crisis, as well as non-climate related factors impacting their childfree choice. Furthermore, participants' views on anti-natalism and the biopolitical nature of discussing childfreedom are shown. Finally, external reactions to their choice and the value of BirthStrike is presented.

5.1.1 *The Two Aspects of Childfreedom as Climate Action*

According to Mia, there are two climate change aspects which influence thoughts on family planning and the choice to be childfree: "One is the emissions that children might produce and the resources they might use, and the other is the kind of world they might live in, in terms of climate change having altered the future". In this, Mia pointed to the state of the world not being considered a safe enough environment for a child to be raised in. She further explained being particularly motivated by the first aspect, i.e., the resource aspect of having children. Both the worries about future resources used and emissions caused by the additional people born as well as worries about the state of the planet impacting the children's well-being were present in several participants accounts. In this sense, childfreedom allows them to feel as though they are contributing positively or at least not negatively toward climate change. Linda described feeling like having children now would be somewhat irresponsible due to the added carbon impact of more people as well as "putting them through what I think they're all going to have to deal with", including "the mess that we're making right now". Her comments illustrate a clear focus on the aspect of what sort of world children are born into. Emma, whilst studying biodiversity and conservation, became aware of the growth of the human population, which shocked her: "It was the moment I realised that everything around me that's happening is because of us, we are too many and we're destroying the planet... I said to myself 'I really don't want to have

kids”’. Emma did not want to contribute to further altering and destruction of the planet or expose children to such a reality. Robert additionally focused on the responsibility parents should take, referring to their act of “intentionally putting kids in an environmental crisis. I feel like I’m being gaslit by the world every day. ‘Oh yeah, climate change is crazy, oh, here’s my kid’. Woah, what?”. Robert likened adhering to social pressures to have children whilst in an environmental crisis to holding them into this burning building, critiquing people simultaneously advocating for climate mitigation while procreating. Jenny likewise commented on people procreating, feeling like they should think it through “instead of just listening to parent or society”. Jenny too considered the implication for the child as well as climate change’s effects on the Earth: “If they still want to have children after knowing everything that probably will happen, then... I mean, that’s their decision but I don’t have to agree with it”.

Thomas found comfort in childfreedom which he found to play an important part a in sustainable future as it means not adding children to the planet or exposing them to an arising climate catastrophe. Likewise, Hannah considered how her potential children would exist in the worsening climate crisis, stating that “I think I’m the best parent I can be. Because my children are not going to be suffering the effects of climate change”. Hannah was also influenced by the first aspect of childfreedom as climate action, considering the tremendous ecological, environmental impact children born in her home country represent, “simply because of what the parents can afford for that child. And we live in such a consumerist society that buy, buy, buy, buy, buy is all we do... Basically, the more you have the better it is”. This made the choice to not procreate easier, from an environmental viewpoint.

5.1.2 Climate Anxieties and Their Impact on Choices to be Childfree

For most participants their motivations for being childfree centred on their deep concern about climate change. Several participants expressed levels of climate anxiety, here understood as negative feelings and fearful reactions to climate change. When reflecting on feelings related to climate change and childfreedom, a few described notions of acceptance or even optimism, but the participants’ language in most cases illustrated negative emotions, such as frustration, hopelessness, guilt, grief, and stress. Hannah described experiencing depression about how much population growth and climate change “cost” our ecosystem, but also notions of guilt: “I do feel guilty for existence (gentle laugh). Even though it’s not my fault, I do feel guilty for using more stuff than I need”. Jenny expressed similar feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and anxiety, stating that “not being able to repair things and needlessly having to buy new” impacted her. “I’m the opposite. I try to get rid of things. The consumerism drives me crazy”.

Emma also revealed a history of depression, worsened by her knowledge of the climate crisis and her experience with climate activism. She described feeling helpless, as “there is so much sadness, so much suffering all around that I think it’s abnormal to feel ok when all these things are happening”. Finding joy in life became difficult for her:

I don’t know how to have fun. I lost that, after the refugee crisis, and the climate crisis thing. I think... only if I get drunk, and I don’t often, then maybe my mind becomes a little numb. Otherwise, it’s 24/7. Really, ignorance is a bliss, I wish I ignored all of this. Negative feelings impacted Emma’s thoughts on reproduction to the point where she felt unhappy with other people’s decisions to procreate, wishing they would adopt and reduce the number of children they plan to have. She was perplexed and frustrated by seemingly senseless attitudes, citing how many people get pregnant accidentally, comparing it to people deciding what to have for dinner rather than viewing procreation like a life altering choice.

Robert described negative feelings leading to acceptance of there being “no hope. We’re still fighting as if there is... but I don’t think we’re going to pull this off”. This led Robert and his wife to decide “that if it’s a climate break down, we’re going to go for assisted suicide”. Similarly, Linda also mentioned worries related to climate change and described herself as somewhat fatalistic. She furthermore cited hopelessness and worry about the indifference of people around her, which was echoed by Thomas when he explained his opinion on people’s attitude toward climate action: “They tend not to think about it, or that the crisis is going to happen in long time, or they cannot do anything to change it”. Disinterested, denying and disregarding reactions to climate change angered Thomas. Additionally, he felt upset and discredited when taking measures viewed as eccentric, illogical and tied to his young age rather than valid idea. Thomas was particularly bothered by the expectation that he would outgrow his current childfree stance. He had considered getting a vasectomy for years and was now pursuing the procedure. Additionally, Thomas described several minimalist lifestyle efforts meant to limit his consumption and climate footprint while also promoting pro-environmental behaviours to others, including veganism. "I know that the price for the climate exists in every product". Thomas felt a sense of relief and accomplishment if he noticed an effect of his climate awareness on others, but nevertheless felt bad for not doing more. In this sense, his awareness proved both productive and inhibiting, as he still was burdened by feelings of inadequacy as he felt like only some of his actions carried weight and "would count". Interestingly, Thomas otherwise described feeling optimism, accepting climate change as a reality, and finding empowerment in climate action. Mia similarly considered herself an optimist and found climate anxiety to be potentially “unproductive”. She tried to mitigate negative emotions through

individual climate actions such as veganism, not flying and consuming products with awareness, strategies which helped Mia alleviate feelings of climate anxiety:

If I feel like I'm causing emissions, then that causes anxiety in me, and it's unpleasant.

But I think a lot of people think 'oh, this makes me feel bad', but they haven't realised that if you do things differently, you won't feel bad, and it's such a better life to have.

Mia did not want to use all her life on “the struggle of climate action”, explaining that she wished to live a good life, and believed that she could whilst not being detrimental toward the environment. Childfreedom becomes one of several strategies for participants to mitigate both their negative feelings as well as avoiding feeling like they worsen climate change.

5.1.3 Further Considerations Impacting the Childfree Choice

The participants described processes of reflection related to their choice, impacted by more than climate change. Thomas mentioned that if climate change was not an issue, he would consider having a family, but Thomas also considered parenthood unappealing and demanding based on his mother's experiences as a single parent. Similarly, Linda, considered many aspects of parenthood disagreeable. Critiquing a lack of support for parents seemed as important as being childfree for environmental reasons: “I suspect I would still not have children if climate change was not an issue”. Linda displayed dissatisfaction with mixed societal messages she observed, referring to pronatalist norms and expectations within institutional systems lacking rights and benefits for parents and objected to the double burden and emotional labour facing mothers in her country. Similar problematic aspects connected to parenthood were pointed out by Mia, who criticised her country's kindergarten coverage as it impacted gendered division of labour and income; “women very often have to leave work for several years, and... so it really impacts the gender equality in this country and the gender pay gap.” Additionally, Mia reflected on how having a child may impact a relationship, as parental stress may cause the end of otherwise strong relationships, and Jenny highlighted how you don't know if your child will “like you” or be healthy; “nothing is guaranteed”. Health aspects influenced Emma's choice, as worries connected to her personal childhood and health issues made her think she “could not be a good mother... I think it would be very selfish to give these genes to a kid”. For Emma, taking care of herself was difficult enough. She felt like people should responsibly consider their abilities to parent, as children deserve and need parents who can meet a certain standard. Furthermore, Emma's childhood suffered because of her health issues, which she does not wish on others.

All participants were bothered by what they observed as a thoughtless approach to procreation, such as Hannah, who explored her parents' reasons for having her, feeling like they had her for entertainment; “just to have a little toy”. Hannah described experiencing a

conversation with a colleague as awkward, scary, and shocking, as this woman wanted a newborn in addition to her already existing children. Hannah likened it to “seven-year-old kids talking that way about their puppies... I’ve never met a woman in her forties talking about her children like little toys”. Both Robert and Hannah grew up catholic, describing the idea of having a child as a given, and Robert offered similar critiques as Hannah, comparing people’s attitudes toward having children to owning them and “talking about kids as if they’re a garden or an art project... there’s a disconnect. They’re individuals”. The issue of having children became a moral one for Robert, who found having children to be a classist issue: “there’s people who are poor, homeless, orphans, refugees... This is where we should be allocating our resources, time, and efforts as a society. I don’t think most people, even when they’re educated, are thinking it through. There is a lack of consideration”. Referencing processes of colonisation as well as poverty, racism and climate change as negatively impacting society, Robert viewed having children as putting them in an unsafe situation which he wanted children to be spared from. Commenting on the same issues, Hannah viewed it as problematic to have children, but her process in terms of choosing to be childfree also involved ideas of pregnancy and birth as unappealing and scary. Additionally, Hannah pointed to the obligations of parenthood, as she felt she “would be very much on my own. And if I do decide to have that child it will be 100 % my responsibility to forever take care of it”. Hannah was stressed by the everlasting nature of parenthood and acknowledged the negative impact a child would have on her life, which in turn would negatively impact the child. Furthermore, she criticised people having children to ensure that they have a caretaker when they’re older, as did Jenny, whose sister mentioned having children to “not die alone”. Mia pointed to people having a child as an attempt to salvage relationships, finding it “tragic”.

The childfree choice was motivated by several considerations, impacted by emotions, past experiences, ambitions for their futures, considerations of parental stress and responsibilities, as well as worries about both children’s and the planet’s future.

5.1.3.1 Biopolitical Discourses and Anti-Natalism

Several participants brought up anti-natalism during our conversations, understood as a wish for human existence to stop. Emma identified as anti-natalist, viewing humanity as destructive and procreation unethical. Her childfree choice, however, was mainly connected to climate change and its effects on our planet. Emma, associating humanity with industrialism, harmful capitalism, and ecological extinction, wished for a permanent birthstrike and the end of human existence. Interestingly, Emma joked that she wished "the pandemic was making us unable to have kids", pointing to a utopian wish for a quick fix to a complicated problem. She furthermore

connected anti-natalism to the concept of consent, considering having children as generally selfish as children do not consent to being born or having to lead their lives.

Robert, who previously thought of having children now saw himself as “de-facto anti-natalist”, longing for discussions on the matter while questioning the morality and justifications of having children. In Robert’s view, a BirthStrike was an ideal middle ground as the “natural compromise between natalists and anti-natalists”, as one “can be in favour of having kids but just agree that right now is not a great time to do it. You don’t have to be an anti-natalist to be a birthstriker”, adding that “the anti-natalist philosophy is based on empathy for children, like, it’s not coming from a bad place”. While praising anti-natalist philosophy, Robert acknowledged its complicated practicalities: “I’m not necessarily saying that I want anti-natalism to work full out, because I understand that it has to be voluntary, same with BirthStrike”. Robert particularly referenced ways in which racism influences reproductive choices. As discussions on antinatalism often are associated with harmful legacies of population control, participants displayed awareness of racist and biopolitical policies and discourses on national levels. Importantly, discussions veered into subjects of both reproductive rights and wrongs: participants problematised topics such as forced sterilisation as well as lack of bodily autonomy, access to reproductive choices and sexual education, particularly for marginalised groups. Their knowledge on systematic and problematic dismissal of reproductive rights made participants distance themselves from arguments for population control. Rather, they favoured informed and consensual reproductive decision, but wished for more consideration from people in general. Rather than measures pertaining to population control, participants argued for normalisation of childfreedom, and against reproductive choices being subjugated to external judgements, opinions, and platitudes, which will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1.4 Reactions to and Implications of Childfreedom in Pronatalist Surroundings

Childfreedom affects one’s social life in various ways, such as social exclusion due to a lack of overlapping interests with people who are parents. Jenny described difficulties building friendships with people who have children as a negative effect of childfree choices. Similarly, Linda felt lucky to be surrounded by childfree people, referring to them as “leftovers who hung out”. Additionally, Thomas wondered whether the childfree choice could lead to difficulties in finding a romantic partner willing to give up potential plans to have children. Thomas further described negative reactions to his childfree choice, as people dismissed it as illogical. He attributed this to people being unwilling or unable to consider alternative ways of living life, pointing to the normativity in having children. Thomas wished people would question cultural norms on traditional family life more, referencing established ways of speaking: “people always

say 'when I'm big, at my house, with my child, with my children'. It is so normal that it isn't about your plans, it's just a constructed phrase". Reflecting on cultural variations, Thomas commented on the ways society in his home country in Eastern Europe may view the choice to be childfree as generally unfamiliar and thus relatively unintelligible as an alternative to having children. Making a premeditated choice to be childfree would be considered norm breaking and imply a failure in making life decisions, whereas being childless by *circumstance* would be accepted. This contrasted Thomas' experiences in the Western European country he studies in where he had "better reactions" when sharing his childfree choice with people, finding them open to the idea "as they would enjoy that". Thomas speculated that the observed cultural differences could be explained by variations of what constitutes a meaningful life, a concept influenced by pronatalist parenthood- and procreation-norms people oblige to. Thomas found that such norms demanding did not apply to him. Similarly, Robert was not preoccupied with following what society deemed normative behaviour, as he found society "irrational". He accepted the awkward position not adhering to norms can bring when he remarked "I'm sure the first person to say 'hey, I think women should be able to vote' got laughed out of the room, right? So, it comes to a point where you've got to say it anyway. Even if it does give you stigma". By opposing pronatalist social norms, Robert and Thomas were by implication able to position themselves as rational thinkers, which strengthened wishes to normalise childfreedom.

5.1.4.1 Experiencing Invasive Pronatalist Pressures and Platitudes

Despite the margins of how to make intimate choices being widened, participants in this study still experience negative aspects related to their childfree choice and pronatalist messages. Participants referenced both shared and unique experiences of pressures and platitudes. For instance, Jenny expected to experience a biological clock, as in a strong, primal drives or urges to have children, "because everyone said 'this is what you'll think about in the future, you're going to have these urges'". Similarly, Hannah mentioned pushy and inappropriate comments: "I was told by several people 'your biological clock is ticking, what are you waiting for? Get on with the program!'... I said, 'I'm not a machine, and my uterus is not an incubator, so f-off'". Hannah objected to the intrusiveness of society her reproductive choices, which had made her "even more opposed to having kids. I was saying to society 'no, you're not going to tell me what to do. I will be the judge of what to do and when'".

Several participants mentioned family members who had to come to terms with their childfree choices, including Mia's grandparents, Jenny's in-laws, and Thomas and Linda's mothers, who had expected them to have children. Further reflecting on pronatalist assumptions, Linda mentioned companies producing baby formula which was advertised and

sent to her. With a laugh, she explained that "they were like 'you got married in your mid-twenties, so you are absolutely about ready to have kids'. Seriously? They decided I'm an old maid now, so they don't advertise that to me anymore". This business strategy of free products being sent to people's homes exemplifies strategic pronatalism and is an effect of parenthood- and procreation-normativity. Reflecting on general views of childfree existences in her home country, Linda found the attitude to be traditional; "like 'make more babies. Birth control: bad, abortion: bad'". She explained that childfreedom is increasingly accepted, but that "people are always telling you 'oh, you'll change your mind', 'you think you don't want them now', 'it's different when it's your own'". Linda showed frustration with patronising, "obnoxious platitudes, which they've finally stopped giving me now that I'm in my thirties", whilst being thankful that to "the people I deal with the most, [childfreedom] is not a big issue".

Robert pointed to negative consequences facing those deviating from the pronatalist norms by remaining childfree, as "you have to step out on your own and that's not easy". This was exemplified by Emma's experiences in her home country, where she felt like an alien due to religious norms defining what a worthy life is: "you are made to have family, and otherwise there is something wrong with you. But... they don't know better. It's brainwashing. And the government is giving two thousand euros to young people to have kids. As if that is all you need". Emma expected that people find comfort in the normative position, preferring that to an alternative one which may include struggling with pressures to comply. She furthermore shared that she had been pregnant once. Emma had wanted a child with her then-boyfriend, but they reconsidered the matter: "if I had kept this child, now I would have a kid six years old, oh my god, it would be terrible. I never had second thoughts after the abortion, it is not a bad thing".

Several participants shared reflections on the possibility of regretting their choice or experiences with others worrying that they would. The relativity of regret was illustrated by Linda, who felt secure in her childfree choice as she was "99 % sure I'd regret" having children. To her, avoiding such a situation was more important than the possibility of regretting living a childfree lifestyle. Jenny stated that regret becomes less of a concern, having wondered whether childfreedom was a mistake as she reached her early thirties. She felt comfortable with her position, happily unaware of what she might be missing out on. "I have nephews I can go visit if I need a few hours of toddlers, and then I can go home", Jenny laughed, indicating that she lived a child-full life. Robert did not worry about missing out on parental joy either, as he mentioned finding fulfilment through volunteering: "you can always volunteer with kids... I've never liked the excuse 'oh, but [having children is] so personal'. Yeah, it's personal to be an orphan too, let's go help them. Come on, let's stop being so selfish about this". Robert did not

view having children as a personal decision, as he reasoned that the choice to procreate would mostly impact the babies born, as they must live the life they're given. Moreover, Robert's stance on possibly regretting his childfree choice was clear: "Imperatively, no. Not while wage slavery exists... nobody outside of the wealthy class is lucky to be alive. We have to work 40 plus hours just to not be in poverty. That's not a situation to feel happy about", he stated, adding that "wage slavery alone is a reason not to have kids. Every day that I'm alive I feel happier and more confident in my decision... I don't want to put anyone in my situation". Happiness was addressed by Hannah as well, who described family members' worry that she might regret her choice, which prompted her to reflect on difficulties and expectations linked to such conversations. Hannah felt she had "to be happy, to have success in my life for them to believe that my choices were good. That's a pressure that I'm starting to resent. I'm a normal person just like everybody else. Yes, my life choices are what they are. I'm not ashamed of them. I don't regret them". Hannah felt the need to seem reassured and comfortable with her choice.

This theme illustrates how invasive reactions to childfree choices fostered both defensive and reflective reactions in participants, influencing their reproductive stance further as well as their responses to invasive platitudes and pressures. The assumptions about regret as associated with childfreedom and stigma participants face shape a need for the childfree person's choices to be justified.

5.1.5 BirthStrike as a Useful Venue for Support, Action, and Inspiration

As BirthStrike was the base for this research and a unifying element of the participants' accounts, a lot of our conversations centred on what BirthStrike represented to them and how it impacted them. Several participants felt like childfreedom and birthstriking was a *sensitive topic*. Making choices and acting on them could, in Mia's mind, be read as statements judging others' actions. She explained that she found discussions on the topic with people who had children difficult, as "you have to be constantly looking after their feelings". In this regard, the Facebook group for members of BirthStrike acted like a "safe space" where she could talk about climate change and aspects of childfreedom without "risking making anyone who might have made a different choice feel bad". In this sense, Mia worried others might feel judged on their particular choice to have children, and likened it to "veganism or not flying", wherein her actions were not "a statement about what anyone else is doing, it's what *I'm* doing". Linda found BirthStrike valuable too, as she couldn't discuss climate change freely with friends with children. Linda deduced that some of her friends who are parents "probably don't pay a lot of attention and don't think about these things very much. And maybe they should, but on the other hand there is only so much that you as an individual can do". Here Linda brought up an

interesting point, defending friends of her who had decided to become parents. She acknowledged the limits of individual climate action. Although Linda felt assured that her friends who are parents know her views on the matter, climate change wasn't a topic they talked about a lot: "I don't want to make anyone else feel bad, and lose sleep worrying about their child's future... But if I had a kid, I would be worrying about my child's future". Elaborating on her statement, she added that "many people will immediately feel judged if you bring up your reason for childfreedom. Climate reasons can make people feel guilty, because they may not have considered that, or they did and decided that having kids was more important". With a laugh, Linda added "which is fine, everyone's got their own priorities". Like Mia, Linda didn't want to sadden or scare people and was "pretty gentle" when discussing her childfreedom. Referring to partaking in discussions on the topic, she mentioned that saying the "wrong thing in the wrong group of people, especially online" will get you "absolutely eviscerated over the idea of not having children". For those interested in childfreedom as climate action, a *safe space* to discuss was beneficial.

For Thomas, BirthStrike provided confirmation to his thought process, in that others shared his opinions, making him feel less "different from others". Not adhering to social norms from a climate action perspective made Thomas feel alienated, much like Jenny, who found comfort in BirthStrike as it confirmed she "wasn't alone in this thinking". Emma acknowledged the struggle: "I feel proud that I am anti-conformist, I'm different, but at the same time I feel lonely". The feeling of being an outcast was touched on by Hannah too, who found solidarity in knowing that BirthStrike included others who challenged societal norms and struggle with it, as it "made me feel sane". She further explained that constantly encountering people conforming to pronatalist norms and "not being able to think outside of the box creates a lot of doubt or pressure to comply and be one of the group, right?" This was conflicting for Hannah, who mentioned handling and being comfortable with "certain levels of otherness, but at some point... I want to feel part of a group". Hannah described a fear of exclusion, but this did not mean she exhibited ambivalence regarding her choice; rather she felt sadness about being left out. She clarified that she felt a "need to belong, and when I'm rejected, for not having kids, thinking differently, objecting to the norms that are in the society right now, I'm like... who am I? I'm still part of this society, like, somebody like me". The rejection Hannah experienced made her feel like she was "doing the right thing. It gives me courage... in a sense it gives me direction as well, like 'you *are* doing the right thing'". For Hannah, her childfree choice was made complicated by other people questioning her, but that the dialogues were helpful as she was able to reflect on and identify reasons behind her childfree choice. Hannah was bothered

by societal perceptions of childfreedom as selfish, and hoped that efforts to normalise being childfree would lead to a paradigm shift through which childfree choices would be perceived as selfless. She found BirthStrike to be a useful tool for spreading awareness, particularly for the younger generation, much like Linda, who wished to support the group and increase its visibility when joining it. Robert felt like birthstriking should be a recognised position in society, as he saw it as something to be proud of, a valid and necessary protest:

this is how it is with most social movements. You know, having interracial seating at restaurants was controversial sixty years ago, like, this is a controversial thing now but maybe not in sixty years. I think BirthStrike is ahead of its time a little bit.

Robert placed responsibility on people as individuals, highlighting everyone's duty to show awareness of their life choices as opposed to passive reactions.

Mia expected BirthStrike to “facilitate more media coverage and thus more exposure of the choice”, which she expected to support people considering childfreedom as well as normalising childfreedom for people, such as “parents or friends of someone who is considering making the choice who may be kind of confused, to feel that it is more normal”. Wishes to normalise childfreedom signals a wish to reframe it from a deviant position as compared to the normative position parenthood holds to a widely accepted one. For Mia, BirthStrike connected climate action and ideas on the meaning of life, as she had grown up with nonparent role models, but appreciated the visibility of people her age who chose childfreedom specifically for climate change purposes. Additionally, Mia observed and discussed BirthStrike's potential as a movement and the feeling of *agency* it provided participants: “I was hoping to kind of feel part of something. Which I did. It was nice to feel like we were doing something together, even if we never met each other”. For her, the group's ability to generate debates and research was valued, and she appreciated that individual actions felt like collective action. Most participants acknowledged the importance of not relying on individual action, and BirthStrike served as a unifying arena through which they could recognise their points of view and withstand societal pressures.

5.2 Defining a Meaningful and Purposeful Life

As pronatalist cultural narratives present parenthood and procreation as the meaning of life, I wanted to explore how the participants constructed alternatives. Participants connected the concepts of purpose and meaning to biological understandings of reproduction, but also pointed to autonomy and agency in how to spend one's time, citing fulfilment through work or being an asset to one's community as valuable alternative roles to that of parent. In the following

section, two distinct attributes of the participants' childfree lifestyle and notions of life meaning and purpose are presented.

5.2.1 Fulfilment through Work, Activism or Self-Actualisation

Aside from the climate change aspect of her childfree choice, Mia found with time that motherhood did not seem fulfilling or purposeful to her. She had considered having children to pass on joyful and impactful aspects of her upbringing, but concluded it wasn't a good enough reason. Additionally, Mia's standards of parenthood were set by her own mother, who was able to prioritise the upbringing over working full-time, which worried Mia:

... I also have the feeling that if I was to be a parent, I would feel extremely stressed out by not being able to work or if I was working at the same time, not being able to give all my efforts to work, and at the same time, I would feel stressed about not being able to give all my efforts to the child. And do that as well as I think it should be done. So, I guess that it also has to do with the fact that I feel quite fulfilled and enjoy my career.

In addition to fighting climate change, Mia found that the meaning of life was largely connected to teaching, passing on knowledge and insights, and encouraging people to consider things in a new perspective. She appreciated this in a sense she expected parents to feel; "I think that for some people that happens, you know, within the kind of parent-child relationship. Which of course it does, but for me, it can happen in a lot of different places, and it doesn't feel necessary for it to happen there". On trying to impact others, Mia's was happy to represent childfreedom and discuss her choice with others interested but didn't actively pursue the topic conversely.

Similarly to Mia, Hannah noted negative impacts of parenthood. She had previously considered fostering or adopting children but struggled with how it would affect her life, pointing to "the amounts of stress, effort, and time commitment" of parenting. Being childfree would in Hannah's view give her energy and ability to support others. Hannah also mentioned how teaching allowed her to share traditions and views with students, which assured her that she wasn't missing out on joyful experiences of parenthood. Talking of her students, Hannah's husband had proclaimed once that "'they're little you'" which became "kind of like a gift, because I didn't always notice this. I was, like, 'aw, that makes me feel so nice and warm'... I keep in touch with them. And that's how you build and keep relationships". Hannah contrasted this form of bond with the biological bonds to children, criticising what she views as problematic aspects of the parent-child bond: "Just because you have a kid does not mean that the child will forever belong to you and do the things you want them to do the way your traditions indicate, right? I broke with a lot of traditions from my parents, and they were loving parents". Hannah life is, through her professional career, child-full in ways she prefers.

Reflecting on what the concepts of meaning and purpose meant to her, Emma shared that her life “is 100% advocating for animals and the environment”, relating her advocacy to her life’s purpose and wondering “if there was no climate change and everything was ok... maybe my life wouldn’t have a meaning. Because I’m so into that”. For Emma, the effect of and subsequent action against climate change provided her life with meaning, as she saw herself as an empathetic person wanting to better the conditions of the voiceless or marginalised. Emma shared her struggles with this, stating that “I wish I could just enjoy life and didn’t know all these things. So, the meaning of life is directly linked with the climate crisis. Because I must do what I can, I think it’s my duty”. She acknowledged the limitations to her individual actions by pointing out that “I’m not going to stop climate change, but at least I must inform others and I think if I can help, I have to, because I am privileged to be able to”. Emma saw her ideas of purpose and meaning as directly linked with the climate activism and that “it would be interesting to see myself in an alternative scenario with no climate crisis. I think I would do things to help, to make the world a better place, but without the anxiety that the end is coming”. Working meaningful jobs was also important to Emma.

Robert also connected the meaning of life to activism for youth or animals or women or climate change, through which he attempted to “prevent suffering... you know, that’s what I would hope that other people would focus on too, because I feel like that’s where you get that fulfilment, when you know you’ve made somebody’s life better”. Thomas similarly focused on the helping others, stating that “parenting does not contribute to society”. Thomas in this sense found positive actions contributing to others’ well-being to be meaningful. In his view, having children is done for personal happiness "rather than something that you're helping the world with... I don't feel like you're doing this sacrifice for the future". Thomas wanted to be an asset.

Linda first associated biological imperatives with the meaning of life, before stating her satisfaction that society had moved beyond acting on biological urges uncritically. She highlighted the individual element, as “you make your own meaning. For some people that probably is raising kids”. Linda clarified that “people who really want to raise kids should be the ones that do it, because they're going to be the best parents". To Linda, seeing parenthood as the meaning of life was connected to the quality of and interest in parenting. Linda also shared worries about people who are ill-suited for parenthood, as "when you have this expectation [of children as the meaning of life], you end up with people who have kids and then regret it, even if they don't want to admit that out loud. Or they have kids and then they're really not fit for the job". In this sense, Linda acknowledges the work parenthood is, and is sceptical

of people not reflecting on why they want children, but rather following pronatalist norms uncritically. Linda empathised with people who in some ways regretted having children:

I think it's hard because I think even if you wish on some level you hadn't had kids you still love your kids, usually, hopefully. So, you wouldn't wish them out of existence... At the same time, there's a mourning process for the life you used to have and the life that you could've had if you'd made a different choice. And I think a lot of people go through that and I don't think very many people are comfortable talking about it.

Linda here acknowledged the difficulties associated with the duality of parenthood and envisioning not being a parent and what a childfree life would look like. Similarly, Thomas emphasised the importance of being able to make informed decisions about adding members to one's family. Thomas decided he would undergo a vasectomy, as it for him was vital to be

in control of your life because... something might happen and this decision is taken away from you, and you must live a life you didn't want... It's just a chance I wouldn't want to take... I would rather accept the chance of changing my mind later and wanting a child and struggling, than the chance that I might have a child, and be forced to change my life perspective because of that.

To Thomas, parenthood is life-altering. He therefore values full bodily autonomy but acknowledges the possibility of regretting procedures such as vasectomies or tubal ligations later in life whilst making the comparison of which alternative is better to regret.

Hannah reflected on what the meaning of life meant to her, sharing that it was impacted by her surroundings: at times she struggled with the duality of wanting to be included, "liked" and "helpful" but also *her authentic self*, explaining further:

We have the need to please others. I like the fact that I can help, but I have to be cautious in not overextending myself... I think part of my reason to be here is to bring awareness to the fact that we don't have to be what others tell us. We can self-determine. We have to find meaning for ourselves, it's *our* meaning. So, that was a big step. Because, as much as I wanted to be outside of the box and the rules, I used a lot of those rules to define myself... like, who am I? What am I? That could be a scary place to be. So... in a sense, living the life I want to live, I feel will give others courage and guidance.

Hannah's reflections illustrate how conformity and shared experiences provide feelings of safety and of belonging, and how non-conformity can feel frightening and isolating.

5.2.2 *The Outcast Revolutionary: On Accepting and Navigating Stigma*

Jenny pointed out that the topic of childfreedom as climate action is a difficult one: "if somebody asks, I'll discuss it, but... It's sort of forbidden topic, not something you can discuss

freely with strangers. I think it is frowned upon ". Jenny's stance differed somewhat from other participants in that she questioned the point in trying to influence others. She found it futile, as she either didn't believe individual action would make much difference or that people would be convinced by her. For Jenny, there was a worry that people choosing to be childfree out of climate concern would "be viewed as weird or a doomsday type person...". Robert accepted and embraced such a stance, as he connected his purpose in life to being considered progressive in a pronatalist society, adding that "because of the severity of the issue, birthstrikers should see themselves as revolutionaries for the right cause". Robert found that his actions would be reactive, happily rejecting societal norms and popular opinion:

What's popular is consuming ourselves to death. I don't adhere to pressures because I understand how irrational society is. Once we are more rational, then maybe I would care more, but when social pressure leads to having kids in an environmental crisis, that's ridiculous. You could have a million people telling you to do it, and I wouldn't. I do understand the pressure, but I guess I've passed the point where I care because society is so broken... that's why I'm proud to be a revolutionary against the norm.

Robert's strategy included finding pride in his childfree choice and considering birthstriking to be a morally justifiable position: "Birthstrikers should be enthusiastic about protecting kids, not grieving that we can't be parents" as the point is to take more responsibility by "saving them from dystopia". Robert further reflected on being perceived as judgemental, considering it something one needs to accept as part of saying something that's radical and non-conforming. Emma, focusing on being compassionate with others, tried to avoid being judgemental. She was aware of the resistance to her own stance, stating that she is "going to be hated for the things I say, that aren't considered normal. It's ok". She accepted the solitude her views led to experience, as she found it "very important to be brave and speak your truth. I accept myself. I don't beg for attention or want to be loved by everyone. I prefer when people listen to my arguments rather than saying what they want to hear". Emma found comfort in "knowing I am loyal to my values, and not accepting compromise. No matter how hard it is".

Participants rejected exclusionary associations of parenthood and fulfilment, referencing arguments for rethinking life satisfaction and purpose as connected to contributing positively to your surrounding community, and living authentically in accordance with one's values.

5.3 Gender in a Pronatalist Gender Regime: Expectations and Responsibility

As illustrated in previous research on childfreedom, notions of gender are heavily tied to the role of parent, particularly for women, as motherhood stands out as a widely agreed upon way of "doing womanhood". Gendered expectations of who wants to parent and why, as well as

participants' understandings of their gender expression and gendered behaviour are presented in the following sections, along with reflections on reproductive responsibility.

5.3.1 Renegotiations of Norms and Gendered Expectations

When asked about gender related topics Jenny struggled to reflect on what womanhood means to her: "it's just that I don't have an opinion either way", further elaborating:

Maybe because it's 2021 and I don't feel like gender roles are assigned anymore. I have a job that I do that is male dominated. My husband and I share responsibilities around the house, so it's just... gender. It sounds simple but that's how I feel.

She acknowledged her way of being a woman as non-conformist through being a non-parent able to focus on her career in a workplace surrounded by men. She in this sense recognises norms she rejects despite suggesting that gender roles are a thing of the past or have evolved:

My parents were born in the forties. And they definitely had gender roles, like, my father went to work, and my mother was a stay-at-home mother and didn't really work ... and all those expectations of women at the time just don't seem to exist as much now. So, we have friends... two men, gay men, who just had a baby through a surrogate woman, and they're great fathers. And 'gender roles'-stuff just doesn't exist in my head.

Like Jenny, other participants reflected on sexual identity when asked about the link between gender identity and parenthood. Mia pointed to complicated options for becoming parents for same-sex couples, citing adoption and surrogacy, when biological reproduction isn't an option. Additionally, she mentioned learning from someone that coming out as gay felt synonymous accepting and leading a childless life. In this man's case, he had to deal with reproductive matters as a teenager, when identifying as gay. The most challenging aspect was, according to Mia, telling his parents that they wouldn't become grandparents, possibly disappointing them. Emma described her country's views on same-sex couples parenting as close-minded, adding:

"I'm not sure if a kid just needs love, protection, care, and nurture or if it's true they need a man and a woman... if they are good parents and give love... but between mother and father and two mothers or two fathers... the whole role-model thing is important.

Having children, to these participants, seemed to be an arena mainly for opposite-sex couples due to biological ability and demands, whereas a distinction was established for same-sex couples who must navigate questions of childlessness or alternative forms of reproduction.

Questions of gendered traits and role-models were touched upon by several participants, who for instance reflected on what various genders joining BirthStrike signalled and why. Linda's impression was that BirthStrike was made up of mostly women, which had more impact than when men say they won't have children:

when men do it, people tend to be like ‘yeah, sure, you’re just living the bachelor life, whatever’. But women are kind of expected to want to be mothers since they themselves were children... Yeah, I don’t see a lot of little boys playing with baby dolls, like ‘here, pretend to be a mom, start training now’... The gender division in toys, I think is starting to get a little better, but it’s still so bad, it’s like, if you’re a boy you get war games and trucks and if you’re a girl you get, you know, baby dolls and fashion, which is just achy. Contrastingly, Hannah felt like men’s voices, through their membership in BirthStrike, challenged and unsettled the links between parenthood and womanhood by associating masculinity and reproduction. This view was echoed by Robert, whose sense of masculinity was confirmed by being seen as a supportive adult rather than subscribing to gender norms:

by saying ‘I’m less of a woman’ or ‘less of a man’ because I don’t have kids, you’re already buying into the mass-produced gender identity thing, right? I see myself as a helpful adult. I feel like the youth will see me as an adult that’s trying to reverse the nonsense that’s leading them into climate change. This empowers me, it doesn’t make me feel like less of a man, and in fact, I reject... I think that’s toxic masculinity anyway.

For Robert, his sense of masculinity was strengthened by his conviction and climate action, and furthermore, he enjoyed the destabilising of the gender binary popularised today as adding that he would prefer parenthood to be viewed similarly to the gender spectrum. “We *assume* that a parent has to be a gender at all, it shouldn’t matter what you identify as. I would like to see that continue to evolve. We tie in gender so much into parenthood”. Disconnecting gender from parenthood made sense to Robert, who also criticised societal acceptance of children’s socialisation and taught practices, referring to it as “coerced brainwashing”. He explained:

when women say ‘but motherhood is part of my identity’... that’s kind of compromised, don’t you think? You guys have had this idea that you’re supposed to be a mother drilled into you from the time that you’re little. Of course it’s going to be part of your identity when that’s... that’s how they were taught to play; ‘practice being a mommy’.

Continuing his point, he referenced women’s arguments about wishing for motherhood by likening them to other biological urges and reflecting on them:

it’s the biological urge for men to just grab on to a woman’s behind or whatever they feel like when they’re attracted to them, to sexually harass women. But we fight that. If we understand that our biological urges are going to hurt somebody, we curb those. It’s a biological urge to go to the bathroom in the middle of the street, but I understand that’s going to be harmful for the rest of society. Biological urge is valid, I’m not trying to

invalidate the claim, but if we're talking about somebody's well-being, you've got to step it up. I mean, I think the child's suffering should trump your urge to have a child.

By likening a biological urge to procreate to other urges deemed socially harmful, Robert highlighted the choice to act on both biological and social pressures, by considering their impacts. Biological imperatives were similarly touched on by Mia, who emphasised her control over her actions and whether to listen to her biological drives; "I decide whether or not to eat cake without paying. But I feel totally fine about refraining from eating it. So, just because features of my body would be convenient for having children doesn't mean I'll use them".

Commenting on social aspects of gender, Emma highlighted the link between non-sustainable and masculine behaviour; veganism, to Emma's understanding, was viewed as an expression of feminine behaviour. Likewise, forms of taking reproductive responsibility were coded as feminine conduct, as suggested by Emma's experience as a researcher interviewing men who had vasectomies done. When discussing the interviews and sharing them online, Emma noted how women acted with surprise at men speaking about the procedures publicly, as masculinity and notions of virility were associated. The implication remained that men generally were uncomfortable with the idea of a vasectomy, because it would signal emasculation. Emma particularly critiqued men's reluctance toward vasectomies, if notions of them being unmasculine negatively impacted women, as tubal ligations are more extensive procedures. Emma's interviews, in an effort to normalise vasectomies, functioned as a re-gendering of reproductive responsibility.

Hannah expressed having aspects of reproductive responsibility and awareness placed on her early, by her father who cautioned her "not to come home pregnant". She remarked that "guys can have sex and there's very little responsibility for them. Girls, if they get pregnant, there is real consequence for them. Even if it's pregnancy that you later terminate, there is that consequence". The expectations befalling women lead Hannah to reject associated gendered behaviours, as she was bothered by the added amount of responsibility befalling women: "The gender roles really bothered me, and oftentimes I would act more like a man, you know, specifying that I'm not interested in having kids to my partners". Hannah associated behaviour coded as appropriate for men with disinterest in parenthood, which may confirm a parenthood-womanhood link as culturally accepted, also by Hannah. She identified ways in which she behaved like a man due to behaviours coded as masculine. By expressing disinterest in having children, Hannah compensated for gender roles and norms associating women and maternal expectations by refusing them. Furthermore, Hannah expressed being responsive to and outspoken against reproductive responsibility routinely placed on women through actively and

assertively placing it on her sexual partners by stating “I don’t care what you feel, what you think about condoms, *you are not going to impregnate me*”. Rather than using contraceptive methods herself, she clarified that the action that is impregnating someone is done by men, assertively placing the responsibility of being aware of consequences on them.

5.3.2 Disconnecting Ideas of Womanhood as Motherhood (or Otherhood)

All participants recognised the widely accepted gendered associations of womanhood and motherhood, which they viewed with scepticism. Their accounts illustrated how being a woman meant being repeatedly assumed to plan having children in ways men aren’t, evident in conversations or for instance in work settings. Jenny mentioned being asked numerous times by her manager at her current and previous workplaces if she was having children, referring to these interrogations as inappropriate and adding that her husband never got such questions:

It’s hard to understand from that conversation whether it was just a friendly chat or whether it was a manager and employee-conversation, and he was trying to get information from me. Like, if I’m going to be leaving for a year. Because I have a fairly good relationship with my manager, we could have conversations on a fairly personal level... but, yeah, it was hard to say what his intention was. But I told him that I don’t have plans... And it’s not just my current job, at my previous job too I was asked that.

Jenny further explored a gendered difference related to parenting and identity, as she wondered if women generally would introduce themselves as mothers first, in contrast to men who she imagined would share what they do for a living first. As a childfree woman, Jenny would share her job title first. “I mean, it’s what I do every day. And then, you know, all the hobbies after that”. Jenny locates her identity in what she does, both for work and in general.

Jenny’s husband, who was present during parts of the conversation, asked to add his perspective:

There’s a feeling in my mind that if I talk about our decision some people that would say ‘you are depriving your wife who probably wants children, and it’s you who is putting this on her’, which is not the case. But that’s something that I’ve thought a lot about. And I don’t talk about this to anybody. And that’s one of the reasons. I think it would reflect negatively on me, the man in the relationship, like I had made this decision... people think the woman wants the child.

He highlighted different expectations being placed on women and men, wondering if it seemed easier for men to choose childfree lives, which in turn revealed an expectation that women want children more than men. At this point, Jenny added that she saw tendencies of the opposite in BirthStrike, as “that was something that I saw in the odd post in BirthStrike, how the woman did not want a child, but their partner did”. Her husband confirmed gendered expectations

toward women wanting children more than men by adding that he doesn't "really think of men wanting it more than women". Emma noted the gendered aspect of pressures, stating that men aren't told they *need* to have children or will regret not having them in ways women are, which she found annoying. Several participants pointed to accepted stereotypes and cultural norms concerning women being more maternal than men are paternal. Mia questioned the validity of connecting women and motherhood by pointing out that many men feel strongly about having children, whilst women can be in-different, unenthusiastic, or uncertain of whether they will make "good mothers". Mia's views were that women experience a range of emotions not coherent with stereotypical motherly ideals. She commented on gendered expectations as a "negative pressure" to do motherhood well or right, leading to women experiencing difficult "tensions" and feeling conflicted on whether the role of motherhood will feel fulfilling. Similarly, Thomas reflected on society's tendency to pressure women to become mothers as tying motherhood to women's "success in life". Such widely accepted notions which leads to more societal pressures about living up to expectations of womanhood.

Hannah's understanding of womanhood as tied to motherhood was exemplified by how she struggled to identify as a woman, based on never having "to have the child next to me, and have those kinds of things, so therefore I thought maybe I'm not a woman? Maybe I'm not a mother? But then again, like, I love making things like women would, crocheting, I love cooking, I love nurturing others in that way". In this, she accepted actions and traits widely associated with femininity and the female gender role but questioned her womanhood due to not experiencing what *she* associated with motherhood; having children by her side. Hannah reflected on her understandings of her gender, introspectively wondering if her breasts, uterus, or vagina made her a woman more so than activities she engaged in. Hannah shared that she had "seen men who are very nurturing, loving, and you know, that's not gender specific". Her observations can be read as a confirmation that the traits mentioned aren't culturally agreed upon signifiers of masculinity, but rather of femininity and therefore more associated with feminine and womanly behaviour. Hannah's reflections contain understandings of gender as practices as well as the relational aspect of gender; women are understood as what men aren't, but reflecting on womanhood was challenging for her:

I say [I'm a woman] but what it means to me... I don't know. It was a process for me to move away from motherhood as womanhood. And it was because of intrusive questions that I looked at it. That's not why I am who I am, and I don't even think I would say, you know, I'm a woman. I don't think it really plays into me as a being, you know.

Hannah described the process of disconnecting womanhood and motherhood as initiated by intrusive questions and her norm-critical outlook on gender. This viewpoint may have fed Hannah's need to distance herself from the identity category of woman, which she viewed as restrictive. Hannah viewed her way of being a woman as non-conformist but clarified that "it's rather that the non-conformist part is pushed on me by the conformity of the rest of society". She related gendered roles impacting women to notions of *disadvantage*, noting her observation of "a female role in society... a martyr. And that's not who I want to be. I reject that role. I've seen it in my mom, my sister, in others. And no. I don't want to sacrifice my life". For Hannah, being a mother meant giving up something, like the chance to make priorities as she wishes and having time for herself. She struggled with norms connecting her gender to parenthood, stating:

I really did not like the fact that I was expected to have kids just because I have a uterus, like, that was so intrusive. And that norm... 'your biological clock'... this is funny for me, but because mine was ticking and I went to a gynaecologist and said "is something wrong with me? Can I not have kids?". I was sexually active, but I was not getting pregnant like friends have. I've never had that problem. So, if I can't have kids, then yay, you know, I will act accordingly. But if I can, then I still have to be careful. So, the gynaecologist had bad news, 'you can have kids'. So, I'm like 'ah, shoot' (laughs).

The expectation agreed on by most of society is that women will be relieved in confirming their fertility, whilst to Hannah, her fertility was a hinder to her sexual practices and comfort.

5.4 Summary of Findings

Participants' childfree choices were motivated by several factors, including narratives on the fragility of the future, impacted by climate change, as well as considerations of parenthood and pregnancy as demanding and not compatible with the lives participants wish to lead. My expectation was that some participants would feel grief in relation to their childfreedom, as much of mass media coverage emphasised the founder's grief. Rather, participants connected grief to the climate crisis, and were content with their childfree choices. Furthermore, invasive reactions and platitudes confirm the existence of pronatalist pressures and gendered expectations towards the parenthood role as essential for a meaningful life. Participants' accounts showed strategies for re-defining what constitutes a meaningful purpose, focusing on being useful in one's community and helping others. In ways, they described an alternative life script to the normative one focused on having children. Lastly, findings revealed complex ways of observing, understanding, and expressing gender. The findings will be discussed in relation to previous literature on the topics as well as theoretical concepts in the following chapter.

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, findings are discussed using theoretical concepts and previous research related to the research objectives presented in chapter one. The research objectives aim to explore the participants' experiences and motivations leading to their childfree choice, as well as their understanding of childfreedom as climate action. Furthermore, the thesis identifies how participants navigate pronatalist pressures and norms, construct life purpose and meaning, and renegotiate norms linking parenthood to gender identity and expression.

6.1 Competing Intimate Citizenship Regimes

Childfreedom as climate action is an emerging discourse possible to study through several concepts, including intimate citizenship. As Plummer (2001) highlights, there is “ceaseless discussion about how to live a life in the late modern world” (p. 244), noting that research on intimate citizenship includes challenges to “dominant cultural forms and assumptions” (p. 245), such as “pro-natalist ideology” (p. 239). Having children is promoted as a fundamental element in the intimate citizenship regimes described by and surrounding participants, understood here as “*a set of norms and practices related to intimate life, in motion*” (Roseneil, Crowhurst, Hellesund, Santos, & Stoilova, 2020, p. 21), preferable to the alternative childfree or childless state.

The participants in this study oppose the regime of pronatalism by questioning its logic and the morality of it while offering childfreedom as an alternative strategy, arguing it alleviates climate change, as shown in section 5.1.2. In doing so, I argue that participants present an alternative regime wherein ways of doing identities (Plummer, 2005, p. 77) include the childfree climate enthusiast as advocating for considerations of reproductive rights and responsibilities.

Importantly, intimate citizenship illuminates “day to day stories of new ways of living which reveal how people confront ethical dilemmas” (Plummer, 2001, p. 248). Through forms of everyday resistance, participants challenge conventional understandings and pronatalist expressions, as will be discussed in a later section. First, pronatalist expressions will be explored using reproductive governance, which enables a focus on moral regimes, understood as “the privileged standards of morality that are used to govern intimate behaviour” (p. 242).

6.1.1 The Mechanisms of and Responses to Reproductive Governance

Examples from the participant's accounts in chapter five reveal awareness of several forms of pronatalist expressions observed or faced by participants, and highlight ways which society is structured around the nuclear family, such as when Hannah is expected to accept and conform to a “program” (p. 28). Reproductive governance, building on governmentality, is useful for explaining how pronatalism functions normatively, as it lets us examine the mechanisms of

pronatalist moral regimes which regulate “reproductive options, behaviours, and identities available” (Morgan & Roberts, 2012, pp. 244, 251). Normative systems described reveal that participants face or observe several forms of pronatalist pressures from families; friends; co-workers or managers; strangers; religious upbringings; governments presenting economic inducements; and companies producing products aimed at parents. One participant, Linda, notices the pressures diminishing, attributing this to her aging into an “old maid” (see p. 29). Still, participants critique patronising platitudes dismissing childfreedom as either selfish (p.32), irrational (p. 36) or something to regret or grow out of (p. 24, 29). Huxley (2008), presenting governmentality, clarifies that certain conducts, including self-regulation (p. 1641) are produced through incitements (pp. 1637-1638, 1640). Regulation may not occur in disciplining and dominating power expressions, as governing also occurs through established “taken-for-granted social relations” (p. 1636) and “discursively produced and circulated rationalities” (p. 1643). When Linda is sent baby formula after entering her first marriage (p. 28-29), she is not forced to have a baby, but the implication is that she should want to. Participants also describe internalising the pressures, much like participants in the study on procreation-norms by Bhambhani and Inbanathan (2020), wondering if something was wrong if they did not want children or were affected by the climate crisis to the degree they are, and wishing for social validation and the feeling of belonging to a group (p. 31).

The moral regime promoted by pronatalist norms frames childfreedom as climate change as “weird” and seemingly unnecessarily pessimistic, as pointed out by Jenny (p. 36). The “identities available” place childfree individuals as outsiders whose choices are available for examination. The strategy utilised by participants include challenging the logics of procreation. As pointed out by Huxley (2008), self-regulating people may challenge governing by “set[ing] governmental projects against each other in counterconducts” (p. 1642) through for instance forms of everyday resistance. Issues with pronatalist efforts becomes evident in the resistance towards pronatalism, which places childfree individuals in the margins of conventional society, as exemplified by Thomas’ frustration with being dismissed as illogical or eccentric (p. 24) or Emma noting how society frames wanting childfreedom as something “wrong” (p. 29) with you. Furthermore, participants object to their childfree choice being examined, citing the intrusiveness (p. 28, 41-42) or patronizing character of pronatalist expressions (p. 29). Childfree individuals facing stigma or pressure to conform to dominant cultures’ views on procreation is consistent with previous empirical studies (Bahtiyar-Saygan & Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2019; Bhambhani & Inbanathan, 2020; Koropeckyj-Cox et al., 2018; Rich et al., 2011).

6.1.1.1 *An Alternative Intimate Citizenship*

Plummer (2001) points to discourses on collapsing values and ethics, wherein “emerging moralities and ethics” (p. 238) become prevalent; in the case of the study participants, BirthStrike represents an intimate citizenship regime with a focus on the responsibility to examine one’s reproductive wishes, something they wish to promote and normalise. The participants, whilst feeling intensely about climate change (section 5.1.2), simultaneously point to the indifference of others. Some participants are apprehensive about others feeling intense eco-emotions and worries about climate change, whilst some, feeling a sense of duty or responsibility, want to spread information on climate change and childfreedom as a strategy for mitigating climate anxiety. This is justified by for instance likening birthstriking to other social movements deemed provocative in the past (p. 32) but accepted as reasonable and morally correct to support today. Such comparative techniques attempt to establish the participants’ arguments as *the* rational ones in a morally superior position to people who have children “uncritically”. As shown, participants experienced frustration as their reasoning was met with scepticism or deemed irrational or immoral by others conforming to pronatalist ideals (p. 24, 27). The participants’ wish for more people to take an ethical stance on climate change echoes what Kakenmaster (2019) refers to in his analysis of climate activism discourse. He describes one dominant approach to climate change and action: “Ethical-individualists propose awakening people’s moral and ethical obligations to combat climate change” and the “moral issue” of “unethical ways of living” (p. 378). Many of the narratives found through this study propagate an option of either acting eco-friendly or acting in manners making one complicit in the climate disaster, and participants place responsibility on privileged people who access education and reproductive autonomy to thoroughly consider reasons for reproduction, among other climate friendly behaviours. In this sense, participants of this study can be understood as proponents of an ethical-individualist climate action regime, framing climate change through a moral lens whilst also acknowledging the need for structural change implemented through intra-governmental policies and scientific breakthrough (p. 30, 32).

Intimate citizenship further points to “questions of belonging, recognition and participation” (Roseneil et al., 2020, p. 18). The conversations with Mia, Robert, Jenny, Emma, Linda, Thomas, and Hannah reveal negotiations with their surrounding contexts and themselves. For some, accepting the non-conformity of childfreedom is easier than for others, and some struggle with being placed in the outskirts of normalcy. Accepting one’s outsider status, compared to people who wish for and/or have children, becomes challenging as some participants wish they would feel a stronger sense of belonging in society and groups (p. 31).

Yet, the dominant and privileged form of intimate life and citizenship remains centred on procreative, heterosexual coupling. As illustrated in section 5.1.5, BirthStrike helps participants withstand societal pressures through functioning as a *safe space* wherein one finds *like-minded* opinions and validation. In this sense, BirthStrike presents a foundation or articulation of changing rationalities of reproduction through which participants can oppose the moral regimes of pronatalist trends and arguments, questioning social conventions and biological drives. Such opposition will be discussed in the following section, as a form of everyday resistance.

6.1.1.2 *Resisting and Reframing Pronatalist Ideals*

Much of the participants' actions and understandings are suitably examined through the concept of everyday resistance, which as mentioned in chapter three, lets us understand actions opposing power in an attempt to undermine it, in a somewhat unconscious, passive or disguised manner – as “a part of normality” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 3) or their personality (p. 10).

Viewing pregnancy as scary or being fertile as disappointing, constitutes a form of resistance to the appeal of having children, for Hannah, who *frames fertility as a hinderance* as it requires reproductive responsibility of her. Such thought patterns are supported by a study by Moore (2021) wherein fertility is experienced as a burden to fix through sterilisation, like Thomas plans to. Thomas and the childfree individuals of Moore's study, consider sterilisation a tool through which they can attain bodily autonomy and avoid the risk of losing control over one's reproductive fate, providing a sense of relief. Similarly, thought patterns or certain phrasings of arguments related to regret exemplifies resistance to pronatalist systems, as participants observe platitudes about regretting childfree choices (p. 30, 41). The participants respond by referring to parents who regret having children (p. 35), or focus on the regret that are sure they would experience if they chose to become parents (p. 29), undermining and opposing pronatalist norms. The participants subvert pronatalist expectations and discourse concerning regret in framing themselves as thankful that they don't have to regret having a child. Some highlight their willingness to regret childfreedom rather than regretting having children (p. 29-30, 34-35). Participants *oppose* what they deem *irresponsible procreation*: the logic of having children during a climate crisis and the personal motivation of parents, as participants criticise having children thoughtlessly. In this sense, participants subvert the procreation-norm, by turning it around and asking parents to question and rationalise *their choice* to procreate. Their focus on the needs and rights of children to be born into a stable environment, in terms of both climate change and standards for parenting, contrast with perceptions of childfree people as selfish, also explored in other studies on childfreedom (Smith et al., 2020). Participants further object to remarks on biological clocks by arguing against the

validity of biological urges and for negotiation of biological needs or wants (p. 38-39), much like the participants in the study by Morison, Macleod, Lynch, Mijas, and Shivakumar (2016) who challenge the “naturalness of reproduction [and] the altruism of those who reproduce” (p. 194). Participants’ critical reflection related to widely recognised reasons for procreation provides an argument against accepting pronatalist control techniques compelling certain behaviours, such as assuming everyone will experience and act on biological imperatives to procreate, or *wants* and *should* have children. Participants furthermore widen the margins for how to live a meaningful life, attempting to reframe the “pronatalist, patriarchal culture wherein having children remains at the core of identity” (Harrington, 2019, p. 23) and social participation. None of the participants view parenthood as an essential component in a happy life but some acknowledge the benefits associated with finding fulfilment through parenthood. They counter the implication that childfree people miss out on fulfilment associated with having children in one’s life by clarifying that their lives are child-full (p. 29, 33), rejecting the idea that childfree people’s lives lack meaning because they don’t take on a parenting role. Reinventing their status as both “child-full” and childfree highlights their options of when to take on a role in the lives of children around them – through their status as an aunt, uncle, teacher, or volunteer, and disrupts the notions of parenthood as being the only way in which to “have children”: Jenny could “have” her nephews and nieces, without parenting them. Furthermore, participants’ views of parenthood a demanding, stressful, or something only those suited for the task should engage in (p. 34), functions as a strategy through which parenthood is redefined as not worth the participants’ effort. They focus on the *constraints* of parenthood, including pressure to be a parent of a certain standard (as in a “good mother”) (p. 41) and the substantial commitment it requires (p. 26), as well as the *benefits* of childfreedom in the ability to prioritise their time or enjoy their careers fully (p. 33). Such resistance to ideals of parenthood through framing it as disadvantageous and childfreedom as liberating is similarly highlighted in other studies (Gietel-Basten, 2021; Settle & Brumley, 2014; Smith et al., 2020; Terry & Braun, 2012), particularly one by Doyle et al. (2013) in which childfree women emphasise finding fulfilment and pride in meaningful work and contributing to their communities through volunteering (Doyle et al., 2013, p. 404).

Findings highlight the effect of making the childfree choice on how childfreedom is perceived; if one by circumstance ends up childless, it is not cause for judgement, but if one actively rejects parenthood, one may be subjected to criticism. This includes being perceived as “a doomsday type” for basing the childfree choice on climate change (p. 36). The act of resistance is thus cause for condemnation by others expecting one to conform to pronatalist

systems, or if, as suggested by participants, climate change and action prompts feelings of guilt in others (p. 31-32). The participants ways of addressing topics of fulfilment and meaning suggests that they resist devaluation of their lifestyle and -choices through framing them positively – as a duty and privilege connected to pride and strength, worth sanctions from those conforming to societal ideals. The conformity of others is in turn seen as affirmation of the non-conventional path as the right one (p. 31), a critical stance on other people’s tendencies to follow norms. However, such forms of resistance are not uniform or cohesive, as some participants simultaneously acknowledge difficulties related to social exclusion (p. 27) or about not fitting in (p. 31). Participants seem both assertive and fragile, highlighting their dynamic and relative relationship with non-conformity and belonging.

While some participants reflected on the meaning of life through biological reproduction, they disconnect the two by not associating parenthood to what they see as a “modern” understanding of meaning of life. In line with a study by Bhattacharya (2011), participants connect purpose and meaning in life to self-determination, independence, professional fulfilment and social responsibility toward the people around you (pp. 283-284).

The climate change aspect of their childfree choice may alleviate the stigma facing the participants, setting them apart from the those in the study by Terry and Braun (2012), who declare their childfree lifestyle as selfish, as they wish to avoid the “impact a child would have” on their lives (p. 214). By referring to childfreedom as climate action and being responsible, the participants in this study’s childfree choice is framed as morally superior to having children thoughtlessly or for personal happiness (p. 25, 34). Participants, presenting themselves as concerned about the environment and with time to volunteer, may be able to mitigate the moral criticism and outrage directed at childfree choices and individuals, as illustrated in a study by Ashburn-Nardo (2017). By referring to the climate crisis and urgency, participants can frame themselves as worrying about a worthy cause, and their childfreedom as selfless – an act prioritising the collective good.

6.1.2 Gender Disconnected from Parenthood

As presented in chapter three, the concept of *doing gender* highlights gendered conduct and norms practiced and performed in accordance with social expectations regularly enough for it to appear as essential rather than constructed ways of behaving (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140). Doing gender has often illustrated the persistence of gender, whilst *undoing gender* by contrast emphasises ways of reducing gender differences, rendering gender irrelevant (Deutsch, 2007).

Participants' accounts illustrated several gendered associations related to parenting. When focusing on gender roles as relevant for her parents' generation but not hers, Jenny associates men with the professional sphere and women with domestic responsibilities, and draws on same-sex households to exemplify how gender roles is a thing of the past, as the father-role has expanded to raising children as well (p. 37) and is no longer recognised as "gender-*inappropriate*" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 135). Jenny does acknowledge the normativity present in her society by highlighting her own way of doing womanhood by being career-oriented as non-conformist, but she also suggests whether gender is somewhat irrelevant in modern society through largely associating it with antiquated gender roles which she dismisses as dated. By disregarding gender as something invisible to her, not relevant enough for an opinion, gender in ways is undone. Contrastingly, when questioning what is in children's interest regarding the genders of parents, Emma subscribes to and upholds a gender binary; based on sex, as in biological differences, and understandings of sexuality (p. 37). Robert challenges such notions of gender as being important when parenting, framing children as needing supportive adults more than gendered role-models (p. 38), also undoing gender by dismantling or reducing its use (Deutsch, 2007, p. 114) in for instance parenting situations. Furthermore, Robert dismisses much of gender understandings as mass-produced (p. 38), which he devalues much like he does other social norms and popular opinions defined by society he views as malfunctioning.

Participants further illuminate several links between parenthood and gender expression, such as norms and expectations they notice for men and women. For instance, Linda highlights how a bachelor-role is accessible for men (p. 38) but less so for women, who are expected to want children and have what is culturally deemed maternal qualities in doing gender "appropriately" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 146). As presented in chapter five, understandings of being a woman is linked to notions of sacrifice (p. 42), double burdens and emotional labour (p. 25), suggesting gendered expectation of women as selfless, nurturing, and hard-working, supported by studies on childfree women's experiences (Bhambhani & Inbanathan, 2018; Rich et al., 2011). The analysis indicates re-negotiations of gendered behaviour through emphasising independence, self-determination and freedom (Peterson, 2015), characteristics stereotypically disconnected from femininity – and motherhood. This is supported by studies in which femininity is re-understood through rejection of pronatalist merging of motherhood and womanhood (Peterson & Engwall, 2013).

The standards for motherhood are also questioned through the notion of a "good mother" (p. 41) and martyrdom (p. 42), which informs Hannah's opinion of motherhood as unappealing

for her, Linda's criticism of lacking parental benefits (p. 25), or Mia's understanding of motherhood as incompatible with her ambitions (p. 33). Hannah's reflections may be read as a rejection of the care-taker role and burdens of responsibility associated with motherhood (Bhambhani & Inbanathan, 2018; Peterson, 2015). Her reflections are supported by the study by Settle and Brumley (2014) wherein childfree women were wary of societal expectations surrounding motherhood making it hard to live up to the motherhood ideal, as well as sceptical of motherhood's impact on their lives. Similarly, the participants in the study by Bhambhani and Inbanathan (2018) were reluctant to take on the commitment of motherhood, equating it with giving up the freedom to prioritise their time as they please (p. 176). Interestingly, Robert, when tying expressions of masculinity to being a contributing member of society (p. 38), associates a care-taker role with expressions of masculinity. Both Hannah and Robert undo gender somewhat, by challenging conventional gender differences and normative notions of traditional masculinity and femininity.

To participants, reproductive responsibility is not understood as ways of "doing manhood". Several participants highlight gendered differences concerning reproductive responsibility. Emma navigates these differences by attempting to normalise vasectomies through interviewing men about theirs (p. 39), whilst Hannah acts out behaviour coded as masculine in a protest toward gender differences in responsibilities (p. 39). Hannah similarly opposed men doing their gender by avoiding reproductive responsibility by actively placing it on them; in ways she was taking reproductive responsibility, but by first claiming disinterest in having children, something she associated with masculine behaviour, and secondly, avoiding contraceptives to push her sexual partners to use protection. The subversion that childfreedom represents in relation to ways of doing gender may be experienced as a loss of gender identity and deemed unintelligible by the participants themselves: Hannah wonders if her anatomy makes her a woman but finds that surrounding invasive interest in her ability to become a mother and her association of motherhood and womanhood makes her distance herself from the notion of being a woman entirely. In ways, her actions are "less gendered, not just differently gendered" (Deutsch, 2007, p. 114). Interestingly, she points to her way of doing womanhood as unconventional, *due to* how commonly motherhood and womanhood is associated. She identifies how conformity in the rest of society sets her way of doing womanhood apart. In other words, widely accepted connotations of motherhood as motherhood complicate gender understandings for some participants.

6.2 Summary of Discussion

This chapter illustrates the power demonstrated by pronatalist expression, as well as the resistance it fosters. In one way, it produces outsiders in those not adhering to pronatalist norms, resulting in negative emotions and experiences of loneliness, and on the other hand it produces resistance. Participants challenge a pronatalist regime simply through living outside of conventional parenthood-norms, but also by framing parenthood as undesirable in section 5.1.3. Pronatalist mechanisms regulate, but also mobilise demands for and patterns of more responsible procreation: participants posit alternative intimate citizenship regimes based on moral resistance against conventional ideas of the nuclear family and having children. As such, participants focus on the rights of children to be born into and raised in a safe environment, as well as individual responsibilities to consider climate change and climate anxiety in reproductive decisions.

To the participants of this study, childfreedom is multi-faceted in that it provides or makes room for challenges, comfort, and purpose in different ways. The disciplining effect of pronatalism, which places participants as outsiders, also prompts them to seek validity, solidarity, and like-mindedness for instance in *BirthStrike*. Participants describe facing pressures and norms to procreate, at times through gendered expectations. Participants' rejection of conventional gender understandings and norms in ways reduce gender to unimportant, or less important than for instance leading a life in which one acts authentically and according to values, oriented both toward oneself and one's community's needs. Participants present alternative reproductive and intimate citizenship regimes, advocating for procreation to be considered in light of the climate disaster, and by implication challenging mechanisms of reproductive governance and moral imperatives to uncritically lead a life which participants view as in opposition with climate action. They promote a regime in which childfreedom is accepted as valid and not subjected to external examinations or pressures to conform to dominant parenthood- and procreation-norms, through resisting and reframing life meaning and purpose as connected to autonomy and self-determination, responsibility, and duty to positively contribute to your community. When participants of this study attempt to normalise the childfree choice and lifestyle, it is at once a request for validation of their choices, a bid for reducing climate emissions, *and* a rejection or resistance of reproductive governance and pronatalism as accepted.

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Climate change will continue to remain a hot topic, engaging climate activists, global leaders, and media attention as well as individual and collective awareness and action. This study set out to access the experiences leading to the particular individual climate action of choosing childfreedom. Specifically, the research aimed to explore members of the BirthStrike movement's understanding of childfreedom as climate action as well as the experiences and motivations leading them to their childfree choice. Furthermore, two sub-objectives were presented, including a focus on how members of BirthStrike navigate and critique pronatalist pressures and norms, and understand and construct life purpose and meaning as separated from parenthood. Finally, the study explores how members of BirthStrike renegotiate the links between parenthood and gender expression.

Understandings of and Motivations for Childfreedom as Climate Action

Participants' accounts show two distinct factors impacting their view on having children during a climate crisis. Firstly, participants want to limit the emissions caused by population growth and subsequent overconsumption. Secondly, participants dread the state of the planet children are born into, considering their right to be brought up in a safe environment. Furthermore, climate change has a profound effect on participants' reproductive decisions stemming from the emotions climate change stirs in them, but also ideas of what provides them with a sense of fulfilment. Experiences of pronatalist pressures furthermore impacted the choice to be childfree.

Sub-Objective 1: Pronatalist Pressures and Meaning of Life

Childfree individuals face stigmatization in surroundings promoting having children, wherein participants deviate from expectations. The childfree individuals in this study rely on strategies in which they may frame their choice in a positive and contributing light, by presenting alternatives to a fulfilled and meaningful life. Participants wish to establish both conversations on and the childfree position itself as a valid, considering it beneficial for climate mitigation and reduction of emission rates.

The participants in this study, by critiquing the morality of pronatalist mechanisms and pressures, are able to frame childfreedom as climate action as an oppositional moral regime to the pronatalist one they identify themselves in. Their alternative regime contains a way of doing their identity as childfree, helpful adults, reframing the meaning of life from a pronatalist understanding to one focused on duty to one's community.

Sub-Objective 2: Gender as Separated from Parenthood

Childfreedom presents a subversion and undoing of gender, due to the conflation of motherhood and womanhood, but also through participants' emphasis of independence and self-

actualisation, characteristics disconnected from stereotypical ideals of womanhood. Female participants struggle to reflect on womanhood as separated from motherhood, illustrating the force of the connection between the two. Participants renegotiate the links between parenthood and gender by framing motherhood as unappealing due to double burdens facing mothers. Furthermore, participants display unconventional ways of doing gender through resisting gender norms and expectations, and they further dismiss the importance of gender as compared to other personal attributes. Lastly, gendered expectations placing reproductive responsibility on women are critiqued, as participants emphasise the importance of reflection on responsibility for all.

As presented in chapter one, this study examines the overview of motivations leading to the participants' childfree choice, including a focus on childfreedom as climate friendly – or at least not detrimental to the environment. The participants' reflections on social norms, such as parenthood- and procreation-norms, highlight an importance placed on self-actualisation as opposed to conformity. They may focus on their agency, and determine for themselves what their time should be spent on. Climate action through childfreedom may be viewed as an extreme measure, but to the participants of this study, it is both a comfortable and valuable choice which makes them feel as though they make a positive contribution. Climate change fosters negative emotions, but their childfree choice provides a way of mitigating them as it gives them time and ability to focus on what is meaningful and purposeful to them. This study contributes to existing empirical research on both childfreedom and climate action by illustrating ways in which the concepts are linked in the lives of members of BirthStrike.

7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Conducting the research presented in this study opened further questions about childfree choices and climate change's impact on them, which should be explored in future research projects. For instance, are there similar conversations to the ones stemming from BirthStrike occurring in areas in the Global South, and if so, how are questions about pronatalist and/or religious norms, individual responsibility and procreational effects on the climate crisis navigated in various contexts? How does the Covid-19 pandemic impact conversations on childfreedom and reproductive matters? Furthermore, similar studies to mine with larger diversity in the participant group would be interesting, to explore discourses on and attitudes toward childfreedom as climate action among various gender identities and queer people for instance. It would be interesting to examine the experiences of childfree people of various sexual identities who may have been assumed to be childless by default of their sexuality not

being encapsulated by hetero- and procreation-norms. Finally, all participants in this study were satisfied with their childfree status. As mentioned, I had hoped to purposively recruit participants grieving their childfree choice, as I knew some of BirthStrike's members did. The study, in this sense, does not reflect experiences of people dissatisfied or who are processing grief in relation to the loss of parenthood. As the aim of the study was to reflect the experiences of members of BirthStrike, findings illustrating more ambivalence could be useful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

<p>Background</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me briefly about yourself • What are your ideas around or thoughts on <i>family planning</i>? (This could be on a structural level, but also on a more personal level: have you planned to have start a family whilst growing up, for instance?) • Do you think there are particular experiences that have influenced or developed your thoughts on family planning? If so, please elaborate. • How did you come to know about BirthStrike?
<p>Motivations for joining BirthStrike</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about what BirthStrike means to you. • BirthStrike’s platform emphasised voluntary childfreedom as a response to climate change. What would you say was most important to you when joining the movement? • Member participation in the movement varied, with some members pledging not to have children, whilst others participated through organising protests for instance. How have you participated in the movement? • What were you hoping to achieve by joining BirthStrike?
<p>Understanding of and relationship to - climate action or activism - climate anxiety or concern - norm critical focus/non-conformity work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your thoughts and feelings on climate change. • What do you consider to be important climate action? • Many of BirthStrike’s members also expressed norm critical focus, criticising “compulsory parenthood”. What are your thoughts on this/is this a factor for you, in relation to your childfree lifestyle choice?
<p>Understanding of <i>meaning of life</i> and construction of <i>life purpose</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Compulsory parenthood” can be explained by parenthood being understood as “the meaning of life”. What do these terms bring to mind? • Have factors such as climate change impacted your understanding of the concept “meaning of life”? If so, how? • Some consider climate action to be their “life purpose”. What are your thoughts on this? • What do you consider to be the general views on childfree existences in your home country and/or community? How do you feel about these views? • Would you consider childfree lives in your country and/or community to be norm breaking?

<p>Links and norms: gender identity and parenthood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some link gender identity and norms to parenthood. What are your thoughts on your society’s expectations towards men/women having children? • Does BirthStrike challenge these links, in your understanding? If so, how? • Have you faced challenges for joining the BirthStrike movement?
<p>Closing comments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BirthStrike movement issued a statement in the summer of 2020, stating that its online presence would largely be taken down. Are you planning to, or have you thought of joining the new platform about “channelling the loss of parenthood into climate justice”? • If not, do you have another arena for your activism/engagement onwards? • Do you have anything you would like to add which we have not touched upon so far?

Appendix 2: Revised Interview Guide

<p>Background</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me briefly about yourself • Did you ever wish for or plan to have children? Growing up, for example? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are your thoughts on people who plan families? • Do you think there are particular experiences that have influenced or developed your thoughts on “family planning”? If so, please elaborate. • Are you familiar with the distinction between <i>childfree</i> and <i>childless</i>? Which suits you better? • I am curious; how open you are about your choices? In what settings is your childfree lifestyle discussed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has it always been this way, or have you become more vocal since discovering BirthStrike? • How did you come to know about BirthStrike?
<p>Motivations for joining BirthStrike</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstly, please tell me about what BirthStrike means to you. • Of course, BirthStrike’s platform emphasised voluntary childfreedom as a response to climate change. My impression is that some already made choices to live childfree lives before encountering BirthStrike and joined in an effort to normalise and increase visibility of childfree lifestyle. Others joined to learn, some joined to find a community of childfree climate activists, and some joined because they want to influence climate politics, for instance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would you say was most important to you when joining the movement? What else? • Did you share the founders’ grief in not having children? • Member participation in the movement varied, with some members pledging not to have children, whilst others participated through organising protests for instance. How have you participated in the movement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider yourself an activist? If so, what does your activism look like? • What was your reaction to BirthStrike closing down last year? You’ve seemed interested in revitalising the movement. • What are you or were you hoping to achieve by joining BirthStrike?
<p>Understanding of and relationship to - climate action or activism - climate anxiety or concern - norm critical focus/non-conformity work</p>	<p>This leads me to my next topic; your relationship with climate action, climate change itself, and norm-critical focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you consider to be important climate action? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you find that climate action gives you an enhanced sense of meaning – as in, “this is what I find the most meaningful in my life”? • Childfreedom as climate action can be viewed as a very personal and difficult choice. Do you ever worry about regretting the choice?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you (or did you) ever worry about missing out on experiences reserved for parents, such as passing on traditions or experiencing parental pride or joy? - Do you worry that people will find you judgemental? → sensitive issue, and some participants indicate this - Have you faced challenges for living childfree and being in BirthStrike? - Did you have to defend the choice at any times? Do you worry about backlash for joining BirthStrike? <p>---</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your thoughts and feelings on climate change. How have these developed? What influences them? • How do you cope with or navigate negative feelings, such as climate anxieties, distress, grief, hopelessness? Any particular strategies? <p>---</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of BirthStrike’s members also expressed norm critical focus, criticising 1) societal pressures about parenthood 2) the idea of “compulsory parenthood” (by this I mean the understanding that everyone should have children) 3) ideas that children complete life and ideas such as women are inherently motherly, and that womanhood equals motherhood. What are your thoughts on this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you find that your choice is viewed as non-conforming to traditional lifestyles? How do you feel about that? - Was this (offering an alternative to parenthood norms) a factor for you, in relation to your childfree lifestyle choice? - What are your thoughts on those “conforming” to traditional life with children?
<p>Understanding of meaning of life and construction of life purpose</p>	<p>In this project, I am also interested in how participants find meaning and purpose in life. I have touched upon this, but...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some relate reproductivity to identity on a fundamental level, such as when considering their role as a parent first and foremost when thinking of their sense of self. What do you consider most important, when thinking about your sense of self? • Do you consider childfreedom as a part of your identity? Or could it be categorized as “just a choice” and not an intrinsic part of you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did BirthStrike influence this? • What lifegoals are important to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some childless or childfree people feel additional pressures to perform well career-wise, in their work. Have you felt such pressures? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How about with your activism, has that taken on a bigger role? • So, “compulsory parenthood” can be explained by parenthood and reproduction being understood as “the meaning of life” for humans. What does the term, meaning of life, bring to mind?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have factors such as climate change impacted your understanding of the concept “meaning of life”? If so, how? • Some consider climate action to be their “life purpose”. What are your thoughts on this? --- • What do you consider to be the general views on childfree existences in your home country and/or community? How do you feel about these views? Are they important to challenge, for you? • Would you consider childfree lives in your country and/or community to be non-conformist and norm breaking?
<p>Links and norms: gender identity and parenthood</p>	<p>Now, my specialisation is in gender analysis, so I have some questions on that topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some link gender identity and norms to parenthood. What are your thoughts on your society’s expectations towards men/women having children? • What consequences would you say the choice to lead a childfree life has for people/men/women? Positive, negative... • Research reveals that childless women sometimes can feel like “less of a woman” after learning that they can’t bear children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For male participants: Has deciding to not be a parent affected how you see yourself as a man? // Is your sense of masculinity affected by being childfree? What do you connect to your masculinity? - Do you think you’ve experienced societal pressures to have children due to your gender? Please elaborate. - For female participants: In this context, I wondered what you connect to your sense of womanhood? How is your gender expression separated from parenthood norms? - Do you think you’ve experienced societal pressures to have children due to your gender? Please elaborate. - Do you think of your way of being a woman as non-conformist? - Would you think of motherhood as a burden or source of stress? • Does BirthStrike challenge the links between parenthood and gender, in your understanding? If so, how? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider norms connected to parenthood important to critique?
<p>Closing comments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have anything you would like to add which we have not touched upon so far?

Appendix 3: Information Letter and Consent Form

<p style="text-align: center;">Are you interested in taking part in the research project "BirthStrike: An Exploration of Childfreedom as Climate Action"?</p> <p>This is an inquiry about participation in the data collection process for a thesis to be written as part of the completion of the master program Global Development Theory and Practice at the University of Bergen (UiB). In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.</p> <p>Purpose of the project Climate change has emerged as one of the defining and most pressing development challenges in the 21st century, requiring knowledge and research on people's personal thoughts on and attitudes toward climate action, and what shapes these. This project is anchored in a curiosity regarding efforts of climate change mitigation, as well as an interest in childfreedom as a response to compulsory parenthood.</p> <p>This project seeks to explore the understandings and views on the links between childfreedom and climate change, from the perspective of members of the movement or campaign called <i>BirthStrike</i>. Joining the movement required members to pledge to forgo having children, as a means of mitigating climate change on a personal level whilst bringing attention to climate issues and concern on a larger scale. The project will explore the members' motivation for joining and participation within the movement as well as their thoughts on and relationship with climate change, gender norms, narratives on "the meaning of life" and compulsory parenthood.</p> <p>The project aims at providing valuable knowledge to research fields such as global development, gender studies and cultural studies.</p> <p>Who is responsible for the research project? The University of Bergen is the institution responsible for the project.</p> <p>Why are you being asked to participate? You are being asked due to your involvement with <i>BirthStrike</i> through their Facebook group.</p> <p>What does participation involve for you? The method applied in the research will be individual interviews, meaning that participating in the project involves being interviewed by the researcher. Please answer the questions when comfortable for you. The interview will be conducted digitally, over the online platform Zoom, and transcribed at a later time. The Zoom interviews will be set up through the UiB server, ensuring that the meeting rooms are encrypted and safe. Interviews are expected to take place in December 2020 and January 2021. Data may also be collected through email correspondence, should the participant prefer this.</p> <p>Participation in the project is voluntary and based on your informed consent. It should be mentioned that no risk is associated with participation. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made</p>	<p>anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.</p> <p>Your personal privacy – storage and use your personal data I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). The people who will have access to the personal data include the master student conducting the research and the supervisor. As a participant in the project you will be anonymised upon transcription of the data, as I will replace your name with a pseudonym and contact details with a code. I can assure you that you will not be identifiable in the final thesis. The data will be stored in a personal computer protected by a password only known to the researcher, and through the SAFE-system (Secure Access to Research Data and E-Infrastructure) provided by the IT department at UiB, which ensures confidentiality in the processing of personal data. All data will be deleted upon the end of the project, which is scheduled for 01.06.2021.</p> <p>Your rights So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to: - access the personal data that is being processed about you - request that your personal data is deleted - request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified - receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and - send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data</p> <p>I will process your personal data based on your consent.</p> <p>Based on an agreement with the University of Bergen, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation on December 14th, 2020.</p> <p>If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Researcher: Silje Mari Mo (silje_mo@student.uib.no) - Supervisor: Haldis Haukanes (haldis.haukanes@uib.no) - Our Data Protection Officer: Henrik Neland Svendsen. - NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (pers.consent@nester.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1). <p>Yours sincerely, Project Leader Haldis Haukanes (Supervisor) Student (Researcher)</p> <p>Bergen, 15.12.2020 <i>Haldis Haukanes</i> <i>Silje Mari Mo</i></p>
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Screenshot 1 - Page 1 and 2

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *BirthStrike – An Exploration of Childfreedom as Climate Action* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in one or multiple interviews through email correspondence or over the Zoom platform

for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 01.06.2021

(Signed by participant, date)

Oral consent:
If preferred, the participant may give oral consent to partake in the interview. The participant must have read the information letter and will be given opportunity to ask questions. The oral consent will be recorded on Zoom, before the interview starts.

3

Screenshot 2 - Page 3

Appendix 4: NSD Letter of Approval and Assessment of Application for Extension

<p>Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger 14.12.2020, 16:50</p> <p>NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA</p> <p>NSD's assessment</p> <p>Project title BirthStrike - An Exploration of Childfreedom as Climate Action</p> <p>Reference number 538270</p> <p>Registered 12.11.2020 av Silje Mari Mo - Silje.Mo@student.uib.no</p> <p>Data controller (institution responsible for the project) Universitetet i Bergen / Det psykologiske fakultet / Hjemil-senteret</p> <p>Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate) Haldis Haukaanes, Haldis.Haukaanes@uib.no, tlf: 004755589259</p> <p>Type of project Student project, Master's thesis</p> <p>Contact information, student Silje Mari Mo, silje.mo@student.uib.no, siljem.mo@gmail.com, tlf: 41693594</p> <p>Project period 20.08.2020 - 01.06.2021</p> <p>Status 14.12.2020 - Assessed</p> <p>Assessment (1) 14.12.2020 - Assessed</p> <p>Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with Norwegian data protection legislation, as long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 14.12.2020, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything</p> <p>about:blank Side 1 av 4</p>	<p>Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger 14.12.2020, 16:50</p> <p>is in place for the processing to begin.</p> <p>NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.</p> <p>TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION The project will be processing special categories of personal data about ethnic origin, political opinions and philosophical beliefs in addition to general categories of personal data, until 01.06.2021.</p> <p>LEGAL BASIS - SAMPLE 1 The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.</p> <p>The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is therefore explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a), cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).</p> <p>LEGAL BASIS - THIRD PERSONS The interviews with may reveal data relating to third persons. The informants might speak about others than themselves such as spouse, and possibly other significant persons in their family/network. The research examines members of the BirthStrike movement, people choosing not to have children as a form of climate action and as a response to compulsory parenthood. The processing of data relating to third persons, and especially their significant others, follows as a natural consequence. The data will include background information and may include special categories of personal data due to the topics discussed.</p> <p>The researcher will take measures to avoid that the recorded information from the interviews contain personal information about the participants and third persons. In particular, they will not audio-record the participants' names. Participants will also be asked to avoid mentioning names of third persons, and rather use terms such as "my spouse", "my mother", etc.</p> <p>In order to achieve the purpose of the project, it is important that the informants get to speak on how their choices have affected their daily lives. It is therefore necessary to process data about third persons in order to achieve the purpose of the project.</p> <p>As long as data about third persons are of limited scope, and data will be anonymized after a short period of time and in the publication, we find that public interest clearly outweighs any potential impact on the rights and freedoms of the participants.</p> <p>The project will process special categories of data relating to third persons on the legal basis that processing is necessary for scientific research purposes, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 e), cf. art. 6 nr. 3 b), cf. art. 9 nr. 2 j), cf. the Personal Data Act §§ 8 and 9.</p> <p>PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding: - lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent</p> <p>about:blank Side 2 av 4</p>
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Screenshot 3 - Page 1 and 2

<p>Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger 14.12.2020, 16:50</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes - data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed - storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose <p>THE RIGHTS OF SAMPLE 1 Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.</p> <p>NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.</p> <p>We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.</p> <p>THE RIGHTS OF THIRD PERSONS Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.</p> <p>While collecting data, personal data about the informants significant others may appear. Information about significant others will not be asked directly about during the interview, however participants might still talk about their significant others. The informants will be asked not to use names, but significant others might still be identifiable.</p> <p>On this basis we find that there can be made an exception from the individual right to information for third persons, as this would entail a disproportionate big effort to inform the third persons cf the General Data Protection Regulation art. 14 nr. 5 b)</p> <p>We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.</p> <p>FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.</p> <p>Zoom is a data processor for the project. NSD presupposes that the processing of personal data by a data processor meets the requirements under the General Data Protection Regulation arts. 28 and 29.</p> <p>To ensure that these requirements are met, you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution.</p> <p>FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data is being carried out in accordance with what is documented.</p> <p>about:blank Side 3 av 4</p>	<p>Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger 14.12.2020, 16:50</p> <p>Good luck with the project!</p> <p>Contact person at NSD: Henrik Netland Svensen Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)</p> <p>about:blank Side 4 av 4</p>
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Screenshot 4 - Page 3 and 4



Melding

02.06.2021 13:51

Behandlingen av personopplysninger er vurdert av NSD. Vurderingen er:

NSD has assessed the change registered on 02.06.2021.

The research period has been extended until 20.11.2021.

Please note that in case of further extensions, it may be necessary to inform the sample.

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Contact person at NSD: Henrik Netland Svensen

Good luck with the rest of the project!

Screenshot 4 - NSD assessment of application for extension