“We despair”: Understanding the effect of political despair on personal well-being and actions to promote social change.

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Summary

In recent years we have witnessed many dramatic social and political changes, from the raging bushfires in Australia, California, and the Amazon; the on-going climate crisis and resistance to climate action; the COVID-19 pandemic; to the Black Lives Matter protests. Such changes can elicit a range of emotional responses. Indeed, during these tumultuous times one emotion that commonly emerged in widespread discussions was despair about the political status-quo (e.g., regarding racial inequality or climate change). I conceptualise this despair as *political despair.* Anecdotal reports (e.g., through global and social media) appear to suggest that political despair has implications for people's ongoing willingness to engage in actions to promote social change, as well as their personal well-being. However, unlike the extensive literature on other political emotions such as anger, guilt, fear and anxiety, there is scant literature on political despair. Therefore, in this thesis I develop an analysis of political despair, that first addresses the antecedent appraisals associated with political despair. I then consider the outcomes of despair and the implications it has for has for individuals and society. Finally, I consider how to mitigate the potential negative outcomes of despair.

Across eight studies, this thesis seeks to understand political despair by triangulating qualitative, cross-sectional, and experimental methodologies. I first address the research question: What is political despair? What are is antecedents and outcomes? Taking a social identity approach, I argue that whilst political despair is a political emotion (i.e., it is connected to views about what is "right and just" in the world), it is also a group-based emotion. That is, it arises from one's commitment to a group that shares a concern about an issue such as racial inequality or climate change; namely, it stems from social identification. Furthermore, political despair is evoked when committed group members perceive that particular socio-political issues are systemic and unjust (illegitimate), as well as uncontrollable and unchanging (intractable).

Accordingly, I argue that people experience political despair because they identify with a group concerned about justice and equality for Black People, or about concerted action to tackle

climate change, and see these issues are illegitimate and intractable. Political despair can be conceptually distinguished from other, related, political emotions (anger, hope, efficacy, anomie). Finally, I propose that experiencing political despair has implications for personal well-being and engagement in conventional and radical forms of collective action. The theoretical tenets of these propositions are outlined in Chapter 1 and are empirically addressed in Chapters 2 and 3.

To first address the antecedents of political despair, in Chapter 2 a group of self-identified supporters of change on racial inequality (Black Lives Matter; Study 1) and climate change (Study 2), who also self-reported experiencing a level of despair about said issues, were sampled. Participants were asked why they feel despair about racial inequality [climate change]. Using the qualitative method of Framework Analysis and drawing on intergroup emotion theory, I found that despair is indeed a prevalent emotion amongst people who support change on these issues. Moreover, consistent with my theorising, the responses indicated that despair was elicited because they appraised the social-political status-quo as being illegitimate and intractable.

I next sought to quantitatively test the antecedent appraisals of political despair that were determined in Chapter 2 (illegitimacy and intractability), whilst also considering the relationships with the outcome variables. Accordingly, Chapter 3 tests the theoretical model of political despair that consists of the antecedent appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability, political despair as a group-based emotion, and the outcome variables of well-being, conventional collective action, and radical collective action, in the contexts of racial inequality in the US (Studies 3 & 4) and climate change in Australia (Study 5). Chapter 3 therefore cross-sectionally tests the theoretical model of political despair across three studies, whilst controlling for anger, a known driver of collective action. The results showed that intractability and illegitimacy were both positively related to political despair, whilst only illegitimacy was associated with anger. As such, seeing the situations as intractable is the distinguishing antecedent of despair. I expected that despair would have diminishing effects on well-being and engagement in conventional actions, but that it would have a positive, facilitative effect on radical action engagement. Indeed, despair was associated with

reduced well-being (specifically, increased stress and burnout, as well as decreased optimism about one's future) and increased engagement in radical actions. However, unexpectedly, political despair was positively associated with engagement in conventional forms of collective actions, suggesting that despair and support of social change movements are co-existing.

Given the evidence that political despair is associated with burnout (Studies 4 & 5) which has previously been found to lead people to disengage from social change movements, Chapter 4 addresses the research question: how do we mitigate the negative impacts of political despair on burnout in the context of climate justice? In Chapter 4 I expanded the theoretical framework to propose that the construct of burnout could be a suitable approach for understanding how despair can impact individuals sustained commitment to the climate movement as well as their personal well-being. That is, burnout can be conceptualised as reflecting two aspects: exhaustion (akin to poor personal well-being) and disengagement (the opposite of commitment to collective action). Accordingly, I seek to attenuate the link between political despair and burnout. Mitigating burnout should allow people to feel well in themselves and in turn continue engaging in actions to bring about climate action. As such, Chapter 4 experimentally explores interventions to mitigate the negative impacts despair can have on the two dimensions of climate orientated burnout (exhaustion and disengagement).

In Chapter 4 I first adapt and validate a new measure of climate orientated burnout (C-OLBI) to be used in the proceeding studies (Study 6). Three potential intervention methods (plus a control group) are tested in two experiments, in the context of climate change in the US (Studies 7 & 8). First, getting people to imagine a positive future where the climate crisis is addressed (utopian thinking). Second, getting people to think about the concrete steps that are required to address the obstacles preventing climate justice (pragmatism). Finally, a combination condition where participants first engage in utopian thinking and then pragmatism, which I propose will have particularly attenuating effects on the relationship between despair and burnout. I found pragmatism and utopian thinking separately had mixed and inconsistent buffering effects on the two dimensions

of burnout (exhaustion, disengagement), but that the combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism was unexpectedly not beneficial.

In Chapter 5 I discuss how the cumulative findings of the empirical work presented here confirm that political despair is a discrete emotion with distinct antecedent appraisals and specific outcomes for individuals and society. That is, that despair is associated with perceiving the political status-quo as illegitimate and intractable. Moreover, that despair is consistently associated with diminished well-being but also with engaging in actions to bring about social change. In Chapter 5 I also explain the potential benefits and limitations of three intervention methods for buffering against despair-induced burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). I specifically address the benefits of pragmatism in promoting continued engagement in actions to bring about social change. I discuss the benefits of using methodological triangulation in my thesis to understand political despair, where it stems from, its implications and potential ways to mitigate its negative effects. Overall, this thesis highlights the need to understand but also mitigate experiences of political despair, to ensure people feel well enough to continue engaging in actions to promote social change, so we can help bring about a more equitable and just society for all.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Lucy Bird

August 2023

Acknowledgment of Country

Flinders University acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which its campuses are located, these are the Traditional Lands of the Arrernte, Dagoman, First Nations of the South East, First Peoples of the River Murray & Mallee region, Jawoyn, Kaurna, Larrakia, Ngadjuri, Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, Warumungu, Wardaman and Yolngu people.

We honour their Elders past, present, and emerging.

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Statement of Co-Authorship

This thesis describes original research undertaken in the College of Education, Psychology, and Social Work at Flinders University. Where these papers have been submitted for publication, the reference has been included below.

Chapter 3, which explore political despair, its antecedent appraisal and its effects on personal well-being and engagement in collective action, has been submitted for publication as:

Bird, L. H., Thomas, E. F., & Wenzel, M. (2023). “We despair”: Examining the role of political despair for collective action and well-being. Manuscript under review.

A Note About the Format of The Thesis

This thesis has been prepared as a series of papers to be submitted for publication. Chapter 3 of this thesis has been submitted for publication and is currently under a second round of review. Chapters 2 and 4 are manuscripts in preparation. Chapters 1 and 5 have been prepared in a traditional thesis format to provide context to the thesis as a whole. Given the format of this thesis, the text within Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are identical to the papers submitted or in preparation to be submitted. However, to ensure consistency across the thesis, I have made minor alterations to the numbering system of the studies, sections, tables, and figures within this paper. I have also replaced the use of first-person plural pronouns (“we”, “our”) with the singular “I” throughout. In addition, to avoid repetition, I have created one single reference list that can be found at the back of this thesis.

Dedication

"I want every girl to know that her voice can change the world" – Malala Yousafzai

"What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make" – Jane Goodall

This thesis is dedicated to all the girls who are told they are bossy, opinionated, and overly emotional. Remember that you are actually empathetic, intelligent people with something important to say. Never lose the passion to fight for what you believe in, even in the face of critics. Because your voice and your actions will shape the future.

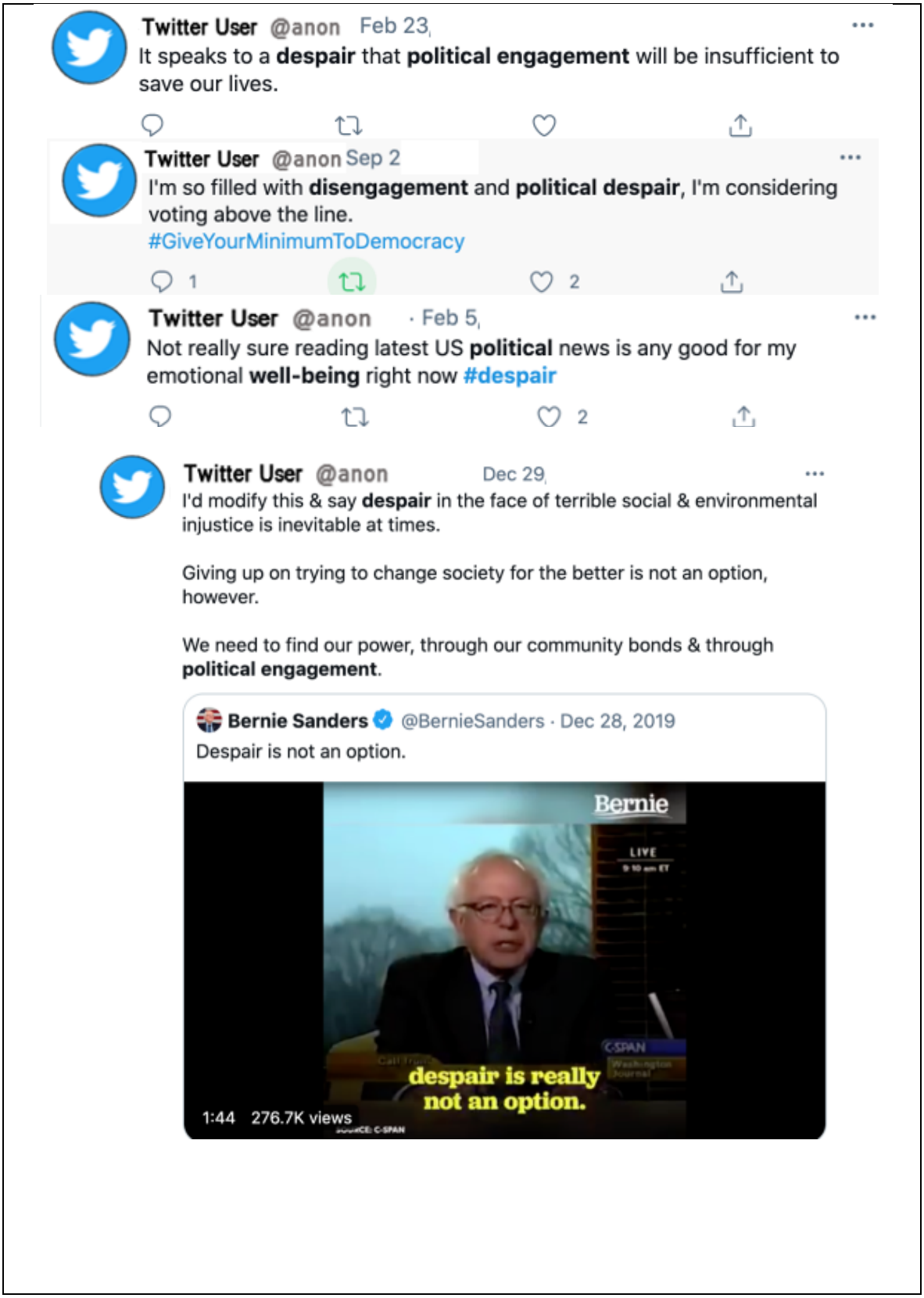
Chapter 1

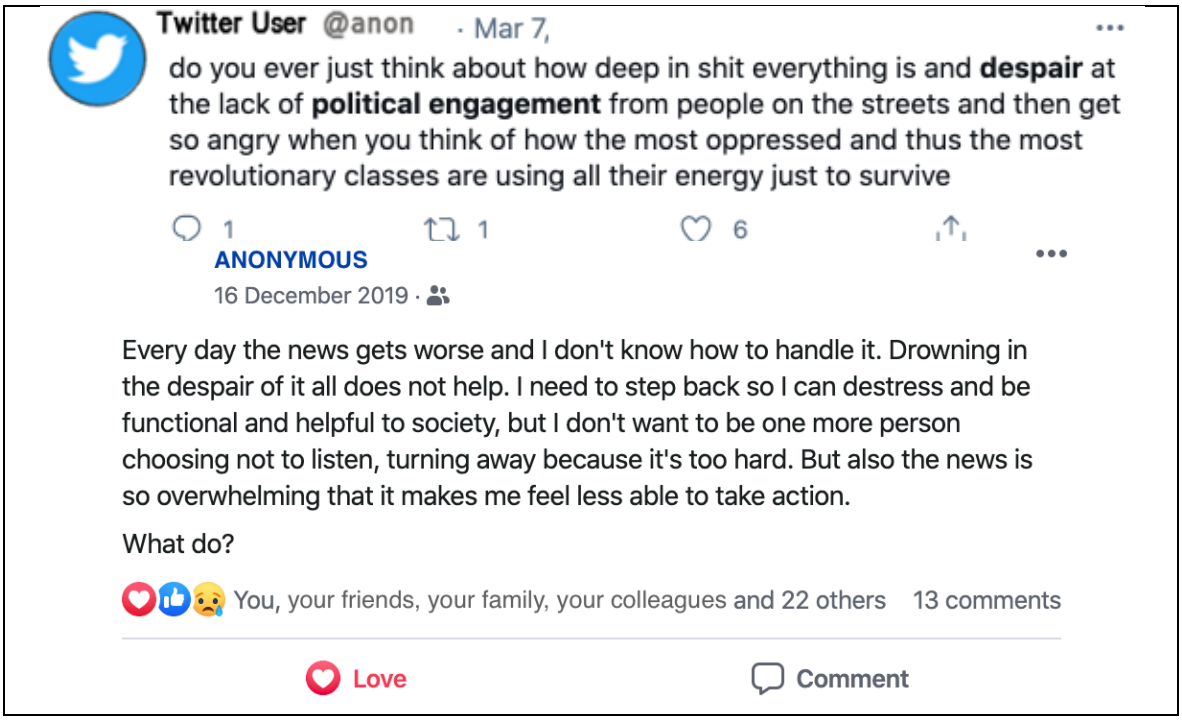
Introduction

Emotions are key to understanding how people experience events, how they evaluate the social-political world around them and the subsequent actions they may take in response (Leach, 2010). Although there is significant understanding of some emotional responses to political events such as anger (Iyer, et al., 2007), sympathy (Leach, et al., 2002), fear (Bar-Tal, 2020), and guilt or shame (Iyer, et al., 2003), there is currently little research on another emotion that I suggest is relevant, that is, despair. Anecdotally, there have been frequent reports of people feeling a sense of despair in response to the many confronting events that have occurred over recent years (e.g., the overturing of Roe v Wade, the storming of the Capitol, COVID-19, raging wildfires and bushfires, and the death of George Floyd which sparked the widespread Black Lives Matter protests). Numerous opinion pieces and news articles have opined the feelings of despair due to recent political and social circumstances and debates (e.g., Goldberg, 2018; 2019; Guilford, 2016; Taub, 2019; Foiles, 2018; Pidd, 2020). For instance, celebrity Jane Fonda reported in an interview with CNN anchor Anderson Cooper that she felt ‘depressed’ about the lack of action on climate change. A cursory glance at different social media platforms suggests that feelings of despair are pervasive and widespread. Figure 1 displays a number of (anonymised) examples.

Figure 1.

Social Media Posts (Twitter and Facebook) Ostensibly Reflecting Political Despair.





Two aspects of the social media interactions captured in Figure 1 are instructive and relevant to the goals of my thesis. The first, is that, alongside despair, people are reporting diminished well-being. For example, one Facebook user reports needing to "destress", and another Twitter user says political news is not "any good for my emotional well-being". Psychologists and therapists have also reported that political events and issues, perhaps especially climate change, are having a pronounced impact on the mental health of people that they see in the clinic (e.g., Hoppe et al., 2023; Touma & Davey, 2023). Such effects may be especially pronounced amongst members of disadvantaged groups (e.g., women of colour; Foiles, 2018; Goldberg, 2018). For example, the Australian Psychological Society website has a whole section about climate change and how to deal with its impacts on mental health; similarly, the American Psychological Society has sections of their website dedicated to climate change and politics impacts on individuals, relationships, and society.

The second notable aspect is that several of the interactions in Figure 1 mention a depleted capacity to continue to engage with the political process to bring about social change. For instance, a Facebook user writes that "the news is so overwhelming that it makes me feel less able to take

action". Other Twitter users reported being "so filled with disengagement and political despair", and "it speaks to a despair that political engagement will be insufficient to save our lives". These comments indicate a potential effect of despair on people's continued engagement in (political, conventional) forms of collective action for social change. This is important because in order to bring about the desired social change (e.g., climate justice), we need people to continue supporting the movement. In combination, the online and popular interactions suggest that feelings of political despair have significant, detectable effects on people's well-being and their ongoing engagement in the political processes necessary to bring about change on these issues.

However, despite the pervasive popular and anecdotal reports of political despair, and its potential impacts on well-being and collective action, there is little in the scholarly literature on this topic. As I describe below, there is minimal definitional clarity around what the construct is, or how it is measured. There is negligible understanding of its antecedents or origins (i.e., in terms of the core appraisals and cognitions that drive it; but see Diamond & Bachman (1986) and Gould (2012) for some exceptions). There are also few empirical tests that examine political despair's impacts on individuals and society; particularly on well-being and (various forms of) political engagement to bring about social change.

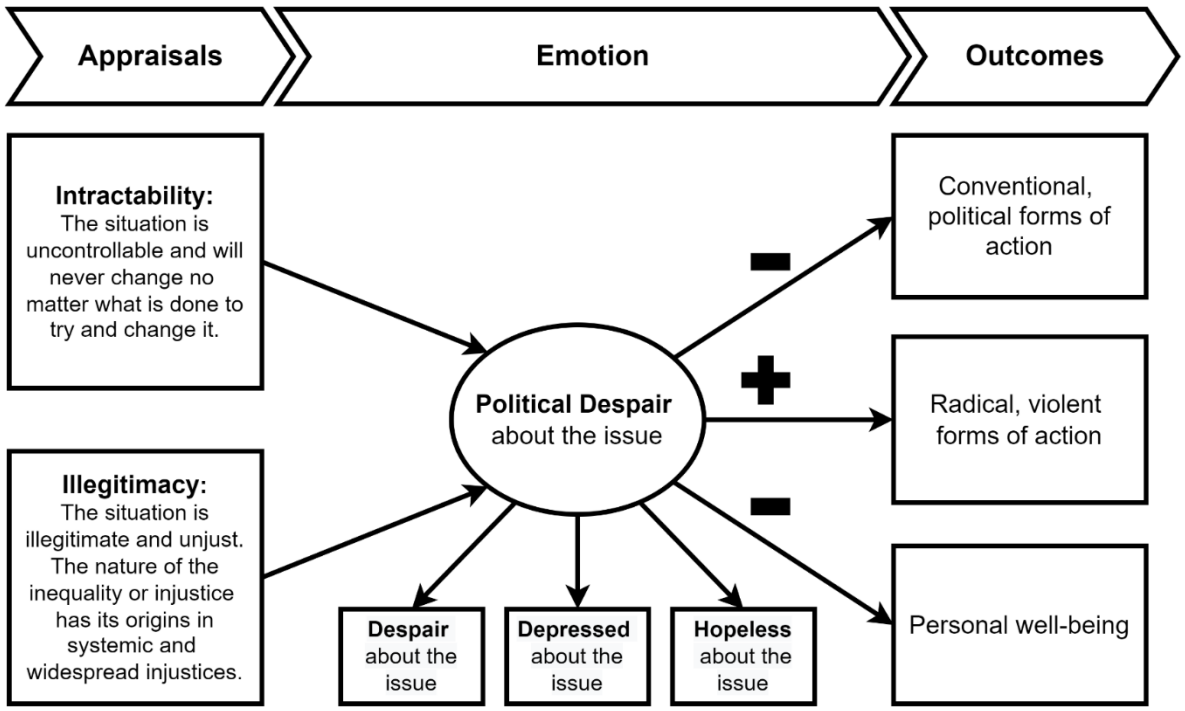
This thesis will therefore develop a conceptual and empirical program of research to map out political despair in the contexts of racial inequality and the climate crisis, its antecedents, and outcomes. I ask: What is political despair, where does it come from, and what effects does it have? In keeping with the observations discussed above, I focus specifically on two key outcomes: well-being, and collective actions that are either conventional (mainstream, political) or radical (potentially illegal or violent; see Louis et al., 2020; 2022). Figure 2 provides an overview of the theoretical model that underpins the thesis.

I propose that the concept *political despair,* can be defined and understood as a feeling of overwhelming despair caused by being committed to a specific desired social or political change (e.g., action on climate change, or to promote racial justice) when the status-quo is appraised as

being illegitimate and intractable. Linking with the arguments above (see Figure 1), I will also investigate how political despair impacts facets of well-being and ongoing willingness to engage in action to bring about a desired social change (i.e., via conventional and/or radical forms of collective action). Conventional collective actions are those which are considered normative, within system and legal in democratic countries, such as voting, sharing online petitions, and attending peaceful protests (e.g., van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). In contrast, radical collective actions are those that use illegal and/or violent tactics, including protests involving property damage and confrontation with police, as well as other forms of civil disobedience or occupation (i.e., sit-ins, lie-ins and die-ins) (Tausch et al., 2011). Figure 2 shows that political despair may have a negative, undermining effect on conventional forms of collective action, whilst political despair is expected to have a positive, facilitate effect on commitment to more radical forms of collective action. Finally, political despair is expected to have diminishing impacts on personal well-being (Figure 2). Social psychology, as the sub-discipline of psychology that seeks to connect how social and political events impact the psychology of individuals, and vice versa, seems particularly well-equipped to help to address these questions.

Figure 2.

Theoretical Model of Political Despair.



Alongside addressing the theoretical gap in knowledge about the nature and effects of political despair, there is also a practical aim. Given that I anticipate political despair will have negative impacts on well-being and conventional action, it is important to understand political despair so that coping tools can be developed to assist people to manage their political despair. This need to find a way to cope with despair is reflected in a Facebook post from Figure 1, "…Drowning in the despair of it all does not help. I need to step back so I can destress and be functional and helpful to society, but I don't want to be one more person choosing not to listen, turning away because it's too hard..." To that end, in this thesis I also address the question: how do we mitigate the negative impacts of political despair? I propose that getting people to imagine a desired, positive future and the steps required to attain this future is a potential method for buffering against political despair, to promote well-being and continued (non-violent) engagement in the democratic process (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Fernando, et al., 2018).

In the review that follows, I first provide an overview of political despair and how it can be understood using the framework provided by intergroup emotion theory (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie, 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016). Next, I outline how political despair about issues like climate change and racial inequality can have implications for society and individuals. I discuss how people's willingness to engage in actions to promote social change (collective actions) may be impacted by experiencing political despair. I also explain the impacts despair may have on some facets of personal well-being. Finally, I discuss a potential means of mitigating the negative impacts political despair can have on collective action engagement and well-being.

Understanding Despair as a Political, Group-Based Emotion

There is currently scant research on political despair in the social psychological domain, however there are a handful of papers from other fields such as sociology, philosophy and political science (see Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gerbaudo, 2013; Gould, 2012; Huber, 2023). These papers offer preliminary evidence about what the construct of political despair is and its potential consequences for well-being and (conventional and radical) collective action. Diamond and Bachman (1986), for instance, examined longitudinally 'nuclear despair', that is, despair aroused by the threat of nuclear war in the 70's and 80's. Although the study focused on nuclear despair, they found it correlated with worry about other social issues. Specifically, their study found that nuclear despair was correlated with decreased interest in participating in mainstream political processes (e.g., voting, contacting government officials and participating in lawful demonstration) as well as poorer mental health and self-esteem, worthlessness, withdrawal, life dissatisfaction, loneliness, and pessimism (Diamond & Bachman, 1986).

Similarly, Gould's (2012) qualitative analysis of political despair, suggested that political despair may be characterised by feelings of hopelessness, emotional and physical exhaustion, and being burnt out (i.e., diminished well-being and reduced involvement in ongoing action for change). Gould (2012, p. 95), a sociologist, defined political despair as "feelings of political inefficacy and hopelessness, the sense that nothing will ever change, no matter what some imagined collective

'we' does to try to bring change". Furthermore, Gerbaudo (2013) proposed – based on observations of dissent and discontent, government corruption, unemployment rates, economic decline, large petitions, and deadly protests – that political despair may have played a role in the revolutionary coups in Egypt. That is, Gerbaudo (2013) suggests that political despair may be associated with increased radical forms of action (linking with Figure 2). Finally, political philosopher Huber (2023) discusses the idea that some forms of despair can be beneficial in driving action, particularly in "unconventional and unexpected ways" (p. 92), that is, some aspects of despair may lead to non-conventional, radical collective actions. Thus, the existing literature suggests that well-being and both conventional and radical collective actions may be affected by political despair (as per Figure 2). Yet, this literature is predominantly theoretical or observational (Diamond & Bachman, 1986, is an exception) and does not empirically test the antecedents of political despair, or the implications of despair on collective action and well-being.

Incorporating the Insights of Intergroup Emotion Theory to Provide a Conceptual Framework for Political Despair

There are many ways to conceptualise and understand emotions. We can understand emotions using physiological theories where we consider how the responses within our bodies are responsible for emotions (e.g., James, 1884; Levenson, 1999). There are neurological theories of emotion that argue that activity within the brain and certain brain structures (e.g., amygdala and hypothalamus) are what causes emotions to be elicited (e.g., Davidson, 2003; LeDoux, 1996; Panksepp, 1998). On the other hand, cognitive theories of emotions suggest that thoughts, evaluations, and other mental activities play vital roles in the elicitation of emotions (e.g., C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Frijda, 1986 1993; Lazarus, 1991a; 1991b). The conceptual framework I utilise for this thesis is informed by the insights of intergroup emotion theory (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie, 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016).

Intergroup emotion theory (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie, 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016) is derived from the joint insights of cognitive theories of emotion (e.g., appraisal theory; C.A.

Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) and the social identity approach (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to intergroup emotion theory, emotions are elicited by perceptions of the world around us and how they relate to our social identities, and then influence attitudes and behaviours (e.g., E.R. Smith, 1993; E. R. Smith, et al., 2007; Mackie, et al., 2000; 2004; 2008; 2016). Social identities are defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Simply put, social identities are the part of a person's self-concept that comes from their perceived membership of a social group. A social identity could refer to something like being a supporter of a particular football team, but can also reflect your identity as a supporter of the climate action movement (see Bliuc et al., 2015). When a social identity is salient, the world is viewed/appraised through the lens of that group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). That is, when one has a social identity (e.g., supporter of racial justice), one appraises the status-quo of that issue, which in turn elicits a discrete emotion. Discrete emotions then lead to specific outcomes in response to the emotion (e.g., engagement in collective actions or impacts on well-being). I draw on intergroup emotion theory as the framework for understanding political despair because it allows us to consider how the social world influences emotions and to map the antecedents and outcomes of political despair.

It follows that I conceptualise political despair as a group-based emotion. Emotions, like despair can be felt due to personal hardships; however, according to intergroup emotion theory they can also be experienced through the lens of a group membership/social identity, that is, as a *group-based emotion* (e.g., E. R. Smith, et. al., 2007; E. R. Smith, & Mackie, 2015). That is, in my conceptualisation, political despair is not defined by despair about personal or idiosyncratic circumstances such as work, financial struggles, or poor health. Rather, for these purposes, political despair is located instead in the social and political fate of groups, particularly disadvantaged groups (i.e., women, people of colour, the LGBTQIA+ community, refugees, and immigrants) or other social issues such as climate change. It follows that political despair is an emotion that stems

from one's commitment to a group who share a concern about a particular issue; that is, it stems from social identification whereby it is not just 'you' who shares a concern about an issue, but it is a collective 'we' who cares.

People can belong to any number of different groups, all of which could (plausibly) form a basis for the experience of group-based despair (Musgrove & McGarty, 2008). Yet, in this thesis I am specifically interested in despair not just as a group-based emotion but also as a reflection of an opinion-based group membership. That is, although people may be categorized based on demographics (e.g., ethnicity, age, gender) that may indeed relate to social identities and social-political views (e.g., Black Americans committed to racial justice), our group memberships can also be formed around opinions. Opinion-based groups refer to a psychological collective of people who share a belief, attitude, value, or opinion about particular issues (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2007; 2015; McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2009). For instance, one may identify as someone who cares deeply about concerted action to tackle climate change. Many people come together due to their support of action to combat climate change; thus, this is a shared belief, and in turn an opinion-based group (Bliuc et al., 2015). Accordingly, opinion-based groups centred on support for racial equality, and support for climate justice are the focus in this research. These groups are formed around shared viewpoints (opinions) about how the world should be (regarding racial equality and climate justice), rather than pre-determined categories like ethnicity. Hence, I argue that if individuals identify with opinion-based groups that are concerned about a particular issue such as equality and justice for black people (Leach & Allen, 2017), or substantial efforts to address the climate crisis (Bliuc et al., 2015), they may – under conditions specified below – experience political despair.

Group-based emotions, such as political despair, can help explain diverging reactions to social and political events depending on how the events are appraised. *Appraisals* are interpretations and evaluations of events and entities that determine which emotion is elicited (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1991a; 1991b; Moors, et al., 2013; Roseman, et al., 1990; C. A. Smith &

Ellsworth, 1985). Primary appraisals are informed by the evaluation that the situation is relevant to the self and considered important to one's goals. At the group level (in the context of intergroup emotion theory), self-relevance is captured with social identification (e.g., Mackie, et al., 2016). In the context of this thesis, the primary appraisal would reflect the evaluation that justice and equality for black people, or concerted action on climate change, are important and relevant to oneself. As outlined above, the relevant self or identity in this context is social identification with the opinion-based group (e.g., supporters of racial equality, and supporters of climate justice; see Bliuc et al., 2015; McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2009).

Primary appraisals create a foundation for secondary appraisals. Secondary appraisals have a number of dimensions which incorporate evaluations about: who is *accountable* or *responsible* (to blame or credit) for the situation; what is the *coping potential* (problem-focused and emotion-focused) of the situation, that is, can it be acted upon; what is the *future expectancy* for change in this situation (Lazarus, 1991a; 1991b; C. A. Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Moreover, specific patterns of appraisals evoke distinct emotions (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1991a; 1991b; Mackie, et al., 2000; Roseman, et al., 1990). For instance, prior work has shown that appraising the ingroup as having an unfair advantage over the outgroup is associated with guilt, whilst appraising the ingroup as having legitimate advantage over the outgroup is associated with pride (Harth, et al., 2013; Leach, et al., 2006). Furthermore, the experience of anger lies in the perception that there is illegitimate harm but that there is the ability to address or confront this harm (high coping potential) (e.g., Scherer et al., 2001; C. A. Smith & Lazarus, 1990; van Zomeren et al., 2012), whilst sadness is informed by the appraisal that there has been permanent, unpreventable loss that one cannot aptly cope with (low coping potential) (C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Tan & C.L. Smith, 2018). Overall, group-based emotions are evoked by primary and secondary appraisals of an event or entity that are consequential to the group, not specifically the individual (Frijda, 1993; Mackie, et. al., 2016).

Applying the insights of intergroup emotion theory, political despair can be argued to be preceded by a specific pattern of primary and secondary appraisals (see Figure 2). The primary appraisal is that this state of affairs is relevant to "us" (social identification), that is, the emotion is embedded in a specific group membership predicated on support for (or opposition to) a state of affairs (an opinion-based group; Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty, et al., 2009). Put differently, one must identify with the group (e.g., as a supporter of racial equality) in order to deem the situation regarding racial inequality as relevant to themselves (e.g., Mackie et al., 2008; 2015; Lazarus, 1991b; van Zomeren, et al., 2012). This primary appraisal then builds a foundation for secondary appraisals. The secondary appraisals reflect the perceptions of who is to blame or to be held to account for the situation, what is expected of the future and the ability to cope with the situation (Lazarus, 1991b).

Based on Lazarus' secondary appraisals, I propose that political despair is in part informed by the perception there is *illegitimate* harm for which an outgroup (and/or my own group) is responsible and this injustice is *systemic*, which in turn reflect the accountability/responsibility appraisal. The coping potential also partly explains political despair, such that 'we' (the ingroup) have little capacity to act effectively in this situation. Finally, political despair is in part explained by the future expectancy appraisal, due to the perception that nothing we do will ever change this state of affairs, the situation is *intractable*. Given that things not changing is related to the act of changing them, I consider coping potential and future expectancy (intractability) as one factor. Therefore, I specify that the secondary appraisals relevant to political despair are 'intractability of the situation' and 'illegitimacy of the system' (see Table 1). Where these pre-conditions are present, then political despair will result. On the other hand, if any of the primary or secondary appraisals are not present, a different emotional response would occur, e.g., anger, sadness, or apathy – as I explain below.

Table 1.

Definitions of Appraisals of Political Despair.

Appraisal	Definition
Social identification (Primary appraisal)	The situation is relevant to the group you identify with and considered important to the group's goals.
Intractability of the situation (Secondary appraisal)	The situation is uncontrollable and will never change no matter what is done to try and change it
Illegitimacy of the system (Secondary appraisal)	The situation is illegitimate and unjust. The nature of the inequality or injustice has its origins in systemic and widespread injustices. There is no legitimate reason for the situation.

Differentiating Political Despair from Other Emotions

Although there is not a coherent empirical literature on political despair as an emotion, there is a literature addressing several other, related, emotions. The intergroup emotion theory framework provides a scaffold for differentiating political despair from these other related, emotions. Below I discuss the similarities and differences between the related, but discrete, emotions of despair, anger, hope(lessness), and sadness. I also differentiate despair from a sense of anomie.

First, as anticipated above, political despair is distinguishable from other forms of despair (e.g., general/clinical despair, depression). I propose that the primary difference between general *despair* and political despair is that general despair is focused on personal, idiosyncratic issues, such as health problems, (i.e., HIV/AIDS, Kylmä et al., 2001) and own financial hardships (i.e., unemployment, Rehder, et al., 2019; Zeglin, et al., 2019). Political despair, on the other hand, stems from one's commitment to specific issues affecting groups (i.e., racial inequality) or other social-political issues (i.e., climate change) (see Gould, 2012). It is therefore located in an experience at the social, or group level and thus stems from social identification with the group. Moreover, climate/eco-depression is a related term to political despair (in the context of climate change) such that it reflects a sense of hopelessness about climate change, the impacts it will have, and the lack of action being taken to address it (Budziszewska & Kalwak, 2022; Stanley et al., 2021). However, I

choose to use political despair as a way of avoiding the clinical/psycho-pathological connotations that the term 'depression' infers.

Anger is the most commonly studied emotion within the political emotion and collective action literature (see SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008, see also (E. R. Smith et al., 2007; Gordjin et al., 2006; Mackie et al., 2000; van Zomeren, et al., 2012). How does the framework allow me to differentiate political despair from anger? Anger is considered an approach or emotion-focused way of coping with the situation, which leads to willingness to engage in collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2004; 2008; 2012). Anger has been found to motivate people to take action against perpetrators of harm (e.g., Gordjin et al., 2006; Mackie et al., 2000; van Zomeren et al., 2012). Anger is elicited when there is high coping potential in the face of injustice (e.g., Mackie, et al., 2000; van Zomeren, et al., 2012), whereas political despair, on the other hand, is associated with low coping potential when faced with injustice (see Table 1). As such, despair is felt when it is believed that there is nothing that can be done to rectify the injustice. Given the relevance of anger in the literature and the overlap it has with my conceptualisation of despair, in the thesis I will primarily contrast political despair with anger.

I also suggest political despair should not be considered merely as a state of *hopelessness* (or, low hope) but as a discrete emotion worthy of empirical investigation. While I anticipate political despair to be negatively associated with hope (see Cohen-Chen et al., 2020a), I do not consider it conceptually identical to low hope. Just as sadness cannot simply be construed as the absence of happiness, despair cannot be reduced to a mere absence of hope. Indeed, both hope (Bury et al., 2020) and despair are predicated on desire for a particular outcome. Yet hope is characterised by the *possibility* of the desired outcome coming to fruition, whereas despair is characterised by perceiving the desired outcome as unattainable/impossible (Bury et al., 2020; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Furthermore, a total absence of hope would reflect emotional apathy as it implies a lack of desire for an outcome, which is quite distinct from despair as conceptualised here.

Similarly, I suggest that despair is different to *sadness.* Sadness is considered to be about loss that is absolute in some terms (it is "gone"). That is, sadness occurs when people perceive their desired outcome as lost, but due to uncontrollable external forces, for example, the loss of a loved one (C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Political despair on the other hand, can be about loss, but in the context of a social-political situation that should, and could change, but is not changing (Gould, 2012).

Finally, *anomie* is conceptually similar to, but distinct from, political despair. Anomie is conceptualised as a breakdown of the moral, social fabric of society in general, often caused by ongoing social-political crises or rapid social changes (e.g., Bjarnason, 2009; Durkheim, 1897/1987; Martin, 2000; Merton 1938; 1968; Teymoori et al., 2017). Anomie can have significant psychological outcomes, such as feelings of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and collective hopelessness as well as isolation, and low social cohesion, which can all contribute to poor well-being and mental health (Bjarnason, 2009; Durkheim, 1897/1987; Teymoori et al., 2017). Anomie can also have severe and potentially damaging social and political consequences (Durkheim, 1897/1987; Martin, 2000; Merton 1938). Anomie may lead to disidentification with superordinate groups (e.g., national identity) and a shift towards ideological and politicized groups (e.g., Teymoori et al., 2017). As such, anomie may be related to political despair in that they both may occur during similar situations and can have implications for well-being. As with political despair, anomie is not just individual, but instead is related to a collective evaluation of society. Anomie, however, conceptually, arises in the context of normlessness, and a lack of moral and social guidelines, as well as being about perceptions of society more generally. Anomie is not conceptualised as an emotional response to a specific issue per se (e.g., Teymoori, et al., 2017). Therefore, anomie and despair are distinct in that, anomie is a perception of society as a whole and reflects the perception that society is normless and experiencing social breakdown. Whereas political despair is an emotion stemming from specific illegitimate and intractable political situations, but not an overall perception of lacking norms or moral guidelines.

Implications of Political Despair

Intergroup emotion theory stipulates that discrete emotions give rise to specific implications or outcomes (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie; 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016). I propose that political despair has the potential to decrease personal well-being and decrease engagement in political and conventional forms of action to bring about change (Figure 2). However, political despair may also increase willingness to engage in radical, perhaps even violent forms of action to support their cause. The rationale for these three outcomes is described in more detail below.

Conventional and radical collective action/s. *Collective actions* in general are "any action that aims to improve the status, power, or influence of an entire group" (van Zomeren, & Iyer, 2009, p. 646). Collective action refers to a variety of actions people can take as they attempt to achieve social and/or political change for disadvantaged groups, non-human animals or the environment (Thomas, & Louis, 2014; Barth et al., 2015; Milesi, & Alberici, 2018). In this thesis I draw on the distinction between *conventional, political actions* (Leach, et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2020) and more *extreme, radical actions* (Jiménez-Moya, et al., 2015). It may be that political despair affects the two forms of action very differently (see Figure 2).

As can be seen in Figure 2, I expect that political despair will have a negative, undermining effect on conventional collective actions. In the context of this research, *conventional actions* are those that are considered normative, legal and within-system, in democratic countries (Leach et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2020). Conventional actions can include actions such as sharing posts on social media, signing petitions, making lifestyle changes and voting. Conventional actions can also include actions such as peaceful protests and demonstrations (van Zomeren, & Iyer, 2009). Based on the literature, I suggest political despair has the potential to decrease people's willingness to engage in conventional actions in support of their belief in a social issue. Political despair is expected to be tied to feelings of inability to act in the situation (diminished coping potential) and belief that the situation will never change (intractability, future expectancy) (Gould, 2012). Moreover, when socio-political situations are perceived as "uncontrollable and excessive" (Mah et

al., 2020, p. 3), that is, the situation is appraised as being intractable, people are likely to give up on efforts to bring about change (see also Ford & Feinberg, 2020). According to a major meta-analysis of the motives for collective action, believing that the group can effectively bring about change is a key antecedent of collective action (van Zomeren, et al., 2008). As seen anecdotally in opinion pieces, news articles and in social media posts (see Figure 1), political despair is linked with inefficacy and burnout which therefore could be negatively associated with conventional action.

Just as efficacy has been found to be critical for political action, the emotion of hope has been shown to have motivational effects on collective action (e.g., Bury et al., 2020; Cohen-Chen & van Zomeren, 2018). Indeed, at times it is argued, That the relationship between hope and collective action engagement is mediated via efficacy (Greenaway et al., 2016). Although, there are conflicting findings whereby hope did not lead to collective actions (e.g., Hasan-Aslih et al., 2018; van Zomeren et al., 2019). Hence, just as hopelessness would be detrimental to collective action due to the lacking prospect of change, so too could political despair.

On the other hand, I explore the proposition that political despair may be associated with a positive, facilitating effect on radical (violent or illegal) forms of collective action. *Radical actions* are those that use illegal and/or violent tactics to bring about a desired social change (Jiménez-Moya et al., 2015). Radical actions may include protests that involve violence, confrontation with police and property damage, as well as sit-ins, lie-ins and die-ins, and other types of civil disobedience (Saab, et al., 2016; Tausch, et al., 2011; Wright, 1997). Radical action is driven from a lack of efficacy, that is, the belief that typical, conventional actions are not having the desired effect, so there is a need to take radical actions (Saab, et al., 2016; Tausch et al., 2011). Diamond and Bachman (1986) also suggest nuclear despair is linked to belief in the efficacy of (what they term) “drastic political actions, such as physical destruction & personal violence” (p. 22). Feelings of powerlessness and lack of control can be linked with violent actions (Ransford, 1968). Similarly, when the disadvantaged group perceive they cannot ‘move up’ in the social hierarchy, they are more likely to engage in radical actions (Wright et al., 1990). Another reason people may be willing

to engage in radical action is because, their coping potential is appraised as diminished and the future expectancy is that the situation is intractable, therefore, they feel they have 'nothing to lose' (Scheepers, et al., 2006; see also, Lazarus, 1991a; 1991b; C.A. Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The concept of having 'nothing to lose' suggests that because the previous attempts to address the current injustices were futile, they have nothing to lose by engaging in radical action (Jiménez-Moya, et al., 2015). Similarly, the perceiving outgroups (e.g., those with an opposing political stance) as unable or unwilling to change (*entity theories*) has been found to be associated with support for radical actions (Shuman et al., 2016). Indeed, based on observations, Gerbaudo (2013) suggested that political despair may have led to the revolutionary coups in Egypt. Although there is literature that indicates that political despair may motivate people to engage in radical actions and simultaneously disengage from conventional actions, I am not aware of any empirical studies testing the effects.

Well-being. How do feelings of despair about current social and political events affect well-being? I suggest that social and political events may have a negative effect on well-being due to political despair (e.g., Gould, 2012; Vestergren, et al., 2017). There are several strands of evidence to suggest that political despair may decrease overall well-being. First, some authors have theorised that political despair has the potential to have negative effects on mental health (e.g., stress, anxiety, and depression; Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gould, 2012). Gould (2012) suggests that political despair can cause emotional and physical exhaustion and, therefore, be associated with reduced resilience, vitality or greater burnout. Moreover, well-being is decreased by negative emotions, which could include despair (e.g., Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Larsen, 2009; see Oh, 2022, for ambivalence and mixed emotions).

A separate tradition of research shows that people who are high in system justification (that is, they believe that social systems are just, legitimate, and fair) typically report greater overall well-being than people who are critical of social and political systems (Napier et al., 2020; Osborne & Sibley, 2013; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018). Simply put, people who, in general, criticize social and

political systems tend to have poorer well-being than those who support the systems. To that end, people who feel political despair are inherently critical of and dissatisfied with current systems, that is they appraise them as illegitimate. Furthermore, political despair may be associated with perceiving the goal of achieving social change as difficult, uncontrollable, and unattainable. Given attainable, controllable, and less difficult goals have been associated with increases in mental health (Gamble et al., 2021), it is plausible that the opposite relationships may be true.

In recent years there has been an emergence of literature on climate related emotions. Eco-anxiety, climate-anxiety, eco-depression, and climate grief have all started to be considered in the literature due to the prevalent reporting of these emotions online and in mainstream media (e.g., Ágoston, et al., 2022; Bingley et al., 2022; Clayton, 2020; Mortreux et al., 2023; Ogunbode et al., 2022; Ojala et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2023; Stanley et al., 2021). Such climate focused emotions have been linked to reductions in well-being (e.g., Clayton, 2020; Ojala et al., 2021; Schwartz et al., 2023; Stanley et al., 2021). These negative climate emotions appear clearly linked with political despair (particularly in the context of climate change) and the current research in this area provides greater evidence of political despair being negatively associated with well-being. As such, I will test the proposition that political despair has negative effects on personal well-being.

One complexity though is that well-being has many facets, and there is little consensus regarding its definition or measurement (Huppert & So, 2013; Marsh, et al., 2020; Park et al., 2023). For instance, some make the distinction between hedonic and eudemonic well-being (e.g., Jia et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2001), others between psychological, emotional, physical, social well-being and life satisfaction (Marsh, et al., 2020; Weziak-Bialowolska, 2021). This research, therefore, takes a data driven approach to well-being in that it will include many facets and allow the data to determine which are relevant. My initial empirical efforts will focus on mental health, stress, resilience, vitality, burnout, and facets from the Well-being Profile (Marsh et al., 2020), as key facets that appear (at face value) to be affected by political despair (see also Figure 1).

Imagining a Positive Future and How to Get There: An Antidote to Despair?

In order to address social-political injustices (such as racial inequality and the climate crisis), we need people to maintain their engagement in actions to promote social change. As such, if the effects anticipated in Figure 2 are correct, it is worth considering interventions that can attenuate the relationship between despair and reduced well-being and conventional action. That is, how can the effects of despair be mitigated against, to allow people to continue to flourish and maintain their engagement in social change movements? I suggest imagining a positive future (utopian thinking), considering the necessary steps required to get there (pragmatism) and a combination of the two (pragmatic utopian thinking) may be appropriate methods of intervention in this context. Furthermore, it is important in this research to consider several intervention methods as different aspects of stressors (i.e., the climate crisis) may be best dealt with through different means (Mah et al., 2020, see also Bingley et al., 2022).

Prospection is the idea of thinking about the future and the range of possible futures (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007). Prospection can lead to political despair because the future could be perceived as needing to change but unlikely to, that is, people may appraise the future as intractable. Prospection is therefore linked to our capacity to see what should and could be, but what (more likely) will be. However, the future can also be considered in a positive way, such as with utopian thinking. I suggest that imagining a positive future society (e.g., where the climate crisis has been addressed), may buffer against the negative impacts on well-being caused by political despair (i.e., utopian thinking; Badaan, et al., 2020; Fernando, et al., 2018; Kashima, & Fernando, 2020). Utopias are "desired possible worlds - ideal worlds that may possibly exist, at least in imagination" (Fernando, et al., 2018, p. 779). *Utopian thinking* is the act of thinking about (imagining) a desired 'utopian' future. Badaan et al. (2020, p. 5) suggest that "the emotional currency in which utopian thinking trades, then, is that of hope – and the overcoming of despair – in the face of injustice". That is,

utopian thinking provides scaffold for a better future, which may overcome the sense of political despair.

Utopias have three functions: criticism, change and compensation. Utopias provide a standard that society and its shortcomings are compared against and *criticised* for. In turn, this comparison between reality and the utopia can result it *change* as it becomes a motivator and goal to strive for (Daysh et al., in press; Fernando, et al., 2018; Kashima, & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990). As such, engaging in utopian thinking may allow people to reappraise the social-political status-quo as changeable, rather than intractable, which in turn has the potential to motivate people to strive to enact the positive, idealised state of affairs. This positive, future-oriented cognition, however, may also inadvertently allow people to escape reality and instead *compensate* for the undesirable current situation (e.g., Levitas, 1990). I suggest that the compensate function of utopian thinking has the potential to improve individuals' well-being, simply because the utopias are positively valanced, which in turn provides a satisfying and contented alternative that one can 'escape' to and that allows one to feel better about the current reality (e.g., Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen & Sevincer, 2018). Moreover, escapism may act as a form of emotion-focused coping and therefore, a way of people regulating their despair (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2016; Ryan 2013, see also Ford et al., 2023; Ford & Feinberg, 2020). As such, I argue that utopian thinking may mitigate the effects of political despair on personal well-being.

However, simply imagining a positive future on its own may be insufficient to reduce the potentially negative effects of despair on conventional action engagement (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Fernando et al., 2018). Indeed, people may also need to consider the steps that are required in order to overcome the barriers preventing their desired future, that is they need to utilise pragmatism. *Pragmatism* involves considering the challenges associated with achieving the envisioned future and planning the required steps to reach that goal (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2023). The existing literature indicates that planning the essential pragmatic steps needed to accomplish a goal can positively contribute to attaining the goal (e.g., Eubanks et al.,

2023; Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). As such, I expect that engaging in pragmatism will be associated with increased engagement in actions to bring about social change (e.g., in the climate movement).

The literature on pragmatic prospection however suggests that the most effective method may be a combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism. That is, first one must imagine the desired positive future (utopian thinking) and then can proceed with thinking about the obstacles to their desired future and the steps that are necessary to overcome the obstacles (pragmatism, Baumeister et al., 2016; Oettingen et al., 2001; see also Fernando et al., 2018). For example, one could imagine a utopian future regarding climate change whereby the climate crisis has been averted, which can act as an anchor and benchmark for cognitions and behaviours (including actions). Then people could consider the specific, concrete actions they will take in order to address their climate concerns. Therefore, people should feel motivated and have a sense of efficacy and purpose which may bolster well-being and engagement in actions (e.g., Bronk & Mitchell, 2022; Gamble et al., 2021). As such, I predict that engaging in pragmatic utopian thinking will buffer against the negative impacts of political despair on well-being and collective action engagement (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Gamble et al., 2021).

Summary and Overview

My thesis is guided by two key research questions: 1) What is political despair? What are its antecedents and outcomes? And 2) how can we mitigate the detrimental impacts of political despair? Across eight studies in my thesis, I utilise methodological triangulation to examine political despair through qualitative (Chapter 2), quantitative cross-sectional (Chapter 3) and experimental methods (Chapter 4). By implementing complementary methods and approaches in the investigation of political despair, I aim to advance a valid and reliable understanding of the concept and its effects.

The current research takes a social identity approach as I assert that political despair stems from one's commitment to a group that shares a concern about an issue such as racial inequality or

climate change; that is, it stems from social identification (Mackie et al., 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This thesis conceives of the underlying groups as based on opinions about how the world should be, that are shared amongst the group members (see McGarty et al., 2009). Accordingly, people may experience political despair because they identify with a group concerned about justice and equality for Black People (e.g., Leach & Allen, 2017), or about concerted action to tackle climate change (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2015), which in turn has personal and societal implications.

This thesis begins by investigating the cognitive evaluations (appraisals) that lead to people experiencing political despair (Chapter 2). I utilise Framework Analysis to investigate why people experience political despair about racial inequality in the US (Study 1), and climate change in Australia (Study 2). Framework analysis is a systematic, step-by-step qualitative method that allows researchers to easily compare participants responses and their corresponding themes (Spencer et al., 2004; Gale et al., 2013). First, a group of self-identified supporters of change on racial inequality (Black Lives Matter; Study 1) and climate change (Study 2), who also self-reported experiencing a level of despair about said issues, were sampled. Participants were then asked why they felt despair about racial inequality [climate change]. Guided by appraisal theories of emotion, I coded the responses and identified two core themes. These themes reflect the appraisals that racial inequality/climate change is unjust and systemic (illegitimate) and that the issue is uncontrollable and unchanging (intractable, linking with Table 1). Thus, the findings from this study help us understand the nature and experience of political despair, as well as where it comes from, using a more inductive method. The findings suggest that political despair can indeed be conceptualised as a discrete emotion, characterised by specific appraisals about the political status-quo, and a core relational theme of *unchangeable systemic injustice*.

Chapter 3 provides a quantitative empirical test of the theoretical model in Figure 2 using cross-sectional methods in the contexts of racial inequality in the US (Studies 3 and 4) and climate change in Australia (Study 5). In this chapter, structural equation modelling confirms that, as theorised, political despair is consistently predicted by the antecedent appraisals of illegitimacy and

intractability. As expected, I find political despair has a consistent, negative relationship with certain facets of well-being (namely stress, burnout and optimism about ones future). Also as anticipated, political despair had a positive relationship with engagement in radical forms of collective action. However, unexpectedly, political despair had a positive relationship with engagement in conventional collective actions in all three studies. That is, contrary to my expectations that political despair would be negatively associated with conventional action engagement, I instead found those higher in despair, were also more likely to be engaging in conventional forms of collective actions. In this chapter I also differentiate political despair from the prominent emotion of anger, and the findings showed it to be distinct with different patterns of appraisals and outcomes. Chapter 3 highlights why it is important to understand political despair: political despair is associated with negative effects on people's well-being and is positively related to people's engagement in actions to promote social change, over and above the well-established effects of anger.

Having demonstrated in the previous chapters that political despair has the potential to decrease well-being, in the fourth chapter of my thesis, I investigate interventions designed to mitigate the negative impacts of political despair. Namely I focus on burnout about climate change, a construct that in Chapter 3 was found to be positively associated with political despair. However, in this chapter I expand on the theorising of burnout, to not only consider the personal well-being aspects of the construct but also how it reflects one's ability to continue engaging in the climate movement. As such, in Chapter 4, climate burnout is conceptualised based on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory as reflecting both exhaustion (diminished personal wellbeing) and disengagement (e.g., from collective actions). Accordingly, the construct of burnout in Chapter 3 reflected the exhaustion facet of burnout only, whereas in Chapter 4 burnout encapsulates both the personal well-being aspect but also a need to withdraw (disengage) from the climate movement (akin to a decrease in collective action engagement). Therefore, in Study 6, I adapt the Oldenburg

Burnout Inventory to the climate context and validate a new measure of climate-oriented burnout (C-OLBI).

Using the new C-OLBI measure, in Chapter 4 I test the relationship between political despair, exhaustion, and disengagement (the facets of burnout). I found that political despair is consistently associated with exhaustion in Studies 7 and 8 but is only related to disengagement in Study 8. Although in Chapter 3 political despair was consistently, positively associated with engagement in collective actions, disengagement is a different construct and as such may provide a more sensitive test for the effects of political despair. That is, active disengagement is different to a lack of engagement. I then take an experimental approach to investigate the conditions in which those who are high in political despair may report reduced burnout (less exhaustion and disengagement). I considered utopian thinking, pragmatism and a combination of utopian thinking + pragmatism as the intervention methods that I expected would attenuate the relationship between despair and burnout. Unexpectedly, the combined task did not have buffering effects for either facet of burnout, and in fact actually strengthened the relationship between despair and exhaustion in Study 7. The pragmatic condition consistently reduced disengagement, regardless of levels of political despair. Utopian thinking also diminished disengagement in Study 8 (but not Study 7). None of the conditions consistently reduced exhaustion. However, in Study 7, both of the separate conditions (utopian thinking, pragmatism) reduced the despair-exhaustion relationship. Accordingly, Chapter 4 highlights that using pragmatism appears to consistently reduce the disengagement facet of burnout, but that exhaustion is not consistently buffered against using the methods in this research. Moreover, utopian thinking has the potential to be beneficial, but the findings are inconsistent.

Finally in Chapter 5, I summarise the key findings from my studies and consider both the theoretical and practical implications of the program of research. Primarily I address the contribution I make to the emotion literature by investigating political despair, a prevalent discrete emotion that had previously been overlooked. I also discuss the importance of reducing political

despair and buffering against the negative affect it has on individual well-being, in particular burnout. I explain that focusing on the pragmatic steps required to achieve a desired future can buffer against the disengagement aspect of burnout and thus should be utilised by social change leaders, movement organisers as well as mental health practitioners and clinicians. However, I also suggest that appreciating the legitimacy of feeling angry about societal problems and the possible fruitfulness of the emotion is important if we want people to flourish and feel well in themselves, but to continue engaging in actions to promote social change. I finish with the limitations of my research and avenues for future research that will further improve our understanding of political despair and ways we can mitigate its negative effects.

Chapter 2

"No matter that we do, nothing is good enough": A Qualitative Investigation of Political Despair

Abstract

People often report experiencing despair about social issues like racial inequality and climate change. I conceptualise these feelings as *political despair* and consider: what causes political despair, that is, what are the antecedent appraisals? Participants, who felt despair about racial inequality ($N = 196$) or climate change ($N = 179$), responded to a prompt about why they feel despair about this issue. A framework analysis of participants responses, guided by appraisal theories of emotion, identified two broad themes (appraisals): perceptions that the issue is unjust and systemic (illegitimate) as well as being uncontrollable and unchanging (intractable). These themes (appraisals), consisting of nuanced sub-themes, explained political despair. The study emphasizes political despair as a discrete emotion with specific appraisals and a core relational theme of *unchangeable systemic injustice*. Understanding political despair is important given its prevalence among supporters of climate justice and racial equality, and its implications for well-being and political engagement.

"No matter what we do, nothing is enough": A Qualitative Investigation of Political Despair.

In June 2019, US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Swedish activist Greta Thunberg met (virtually) to discuss climate justice. Ocasio-Cortez described "wallowing in despair" and asked Thunberg "why aren't you so filled with despair that you're staying on your couch every day, and just waiting for the apocalypse?" (Brockes, 2019). These interactions suggest that some people do not just feel anxiety (Clayton, 2020; Clayton & Karazsia, 2020), anger (Stanley et al., 2021), hope (Ojala, 2012), fear or guilt (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017) about climate change, as the prior literature suggests: some people also feel despair. Moreover, climate change is not the only political issue that many people report feeling a sense of despair about. The global Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have also led to anecdotal reports of despair about the political and social status-quo in relation to the status of Black people and women, respectively (e.g., Chotiner, 2020a; 2020b; Goldberg, 2018). Indeed, in an interview with Chotiner (2020a), Bryan Stevenson suggested that "The [Black Lives Matter] protests are a symbol of frustration and despair." I propose that this emotion, experienced in relation to social and political circumstances, can be termed *political despair*.

But what is political despair? Sociologist Gould (2012) defined political despair as "feelings of political inefficacy and hopelessness, the sense that nothing will ever change, no matter what some imagined collective 'we' does to try to bring change." Gould's (2012) definition stemmed from observational research conducted in the context of Act Up activists in the AIDS epidemic movement. Notwithstanding this important work, I currently have scant understanding of political despair and the role it plays in shaping people's engagement with social and political issues. In this chapter I ask: what leads to the experience of political despair? Why do people report feeling it? My analysis draws upon appraisal theories of emotion to suggest that people feel despair because of a discrete pattern of evaluations (appraisals) about the social and political context. I adopt qualitative methods, and thus ask people to explain why they feel despair about two specific political issues, racial inequality, or climate change. That is, based on people's first-hand accounts of why they feel

despair about climate change and racial inequality, I seek to understand the appraisals of political despair.

Understanding Political Despair Using Appraisal Theory

Appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 2013) suggest that, in order to understand the experience of political despair, we need to identify the specific pattern of cognitive evaluations (i.e., appraisals) that elicit the emotion. Appraisals are key to understanding emotions because they specify the circumstances and judgements or evaluations that leads to people experiencing specific emotions (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 2013). Emotions arise in response to specific events or circumstances, but they stem from our judgements (appraisals) of those events, as well as our own goals in that context (Lazarus, 1991b).

Our starting point is the observation that feeling despair suggests that the issue is relevant to oneself and one's goals. Lazarus (1991) terms this self-relevance evaluation the *primary appraisal*. Primary appraisals reflect the motivational relevance and motivational congruence/incongruence of the event in accordance with your goals. In the context of the issues considered here, climate change and racial inequality, the primary appraisal would incorporate being committed to climate action or racial equality and seeing the current status-quo as incongruent with one's personal or group goals. This evaluation would then prompt further appraisals of the situation, termed secondary appraisals.

Specific patterns of secondary appraisals determine which emotion is elicited (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1991b; Mackie, et al., 2000; Roseman, et al., 1990). *Secondary appraisals* incorporate evaluations about accountability, coping potential and future expectancy (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). *Accountability* refers to who can be blamed or held responsible for the issue at hand. *Coping potential* considers the personal or group efficacy and ability to change the situation or what resources are available to deal with it. *Future expectancy* is the evaluation of the likelihood of change in the status-quo. To date, I am not aware of attempts to identify the specific pattern of secondary appraisals associated with political despair. There has, however, been

substantial research on secondary appraisals for emotions other than despair. For instance, guilt is associated with appraising the ingroup as being accountable for a negative situation of the outgroup, whereas pride is associated with appraising the ingroup as having legitimate advantage over the outgroup (Harth, et al., 2013; Leach, et al., 2006; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Anger is related to appraising the outgroup as to blame for a negative situation (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Finally, hope is related to appraising a future as leading to a goal that is possible but not certain (Chadwick, 2015). In this research I am interested in the secondary appraisals (relating to accountability, coping potential, future expectancy) that are associated with the experience of despair, as currently they are unknown.

Finally, according to appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991b), to understand emotions it is not sufficient to only identify the appraisals, but also the core relational theme (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). A *core relational theme* is the central (core) meaning of all appraisal components of the emotion, combined. That is, core relational themes draw on all appraisal questions and are "defined by a specific configuration of answers to several appraisal component questions" (Smith & Lazarus, 1993, p. 236). Core relational themes assist with ascribing meaning to emotions and giving brief and holistic descriptions of what people are experiencing. For example, Smith and Lazarus, (1993) suggest the core relational theme for anger is other blame, whilst guilt is self-blame. Perceptions of danger/threat are considered the core relational theme for fear, whereas a sense of irrevocable loss, helplessness about harm or loss, is suggested for sadness (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Bringing together both the cognitive appraisals and the core relational theme should provide a framework for defining and understanding political despair.

The Current Study

The current research adopts a qualitative methodology to understand the construct of political despair. All participants in this study self-reported being committed to the value underpinning the change (racial equality/ climate action) and agreed that they experienced a level of despair about the current state of affairs regarding that issue. The analysis seeks to identify the pattern of cognitive appraisals that are associated with political despair, and the core relational theme. That is, the analysis was guided by explicit and implicit references to: the primary appraisals (self-relevance, why it is relevant to me and us); the secondary appraisals – accountability (who is accountable or responsible); coping potential (the potential for us to cope with the problem/issue); and future expectancy (likelihood of changes). These were coded and grouped into themes so that I could understand the nature of the appraisals that were relevant to despair. The themes were also quantified (as count data) in order to get a sense of how prevalent they were in the data. I consider the appraisals and themes across the two issues of racial inequality and climate change to identify what they have in common (i.e., what are the more universal features of despair) but also the contextual differences related to the different issues (nuances). Finally, I used these qualitative and quantitative markers to formulate the core relational theme for the emotion of despair.

In keeping with an iterative, inductive coding procedure, I was open to participants' experiences and insight into what characterises the key elements of political despair that went beyond the core appraisals and relational themes per se. I utilise a realist/essentialist epistemological approach for this research as I seek to understand people's experiences and motivations through the language they use. This approach postulates that the data contains an objective reality whereby people's words give realistic meaning to their experience (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

I implemented the five stages of network analysis proposed by Spencer and colleagues (2003). As such I familiarised myself with the data, identified the themes (and sub-themes), generated the initial codes (indexing), chart and summarise the findings, then interpret and map the

themes, linking the data to the overarching narratives of the responses. For framework analysis and qualitative research, it is important to be transparent about the approach adopted when interpreting the data (Tracy, 2010). During this process I generated codes and themes based on what participants were writing, I then considered how the themes related to the original appraisals of accountability, coping potential, and future expectancy as well as themes outside of appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993).

Method

Participants

Racial Inequality in the US

The data form part of a larger project examining different emotional responses to racial inequality and climate inaction. Participants (N = 196) for Study 1 were a sample of citizens/permanent residents from the United States of America, recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk in 2020. A majority of participants were male (52%, 46.4% female, 1.5% identified as 'other'), aged 18 or older (M = 39.3), and the majority identified as liberal (59.7%, compared to moderate 23.5%, conservative 10.2% or 'uncertain/something else' 6.6%). To be eligible to participate, panellists had to self-identify their support for racial equality by selecting 'support' in response to the question 'do you support or oppose racial equality?' Participants reported a moderate level of identification as a supporter of racial justice (M = 5.22, SD = 1.14, on a 7-point scale). Additionally, participants had to self-report a level of despair about racial inequality in America, on a 7-point Likert scale whereby a score of 4 or higher indicated experiencing a level of despair. Respondents on average reported a moderate level of despair (M = 5.03, SD = 0.92). These preconditions were important for my analysis as people had to identify with the cause/ care about racial equality in order to feel a level of despair about it.

Climate Change in Australia

Study 2 was conducted from October 2020 to April 2021 as an online questionnaire involving participants (N = 179) who were recruited in return for credit in an undergraduate

psychology course at an Australian university (n = 163), and the general public from online platforms (n = 16). Participants were primarily female (82.1%, 15.1% male, 1.7% identified as 'other', 1.1% did not wish to disclose), aged 18 or older (M = 25.64). Most participants indicated politically they identified with 'uncertain/something else' (57.5%, others identified as liberal 34.6%, moderate 7.3%, conservative 0.6%), perhaps because the traditional 'liberal'-'conservative' binary labels are less commonly used in Australia. To be able to participate in the study, respondents had to select 'support' as the response to the question 'do you support or oppose actions to combat climate change?' On average, participants reported a moderate level of identification as a supporter of action on climate change (M = 5.01, SD = .84). Additionally, respondents had to self-report on a 7-point Likert scale, experiencing a level of despair about climate change in Australia, whereby scoring a 4 or higher indicated feeling a level of despair. Overall, participants reported a moderate level of despair (M = 5.02, SD = .93).

Procedure

The materials and the approach were identical for the two samples, but items were worded to refer to the relevant issue (racial inequality in Study 1, climate change in Study 2). Participants responded to a prompt that read: "Earlier you indicated that you feel a level of despair about racial inequality [climate change]. Please tell us, briefly below, why you feel despair about this situation". Participants responded to this open-ended question with no time or word limits. Responses to this question form the basis of my analyses. The average number of words that participants wrote was 39.6 for racial inequality and 38.5 for climate change. The initial coding was conducted using the Nvivo software, by the first author (in discussion with co-authors) and was guided by the framework analysis principles of Spencer and colleagues (2003). All responses were read through multiple times and themes were identified. The data was then systematically coded (responses could be coded against more than one theme if necessary). Once the complete list of codes was generated, I charted and summarised the codes so similar codes (and subcodes) were grouped together to determine the themes of the data. I analysed the themes across the two issues (racial inequality and

climate change) to examine the similarities but also nuances (regarding how the themes were expressed in the two different contexts), as I describe below. See Table 2 for a structured map of the themes and subthemes with examples. The quotes selected for each theme were illustrative of the theme but also representative of many of the participants' responses.

Table 2.

Mapping the Themes and Subthemes of the Data.

Themes and subthemes	Study 1 - Racial Inequality		Study 2 - Climate Change	
	Occurrence	Example	Occurrence	Example
Illegitimacy				
The issue is unjust and causes suffering	64	"Being treated differently or unfairly because of our race, skin color or ethnicity is completely wrong and nobody should ever feel ashamed of who they are."	27	"I feel despair towards the planet and other living organisms that are suffering at the hand of humans and climate inaction."
It is a widespread and systemic issue	38	"I feel like systemic racism is so entrenched in modern society, that people don't even see it happening anymore and make up excuses for what they are seeing instead of looking at the truth of the situation. It creates a feeling of despair for me."		
- Politicians and governments are the issue	38	"Because we have a president in Donald Trump who stokes racial division in order to advance his own political standing with his base. He has no interest in unifying Americans"	34	"I feel as though although we are trying to make a difference all the government cares about are votes and will not act until it is too late"
- Large corporations are the issue			19	"the fact that most of climate change is caused by large corporations, so even if every average person 'plays their part' it won't actually do a whole lot to reduce climate change overall, because it's the corporations that need to change the way

				they work and produce their products."
- It is a societal issue	33	"Many people in this country are not willing to change their views about racial inequality and seem to have no morals about how they view and treat minorities and this gives me a feeling of hopelessness."	24	"A large proportion of the population are too focused on their own needs that when it comes to tackling these bigger problems, they only focus on the inconvenience it is too them. Therefore they won't make change for the greater good or are blindsided to making change due to their selfishness."
Intractability				
The issue is irreversible/ unchangeable/ uncontrollable	30	"it seems like things will never get better."	24	"So much irreversible damage has already been done..."
Not enough progress is being made	74	"many other people that are trying to dismantle progress towards racial equality. It's unfortunate that we still are in such a situation in 2020."	93	"I just feel like not enough change is happening and that there is not a lot of time left to reverse the effects of climate change and since not a lot is happening I feel despair."
Average people's actions will not make a difference	18	"I just feel that no matter what we do, nothing is enough."	22	"no matter what i do it will never make a big enough impact"
Widespread, systemic change is required	11	"Because I think it will take a complete reconstruction of American society (including reparations, a reconciliation committee, etc) for things to change, and white Americans are invested in maintaining their power and white supremacy"	14	"its going to take a lot of cooperative effort to change anything"

Lack of awareness	39	“People refuse to see it exists so it’ll never be resolved. So it’s frustrating”	20	“Inaction, denial, and ignorance are seeing us rapidly approach tipping points and a domino effect of catastrophic changes that we may not be able to recover from.”
- People do not care	9	“I feel like there are a small, but loud portion of Americans that truly do not care about American people of color”	23	“…not enough people care about climate change to prevent further damage being done.”
Outcomes of despair				
Negative outcomes of despair	31	“I feel like no matter what we do, we will never be able to have full equality for everyone of any race because there will always be closed minded people, which leaves me in despair and hopeless for the future.”	38	“In school, there was a huge emphasis on climate change and a lot of my friends and I were apart of groups combatting climate change. It was an environment where the discussion around climate change was extremely prevalent. Although I learnt a lot and became extremely educated on the topic, I think it took a toll on my mental health. Some of the documentaries we watched were extremely depressing and I just didn't see how it was ever going to be fixed. It took a toll on my daily life...”

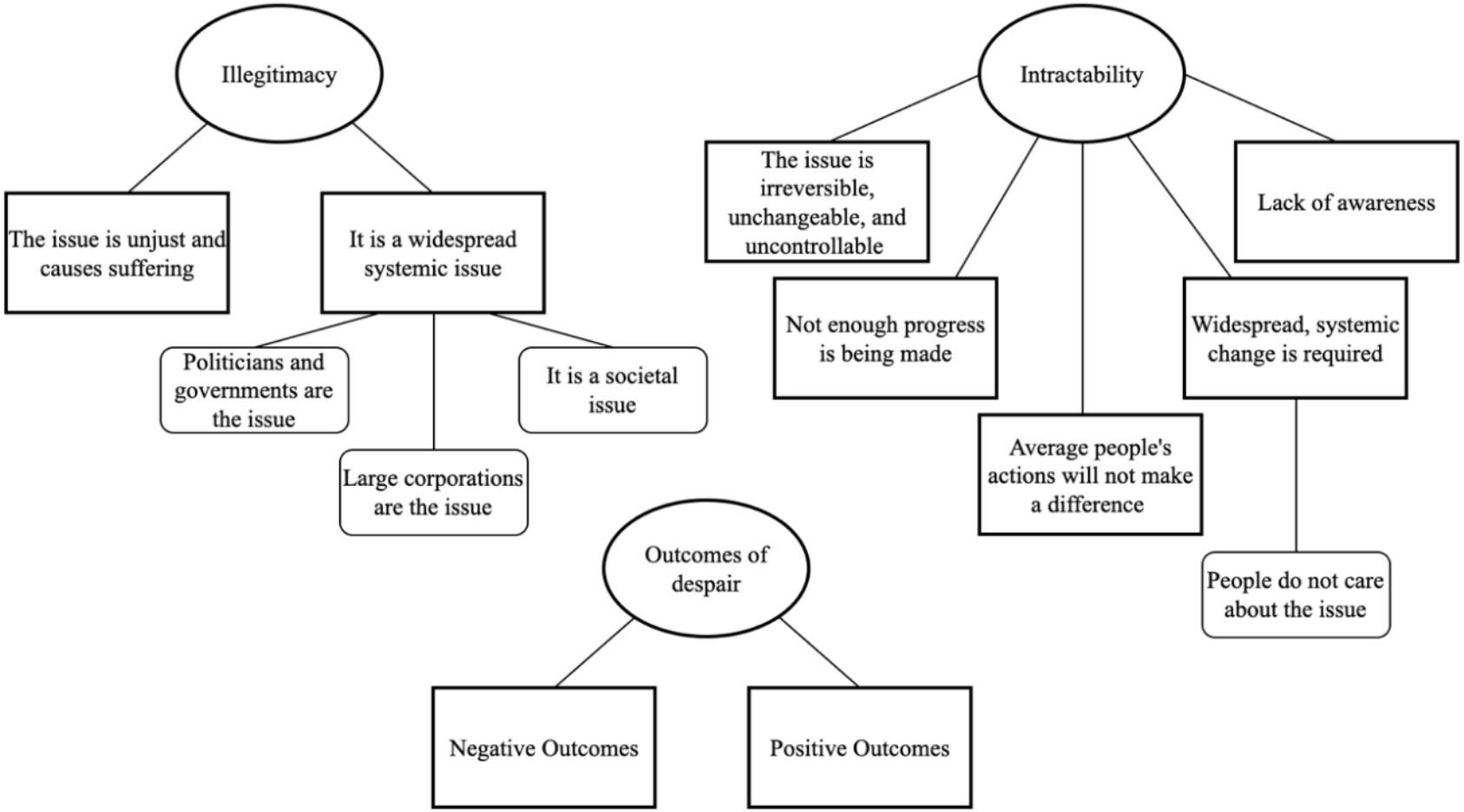
Positive outcomes of despair	7	“I do do little things that I can such as sign petitions and post on social media.”	5	“I guess it's a 'global' problem, that sometimes I feel my 'everyday life changes' I try to incorporate into our lives, wondering if it is going to make the difference in time. If there are 'others' out there like me, just trying to do there bit everyday for changes. Sometimes, the big picture can be overwhelming, so I find breaking big issues like this down, much easier to came at from a positive angle and ask the question of myself "What can I do today and hereon out to help start the process?' I live on a rural farm and have many animals and therefore my family and I have made everyday life changes that will have immediate impact on the way we live our 'everyday lives'. It gives me a sense of ownership to a global problem, that anyone can do.”

Results

Overall, three central themes were identified in the data. In keeping with my focus on the evaluations or appraisals that lead people to feel despair, the themes of illegitimacy and intractability were two central themes that participants reported when explaining why they feel political despair. The other theme reflected the outcomes of experiencing political despair. Table 2 displays the themes and subthemes, their prevalence as well as examples that illustrate the themes. Figure 3 provides a thematic map of how the subthemes map onto the themes.

Figure 3.

Political Despair Thematic Map Showing Three Main Themes of the Data in the Contexts of racial inequality and Climate Change.



Participants quotes are identified with a participant number that begins with CC for the climate change sample and RI for racial inequality sample. I denoted the gender of participants with F for female, M for male, as well as age. For the racial inequality sample, participants ancestry is included. All quotes provided by participants are verbatim, and any grammatical or typographical errors have been maintained.

Illegitimacy

Across both issues (racial injustice, climate change), there was a broader theme of illegitimacy. The theme of illegitimacy represents the notion that the situation is illegitimate and unjustifiable; the scale of the issue is due to it having its origins in systemic and widespread injustices. From the perspective of participants, there is no legitimate reason, or way, to justify the status-quo on this issue (racial inequality/ climate change). In the context of racial inequality, this broad theme was reflected with terms like 'unfair', 'injustice', 'bias', 'nepotism', 'mistreatment', 'suffering' and 'discrimination'. These terms are often synonymous with illegitimacy but also reflect the perception that systemic harm is caused to Black Americans due to racial inequality. In the climate change context, participants referred to the lack of action being taken to address climate change as illegitimate and unjust due to the harm and suffering it causes to humans, the environment, and animals. These perceptions were reflected in terms of 'neglect', 'destruction' and 'suffering'. Within the broader illegitimacy appraisal theme there were two subthemes reflected (see Figure 3 and Table 2) which captured evaluations of the unjust suffering and harm, as well as the systemic nature of racial inequality and climate inaction.

The Issue is Unjust and Causes Suffering

Participants frequently expressed the idea that climate change and the lack of action taken to address the issue causes suffering to not only humans but also the environment and other living creatures (see Table 2). For instance, one participant (CC85-F-21) explained that: "I feel despair towards the planet and other living organisms that are suffering at the hand of humans and climate inaction." This response highlights the suffering and harm caused is illegitimate because, in their

view, there is no justifiable or appropriate reason for the inaction (Tyler, 2006).

Similarly, the subtheme of unjust suffering was relevant in the context of racial inequality because the injustice causes harm to Black Americans and there is no legitimate reason for this injustice and harm (Table 2 shows that this was a prominent theme in the data). The injustice of racial inequality was expressed in the following response (RI181-M-33-White/Caucasian): "Being treated differently or unfairly because of our race, skin color or ethnicity is completely wrong and nobody should ever feel ashamed of who they are." In the context of this sub-theme, people reflected that they feel despair because of the illegitimate racism and lack of justice that causes Black Americans to suffer. Whilst for the climate context, the harm and suffering are caused by inaction, in the context of racial inequality it is mainly caused by active denigration and harm.

It is a Widespread and Systemic Issue

Participants discussed the idea that racial inequality and climate change inaction are systemic issues that are pervasive and widespread. This theme reflected that the blame for these issues is at a systemic level, that is, created and maintained by systems of inequality rather than via inter-individual interactions per se. Individuals commonly mentioned the systemic nature of racial inequality often specifically referring to systems calling it a 'systemic issue', 'systemic problem', 'systemic racism'. For example, a participant (RI60-F-26-Asian) stated, "I feel despair about racial inequality in the United States because it still seems so widespread, systemic, and divisive." This statement highlights the perception that racial inequality is rooted in systems that are unjust towards Black Americans. The systemic nature of racial inequality reflects that it is a deep-seated and widespread issue, not just something perpetrated by a handful of people.

The subtheme that the inequality and injustice is systemic and widespread was comprised of four additional subthemes which differed in where the perceived blame and accountability for the issues lay. These additional subthemes map onto the accountability appraisal as they comprise of people's evaluations about who is responsible and accountable for racial inequality and climate change (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The specific systems of the additional subthemes

connect to the broader subtheme of 'it is a widespread and systematic issue' because they are all widespread forms of systems that people hold accountable for racial inequality and climate change. The specific systems and institutions participants suggested are accountable differ across the two issues, as detailed below.

Politicians and governments are the issue. In the context of racial inequality, some people suggested that the blame lies with politicians and governments. This subtheme can be seen in the following responses (RI17-M-57-Black): "we have a president and a political party that is actively working against racial inequality." Another participant (RI2-M-32-White/Caucasian) responded that they feel despair because "there is still police brutality going on and a racial bias towards arrests." These responses highlight that some people suggest political authorities (e.g., specific politicians), political parties as well as government funded departments (e.g., the police) are often to blame for ongoing racial inequality.

When discussing climate change, participants also held the government responsible, as reflected in the following response (CC116-M-22):

> …both major parties are not doing enough to combat climate change. The presence of the oil and coal lobbies within the political systems as financiers is corrupt and forces the hand of our leadership... also our role as a natural resources nation makes us predisposed to keep doing what has worked for decades. It just feels useless...

Participants expressed in the above responses, the perception that government institutions and politicians are part of the issue exacerbating racial inequality and climate inaction – in appraisal terms (e.g., Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993), they hold those authorities as responsible or accountable for the state of affairs. Respondents also suggested that those in power that are being held accountable for the issues, are not seen as legitimate because they are not using their resources in the desired and beneficial way. Governments that are considered legitimate use their resources in ways that the public see as responsible and worthwhile and address their needs (i.e., take steps to address climate change and racial inequality) (Tyler, 2006).

Large corporations are the issue. In line with the accountability appraisal, participants expressed large corporations were to blame for the lack of action taken to address climate change. For instance, one person (CC86-F-26) stated: “if something is not done to stop large companies ruining the earth is over for us all”. This response articulates the evaluation of powerful companies having illegitimate power when it comes to their impact on climate change and the influence, they have to prevent climate action. However, as seen in Table 2, in the context of racial inequality, large corporations are not perceived to be blamed.

It is a societal issue. However, some participants expressed the unjust harm is not just inflicted by specific systems and those in powerful positions but is also perpetuated by the public, or by society as a whole. That is, the injustice is not necessarily rooted in specific systems but is within the fabric of society. Society can be considered a system given the roles, rules, norms, social structures and hierarchies that exist within it, even if there is not one specific entity or system attached (Parsons, 2013). But this additional subtheme is also connected to the broader subtheme of “it is a widespread and systemic issue”, as people expressed that the issues are widespread within society. The systemic harm inflicted by racial injustice at a societal level is reflected in the following response by a participant (RI51-F-34-Latino):

> I feel like systemic racism is so entrenched in modern society, that people don't even see it happening anymore and make up excuses for what they are seeing instead of looking at the truth of the situation. It creates a feeling of despair for me.

This response highlights that racial inequality is a widespread, societal, and entrenched systemic issue that causes illegitimate harm.

Similarly, climate change respondents expressed that people in general and society as a whole are to blame for the inaction for climate change, as stated by the following participants (CC30-F-23): “because some people just don't care about repairing our world and reducing climate change. Some people only care about themselves, not our land and our animals.” Another respondent (CC84-F-29) suggested that they feel despair about climate change:

> due to the lack of effort our society, as a whole, have done for climate change regardless of the evidence. I have lost hope that things will change. When they do, it will be to late for people, animals and the environment.

These statements indicate that political despair can be caused by the belief that society is at least in part, responsible for the illegitimate issues of racial inequality and climate change.

Interim Summary

The responses of participants suggest that illegitimacy is an antecedent appraisal of political despair as it is an overall cognitive evaluation that the situation and actions (inaction) are unjust, illegitimate, blameworthy, and in particular, they are reflective of a larger, systemic injustice. Thus, the theme of illegitimacy reflects the appraisal of accountability, whereby there are evaluations of the blame and accountability for the current state of affairs (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). That is, in the context of political despair, it is systematic injustices that are to blame for racial inequality and climate change. This infers that accountability is not always directed at one specific target but can be attributed to systems and institutions such as the government, large corporations, and police departments. The blame is ingrained into the fabric of society, and it causes illegitimate and unjust harm. Therefore, the data suggests that illegitimacy is a core part of the pattern of appraisals associated with political despair.

Intractability

For both racial inequality and climate change, there was a broad theme of intractability. Respondents commonly explained that there was no way of changing the situation (racial inequality/ climate change) no matter what actions are taken, that is, the situation was intractable. The theme of intractability represents the evaluations participants made about the situation being uncontrollable and never changing, no matter what they try to do to change it. The intractable nature of the situation is reflected in terms participants used such as “irreversible damage”, “inevitability”, “no improvement”, “out of control”, “things will never get better”, “change is impossible” and that “there is no solution”. The situation being considered intractable was prominent in responses for

both racial inequality and climate change. Intractability is a complex theme with five key subthemes (see Figure 3) which reflect interrelated but nevertheless distinct aspects of the overall theme.

The Issue is Irreversible, Unchangeable, and Uncontrollable

Participants frequently discussed the idea that racial inequality and climate change are intractable, in that the status-quo appears to be irreversible, unchangeable, and uncontrollable. Individuals commonly discussed the perception that racial inequality will always exist and cannot be changed, as seen in the following response (RI144-F-35-White/Caucasian): "It feels like things will never get better and that things are actually getting worse to an extent." This response highlights the sense there is nothing that will resolve the issue of racial inequality in the US.

Similarly, in the context of climate change, participants explained that they feel political despair because they see the damage done to the earth as irreversible and that they have no control over the situation. This is expressed in the following responses: "Because I feel there has been irreversible damage done to the planet" (CC20-F-25), and "This is something that feels out of control for me" (CC97-F-29). These responses highlight that a key aspect of intractability that people commonly report is related to their belief that climate change and racial equality will never be resolved. Perceiving the situations as intractable, irreversible, unchangeable, and uncontrollable are associated with the appraisal of future expectancy, because it reflects the notion that people expect no change to the current situation in the future, that they do not expect things to get better for climate change or racial inequality (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). According to these participants, the situations seem unchangeable and intractable in nature, which is what elicits a sense of despair.

Not Enough Progress is Being Made

Respondents frequently invoked a temporal aspect to their responses to the issue, highlighting the perception that not enough is being done to address the situation (racial inequality/climate change). Participants in both contexts also expressed the slowness of action, the sense of lacking time to make crucial change, and some participants reported that they believe the

situation is getting worse (i.e., that the movement is failing to achieve its goals; see Louis et al., 2020). As seen in Table 2, the theme of 'not enough progress is being made' is the most prevalent across both contexts, highlighting the significance of this perception in the experience of political despair. Regarding racial inequality, for example, participants stated, "I do not see the things that need to be done to make these improvements happening" (RI10-F-60-White/Caucasian), and "Because it's been decades and the same problems persist. Why the fuck do we keep letting this happen? It's been time for change for years" (RI122-M-28-White/Caucasian). Responses such as these reflect the perception that not enough is being done quickly enough to improve racial equality.

People similarly reported the notion that damage caused by climate change will continue because the action required to combat climate change is not being taken, as seen in the following responses, "not enough is being done to combat it and it is almost getting too late" (CC153-F-21) and "It feels as though we are running out of time and does not feel like there is any positive change happening therefore, a level of despair/hopelessness is definitely felt within" (CC126-F-23). Additionally, a participant (CC66-F-22) stated: "I feel despair about climate change because as climate change continues to increase in its severity and the level of action to combat climate change remains stagnant, there is less hope for effective action to combat climate change." Such responses highlight the perception that currently there is a lack of progress on climate justice, which is leading to despair. Specifically, people often mentioned that people/society as well as the government are not taking the actions necessary to make progress on combatting climate change, which links with aspects of illegitimacy, particularly, the blame and accountability appraisal. Furthermore, this subtheme relates to the coping potential and future expectancy appraisals as it reflects people's belief that although there is potential to make changes, change is not occurring fast enough which has serious implications for the future of climate justice and racial equality (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993).

Average people's actions will not make a difference. Participants' responses commonly reflected the perception that no matter what "average people" try to do to address the issue, their actions will be futile, and that they were powerless to make an impact. Thus, the third subtheme of intractability reflects people's perception that the actions taken to address the situation do not make a difference. This subtheme maps onto the appraisal of coping potential as it is associated with the potential for people's actions to effect change (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Specifically, this subtheme relates to the approach form of coping with the situations as it is about engaging in actions to bring about change, as a way of coping with the status-quo (e.g., van Zomeren, et al., 2012).

In the context of climate change, people's responses demonstrated the perception that the actions of average people did not have the power to make real change. For instance, one participant (CC26-F-28) reported that they feel despair, "because it feels like we don't have power to change this situation". Another participant (CC45-F-22) stated: "Despite all the effort and energy you put into the situation, it just feels as if there's no improvement. It just deepens this sense of despair, that there's truly nothing we can do." As reflected in these responses, people believe that no matter what actions they take to try and combat climate change, their actions have no real impact.

Participants gave similar responses regarding racial inequality, highlighting a sense of powerlessness and inability to change the current circumstances. In the context of racial inequality, this subtheme can be seen in the following responses: "I just feel that no matter what we do, nothing is enough" (RI36-M-31-Asian) and "I feel like there is more I could do but I feel like anything I do is not enough" (RI77-F-25-White/Caucasian). Participants commonly reported that one of the reasons they were experiencing despair about climate change or racial inequality was due to their perception that nothing they do to try and change the situation will have any impact.

Widespread, Systemic Change is Required

As with the systemic aspects of the illegitimacy appraisal, participants frequently stated that there is a need for systems and society to change to address climate change and racial inequality.

Linking with the idea that the roots of the "problem" itself are systemic, so too did people reflect on the difficulties of achieving systemic change as sources of their despair. Reflecting this subtheme, participants explained that it is large changes that affect all levels of society that will make a real difference. For example, in the climate change context, people stated: "I believe radical change is necessary to save our planet…" (CC98-F-28) and "It is difficult to take action on climate change as we need a majority of the population to join us" (CC129-F-21). As seen in these responses, some people feel despair about climate change due to the widespread change that is required in order to combat the situation.

In the context of racial inequality, participants also discussed a need for radical systemic and societal change. This is expressed in the following response (RI104-F-35-White/Caucasian):

> I'm not confident that the political structures exist in the United States to seriously deal with racial inequality. When movements like the recent one emerge, they seem to quickly dissipate, and devolve into a set of demands issued to existing authorities. Real political change requires the development of entirely new structures for collective decision making and action (which might or might not take the form of new political parties), and I have no idea where that is going to come from.

The response of this participant highlights the notion that in order to address the racial inequality effectively, radical systemic change is required, but that this is a difficult and complex situation and explains in part why some feel political despair. The perception that widespread, systemic change is required to bring about racial equality and climate justice maps onto both the future expectancy and coping potential appraisals (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). That is, people expressed that in order for there to be any improvements for the future, they expect radical change is required (future expectancy), and engagement in this widespread, systemic change is an approach form of coping with the current circumstances (coping potential) (van Zomeren, et al., 2012).

Lack of Awareness

The final subtheme of intractability reflected participants' perception that a portion of society is not fully aware of how problematic racial inequality and climate change are. The responses applicable to this subtheme reflected the belief that part of the issue and why it appears to be intractable, is that not enough people are aware of the negative consequences of climate change and racial inequality. That is, participants expressed their perception that others are not accepting the issues, are being naïve and ignorant, or do not understand the issues; therefore, it cannot be changed. As such, this subtheme is associated with the future expectancy appraisal because, participants expect the future to be difficult to improve due to the lack of awareness about climate change and racial inequality (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993).

In the context of climate change, people expressed their belief that some people are not aware of the importance of combatting climate change. For instance, participants stated, "Because I do not think people really understand how bad it is and how close we are to completely ruining the world" (CC14-M-35) and "I despair that we have let the problems get this bad and there are still so many people (especially those in power) who blatantly refuse to acknowledge climate change as a legitimate world issue" (CC44-F-25). These responses highlight the perception that some others lack awareness and understanding about climate change and the catastrophic impact it may have. Additionally, it may be that people do not perceive those in power as lacking awareness and understanding but hold instead a more sinister belief that those with power and privilege play down the issues to protect their power and privilege.

Likewise, regarding racial inequality, people also discussed the lack of awareness about the situation some people have. This perception is expressed in the following response (RI16-F23-White/Caucasian), "Very few people actually recognize the need to bring about racial equality and even those who do often have a poor understanding of how think systemically and materially". This participant conveyed the idea that some people are naïve or ignorant to the importance of racial

equality, as well as the lack of understanding some people have about the issue. There is also an additional subtheme related to lack of awareness that participants discussed.

People do not care about the issue. Some participants mentioned in their responses that it seems like some people do not care about the issues of racial inequality and climate change. For instance, a participant (CC70-F-22) stated, "I feel despair about this situation because I feel like not enough people care…" in regard to climate change. Such reflections convey the perception that a significant number of people do not care about the implications of climate change.

In the context of racial inequality, people also discussed the perception that others do not care about the inequality that Black Americans face, as reflected in the following response (RI15-F-23-White/Caucasian), "It's very disheartening to see all the people dying and it all turns into politics. Nobody cares about human lives anymore." As expressed in this response, some people perceive others as not caring about the lives of Black Americans or achieving racial equality.

Interim Summary

People's responses about political despair suggest that intractability is an antecedent appraisal as it is a cognitive evaluation that the status-quo for the issues of climate change and racial inequality is irreversible and unchanging. Therefore, the data indicate that intractability is a key aspect of the pattern of appraisals associated with political despair. Moreover, the theme of intractability reflects the appraisals of coping potential and future expectancy (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993).

Participants' responses indicated that there was low coping potential for the situations of racial inequality and climate change. Coping potential refers to the perception of ability to change and emotionally deal with the current circumstance (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Specifically, the responses highlight that problem-focused coping is most relevant for political despair in that participants discussed their lack of ability to make a difference in this situation. The theme of intractability and the subthemes of "not enough progress is being made", "average people's actions will not make a difference", "widespread, systemic change is required" and "lack

of awareness", correspond to the appraisal of coping potential, as people expressed that they believed their actions, and the actions of other "average" people would not have the potential to change the current situations unless there was widespread, systemic change. Intractability and appraising the situation with low coping-potential was reflected in participants responses because they commonly discussed that not enough is being done to address the issue and that no matter what actions they take, things do not seem to change.

The other key aspect of evaluating the situation as intractable is how it relates to the future expectancy appraisal. Future expectancy refers to the possibility of there being a change in the situation, for any reason (Lazarus, 1991b; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The theme of intractability and specifically the subthemes of "the issue is irreversible, unchangeable, and uncontrollable", "not enough progress is being made" and "widespread, systemic change is required" are related to future expectancy because they reflect the perception that the situations are irreversible and unchangeable. That is, people expect the future to not be an improvement on the current situation that is causing them despair. The idea of future expectancy is reflected in participant responses discussing issues such as irreversible damage, a sense that things will never get better, as well as despair about other people not recognising how serious the problem is.

Outcomes of Political Despair

Although the question (prompt) asked people to consider why they feel despair, several people also mentioned some of the consequences of their despair. Participants discussed the effects political despair had on their well-being, their willingness to engage in collective actions as well as their views of the future. I categorized the outcomes as broadly positive or negative effects of despair.

Negative Outcomes of Despair

As seen in Table 2, some people reflected upon negative outcomes from their experience of political despair. Some respondents discussed their poor well-being, for instance in regard to racial inequality a participant (RI178-M-37-White/Caucasian) stated, "when I think about how many

people around me want me dead I want to throw up." Additionally, some people mentioned a desire to disengage from collective actions as seen in the following response (RI144-F-35-White/Caucasian): "at times it makes me want to quit all together". Furthermore, it was common for participants to also write that they had negative outlooks of the future due to climate inaction or racial inequality. For example, a participant (CC71-M-22) stated:

> I feel despair as I am of an age (19) where I will feel the full impacts of climate change, but at least I have seen a lot of the world in it's glory whereas I don't know if this will be the same for my children.

Responses such as this highlight that people have a negative outlook of their own future but also for future generations due to the impacts of climate change. These negative outcomes of despair reflected the potential detrimental effects political despair can have.

Positive Outcomes of Despair

However, a small minority of participants reported positive outcomes of political despair (Table 2). At odds with the respondents who sought to disengage, others expressed a willingness to continue engaging in actions in order to bring about their desired social change. For instance, one participant (CC124-F-22) explained, "I still feel passionate about this cause (I am a pescatarian, share things regularly on social media etc) but I am not letting it control my day to day." Additionally, regarding racial inequality, someone (RI136-M-58-White/Caucasian) explained "The despair is there but I don't and won't allow it to overwhelm me. This situation requires a lot of thinking and actions that will hopefully, reverse this "trend"." These respondents discussed the actions that are part of addressing the issues (climate change/racial inequality) but reflected on the point that they no longer allow it to negatively impede on their days (i.e., protecting their well-being), exhibiting a form of emotion-focussed coping (van Zomeren et al., 2004)

Moreover, some people reported that, alongside their despair, they also have hope for the future. However, the responses that discussed a sense of hope were often contingent on actions being taken or something being changed. That is, if specific changes were to happen then they have

hope for the future, for example:

> I do feel like there is hope, but more people need to band together to make change. We need the people that are fight for racial equality to be in office and positions of power. I feel like everyone is old and set in their ways. They don't want the younger generation to be telling them that what they have been doing is wrong. They don't want to admit that what they are doing is WRONG. There is hope and that is what keeps me going. (RI86-M-24-White/Caucasian)

Although these responses about hope and positive outcomes were not broadly represented in the data, they raised the possibility that even though the participants reported feeling despair, their experience of despair was not necessarily as negative as many others. Moreover, for some people, experiencing despair may be more reflective of their care for racial equality and climate justice. It is possible that feeling despair shows that people worry about these issues, they still care, and it is not necessarily possible to feel positive emotions about these issues when you still think the status-quo is not aligned with the desired outcome. Previous research has found that even just the suggestion of a positive outcome being possible, can turn the caring and investment people have in these movements into hope (Bury et al., 2016; 2020). So, perhaps a vacillation between despair and hope may apply to some participants in these contexts, or there may be a complex relationship between people feeling both despair and hope that I am yet to understand.

Core Relational Theme

Finally, I used the themes that were extracted from the data to derive the core relational theme of political despair. A core relational theme accounts for all the cognitive appraisals that elicit the emotion (political despair) in combination and reflects a broader meaning that is ascribed to the emotion (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). “A core relational theme is simply the central (therefore core) harm or benefit that underlies each of the negative and positive emotions” (Smith & Lazarus, 1993, p. 236). Having a core relational theme for political despair allows us to understand the emotion as a whole, in a simplistic way, that singular appraisals cannot. By considering the political

despair appraisals of intractability and illegitimacy together, I derived a core relational theme. The core relational theme for political despair was *unchangeable systemic injustice.*

General Discussion

In this study I aimed to understand the aetiology of political despair. Accordingly, I used the framework provided by appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 2013) to identify the pattern of appraisals and core relational theme for this little-studied emotion. I identified three themes, and an additional 13 subthemes. First, the theme of illegitimacy reflected the accountability appraisal: here, participants reported an evaluation of the unjust and systemic nature of racial inequality and climate change inaction. Second, the theme of intractability, which reflected the coping potential and future expectancy appraisals, was a prominent explanation for why people feel despair. The intractability theme suggested that participants saw racial inequality and climate change as uncontrollable and never improving. In keeping with the propositions of appraisal theories of emotion, I consider the themes of intractability and illegitimacy as antecedent appraisals of political despair – specific cognitive evaluations of the situations at hand that separately and in combination shape the discrete emotional experience. The third theme, outcomes of political despair, does not map onto the appraisals, however it offers important insight into how political despair affects people's well-being and political engagement, both negatively and positively. Based on these responses, the proceeding framework analyses and further reflections, I also offer a working definition of political despair as *a feeling of despair caused by being committed to a specific, desired social or political change but believing that the situation will not improve* (see also Gould, 2012).

Within the emotion literature, specifically appraisal theory (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 2013) and intergroup emotion theory (e.g., Mackie et al., 2008; 2009; E.R. Smith & Mackie 2008; 2015), there is generally a solid understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of many core "political" emotions (e.g., anger, shame, hope; see Leach, 2010). However, another prominent political emotion (despair), has, to my knowledge, been little studied. This study

is part of a larger project examining attitudes towards racial inequality and climate action. My analyses focus on those who report feeling despair, but this is a sizeable proportion of both samples: 53.5% of respondents agreed that they felt despair about racial inequality and 60% of respondents said they felt despair about climate change. The high prevalence of despair amongst those who support social change highlights the importance of understanding why they are experiencing this emotion.

Whilst despair is its own discrete emotion, with a unique signature of appraisal (e.g., Moors et al., 2013; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 2013), aspects of its appraisal pattern nevertheless overlap with other emotions. Specifically, there are similar elements between anger and despair: both are predicated on the perception of injustice (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2012) and perceiving an outgroup as being to blame for the current circumstances (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Furthermore, despair may also have similarities with anger in that it may be related to collective action. Anger is the most widely studied emotion in the collective action literature (see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for a meta-analysis). In the current study, people mostly discussed the dampening effect despair had on their collective action engagement as well as the perceived efficacy of their actions ("average people's actions will not make a difference"). It may be that there are important flow-on consequences of despair for collective actions that are yet to be considered.

Using framework analysis allowed me to gain rich details about people's experience of political despair and why the emotion may be elicited, however there are some limitations to this approach that future research could address. In this study I was unable to empirically test the causal sequence of evaluation appraisals, emotions, and outcomes, thus, future research could test the causal role of the appraisals found in this study in political despair elicitation. Additionally, in this study I asked relatively large samples of participants one relatively general question; I did not conduct in-depth interviews about participants' experience of political despair. Future research could benefit from gaining more knowledge about the phenomenology of political despair via an interview methodology that allows for a deeper interrogation of responses from participants.

Finally, future research could consider the responses reflected in the outcomes of political despair theme I identified. The outcomes that participants discussed could offer insight to research that examines the role political despair plays in people's collective actions and well-being.

Conclusion

This research has attempted to understand peoples experience of political despair in the context of climate change and racial inequality. To that end, I utilised qualitative methods and structured the framework analyses around the appraisal theories of emotion framework (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The appraisals of intractability and illegitimacy that appear to be antecedent appraisals of political despair indicate that people see issues like racial inequality and climate change as unjust systemic issues that seem to be uncontrollable and unchangeable. Overall, my findings highlight that people can be deeply affected by the stagnation on political issues like climate change and racial equality. People also feel helplessness in the pursuit of societal issues that seem too systemic and ingrained to show any sign of abatement. These perceptions can be to the detriment of individuals well-being, as well as potentially, their ongoing political engagement.

Chapter 3

"We despair": Examining the role of political despair for collective action and well-being.

Abstract

Anecdotally, people often report feeling despair about the political status-quo. I conceptualise these feelings as political despair. But what *is* political despair, and what are its effects? I adapt Intergroup Emotion Theory to analyse political despair in the context of racial inequality (Study 3-4) and climate change (Study 5). Three cross-sectional studies (total $N = 866$) tested the measurement of political despair (relative to anger), its pattern of appraisals, and outcomes for conventional and radical actions along with well-being (stress, burnout, and optimism). Structural equation modelling differentiated political despair from anger (hope, and related constructs) and found that despair is predicted by evaluations that the situation is both illegitimate and intractable (unchangeable). Moreover, political despair consistently had negative relationships with well-being, and positive relationships with both conventional and radical forms of action. The results suggest political despair can diminish well-being and impacts people's engagement in action for social change.

"We despair": Examining the role of political despair for collective action and well-being.

> Politics are an important part of people's lives. When something important to us is "at stake" in a political issue or event, we determine its evaluative meaning for us. This evaluative meaning is emotion… *[emotions] are the lived experience of politics in people's lives*… (Leach, 2010, p. 1827, italics added)

Recent years have witnessed many dramatic social and political movements and changes. The raging wildfires in California, the Amazon and Australia, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter protests have all been experienced as relatively sudden, discontinuous social changes (see de la Sablonnière, 2017; Livingstone, 2014). These events can elicit many different emotional responses in those that witness them: anger at political adversaries (Iyer et al., 2007) and guilt or shame about the illegitimate (in)action of one's group (Iyer et al., 2003). As Leach (2010, above) points out, such emotions are key to understanding how people experience evaluative meaning of these events and take subsequent action. Anecdotally, people appear to be reporting feeling a sense of despair about many of these events, too. Numerous opinion pieces and news articles have expressed the feelings of despair due to recent political and social events (e.g., Goldberg, 2018; 2019; Taub, 2019). Such feelings of despair may diminish the well-being of those fighting for change, via experiences of burnout and stress (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski 2019; Gorski & Chen, 2015). Feelings of despair may also affect people's capacity to continue engaging in conventional collective actions in support of the cause (Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gould, 2012). A cursory glance at different media platforms suggests that feelings of despair are pervasive and widespread.

However, despite frequent anecdotal reports of (what I term) political despair, there is little in the scholarly literature on this topic (but see Cohen-Chen et al., 2020a; Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gould, 2012, for exceptions). In this chapter I ask: What are the cognitive antecedents (appraisals) and associated action tendencies of political despair? What effects does it have for

people's well-being and ongoing engagement in (conventional or radical) actions to bring about social change?

Figure 2 provides a conceptual overview of the theoretical model that underpins the current research. I propose that the concept *political despair* can be defined and understood as a feeling of despair caused by being committed to a specific, desired social or political change but believing that the situation will not improve (see also Gould, 2012). Furthermore, I test whether political despair impacts feelings of well-being as well as willingness to engage in actions to bring about a desired social change (i.e., via conventional and/or radical forms of collective action; see Louis et al., 2020; see Figure 2). I provide empirical tests of these associations in the context of the movement to promote racial justice and equality for Black people in America (Black Lives Matter; Study 3-4) and action to combat climate change in Australia (Study 5).

Towards a Conceptual Framework of Political Despair: Differentiating Despair from Other Emotions Using Intergroup Emotion Theory

The conceptual framework is informed by *intergroup emotion theory* (e.g., Mackie et al., 2008; 2009; E.R. Smith & Mackie 2008; 2015). Intergroup emotion theory itself represents a theoretical integration between the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and appraisal theories of emotion (C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). According to appraisal theories of emotion, discrete emotions are preceded by specific cognitive evaluations (appraisals). A specific pattern of appraisals will give rise to a discrete (separate, distinct) emotion (C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) which will, in turn, be associated with particular action tendencies (Mackie et al., 2000). Thus, feeling sad is informed by the appraisal that there has been an unpreventable, permanent, meaningful loss and tends to be associated with withdrawal (C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Tan & C.L. Smith, 2018). Feeling angry is informed by the appraisals that there is harm, an injustice or a violation committed against you or your group by another individual or group (e.g., Scherer et al., 2001) and tends to be associated with moves to confront or challenge the source of the harm (e.g., Mackie et al., 2000). Conversely, hope is informed by the appraisal that there is a particular

outcome that is desired and that there is some possibility of this outcome coming to fruition (e.g., Bury et al., 2020; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Moreover, a key insight of intergroup emotion theory is that when a particular group membership or social identity is salient, those group memberships become the lens through which the world is viewed or appraised (E.R. Smith et al., 2007). Thus, the appraisal-emotion-action sequence occurs at the group level: one appraises (evaluates) the world as a group member, experiences emotion based on that group membership, and acts as a member of that group (Mackie et al., 2000).

Pattern of Appraisals

Linking with the insights of appraisal theories of emotion, I suggest that political despair is a discrete emotion with a unique pattern of cognitive evaluation and outcomes (e.g., C.A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). People can evaluate social and political issues as relevant to the self (primary appraisal) and share this appraisal with others. As such, political despair is an emotion felt about a societal issue; but specifically - as politics is a struggle of sides for power and influence - it stems from one's commitment to a group among whom concern about the issue is shared; that is, it stems from social identification (Mackie et al., 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the work that is described here, I conceive of the underlying groups as based on opinions, shared within the group, about how the world should be (see McGarty et al., 2009). Accordingly, I suggest that people may feel despair because they identify with a group concerned about justice and equality for Black People (e.g., Leach & Allen, 2017), or about concerted action to tackle climate change (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2015). People feeling despair about an issue without seeing this as shared with others, may feel despair (just as they may feel despair about their personal financial situation or their loneliness), but that would not be political despair. It becomes political only if the concern is shared (e.g., cost-of-living pressure, or a loneliness epidemic due to bad public policy), and it is about seeing oneself as part of the group sharing the concern, highlighting, or advocating for the issue. Although I consider political despair as being based on opinions about desired social change, I acknowledge that despair

could be greater for group members who are committed to change but also themselves directly experience disadvantage (see Appendix A).

I propose that there are two secondary appraisals associated with political despair (Figure 2). First, the appraisal of illegitimacy: that is, that there is *illegitimate* disadvantage or harm for which an outgroup (and/or my own group) is responsible (akin to the justice path in the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA); van Zomeren et al., 2008). Moreover, the nature of the illegitimate disadvantage is systemic*,* in that it is rooted in the laws, institutions and regulations within society. Secondly, political despair is related to the appraisal of *intractability*, such that 'we' have little capacity to act effectively in this situation, as 'nothing we do will ever change this state of affairs' (akin to the efficacy path in SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008; but see Cohen-Chen et al., 2015 and cognate research on entity theories, Shuman et al., 2016). Importantly, both appraisals (illegitimacy and intractability) are required for political despair to be elicited.

Differentiating political despair from other emotions. The intergroup emotion framework provides a useful way of distinguishing political despair from other forms of despair (e.g., clinical despair or depression). Here, political despair is not related to feelings of despair about personal or idiosyncratic circumstances such as work, financial struggles, or poor health (e.g., Rehder et al., 2019), as it may be for clinical despair. Moreover, political despair is different to clinical depression because depression focuses on holistic experiences and ostensibly maladaptive cognitions, whereas political despair is focused on specific issues and should not be conceptualised as maladaptive/pathological. For example, feeling despair about the looming devastation of the climate crisis could be considered an accurate evaluation of the state of the world, not an aspect of psychopathology (e.g., Pihkala, 2020).

The framework can also help distinguish political despair from other emotions like anger or hope. Given the current literature has recognised anger as a key approach/emotion-focused coping-pathway to collective action engagement (van Zomeren et al., 2008), I focus on distinguishing despair from anger. Like despair, anger is likely informed by an appraisal of illegitimate harm, but

is differentiated from despair by the absence of the intractability appraisal. Additionally, political despair would be expected to be negatively related to hope (see Cohen-Chen et al., 2020a). Yet, in the same way that sadness is not simply the absence of happiness, despair is not reducible to low hope. Hope and despair both imply a desire for a particular outcome, but hope's desired outcome is paired with possibility, whereas despair's desired outcome is paired instead with impossibility/intractability (Bury et al., 2020; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Furthermore, a lack of hope would imply a lack of desire for an outcome and would reflect an emotional apathy which is different to the feeling of despair conceptualised here.

Outcomes of Political Despair

The present research considers the implications of despair for well-being and collective action as separate but interconnected outcomes. They are likely to be correlated because, on the one hand, poor well-being may stymy continued engagement in collective actions. Indeed, many supporters of social change who experience burnout disengage from collective action, at least for a period, in order to improve their well-being again, which can be detrimental to social change (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski & Chen, 2015). Conversely, engaging in collective actions may impact personal well-being (Ni, et al., 2020). I therefore propose a model that considers both well-being and action engagement as interconnected outcomes of political despair (Figure 2).

Conventional and radical collective action/s. Intergroup emotion theory stipulates that discrete emotions elicit specific intergroup action tendencies (e.g., Mackie et al., 2000; 2008; 2009; E.R. Smith & Mackie 2008; 2015). In the collective action literature, anger has been studied as a key, action-oriented emotion that flows from group memberships and facilitates engagement in collective action (see SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008). I therefore consider the effects of political despair on collective action, controlling for the effects of anger. *Collective action* in general is "any action that aims to improve the status, power, or influence of an entire group" (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009, p.646). Collective action is a way of 'coping with' (responding to) an undesired status-quo (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Collective actions can involve *conventional actions* (Leach et al., 2006;

Louis et al., 2020) and/or more *extreme, radical actions* (Jiménez-Moya et al., 2015). It may be that political despair affects the two forms of action differently.

Specifically, I propose that political despair will be negatively associated with conventional collective actions (Figure 2). *Conventional actions* are considered normative, legal and within-system, in democratic countries, such as signing petitions, voting, and attending peaceful protests (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Gould (2012) suggests that political despair may flatten political possibilities, deplete activist energy to act and lead to political withdrawal in general. Diamond and Bachman (1986) examined 'nuclear despair' (i.e., despair aroused by the threat of nuclear war in the 70's-80's) and found that it correlated with decreased interest in participating in mainstream political processes. Thomas et al. (2018) demonstrated that distress about the plight of refugees predicted reductions in online interactions, which, in turn, reduced engagement in collective action to support refugees.

On the other hand, political despair may be associated with a positive effect on radical (violent/illegal) forms of collective action. *Radical actions* are those that use illegal and/or violent tactics to bring about a desired social change. Radical actions may include protests involving violent confrontation with police and property damage, as well as sit-ins, lie-ins, die-ins, and other forms of occupation or civil disobedience (Tausch et al., 2011). Feelings of powerlessness and lack of control can be linked with increased support for more violent actions (Ransford, 1968; Tausch et al., 2011) leading people to feel that they have 'nothing to lose' by engaging in more radical forms of action (Scheepers et al., 2006). Similarly, the belief that outgroups (e.g., those opposed to political change) are unchangeable (*entity theories*) has been found to be associated with support for radical actions (Shuman et al., 2016). Indeed, Gerbaudo (2013) proposed – based on observational methodology – that political despair may have played a role in the revolutionary coups in Egypt (see also Diamond & Bachman, 1986). I am not aware of any empirical studies that test these effects systematically and compare the effects of political despair on conventional and radical collective actions.

Well-being. Well-being is impacted by the world around us and is not experienced in a vacuum where only idiosyncratic/personal issues affect health and well-being (e.g., Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991; 2021). Supporters of social change frequently report feeling burnt out, stressed, anxious, and depressed, along with a deterioration in physical health and a sense of disillusionment about the movement (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski & Chen, 2015). It is well documented that people's group memberships/social identities affect their well-being: as group memberships are also reflective of 'self', and influence people in ways that cannot be simply understood by only considering the individual (e.g., Jetten et al., 2012). The literature also indicates that those fighting for change who are also members of disadvantaged groups (e.g., Gorski & Chen, 2015; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011) carry heavier burdens and may face greater burnout compared to allies.

Moreover, there are several lines of evidence to suggest political despair may decrease overall well-being. First, well-being is decreased by negative emotions (Larsen, 2009), which could include despair about current social-political issues. Gould (2012) theorises that political despair can cause emotional and physical exhaustion and, therefore, be associated with reduced resilience, vitality, or greater burnout. Diamond and Bachman (1986) found nuclear despair was correlated with poorer mental health, worthlessness, withdrawal, loneliness, and pessimism. Given that hope bolsters well-being (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999), it is also possible that an opposed emotion (despair) will diminish it.

One complexity though is that well-being has many facets, and there is little consensus regarding its definition or measurement (Marsh et al., 2020). I adopt an explicitly exploratory approach to test the effects of despair on multiple indicators of well-being (mental health, stress, resilience, vitality, and burnout). I consider that it is possible that despair may be associated with some aspects of well-being more than others. For instance, feelings of stress and burnout may be more sensitive to the effects of despair because of the intractable nature of the situations causing despair (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Halperin, 2014). Moreover, the effects of despair on more general markers of well-being relating to vitality (a sense of energy/vigour) and mental health (i.e.,

depression, anxiety) may be buffered by the presence of other factors and, therefore, the effects of despair on these factors would be relatively small.

The Current Research

Anecdotal reporting suggests that political despair may be a significant group-based emotion that has implications for people's well-being, as well as their engagement in ongoing action to bring about social change. However, I am not aware of direct empirical tests of these effects. Three cross-sectional studies provide a test of the theoretical model (Figure 2), conducted in the context of the United States Black Lives Matter protests (Study 3-4) and Australian movement for climate justice (Study 5). Across the studies, I selected participants who were self-identified supporters of the movement/issue (i.e., racial equality, climate justice). Given my analysis above that despair is something felt by people committed to a desired social or political change, but not necessarily by society at large, I sampled on this basis. Thus, to be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to select that they support the ideal of racial equality (Studies 3-4) and climate justice (Study 5).

Measures of appraisals (illegitimacy, intractability), emotions (despair, anger), self-reported conventional [radical] action as well as conventional [radical] action intentions were taken so that self-reported (past) and intended (future) action can capture the full temporal range of involvement (what people have done and what they intended to do). I use structural equation models to test effects of despair on commitment to conventional and radical forms of collective action, along with well-being. Although my a-priori focus was on distinguishing despair from anger, during the review process it was suggested that I should also seek to empirically differentiate despair from hope. Accordingly, Appendix A contains tests of the effects of despair controlling for hope.

Transparency and Openness

The studies were part of a broader program of research and the questionnaires included items that are beyond this study's focus. The full verbatim questionnaires and datasets used for the current analyses are available at https://osf.io/skwv3/?view_only=c169995052cc442983961f74ca90fc53.

I took an explicitly data-driven approach to well-being. Specifically, I measured multiple facets of well-being and conducted preliminary tests (see Appendix A), to establish which dimensions of well-being were uniquely associated with despair and anger. I then focused on those in the primary tests reported below.

In the Structural Equation Models detailed below, I include a mix of latent and observed variables. I modelled despair and anger as latent variables to test the measurement of political despair and differentiate it from anger. I modelled (conventional and radical) action as latent variables because I had two parcels of indicators that measured action (intentions and self-reported action). All the other variables were modelled as manifest/observed variables. Appendix A contains results of sensitivity analyses that were suggested during peer review to examine the effects of these researcher degrees of freedom.

Study 3

Study 3 focuses on despair in the context of the racial inequality between Black and White Americans, in the context of the June 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests. After the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer, widespread protest occurred across the US and around the world, demanding reforms to policing and racial equality. I sampled supporters of racial equality who were both Black and White. The effects of despair may be particularly pronounced for people who are supporters but also directly experience the disadvantage. Appendix A contains analyses that consider the effects of appraisals and despair for people who specifically identify as Black American, and for people who strongly identify as supporters of change. The primary tests reported below included the whole sample (that is, disadvantaged group members and allies).

Method

Participants ($N = 202$) were a sample of residents/permanent citizens from the US, recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. To ensure data quality, participants were removed if their geolocation, WorkerID, attention checks and/or quality of written responses indicated that they were likely to be bots ($n = 21$), non-US residents ($n = 20$) or did not respond attentively ($n = 3$). I

was left with a final sample of $N = 158$. A Monte Carlo analysis in Mplus showed that, with a statistical power of 0.80 and a significance threshold of 0.05, this sample size would be able to detect structural relationships of $\beta = .40$. Participants were primarily male (73.4%), aged 18 or older with the majority being in the 22-31(31.6%) and 32-41(39.9%) age categories, and the majority identified as liberal (49%, moderate 20.4%, conservative 26.8%).

To be eligible to participate, panellists had to self-identify their support for racial equality by selecting 'support' to the question 'do you support or oppose racial equality?'. On average, participants reported a moderate-to-strong level of identification as a supporter of racial justice ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.12$), suggesting that the pre-condition of group membership, that is, social identification as a supporter, had been met. Given that the sample includes people who were deeply committed to change and more nominal supporters, the Appendix A also contains analyses that consider whether the pattern of effects differ based on identification as a supporter of change.

Measures

Participants responded to the questionnaire items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*) unless otherwise indicated.

Intractability. I used four items to measure the intractability appraisal, reflecting the perception that nothing will ever change on the issue of racial inequality, $\alpha = .930$. Example items are: "there is no escape from racial inequality", "racial inequality will never change no matter what we as supporters of racial equality do to try and bring change".

Illegitimacy. The appraisal that the current situation is illegitimate and systematic in nature was measured with three items, $\alpha = .912$, for example: "The current situation for Black Americans is completely unjust", "Systematic racism is to blame for the inequality and injustice experienced by Black Americans".

Political despair. I used three items to measure the feeling of political despair. The items were: "Thinking about the current state of affairs regarding racial inequality in America, I feel: despair, depressed, hopeless", $\alpha = .825$. I determined that 'hopeless' and 'depressed' were the most

colloquially relevant synonyms of despair, such that lay people commonly use these words interchangeably in the contexts considered here.

Anger and Hope. Two items were used to measure the feeling of anger, α = .732. The items were: "Thinking about the current state of affairs regarding racial inequality in America, I feel: anger, outrage". Supplementary measures of hope were measured using the same stem, but participants rated their agreement that they felt "hopeful" and "optimistic", *r* = .819.

Conventional collective action: self-reported action and political intentions. Seven items were used to measure participants recent self-reported engagement (past-two months) in conventional actions, as well as intention to engage in the same actions in the future. Responses to the self-report items were either yes (coded 2) or no (coded 1), α = .843. For example, "I have contacted my congressional representatives, demanding that systematic racism is addressed"; "I have attended a rally demanding that systematic racism is addressed". Participants also reported their intention to engage in seven actions, α = .927. For example, "I intend to contact my congressional representatives, demanding that systematic racism is addressed". Given that there were two sets of action outcomes, to avoid multiple models, I decided to model these together as parcelled indicators of a conventional collective action latent variable.

Radical collective action: self-reported action and radical intentions. Two items addressed if participants had recently (in the past two months) engaged in radical actions. The responses to the items were either yes or no, *r* = .486. The items were: "I have attended a rally and become involved with confrontation with the police"; "I have attended a rally that became violent". Participants also indicated their intention to engage in six radical actions, α = .937. For example: "I intend to participate in a protest to support racial equality, even if that protest involves confrontation with police." As with conventional action, given the two sets of items, these were modelled together as a radical collective action latent variable.

Well-being. Appendix A shows that I measured several facets of well-being. Given the large number of measures of well-being and the exploratory approach that I adopted here, I first

sought to determine which of the facets of well-being were uniquely associated with despair and anger. I conducted a multiple regression with the well-being items predicting despair [anger] to test which aspects were uniquely related to political despair. Stress was the only variable that emerged as a positive predictor of despair [anger], $\beta = .41$, $p \leq .001$, whilst vitality, resilience and mental health were not significant predictors (all βs between -.21 and .10, ps between .119 and .626). I therefore focused on stress in the test of the primary model.

Stress. Three items from the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were used to measure stress, $\alpha = .906$, for example: "In the past week… I found it hard to wind down". Stress was modelled as an observed outcome variable.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics of key variables are presented in Table 3. To test the theoretical model (Figure 2), I conducted Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using IBM SPSS Amos 25. Good model fit was indicated by a non-significant chi-square, a CFI ≥ .95, a RMSEA ≤ .08 (Kline, 1998), and a SRMR <0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 3.

Study 3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of all variables.

	Mean (SD)	Illegitimacy	Intractability	Political Despair	Anger	Conventional Self-reported Action	Radical Self-reported Action	Conventional Intentions	Radical Intentions	Stress
Illegitimacy	5.49 (1.52)	1	.023	.469**	.612**	.302**	.100	.539**.	414**	.117
Intractability	3.44 (1.89)		1	.485**	.027	.425**	.491**	.487**	.301**	.625**
Political Despair	4.37 (1.58)			1	.619**	.559**	.425**	.607**	.529**	.426**
Anger	5.20 (1.58)				1	.360**	.169*	.561**	.416**	.076
Conventional Self-reported Action	1.45 (.35)					1	.616**	.748**	.693**	.392**
Radical Self-reported Action	1.23 (.36)						1	.433**	.550**	.422**
Conventional Intentions	4.69 (1.62)							1	.776**	.298**
Radical Intentions	4.06 (1.83)								1	.510**
Stress	3.91 (1.86)									1

Note. *denotes $p \leq .05$, **denotes $p \leq .001$

Empirically Differentiating Despair from Other Emotions

I first conducted a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation to determine if the despair items loaded onto a common factor that was different to items measuring anger and hope. The solution identified two components (Table 4): the first defined by the despair and anger items and the second defined by the hope items. Given this pattern of effects, the focus of the primary analyses was to differentiate despair from anger (but see Appendix A for tests of the model with hope).

Next, I sought to develop a measurement model for despair about racial injustice, relative to feelings of anger. Political despair was modelled as a reflective latent variable with the indicator's "despair", "depressed", and "hopeless". Anger was measured as a reflective latent variable indicated by (observed) "anger" and "outrage". The latent variables of political despair and anger were allowed to correlate. The analysis indicated that the model of political despair (with three indicators: despair, hopeless and depressed) and anger (anger and outrage) had acceptable fit. Table 5 (Model 1) shows that although the RMSEA was higher than accepted thresholds, the other fit indices evidenced acceptable fit with the data. The indicators loaded well (β = >.74 for political despair, β = >.81 for anger). I concluded that anger and political despair are empirically distinct.

The measurement model showed, however, that political despair and anger were highly correlated (r = .72, p < .001). To assess the impact of multicollinearity, I examined the Variance Inflation Factor. The VIF = 1.647; since this value was below the rule of thumb threshold of 3, it suggests that multicollinearity was not an issue for this study (Thompson et al., 2017). These measures of despair and anger were then used in the test of the full theoretical model.

Table 4.

Principal Components Analysis (with Varimax Rotation) of Emotion Items.

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
Emotion	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Despair	.831	.008	.886	.019	.819	-.066
Hopeless	.779	-.128	.717	-.050	.599	-.142
Depressed	.815	.101	.870	.070	.770	-.294
Angry	.843	-.071	.827	-.049	.818	-.033
Outraged	.785	-.011	.871	.016	.842	-.177
Hopeful	-.012	.954	.021	.969	-.040	.924
Optimistic	-.033	.950	-.014	.969	-.247	.872
% Of Variance	47.018	26.353	49.951	26.991	43.848	25.048

Table 5.

Study 3 Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Models.

Model name	X^2 (df) =, p =	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Model 1 – Despair and anger measurement model	X^2 (4) = 15.335, p = .004	.134	.973	.044
Model 2 – Full theoretical model	X^2 (41) = 96.097, p < .001	.093	.955	.058

Theoretical Model: The Role of Appraisals and Outcomes

Using Structural Equation Modelling, the full theoretical model was tested (Figure 2). The appraisals (intractability, illegitimacy) were modelled as observed variables, as was stress, whilst despair, anger, conventional and radical action were modelled as latent variables. The appraisals were allowed to correlate, as were the emotions and all outcome variables. Modification indices indicated a correlation should be allowed between conventional and radical self-reported actions to improve model fit, thus this path was included. There were direct paths from the appraisals to each of the emotions (despair and anger) and from the emotions to the outcome variables.

The full theoretical model showed acceptable fit (Model 2, Table 5). Whilst the RMSEA was again higher than the acceptable threshold, the other fit indices demonstrated acceptable fit with the data. Figure 4 shows the model with the associated standardised regression coefficients. The figure indicates that the appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability were positively related to political despair, which in turn was positively associated with conventional actions, radical actions, and stress. Contrary to hypotheses, despair was positively associated with conventional action. Figure 4 also shows that the standardised estimate coefficient from political despair to stress was greater than 1 ($\beta = 1.15$, $p < .001$). However, beta's are not correlations, they are rates of change and can exceed the bounds of -1, 1 (Deegan, 1978; Jöreskog; 1999). Providing good discriminant validity for the effects of despair, anger was not predicted by intractability and, unexpectedly, anger did not have a significant relationship with conventional action (discussed further below). Figure 4 shows that anger had a negative relationship with radical actions and a negative association with stress.

Given action intentions reflect the future, and self-reported actions reflect the past, I tested the theoretical model without the action latent variables and instead with the observed variables of action intentions and self-reported actions separately. I found that the pattern of results remained consistent with the primary pattern of effects reported here (see Appendix A)

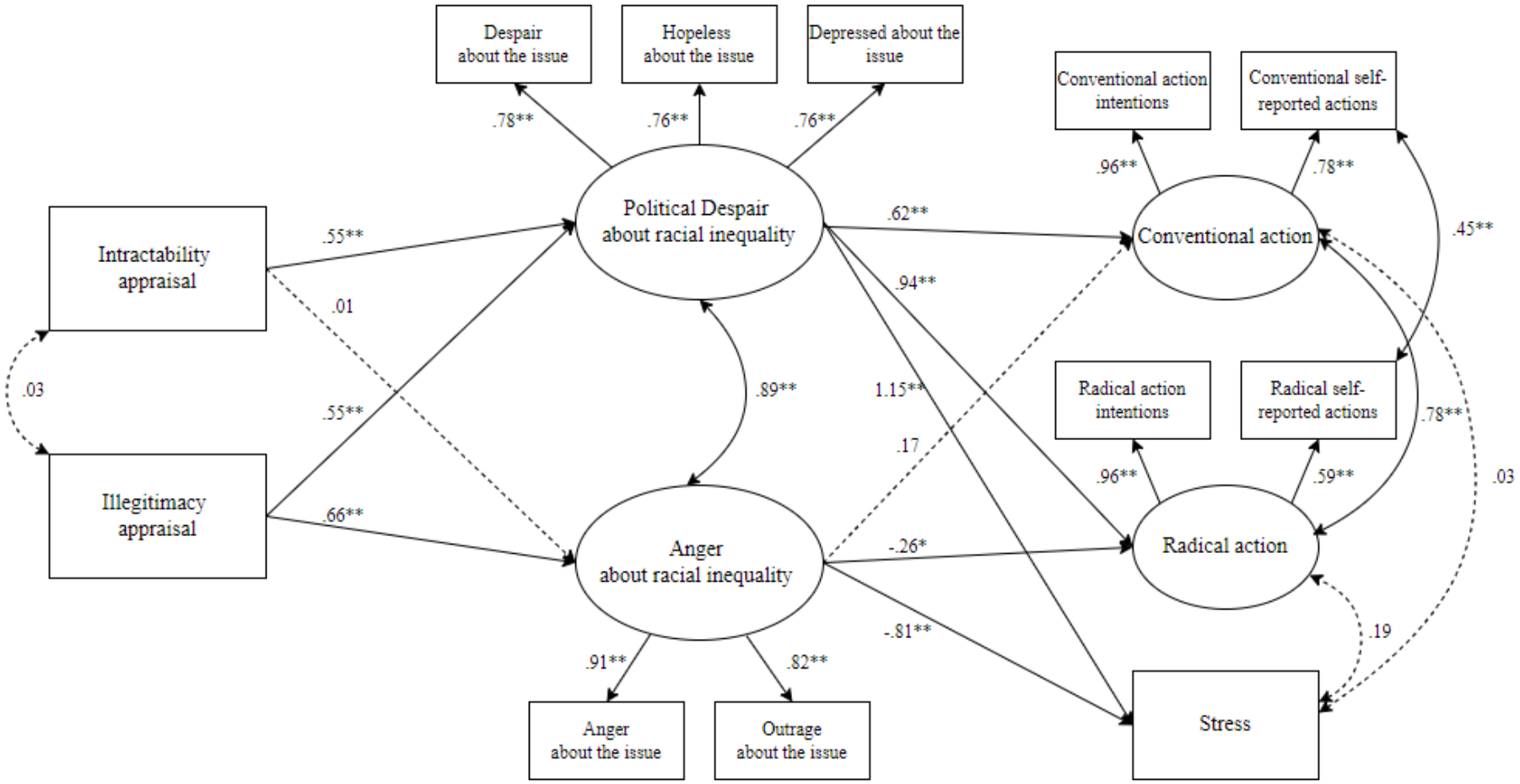
Table 6 displays the indirect effects. It shows that the indirect effects of the appraisals (intractability, illegitimacy) on the outcome variables (conventional actions, radical actions, stress) via despair were all positive and significant. However, the indirect effects of appraisals on outcomes via anger were not significant, except for the negative path from illegitimacy to stress.

Study 3 provides initial evidence that political despair is an important group-based emotion in the context of responses to social and political issues. Although highly correlated with feelings of anger in this sample of people who support the principle of racial justice and equality, political despair was nevertheless a distinct emotion with a diverging pattern of appraisals and outcomes. As hypothesised, political despair was positively related to radical action engagement, as well as feelings of stress (decreased well-being). However, unexpectedly, political despair was positively associated with commitment to conventional action. Moreover, once the effects of despair were controlled for, anger was found to not have a relationship with conventional action. Finally, and unexpectedly perhaps, Appendix A shows that none of the focal paths (appraisals to despair, despair to outcomes) were moderated by either disadvantaged group membership, or identification as a supporter of racial equality.

Study 3 was conducted during a period of live, tumultuous protests in which despair and ongoing action appeared to be contextually aligned. That is, at that time point (June 2020), there was widespread discussion about how things never change and associated despair (Chotiner, 2020b), but there was nevertheless also significant action. It is possible, therefore, that despair may have different effects on (conventional and radical) action, and well-being, when the movement is experiencing lower levels of overall mobilisation and contention. I investigated this possibility in Study 4.

Figure 4.

Study 3 Standardised Regression Coefficients for The Tests of The Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, and Outcomes.



Note. Dashed line denotes non-significant paths
* denotes $p<.05$ ** denotes $p<.001$

Table 6.

Study 3 Specific Indirect Effects of All Paths of the SEM.

Specific Indirect Effects	*b*	*p*	95% CI	SE
Intractability → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.277	.001	.169, .384	.055
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.352	.001	.191, .572	.094
Intractability → Political Despair → Radical Action	.479	.001	.326, .624	.076
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Radical Action	.609	.001	.335, .966	.159
Intractability → Political Despair → Stress	.614	.001	.457, .810	.089
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Stress	.780	.001	.477, 1.238	.192
Intractability → Anger → Conventional Action	.001	.881	-.018, .038	.014
Illegitimacy → Anger → Conventional Action	.113	.342	-.108, .380	.124
Intractability → Anger → Radical Action	-.002	.701	-.062, .036	.022
Illegitimacy → Anger → Radical Action	-.201	.164	-.532, .115	.158
Intractability → Anger → Stress	-.007	.951	-.120, .113	.059
Illegitimacy → Anger → Stress	-.661	.001	-1.148, -.341	.202

Study 4

To further consider the effects of illegitimacy and intractability appraisals, emotions (political despair and anger), and outcomes, I conducted a conceptual replication and extension of Study 3, in September 2020. By September, the civil unrest seen in June after the death of George Floyd had somewhat subsided (see Abraham, 2020 for timelines). While Study 3 provided an initial test of the theoretical ideas, the study was not sufficiently powered to detect smaller effects. Accordingly, I recruited a larger sample of supporters of racial equality to participate in Study 4. As in Study 3, I have included analyses of the effects appraisals and despair have specifically on those who identify as Black Americans (see Appendix A), however the primary analyses below include the whole sample. Additionally, I expanded the measurement of the illegitimacy/intractability appraisals and extended the measures of well-being to also test for effects of despair (anger) on burnout and optimism about one's future.

Method

The materials and approach were identical to Study 3, unless otherwise identified below. Participants were again removed if their geolocation, WorkerID, attention checks and/or quality of written responses indicated that they were likely to be bots (n = 39), non-US residents (n = 11) or did not respond attentively (n = 7). I was left with a final sample of N = 366. A Monte Carlo simulation in Mplus indicated that, for a power of 0.80 and a significance threshold of 0.05, this sample size would be able to detect structural relationships of about β = 0.25, that is, a moderate effect size. Participants were primarily male (55.5%, 1.1% identified as 'other'), aged 18 or older (M = 41) and a majority identified as liberal (48.6%, compared to moderate 26.8%, conservative 19.1%).

Participants again had to self-identify their support for racial equality by selecting 'support' to the question 'do you support or oppose racial equality?' to be eligible to participate. On average, participants reported a moderate level of identification as a supporter (M = 4.90, SD = 1.27),

suggesting that the pre-condition of social identification as a supporter of racial equality (group membership) had been met.

Measures

The measures of political despair α = .858, anger *r* = .839, hope, *r* = .881 and stress α = .867, were the same as those in Study 3. Conventional self-reported action α = .751, and conventional action intentions α = .911 were also identical to the Study 3 measures and were again modelled together as a conventional collective action latent variable.

Study 4 included several other emotions a-priori designed as filler items that are synonyms of despair, (desperate, disheartened, anguish, misery). I argue these items are less colloquially related to despair for lay people, for example, 'misery' is more akin to sadness, and 'disheartened' is more ambivalent than despair. However, I provide exploratory factor analyses of these emotions in Appendix A, that support the selection of items that are reported here.

Intractability. I expanded the measure of intractability and used eight items to measure the appraisal that nothing will ever address racial inequality, α = .918. An example additional item was: "The inequality between White and Black people will never change".

Illegitimacy. The appraisal of the illegitimacy and unjustness of racial inequality being caused by systemic racism, was expanded, and measured with four items, α = .932. For example, "The discrimination and injustice experienced by Black Americans is utterly unfair".

Radical self-reported action and radical intentions. One additional item was included in the self-reported radical action measure, "I have attended a rally that involved property damage", α = .770. An additional item for radical intentions was also included, "I intend to participate in a protest that involve taking control of/obstructing public places", α = .923. In line with the approach used in Study 1, the two sets of items were modelled together as a radical collective action latent variable.

Well-being. Appendix A shows the facets of well-being considered in Study 4. As in Study 3, I conducted a multiple regression with the well-being items predicting despair and anger to test

which aspects were uniquely associated with the emotions. Only stress, $\beta = .18$, $p = .009$ and burnout $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$, emerged as unique predictors. I therefore focused on stress (measured as in Study 3; $\alpha = .867$) and burnout in the test of the primary model.

Burnout. Seven items (adapted from Malach-Pines, 2005) were used to measure burnout, $\alpha = .888$. For example: "When you think about your efforts to improve racial equality, how often do you feel the following? tired, disappointed with people, worthless/like a failure" (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = Never, 7 = Always).

Results and Discussion

Empirically Differentiating Despair from Other Emotions

The descriptive statistics of the focal variables are presented in Table 7. As in Study 3, I used a PCA to examine the underlying factor structure. Table 4 shows that, as in Study 3, the despair and anger items loaded the first factor and hope items loaded onto the second. I therefore retained a focus on differentiating despair from anger (but see Appendix A for tests of hope).

I then tested the measurement of political despair and anger as latent variables, using the same approach as Study 3. Model testing confirmed that measuring despair and anger as discrete constructs fit the data well (see Model 3, Table 8 for fit statistics). As in Study 3, despair and anger were strongly correlated ($r = .77$, $p < .001$). However, the VIF again was below the common thresholds, suggesting that multicollinearity was not an issue for these measures (VIF = 1.785).

Table 7.

Study 4 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Variables.

	Mean (SD)	Illegitimacy	Intractability	Political Despair	Anger	Conventional Self-reported Action	Radical Self-reported Action	Conventional Intentions	Radical Intentions	Stress	Burnout
Illegitimacy	5.20 (1.63)	1	-.137**	.469**	.572**	.372**	.203**	.555**	.456**	.105*	.216**
Intractability	2.30 (1.13)		1	.172**	-.049	.007	.110*	-.020	.032	.213**	.192**
Political Despair	3.87 (1.61)			1	.663**	.338**	.229**	.426**	.419**	.377**	.519**
Anger	4.41 (1.85)				1	.359**	.224**	.456**	.420**	.196**	.370**
Conventional Self-reported Action	1.25 (.27)					1	.523**	.728**	.593**	.182**	.299**
Radical Self-reported Action	1.05 (.16)						1	.367**	.528**	.112*	.216**
Conventional Intentions	3.76 (1.64)							1	.701**	.193**	.332**
Radical Intentions	2.86 (1.52)								1	.220**	.336**
Stress	3.13 (1.58)									1	.572**
Burnout	2.98 (1.27)										1

Note. *denotes $p \leq .05$, **denotes $p \leq .001$

Table 8.

Study 4 Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Models.

Model name	X^2 (df) =, p =	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Model 3 – Despair and anger measurement model	X^2 (4) = 8.389, p = .078	.055	.996	.022
Model 4 – Full theoretical model	X^2 (48) = 162.806, p < .001	.081	.956	.049

Theoretical Model: The Role of Appraisals and Outcomes

I then tested the full theoretical model (see Model 4, Table 8 for fit statistics). The model was identical to Study 3, with the addition of burnout as a well-being outcome variable. Burnout was allowed to correlate with all other outcome variables and was predicted directly by despair and anger. The full model had acceptable fit with the data (Model 4). Figure 5 shows the final model with standardised regression weights. Consistent with Study 3, the appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability were positively associated with political despair, whereas only illegitimacy was positively related to anger and intractability was not. Political despair was positively linked with conventional and radical actions, as well as stress and burnout. Anger was not associated with burnout and had a negative association with stress. Anger also had positive relationships with both conventional and radical action. As in Study 3, I found that when action intentions and self-reported actions were modelled separately the results replicated those of the full model (see Appendix A).

Table 9 displays the indirect effects. As in Study 3, I found that the indirect effects of the appraisals on the outcome variables via despair were all positive and significant. However, via anger, only the indirect effects of illegitimacy on the outcome variables of conventional and radical action and stress were significant. The indirect effects from illegitimacy to action, via anger, were positive whereas the effect on stress was negative. All other indirect effects via anger were not significant.

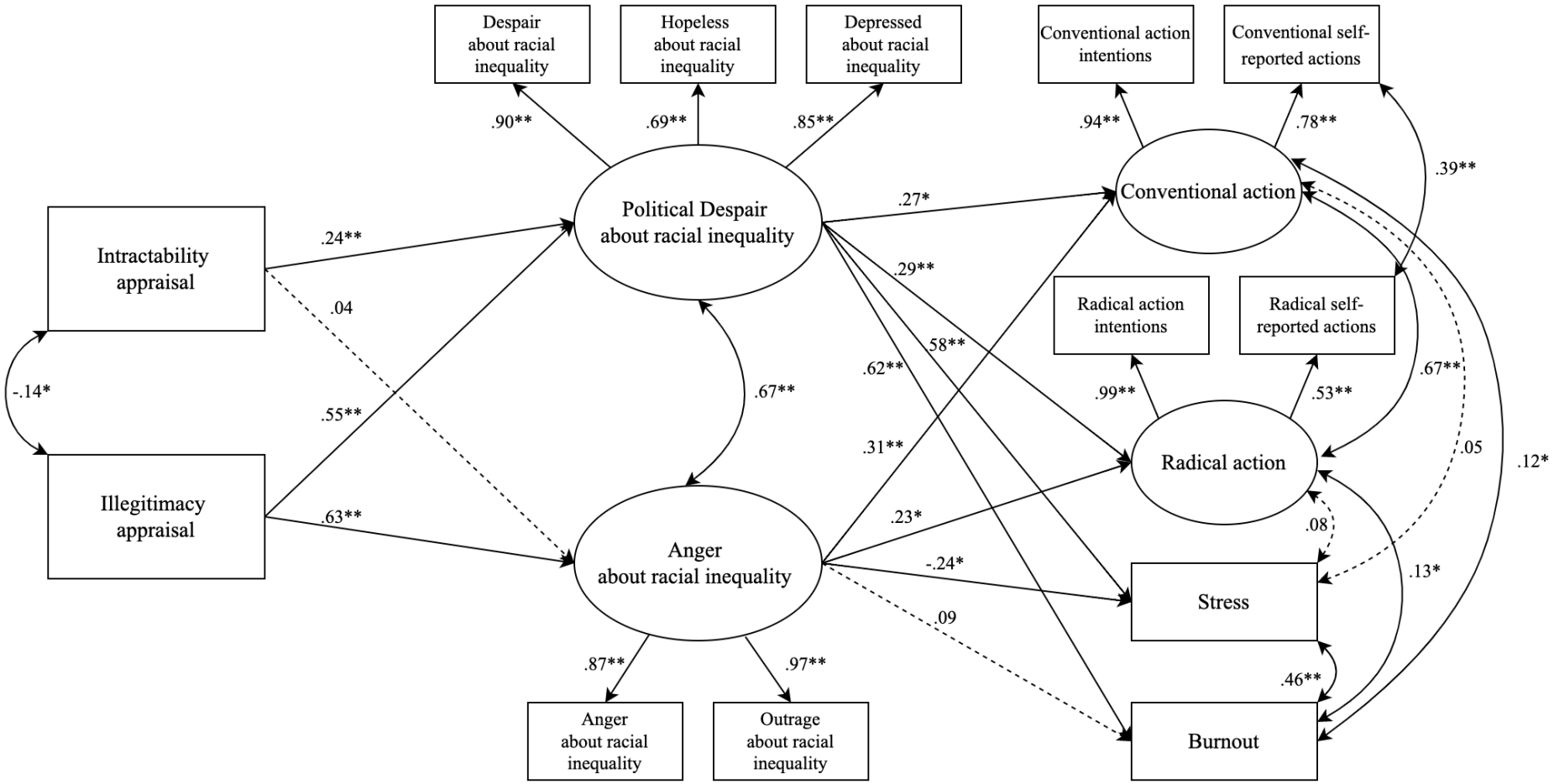
Study 4 extended upon the findings of Study 3. As in Study 3, political despair was positively associated with engagement in radical action and again, unexpectedly, conventional action. Political despair again was positively related to greater stress and burnout indicating an association with reduced well-being overall. Unlike Study 3, anger was positively associated with conventional and radical action engagement, whereas in Study 3, anger was not associated with conventional action and was negatively associated with radical action. However, as in Study 3, anger had a negative relationship with stress. The additional variable of burnout was not associated with anger. Appendix A shows that, as in Study 3, there was little evidence that the paths were

stronger for disadvantaged group members (i.e., Black Americans) relative to other group members. However, there was evidence that the path between despair and conventional collective action was weaker for people who directly experienced racial inequality. Identification as a supporter of racial equality did not qualify the primary pathways of the theoretical model (see Appendix A).

There were some notable contextual differences between the two studies. In Study 4 the protests had subsided, which may explain why the pattern of effects were generally weaker compared to Study 3. That is, fewer people were acting at this time (Abraham, 2020), which may account for the weaker relationships between political despair and actions. Additionally, Black Lives Matter protests were no longer dominating the media, therefore people may have felt less despair as they were not constantly experiencing discussions of inequality (contrary to Study 3). The sample mean of political despair appeared to be lower in Study 4 compared to Study 3 (see Tables 3 and 7). Nevertheless, however, the results of the two studies were consistent in identifying a similar effect of appraisals on despair, as well outcomes: specifically, that political despair was associated with unexpectedly greater engagement in conventional and radical actions as well as diminished well-being (over and above the effects of anger).

Figure 5.

Study 4 Standardised Regression Coefficients for The Tests of The Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, and Outcomes.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths
* denotes $p<.05$ ** denotes $p<.001$

Table 9.

Study 4 Specific Indirect Effects of All Paths of the SEM.

Specific Indirect Effects	*b*	*p*	95% CI	SE
Intractability → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.089	.020	.020, .176	.039
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.143	.031	.020, .262	.062
Intractability → Political Despair → Radical Action	.091	.007	.027, .174	.037
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Radical Action	.147	.009	.039, .258	.055
Intractability → Political Despair → Stress	.193	.001	.091, .334	.061
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Stress	.311	.001	.196, .457	.066
Intractability → Political Despair → Burnout	.166	.001	.082, .276	.049
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Burnout	.268	.001	.182, .385	.051
Intractability → Anger → Conventional Action	.017	.409	-.029, .069	.024
Illegitimacy → Anger → Conventional Action	.186	.001	.078, .333	.065
Intractability → Anger → Radical Action	.012	.331	-.017, .054	.017
Illegitimacy → Anger → Radical Action	.131	.008	.032, .267	.058
Intractability → Anger → Stress	-.013	.366	-.060, .022	.019
Illegitimacy → Anger → Stress	-.147	.012	-.292, -.033	.065
Intractability → Anger → Burnout	-.004	.336	-.033, .006	.009
Illegitimacy → Anger → Burnout	-.046	.261	-.154, .034	.047

Study 5

To extend this research to a different context, Study 5 was conducted in the context of climate change in Australia. Although public opinion polls show that Australians overwhelmingly support climate action and investment in renewable energy (Kassam & Léser, 2021), the majority perceive that the Australian government is not doing enough on this issue (Murphy, 2019). The current lack of climate action may be seen as illegitimate by those who support climate justice. For those who also perceive that the lack of action is illegitimate and leading to irreversible damage, climate inaction may act as a source of political despair. I expected that despair would be associated with decreased engagement in conventional action. However, Study 3-4 in the context of racial justice suggest that this is not the case. I therefore had no clear, a priori expectation for the relationship between political despair and conventional climate action in Study 5. I hypothesised that political despair would be linked to increased engagement in radical actions, whilst being associated with diminished well-being.

Method

Study 5 focuses on climate justice in Australia. Study 5 was conducted as an online questionnaire involving participants ($N = 298$) who were recruited in return for credit in an undergraduate psychology course at an Australian university ($n = 278$) and the general public from online platforms ($n = 20$). A Monte Carlo simulation in Mplus indicated that, for a power of 0.80 and a significance threshold of 0.05, this sample size would be able to detect structural relationships of about $\beta = 0.29$, that is, a moderate effect size. Participants were primarily female (75.8%, 21.1% were male, 1.7% identified as 'other', 1.3% did not wish to disclose), aged 18 or older ($M = 26.1$). Most participants indicated politically they identified with 'uncertain/something else' (55%, others identified as liberal 28.2%, moderate 14.1%, conservative 2.7%).

As in Study 3-4, to be eligible to participate, panellists had to self-identify their support for climate justice by selecting 'support' to the question 'do you support or oppose actions to combat climate change?' On average, participants reported a moderate level of identification as a supporter

of action on climate change (M = 4.76, SD = .92), suggesting that the pre-condition of social identification as a supporter of climate justice (group membership) had been met.

Measures

The materials and the approach were identical to Study 3 and 4. All items (except those reported below) were adapted from those reported in Study 4, but relevant items were reworded to refer to climate change. For instance, one of the intractability appraisal items read: "It is now impossible to combat climate change." The measures therefore included: political despair, α = .770, anger, r = .813, hope, r = .674 and intractability, α = .816.

Consistent with the method of Study 4, in Study 5 I included a-priori filler items that are synonymous with despair, (desperate, disheartened, anguish, misery). In Appendix A, I again provide exploratory factor analyses of these emotions. The findings support the selection of items reported here.

Illegitimacy. I expanded the measure of illegitimacy to five items, α = .782. The measure focused on the lack of action addressing climate change being illegitimate and systematic. For example: "There is no legitimate reason not to act to combat climate change", "Governments are to blame for the lack of action taken to combat climate change."

Conventional self-reported action and conventional intentions. Seven items were used to measure participants recent self-reported engagement (past-two months) in conventional actions. Responses to the self-report items were either yes or no, α = .624. For example, "I have signed a petition demanding climate change is addressed"; "I have reduced my own carbon footprint (i.e., riding a bike more, reduced meat intake, using less plastic)". Participants also reported their intention to engage in the same seven actions, α = .856. For example, "I intend to contact my government representatives, demanding that climate change is addressed". As in the previous studies, the two sets of items were modelled together as a conventional collective action latent variable.

Radical self-reported action and radical intentions. Five items addressed if participants had recently (in the past two months) engaged in radical actions. The responses to the items were either yes or no, α = .716. The items included: "I have attended a rally and became involved with confrontation with the police." Participants also reported their intention to engage in eight actions, α = .911. For example: "I intend to participate in a die-in/lie-in (laying on and obstructing public roads/spaces) to protest for climate action". Again, I modelled the two sets of items together as a radical collective action latent variable.

Well-being. I again explored which facets of well-being were related to despair and anger via a multiple regression (see Appendix A). Only burnout, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$, and optimism about one's future $\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$ emerged as unique predictors but, unlike in Study 3-4, stress did not emerge as a unique predictor, $\beta = .06$, $p = .322$. I therefore focused on burnout (measured as in Study 4; α = .863) and optimism about one's future as the well-being measures for the primary analyses.

Optimism about one's future. Three items (adapted from Marsh et al., 2020) measured optimism about one's future, α = .900. The items included: "I feel very optimistic about my future", "My future looks bright to me" and "I am always optimistic about my future."

Results and Discussion

Empirically Differentiating Despair from Other Emotions

The descriptive statistics of the appraisals, emotions and outcome variables are presented in Table 10. As in Studies 3-4, I tested how the items of despair, anger and hope load together using a PCA. Consistent with Studies 3-4, I found despair loaded with anger, but not with hope (see Table 4). The primary analyses therefore focus on testing effects of despair relative to anger (but see Appendix A for tests of effects controlling for hope).

Table 10.

Study 5 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Variables.

	Mean (SD)	Illegitimacy	Intractability	Political Despair	Anger	Conventional Self-reported Action	Radical Self-reported Action	Conventional Intentions	Radical Intentions	Burnout	Optimism about one's future
Illegitimacy	5.62 (.95)	1	.068	.388**	.470**	.326**	.092	.451**	.377**	.248**	-.183**
Intractability	2.84 (.89)		1	.286**	.052	-.036	-.020	-.097	.071	.260**	-.178*
Political Despair	4.34 (1.31)			1	.597**	.310**	-.013	.470**	.437**	.491**	-.275**
Anger	4.82 (1.54)				1	.416**	.074	.535**	.533**	.402**	-.177*
Conventional Self-reported Action	1.40 (.22)					1	.346**	.651**	.458**	.291**	.017
Radical Self-reported Action	1.02 (.10)						1	.174*	.215**	.030	.092
Conventional Action Intentions	4.88 (1.14)							1	.638**	.317**	.040
Radical Action Intentions	3.50 (1.43)								1	341**	-.164*
Burnout	3.37 (1.15)									1	-.277**
Optimism about one's future	4.70 (1.35)										1

Note. *denotes $p \leq .05$, **denotes $p \leq .001$, #denotes $p = .055$

I took an identical approach to the prior studies and tested the measurement of political despair and anger as latent variables. The measurement model had excellent fit when modelling latent variables of political despair and anger as discrete emotions (Model 5, Table 11). As in Studies 3 and 4, political despair and anger were strongly correlated ($r = .71$, $p < .001$), but the VIF did not indicate any multicollinearity issues (VIF = 1.553).

Theoretical Model: The Role of Appraisals and Outcomes.

The measurement model of anger and despair then formed the basis for the test of the full theoretical model. The model was specified as in Studies 3-4; however, the well-being outcome measures were optimism about one's future and burnout. That model demonstrated acceptable fit with the data (see Model 6, Table 11). However, radical self-reported action had relatively weak factor loadings onto the radical action latent variable ($\beta = .20$, $p = .027$). Table 10 shows that the proportion of people that reported engaging in self-reported radical action was very low (only 7.72% of participants reported engaging in any form of radical action), likely due to the restrictions on gathering imposed by the COVID-19 crisis. Given the limited variance in self-reported radical actions, I removed that variable from the model. The final model therefore modelled only observed radical action intentions.

The final model had acceptable fit (Model 7, Table 11). The RMSEA and CFI demonstrated acceptable fit and the SRMR evidenced good fit with the data. Figure 6 shows the full model with standardised regression coefficients. A similar pattern of appraisals was observed: intractability and illegitimacy positively related to political despair whilst only illegitimacy was associated with anger. As in Study 3-4, despair was positively linked to both conventional and radical collective actions. Political despair was also positively related to burnout (as in Study 4), and negatively related to optimism about one's future. These findings confirm that despair about climate change was negatively associated with well-being (burnout and optimism about one's future). Anger was positively associated with action as in Study 4; however, anger had no relationship with the well-being measures of optimism about one's future and burnout. As in the prior studies, I tested the

model with only action intentions and found the results were consistent with the full theoretical model (see Appendix A).

Table 12 displays the indirect effects. As in Studies 3-4, I found the indirect effect between intractability and radical collective action via despair was significant. Additionally, the paths from illegitimacy and intractability to optimism about one's future and burnout via despair were also significant, supporting the findings in Studies 3-4 where the indirect effects from appraisals to well-being were significant. However, unlike the previous studies, the indirect effects from illegitimacy to conventional and radical action, as well as intractability to conventional action were not significant. Additionally, as I found in Study 4 (but not Study 3), the paths from illegitimacy to conventional and radical actions via anger were also significant.

Study 5 extended the tests of the theoretical model of political despair to consider effects of appraisals, emotions, and outcomes (engagement in conventional and radical collective actions, and well-being) in the context of climate justice in Australia. As in Studies 3-4, there was evidence that despair was associated with engagement in action (conventional and radical) as well as diminished well-being (greater burnout and lower optimism about one's future). Unlike Studies 3-4, stress was not uniquely associated with the emotions in this context and sample. Although anger was a stronger predictor of action for this sample, despair nevertheless explained additional variation in conventional and radical action, over and above the effects of anger. Furthermore, identifying as a supporter of the climate action movement only moderated the pathway from intractability to political despair such that being highly identified with the climate movement appears to buffer the relationship between despair and intractability (see Appendix A for details).

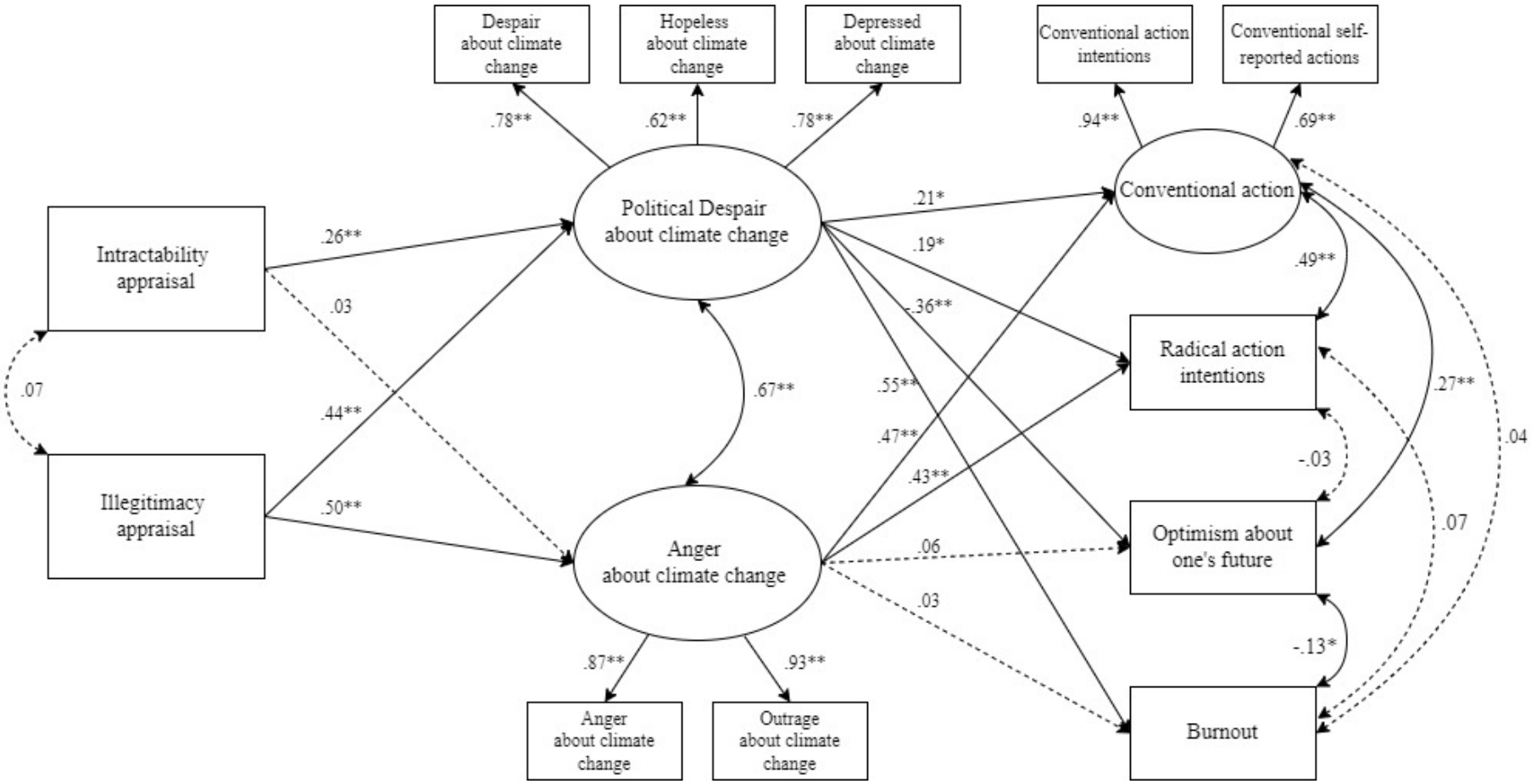
Table 11.

Study 5 Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Models.

Model name	X^2 (df) =, p =	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Model 5 – Despair and anger measurement model	X^2 (4) = 2.505, p = .644	.000	1.000	.008
Model 6 –Full theoretical model with self-reported radical action	X^2 (48) = 135.155, p < .001	.078	.943	.051
Model 7 – Final full theoretical model without self-reported radical action	X^2 (39) = 120.158, p < .001	.084	.946	.049

Figure 6.

Study 5 Standardised Regression Coefficients for The Tests of The Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, and Outcomes.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths
* denotes $p<.05$ ** denotes $p<.001$

Table 12.

Study 5 Specific Indirect Effects of All Paths of The SEM.

Specific Indirect Effects	*b*	*p*	95% CI	SE
Intractability → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.065	.126	-.042, .148	.064
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Conventional Action	.102	.220	-.093, .273	.105
Intractability → Political Despair → Radical Action	.080	.050	.000, .190	.051
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Radical Action	.124	.078	-.024, .303	.086
Intractability → Political Despair → Optimism about one's future	-.143	.012	-.358, -.020	.084
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Optimism about one's future	-.224	.013	-.476, -.043	.109
Intractability → Political Despair → Burnout	.188	.001	.074, .383	.077
Illegitimacy → Political Despair → Burnout	.294	.001	.160, .499	.089
Intractability → Anger → Conventional Action	.016	.654	-.067, .092	.045
Illegitimacy → Anger → Conventional Action	.266	.001	.111, .578	.124
Intractability → Anger → Radical Action	.019	.636	-.071, 116	.048
Illegitimacy → Anger → Radical Action	.325	.001	.159, .548	.098
Intractability → Anger → Optimism about one's future	.003	.437	-.015, .086	.018
Illegitimacy → Anger → Optimism about one's future	.046	.684	-.153, .267	.106
Intractability → Anger → Burnout	.001	.750	-.017, .035	.014
Illegitimacy → Anger → Burnout	.016	.826	-.157, .140	.080

General Discussion

Anecdotally, political despair is an emotion felt by those who are committed to specific social and political changes but believe that their cause is struggling with setbacks and inertia (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Goldberg, 2018; 2019; Taub, 2019). Although there is a small literature in other parts of the social sciences (e.g., Gerbaudo, 2013; Gould, 2012) little research has empirically examined political despair, its measurement, antecedents, and outcomes. This research sought to address these gaps in the contexts of justice for People of Colour in the United States (Studies 3-4) and action for climate justice in Australia (Study 5).

Across the three studies, I found general support for the theoretical model of political despair (Figure 2), with some notable exceptions. As expected, and in keeping with the insights of intergroup emotion theory (e.g., Mackie et al., 2008; 2009; E.R. Smith & Mackie 2008; 2015), specific appraisal patterns (relating to intractability and illegitimacy) differentiated political despair from anger: both emotions were associated with perceptions that the status-quo is illegitimate but perceiving the situation as intractable was uniquely associated with political despair, not anger. The measurement of despair and anger was also found to be reliable (Studies 3-5) and lends support to the idea that the two emotions are highly correlated, yet distinct. Additionally, I theorised and found empirical evidence that despair is distinct from hope, a discrete emotion in its own right. I consistently found that political despair (but not anger) was associated with some facets of well-being: stress in Study 3; stress and burnout in Study 4; burnout and lack of optimism about one's future in Study 5.

Moreover, unexpectedly, there was consistent evidence that political despair was associated with support for engagement in conventional and radical actions to promote social change. Contrary to expectations, political despair was *positively* related to conventional action engagement in all three studies. That is, despite its pernicious effects on stress, burnout and optimism about one's future, despair was not associated with "giving up" (as had been observed elsewhere, Thomas et al.,

2018). Overall, the theoretical model of political despair was well supported except for the unexpected result that despair did not have a negative relationship with conventional action.

We Despair and Yet We Act

Despair diagnoses a sense of deep emotional investment in a cause or issue: you do not feel despair about something you do not care about. Engaging in conventional action may therefore be a form of coping with the despair that people are experiencing (following Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; van Zomeren et al., 2012). One poll reported that people politically engage to actively manage their feelings of despair (Taub, 2019). This emotion-focused coping may help to explain why not all aspects of well-being are negatively associated with despair. Political engagement can be beneficial for well-being because acting in line with your values and identity as well as attempting to help others, feels good and can be associated with a rich and meaningful life (Anderson, 2009; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2016). Moreover, social identities (including those linked to social change movements) have positive outcomes for health and well-being (Jetten et al., 2012). Likewise, for those who feel despair but continue to engage conventionally, the sense of autonomy, meaning and connection that action provides may buffer the effects of political despair on those facets of well-being.

However, despair is still associated with decreased well-being on some facets, particularly stress, burnout, and optimism about one's future. As such, despair may be considered a "feel bad, do good" emotion, much like anger, but contrary to my expectations of despair being a "feel bad, do bad" (i.e., the opposite of hope, Cohen-Chen et al., 2020b). These findings point to the need to better understand the complex inter-relations between emotions (despair, anger), actions designed to promote societal-level well-being (via collective action) and personal well-being.

It also appears that the specific, discrete emotions underpinning action can play an important role in protecting well-being. Specifically, the findings suggest that anger plays an intriguing role in shaping well-being outcomes. I found anger did not have a diminishing effect on well-being, as despair did. Indeed, once the effects of despair were accounted for, anger was associated with *lower*

stress (Study 3-4) and had no association with burnout (Study 4-5) or optimism about one's future (Study 5). Although my data is correlational and I cannot draw causal conclusions, it may be that developing an angry response to a social injustice or collective grievance can decrease people's level of stress and burnout, whilst still maintaining their engagement in action to promote social change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; van Zomeren et al., 2012). Thus, efforts to promote continued engagement could effectively harness feelings of anger about injustice as a socially relevant but also personally 'healthy' response.

Importantly, these findings may have clinical implications. That is, as I have discussed, it is clear that political despair has the potential to negatively impact well-being and health (Diener et al., 2017). Therefore, practitioners (e.g., clinical psychologists) should consider the effect political events may have on well-being when treating clients. Greater understanding of the role of emotions like political despair and the impacts that social, political events have on people should be incorporated into the assessment and treatment of clients presenting to practitioners.

Furthermore, the relationships between appraisal, emotion, and outcomes (action, well-being) are likely to be dynamic whereby people may reappraise the situation when there are changes or continued lack of change (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Reappraisal has the potential to lead to adoption of an emotion-focused coping strategy such as disengagement, in order to bolster well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Overall, the results suggest there may be recursive/dynamic processes between political despair, acting and well-being that warrants further consideration (Vestergren et al., 2017).

It is also the case that recent models of collective action highlight considerable heterogeneity in how people respond to the struggles of their cause (e.g., Louis et al., 2020;). The DIME Model (Louis et al., 2020) suggests that, whilst some disidentify and disengage after failure, others will tackle the problem with renewed energy. It may be that there are sub-groups within the broader sample such that, for example, high despair and low anger lead people to disengage but high despair and high anger lead to continued engagement. Within these subgroups, there may also

be those who not only re-energise but also innovate (radicalise) (Louis et al., 2020). Despair may "open new political horizons" (Gould, 2012, p. 107) suggesting that some group members may come to see their current, conventional actions as ineffectual. The current analysis models the sample as a homogeneous entity to identify an average overall effect on action, but these sub-group differences may be revealed with person-centred analyses.

The findings, and in particular, variation in the strength of effects across the three studies, also point to an important role for the societal contexts in which the sampling took place (see Thomas et al., 2022). By 'context' here I refer to the level of live, tumultuous protest occurring as well as the issue being addressed (racial equality versus climate change). Specifically, seeing many others engaging in action and experiencing a period of mobilisation – what Klandermans (2004) referred to as a period of 'high supply' opportunities for engagement – may explain the particularly strong relationship between political despair and conventional action in Study 3 (during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests) compared to Study 4 and 5. On the other hand, there may also be important contextual differences between saying you "feel despair" about the injustices experienced by Black Americans, and despair about climate inaction. These differences await further consideration. These points about context, though, are consistent with recent calls for a systems meta-theoretic approach which invites us to consider how inter-individual, inter-group and societal processes interact in ways that are dynamic, non-linear, and 'noisy' (Bou Zeineddine & Leach, 2021; Leach & Bou Zeineddine, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022).

Limitations and Future Directions

My research investigated political despair, as distinct from anger, as part of an emotion-focused pathway to collective action. I did not consider a problem-focused pathway that is represented by a group's resources and efficacy to achieve its goals (see van Zomeren et al., 2004). However, in supplementary analyses (see Appendix A) I explored the relationship between political despair and efficacy. Intriguingly, in all three studies, neither group efficacy nor political efficacy were significantly correlated with political despair (*r*s ranging from -.063 to .049). Nevertheless,

future research could consider how despair is related to group efficacy and problem-focussed paths to engagement.

It is also the case that the current research was cross-sectional and therefore I cannot draw causal conclusions from the results. Longitudinal and experimental research will help to ascertain the causal nature of the effects identified here and investigate the possibility of any reverse causation explanations. Linking with the reflections above, longitudinal research would have the additional capacity to consider how despair, action and (multiple facets of) well-being reciprocally inter-relate, how different subgroups of people change over time, as well as how despair shapes outcomes over the broader 'life course' of a social movement. Although the current research measured past (self-reported) and future (intended) actions, both are limited by social desirability/demand characteristics and the implementation gap; that is, the gap that exists "between the ideals of political transformation and the realities" of the social/ political status-quo (Dixon et al., 2017, p 91). The model treats anger and despair as emotions that exist in the "here and now", but the actions are in the past and future. Longitudinal research could be used to model prospective influences.

It is also the case that measurement of emotions is notoriously difficult. In this research I measured political despair using attitudinal statements about the degree to which the emotional state is one that the people experience. However, this does not get at the phenomenology of political despair as an emotion. Future research could utilise different methods, such as qualitative analyses, to address the phenomenology of political despair. Anger is the most common emotion in the collective action literature which is why I included it in my models. However, future research may benefit from comparing despair to contempt (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011) especially regarding effects on commitment to more radical forms of action. Another measurement limitation for anger is that it included only two items, future research could include more items to measure anger.

Conclusion

Although I opened the current chapter with suggestions that despair may be having widespread, material effects on people's well-being and capacity to engage in political life, the message of the present data seems to be that despair is not all bad. While it implies a threat to people's well-being, it also instils the motivation to act, and to act radically when needed. However, given that we want to avoid diminishing people's well-being, activist groups should seek to harness feelings of anger, which are associated with conventional action but not decreased well-being. As the Terminator says to John Connor, the future leader of the world-wide resistance against the machines, after intentionally provoking him: 'Anger is more useful than despair.'" (Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines, 2003)

Chapter 4

"There's no place for burnout in a burning world": Examining the Exacerbating and Attenuating Factors of Climate Burnout.

Bringing about action on the climate crisis takes time and the continued, concerted efforts of supporters. Social change movements, including the climate justice movement, often face opposition, setbacks, and failures (see Lizzio-Wilson et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2022). As such, for the movement to be sustained through hard times, we need people to maintain their commitment to the cause. However, often people cannot maintain their commitment due to experiencing intense, negative emotions like eco-anxiety (Stanley et al., 2021), or a sense of inefficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Burnout is another relevant factor in explaining why people disengage from social change movements (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Vandermeulen et al., 2023). Conceptually, *burnout* is defined by two distinct components (Demerouti et al., 2003): The first is *exhaustion*, capturing experiences of feeling drained and weary, *disengagement,* which involves distancing oneself from the stressor (in this case, action to combat climate change; Demerouti et al., 2003). Burnout can have detrimental impacts for mental health (i.e., detrimental to individuals; Maslach & Leiter, 2016) but may also lead to disengagement from social change movements (i.e., detrimental for society; Chen & Gorski, 2015). Accordingly, applying the concept of burnout to climate change suggests that one feels worn out and exhausted due to the immense challenges posed by climate change, and a desire to withdraw or disengage from the movement for climate action due to the overwhelming challenges the movement faces.

What are the factors that predict or explain climate burnout (exhaustion and disengagement)? I suggest that people are more likely to experience burnout when they feel despair about climate change and the lack of action being taken to address it. That is, climate despair is likely to be an exacerbating factor of burnout (see Chapter 3, Studies 4 & 5). Given the need for continued commitment to the climate movement, it is imperative we find ways to mitigate climate

burnout. This research is important theoretically as well as practically: because, as stated in the title, "there's no place for burnout in a burning world" (Wood, 2022). In the current research I examine whether despair about the climate crisis is associated with experiencing burnout.

Moreover, part of the solution to continued engagement in the climate movement may be in mitigating the association between feeling despair and exhaustion, and/or despair and disengagement. Therefore, I also consider ways to attenuate those links so that people can continue to engage in action for climate justice. That is, I take an experimental approach to investigate the conditions under which people high in political despair may report lower burnout, as this should lead to better outcomes for individuals and society. I propose that imagining a positive future and the steps necessary to achieve this future may buffer against burnout for those who support the climate movement. Namely, people should feel better in themselves (lower exhaustion) but should also maintain their willingness to support climate justice (lower disengagement) when they imagine a positive future regarding climate change, and the practical steps that are needed to achieve climate justice. In order to test these propositions, it was necessary to develop a reliable and valid measure of climate burnout. Therefore, as a secondary contribution, I develop a climate burnout measure by adapting The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI, Demerouti et al., 2003) to the climate context.

Conceptualising the Dimensions of Climate-Oriented Burnout

Burnout refers to the prolonged exposure to enduring, unjust and stressful situations that diminishes people's well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Specifically, climate burnout may be experienced as fatigue, frustrations and withdrawal by individuals who work to address the long-term and emotionally taxing challenge of climate change but perceive their actions to be ineffectual. A line of research led by Gorski and Chen, has linked activism and burnout (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen 2015). They have found that activists experience burnout which depletes their ability to continue engaging in the movement, leading to periods of disengagement with the cause. Their primarily qualitative research focuses on racial

justice (e.g., Gorski, 2019), human rights (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015) and animal welfare activists (e.g., Gorski et al., 2019); there is little research that examines the burnout experienced by those in the climate justice movement (but see von Hellermann, 2021, for an anthropological account).

According to Demerouti et al (2003), burnout is comprised of two key dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. The first component, *exhaustion,* captures the experience of feeling drained and weary. Conceptually, exhaustion focuses on consequences of the stressors experienced and is linked with the diminished personal well-being aspect of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2003). There are various aspects of exhaustion including physical, emotional, and psychological/cognitive. In the climate context, exhaustion reflects a sense of weariness and emotional depletion by the climate crisis and its effects. Burnout also has a *disengagement* dimension that reflects a distancing of oneself from the stressor (Demerouti et al., 2003). In context of this research, disengagement would reflect people stepping away from the climate justice movement and no longer engaging in collective actions to promote climate action (either temporarily or permanently; Chen & Gorski, 2015).

Whereas the exhaustion dimension reflects people's subjective sense of poor well-being as individuals, the disengagement dimension is associated with diminished efforts to bring about change at the societal level (i.e., via collective action). As such, disengagement is tied to the societal impacts of burnout in that it can lead people to disengage from the climate movement, thus having implications for efforts to achieve climate justice at the systemic level (see also Bingley et al., 2022).

Well-being is often conceptualised as linked to intra-individual (psychopathology) or interpersonal factors (relationships) but there is growing recognition that well-being is also linked to the social world (e.g., social identities, Haslam et al., 2021). That is, well-being is not experienced in a social vacuum, indeed societal level issues can also affect different aspects of our well-being (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991; 2021). Engaging in social movements can provide social

connections and support, empowerment and meaning which are all associated with bolstering people's well-being (Greenaway et al., 2015a; Vestergren et al., 2017; 2019). However, as I suggest, when you support a social movement that you perceive is not having the desired impact, this societal level of conflict may impact individual level well-being, conceptualised here more specifically as burnout.

Climate Despair as An Exacerbating Factor of Burnout

In Chapter 3, I found that political despair had a positive relationship with burnout (as measured and conceptualised by Malach-Pines, 2005). The Malach-Pines (2005) burnout measure best reflects the exhaustion dimension of the current conceptualisation of burnout. As such, I suggest that feeling despair about the climate crisis may be contributing factor to people's levels of exhaustion. Gould (2012) suggests that political despair may be associated with experiencing burnout, decreased resilience, and vitality because it causes both physical and emotional exhaustion. Despair about the nuclear war in the 70's and 80's was also found to be associated with poor mental health (Diamond & Bachman, 1986). Additionally, negative emotions such as climate despair is associated with decreased well-being (e.g., Larsen, 2009). As such, I anticipate that climate despair will be positively associated with the exhaustion dimension of burnout.

I also argue that climate despair will be related to the disengagement dimension of burnout. In Chapter 3 I showed that, unexpectedly, political despair positively related to engagement in collective actions (both conventional and radical; see Studies 3-5). However, active disengagement from social movements is different to a lack of engagement in collective actions (see Stroebe et al., 2019; Stuart et al., 2018). That is, reporting that you intend to actively distance yourself from the climate movement may be different to a lack of action per se, much in the same way that disidentification from a group has been shown to be conceptually distinct from non-identification (see Becker & Tausch, 2014). There is a difference in people never deciding to engage in collective actions (reflected in low collective actions), and people who have been previously engaging in

actions, but decide to step away from those actions now due to burnout. That is, people may retain their psychological commitment to an issue (similar to moral convictions about the cause, Skitka, 2010), but still decide not to actively advocate on the issue anymore. As such, I anticipate that political despair will relate to the disengagement dimension of burnout, such that despair will be positively associated with disengagement. Diamond and Bachman (1986) found 'nuclear despair' was related to withdrawal and a diminished interest in political participation. Gould (2012) also proposed that political despair could lead to decreased energy to act, in turn leading to political withdrawal, but that it can also flatten political possibilities due to an increased sense of inefficacy. Thus, I expect climate despair will be positively related to the disengagement aspect of burnout. Overall, I argue that the people most likely to experience burnout, are those who are high in despair. That is, if people feel despair about the climate crisis, they are more likely to feel exhausted and seek to disengage from the climate movement.

Buffering Against Despair Induced Burnout

How can we attenuate the link between political despair and burnout? The solution to buffering against despair-induced burnout may rest on people imagining the future in positive terms and/or envisaging ways of achieving that future. Yet, how these methods work in practice may differ for the two dimensions of burnout. First, one possibility is that imagining a positive future society, where the climate crisis has been addressed (i.e., utopian thinking; Badaan, et al., 2020; Fernando et al., 2018; Kashima & Fernando, 2020) might buffer against exhaustion. There are three functions of utopias: criticism, change, and compensation. That is, utopias – as representations of ideals of how things could or should be – provide a standard in which the status-quo can be compared against, and its shortcomings *criticised*, which can lead to commitment to *change* as it becomes a goal and motivator for improvement (Fernando et al., 2018; Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990). Utopian thinking may allow people to regard the status-quo as evitable, rather than inevitable because there is an alternative future they can now imagine. That is, utopian thinking

may encourage people to reappraise the situation as changeable, not intractable (Badaan et al., 2020). Additionally, such positive, future-oriented thinking may allow people to escape reality to *compensate* for the harsh present-day reality (Fernando et al., 2018; Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990).

Based on this reasoning, I anticipate that the compensation function of utopian thinking may attenuate the despair-exhaustion link, simply because the utopias are positive and future oriented. Thus, utopian thinking may provide a "feel good" response that one can "escape" to, which in turn makes people feel accomplished, satisfied and better about the current situation (e.g., Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Oettingen & Sevincer, 2018). As such, I argue that utopian thinking may buffer against despair-induced exhaustion.

Yet utopian thinking on its own may be insufficient to reduce the disengagement facet of burnout. Given that utopian thinking can lead to escapism, people may be less motivated to put in the effort to achieve the desired future, as the future they 'escape' to provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction (e.g., Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen & Sevincer, 2018). Furthermore, 'escaping' to a utopian future may allow people to engage in emotion-focussed coping (i.e., reducing negative feelings) but limits problem-focussed coping (i.e., engaging in actions to ameliorate the problem itself, e.g., Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Ford et al., 2023; Goldenberg et al., 2016). Rather, people may also need to consider the steps that are necessary to overcome the barriers preventing their utopian climate future, that is, they need to employ *pragmatism*. Pragmatism refers to the consideration of the obstacles to attaining the desired future and planning the steps necessary to get there (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2023). There is research to suggest that planning and focusing on the necessary pragmatic steps required to achieve a goal can be beneficial for motivation and success in attaining the goal (e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990; 2013; Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). Therefore, I expect that

engaging in pragmatism may mitigate against despair-induced burnout, and in particular the disengagement facet of burnout.

However, the pragmatic prospection literature has found that first imagining the desired outcome (utopian thinking) before the pragmatic element can more meaningfully shape motivation to attain the desired outcome (i.e., climate justice, Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2023; Oettingen et al., 2001). That is, first imagining a utopian climate future can anchor cognitions and behaviours, thus providing a benchmark for action. Utopias, however, need to be linked with a means of attaining that future, otherwise that future is just fantasy, linked with an escapist dream rather than a concrete possibility (e.g., Kappes & Oettingen, 2011; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002). Therefore, thinking of pragmatic steps to attain the utopian future may provide motivation to take the necessary steps. As such, I suggest that pragmatic utopian thinking will also buffer against despair-induced disengagement, perhaps more so than just engaging in pragmatism (Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2023; Oettingen et al., 2001).

The Current Research

Recent work conducted by Vandermeulen and colleagues (2023) highlighted the importance of identifying the factors that predict burnout, as well as strategies to combat burnout. In this chapter I attempt to address these calls, at least partially. As detailed above, I contend that despair may be an exacerbating factor of burnout. However, currently there is scant research investigating the links between climate despair and the two aspects of burnout: exhaustion, and disengagement. In this research I will investigate these relationships and also examine potential ways to mitigate against climate despair-induced burnout. Specifically, I will test the role of utopian thinking and pragmatism in reducing exhaustion and disengagement.

Two pre-registered experimental studies test whether the relationships between despair and burnout (exhaustion and disengagement) can be attenuated. Using experimental methods, I experimentally induce a focus on a positive future (via. utopian thinking), either alone or in

combination with pragmatic solutions in attempt to mitigate climate despair induced burnout. In the experiments, participants completed a pre-measure of political despair and then were randomly allocated into one of four experimental conditions (utopian thinking, pragmatism, utopian thinking + pragmatism, or a passive control), followed by measures of the dependent variables. However, before it was possible to experimentally examine the effects of utopian thinking and pragmatism on burnout, it was first necessary to develop and assess a measure of climate-related burnout.

Pilot Study (Study 6)

The Pilot Study (Study 6) focused on developing and validating an adapted climate action version of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (C-OLBI; Demerouti et al., 2003). The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI, Demerouti et al., 2003) is a validated measure in the context of burnout in the workplace (e.g., Maslach Burnout Inventory; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It has good reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity with other burnout measures (Demerouti et al., 2003). However, the current measure is not well equipped to assess burnout for climate action supporters. I therefore adapted the items from the OLBI to the climate context by re-wording them to applicable scenarios and excluding items that could not be adapted. Having developed the scale, I then tested it to see if it had the same factor structure as the OLBI, that is, whether the items load onto the two separate exhaustion and disengagement factors. In this pilot study I also test the convergent and discriminant validity of the C-OLBI dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement.

The convergent validity of the exhaustion subscale will be assessed via a positive correlation with burnout (Malach-Pines, 2005, as per the measure of burnout from Studies 4 and 5 in Chapter 3) and stress (DASS-21, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The convergent validity of the disengagement subscale will be assessed via a negative correlation with (conventional and radical) collective action. The discriminant validity between exhaustion and disengagement, will be assessed by a non-significant (or weak) relationship between exhaustion and collective action

engagement, and a non-significant (or weak) association between disengagement, burnout, and stress.

Method

Ninety-eight permanent residents or citizens from the United States of America were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk. To be eligible to participate, participants had to self-select that they believe in climate change and that it was the result of human activity. That is, participants had to select yes to both questions; 'Do you believe our climate is changing?' and 'Do you believe that human activity is at least in part responsible for climate change?' to participate. To ensure data quality, participants were removed if two of the Qualtrics metrics for fraudulent responders indicated the response was duplicated or provided by a bot (i.e., duplicate geolocation, Recapture score, Relevant ID duplicate score, Relevant ID fraud score). As a result, 7 participants were excluded, and the final sample consisted of $N = 91$. Participants were primarily male (64.8 %), aged 21 or older ($M = 37.82$) and identified as a Democrat (59.3 %, compared to 14.3 % Republican, 24.2 % independent, and 2.2 % uncertain/swing voter).

Measures

Participants responded to the questionnaire items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*) unless otherwise indicated.

Climate adapted Oldenburg Burnout Inventory scale development (C-OLBI). I adapted the 16 items from the OLBI to the context of support for climate action and pilot tested the items for face validity, comprehension and to check that the items loaded onto the exhaustion and disengagement factors. Nine items from the OLBI could not be adequately adapted to the climate context. Example items that were removed were: "I always find new and interesting aspects in my efforts to promote climate action" (disengagement, reverse scored) and "After a day of working toward climate justice, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better" (exhaustion). To keep the number of items constant across the two subscales, I included an

additional purpose-built item in the disengagement subscale, “If things do not change soon, I will have to give up my efforts to promote climate justice”. Therefore, I was left with eight items, four for each subscale (see Table 13 for the items).

Malach-Pines Burnout. I also measured burnout with seven items adapted from Malach-Pines (2005) to test the validity of the C-OLBI (α = .903). Items included: “When you think about your efforts to improve climate change, to what extent do you feel the following: tired, disappointed with people, worthless/like a failure” (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = Never, 7 = Always).

Stress. Three items from the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were used to measure stress (α = .919), for example: “In the past month… I found it hard to wind down”.

Conventional Action Intentions. Seven items were used to measure participants intention to engage in conventional actions (α = .922). For example, “I intend to attend a rally demanding that climate change is addressed” and “I intend to reduce my own carbon footprint (i.e., ride a bike more, reduce meat intake, use less plastics)”.

Radical Action Intentions. Five items addressed participants intentions to engage in radical actions (α = .908). For example, “I intend to participate in protests that involve taking control of/obstructing public places to demand more climate action.”

Table 13.

Pilot Study (Study 6) Principal Components Analysis Varimax Rotated Item Loadings for C-OLBI.

Dimension	Item	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings	Retained items
Exhaustion 1	When I think about efforts to promote climate justice, I feel energized. (Reverse scored)	**.838**	.122	
Exhaustion 2	I can tolerate the pressure of my continued support for climate justice very well. (Reverse scored)	**.717**	.293	
Exhaustion 3	When I think about the fight for climate justice, I feel worn out and weary.	.127	**.781**	✓
Exhaustion 4	I find my efforts to promote action on climate change emotionally draining.	-.079	**.825**	✓
Disengagement 1	I feel disconnected from the goal of action to combat climate change.	**.817**	.155	✓
Disengagement 2	I feel more and more engaged in my support for climate justice. (Reverse scored)	**.843**	-.084	✓
Disengagement 3	I think about efforts to promote climate justice in a negative way.	.119	**.672**	
Disengagement 4	If things do not change soon, I will have to give up my efforts to promote climate justice.	.261	**.700**	

Note. **Bold** denotes significant effects.

Results

The Underlying Factors of The Climate Adapted OLBI (C-OLBI)

First, I conducted a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to explore whether the C-OLBI items loaded onto two separate exhaustion and disengagement factors, respectively. I included all eight items from the C-OLBI and conducted a PCA with the Varimax rotation method. The results indicated that there were two factors, with eigenvalues greater than 1, which together accounted for 63.29 % of the variance. However, the items did not load onto the exhaustion and disengagement factors in a way that was consistent with the original OLBI scale. The first factor, which accounted for 40.22% of the variance, was defined by exhaustion 1 and 2, disengagement 1 and 2. The second factor (accounting for 23.06% variance) was defined by exhaustion 3 and 4, disengagement 3 and 4 (see Table 13 for item loadings). Importantly, there were no cross-loading items, indicating that these factors were empirically distinct facets of burnout. Given this pattern of results, I opted to retain the two items that factored together with the highest loadings, that were also consistent with the original dimension (retained items are denoted with a ✓ in Table 13). Both subscales were reliable (exhaustion, $r = .658$, $p < .001$; disengagement, $r = .610$, $p < .001$), the final items are in Table 13.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity of the C-OLBI

I next assessed the discriminant and convergent validity of the exhaustion and disengagement subscales by examining how they correlated with related measures assessing well-being and collective action intentions (see Table 14 for correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics).

Other Well-Being Measures: Burnout and Stress

To demonstrate convergent validity, I expected exhaustion to be positively correlated with well-being measures, burnout, and stress, as exhaustion reflects weariness and being emotionally drained which are part of well-being. However, I expected disengagement would be unrelated to

stress and burnout. As expected, exhaustion was positively related to both burnout and stress, supporting the convergent validity of the exhaustion dimension with other well-being measures (see Table 14 for correlation coefficients). Providing good discriminant validity for the scale, disengagement did not relate to stress or burnout. This pattern of association suggested that the two factors of the C-OLBI were conceptually distinct.

Collective Action

As expected, disengagement was negatively associated with conventional and radical collective action intentions (see Table 14 for correlation coefficients), thus providing good convergent validity. Exhaustion was unrelated to conventional actions but was, unexpectedly, positively associated with radical action intentions. The differing pattern of correlations of exhaustion and disengagement with collective actions provided discriminant validity for the subscales.

Discussion

Overall, exhaustion and disengagement appear to be distinct constructs that are related to the constructs that would be expected. That is, exhaustion shows good convergent validity with the well-being measures (burnout and stress), whilst disengagement was convergently valid with low intentions to engage in actions to promote climate justice. Moreover, exhaustion and disengagement demonstrated good discriminant validity because exhaustion did not correlate with conventional action and disengagement did not correlate with the measures of burnout and stress.

Table 14.

Pilot Study (Study 6) Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Variables.

	Mean (SD)	Exhaustion	Disengagement	Burnout	Stress	Conventional actions	Radical actions
Exhaustion	3.44 (1.53)	1					
Disengagement	3.73 (1.56)	.099	1				
Burnout	2.76 (1.36)	.664**	.064	1			
Stress	3.26 (1.77)	.550**	-.094	.594**	1		
Conventional actions	4.02 (1.55)	.115	-.599**	.329*	.266*	1	
Radical actions	2.62 (1.51)	.310*	-.460**	.280*	.294*	.705**	1

Note. * denotes $p \leq .05$, ** denotes $p \leq .001$

Study 7

Study 7 examines whether despair about climate change impacts the two dimensions of burnout, as well as the conditions under which people high in climate despair may report reduced exhaustion and disengagement. Specifically, I consider the moderating effect utopian thinking, pragmatism, and the combination that both utopian thinking and pragmatism may have on the relationship between climate despair and burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). As such, in Study 7, I specifically test two predictions about the role of utopian thinking and pragmatism on the relationship between despair and both dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). I hypothesised:

H1: a two-way interaction whereby people high in despair will report lower *exhaustion* if they complete the utopian thinking task, compared to if they do not.

H2: a three-way interaction, such that people high in despair will report lower *disengagement* if they engage in the pragmatic + utopian thinking condition only.

Openness and Transparency

In both studies the analyses addressing the three-way interaction between climate despair, utopian thinking and pragmatism on the outcome variables were pre-registered (see OSF for pre-registrations: Study 7 https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/856DW, Study 8 https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/CSQD7). There were also pre-registered predictions regarding conventional and radical collective action engagement, these analyses can be found in Appendix B.

Method

Participants and Design

Study 7 was conducted as an online questionnaire, sampling United States of America citizens/ permanent residents (N = 656), recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. A-priori sample size was calculated using G*Power from power analyses that accounted for the moderator and included the parameters of a small effect size, Cohens f = .02, at 80%, α = 0.05, and numerator df =

4. The power analyses determined a sample of $N = 612$, ($n = 153$ per condition) would be sufficient to detect small effects (I added a buffer of 20 participants due to the exclusion criteria and potential missing data, thus aimed for a sample of $N = 632$).

As in Study 6, to be eligible to participate, respondents had to self-select that they believe in climate change and that it is the result of human activity. To ensure data quality, participants were removed if they used a duplicate WorkerID ($n = 14$), the geolocation and IP address were duplicated ($n = 2$), if Qualtrics data quality metric Recapture score is below .8 ($n = 9$), or they did not respond attentively ($n = 8$). I was left with a final sample of $N = 623$. Participants were equally male (49.6%) and female (49.3%; non-binary 0.2%, other 0.2%, prefer not to say 0.8%), aged 21 or older ($M = 43.86$, $SD = 12.49$), majority identified as white (72.6%), the majority identified as at least somewhat liberal (60%, compared to moderate 17.6%, at least somewhat conservative 22.4%), and most supported the Democratic party (54.6%, Republican 18.1%, independent 22.6%, uncertain/ swing voter 4.7%).

Participants first responded to pre-measures of emotions, specifically political despair. They were then randomly allocated to one of four experimental conditions. Participants then completed the rest of the study including measures of the dependent variables. As such, this study had a 2 (utopian thinking: present, absent) x 2 (pragmatism: present, absent) between groups experimental design whereby the independent variable was climate despair, and the dependent variables were exhaustion and disengagement.

Experimental Manipulations

Participants were allocated to one of four experimental conditions: utopian thinking, pragmatism, combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism and a passive control. The conditions are detailed below.

In the *utopian thinking condition*, participants were asked to imagine a positive future where climate change has been significantly addressed and then select three images out of 10 that reflect

their imagined ideal future regarding climate change (following the procedure developed by Daysh et al., in press). Participants then spent three minutes writing about their desired future; on average, participants wrote 73.87 words (*SD* = 34.83).

In the *pragmatism condition,* participants were asked to think of obstacles to the desired future of achieving climate justice and the necessary concrete steps required to achieve said future. Respondents then selected three images out of 10 that reflect the climate initiatives they would be most interested in promoting (i.e., nature restoration and protection, renewable energy and energy storage, political and social change initiatives) and then spent three minutes writing about the obstacles to their desired climate future and the actions they could take to achieve this future; on average, participants wrote 87.72 words (*SD* = 49.89).

People allocated to the combined *utopian thinking + pragmatism condition*, were asked to complete both tasks detailed above. That is, participants first were asked to imagine a positive, optimistic climate justice future, select three images out of 10 that reflected their ideal climate future and spend three minutes writing about their desired future; on average, participants wrote 77.08 words (*SD* = 35.49) in this section. Next, participants thought of the obstacles to achieving climate justice and the necessary concrete steps required to attain this, selected three images out of 10 that reflected the climate initiatives they were most interested in promoting and wrote about the obstacles to their desired climate future and the actions they could take to achieve this future for three minutes; on average, participants wrote 79.66 words (*SD* = 38.80) for this section.

Participants in the *control condition* did not complete a thinking task and were directed to complete the dependent measures.

Measures

Climate despair. I used three items to measure the feeling of despair about the climate crisis. The items were: "Considering the current state of affairs regarding climate change, I feel: despair, depressed, hopeless" (α = .882).

C-OLBI exhaustion. I measured the exhaustion dimension of the C-OLBI based on the findings of the Pilot Study, with two items (r = .770, p < .001). The items were: "When I think about the fight for climate justice, I feel worn out and weary" and "I find my efforts to promote action on climate change emotionally draining".

C-OLBI disengagement. The disengagement dimension of C-OLBI was measured with two items, based on the Pilot Study (r = .581, p < .001). The items were: "I feel disconnected from the goal of action to combat climate change" and "I feel more and more engaged in my support for climate justice".

Results

A very small amount of data (0.4%) was not missing completely at random, Littles MCAR X^2 (85) 170.758, p < .001 and was addressed using Expectation Maximisation in SPSS. The means (standard deviations) and correlations for the key variables are presented in Table 15. Table 15 shows that the sample mean for climate despair evidenced moderate agreement that they felt despair. Levels of exhaustion were around the mid-point and disengagement was just below the mid-point.

Table 15.

Study 7 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Variables.

	M (SD)	Political despair	C-OLBI exhaustion	C-OLBI disengagement
Political despair	4.08 (1.56)	1		
C-OLBI exhaustion	3.58 (1.60)	.437**	1	
C-OLBI disengagement	3.32 (1.45)	-.033	.336**	1

Note. ** denotes $p < .001$

Testing the Exacerbating and Attenuating Factors Driving Climate Exhaustion

The correlations displayed in Table 15 suggest that climate despair had a moderately strong, positive association with C-OLBI exhaustion, which suggests that despair may exacerbate the exhaustion dimension of burnout. To test the effect of climate despair on exhaustion as well as the prediction that people high in despair will report lower exhaustion if they complete the utopian thinking task, compared to if they did not (H1), I conducted a moderated regression using Hayes PROCESS, Model 3. The independent variable (X) was political despair (continuous), the moderator 1 (W) was utopian thinking (coded 1= utopian thinking, -1 = no utopian thinking), moderator 2 (Z) was pragmatism (coded 1= pragmatism, -1 = no pragmatism), and the outcome variable (Y) was exhaustion.

Table 16 displays the results of the analysis, including the direct and interactive effects of climate despair, utopian thinking, and pragmatism on exhaustion. There was a significant main effect of climate despair on exhaustion, such that as despair increases, exhaustion increases (see Table 16). However, there was no main effect of utopian thinking or pragmatism. There was also no support for the hypothesised two-way interaction (H1) and the other two-way interaction was also non-significant.

However, Table 16 displays a significant three-way interaction. The strength of the despair-exhaustion relationship was attenuated in the utopian thinking, and pragmatism conditions when considered separately. Table 17 displays the simple slopes. Whilst the relationship between despair and exhaustion was significant in each condition, it was significantly weaker when participants engaged in either the utopian thinking or pragmatism condition, respectively. On the other hand, the combination of utopian thinking + pragmatism strengthened the relationship between political despair and exhaustion, relative to the other conditions (see Table 17). These results suggest that, whilst utopian thinking and pragmatism separately reduced the strength of the association between despair and exhaustion, the combination of both utopian thinking *and* pragmatism made people feel more exhausted, relative to the control (and other conditions).

Table 16.

Study 7 Unstandardised Regression Weights - Main Effects and Interactions.

		Exhaustion				Disengagement			
		B	*SE*	*p*	*95% CI*	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*95% CI*
Main Effect	Climate Despair	**.448**	**.037**	**<.001**	**.376, .521**	-.032	.037	.381	-.105, .040
Main Effect	Utopian Thinking	-.021	.058	.713	-.135, .092	-.091	.058	.118	-.204, .023
Main Effect	Pragmatism	-.034	.058	.555	-.148, .079	**-.183**	**.058**	**.002**	**-.297, -.070**
Two-way interaction	Despair x Utopian Thinking	.029	.037	.436	-.044, .101	.047	.037	.201	-.025, .120
Two-way interaction	Despair x Pragmatism	.037	.037	.320	-.036, .109	.054	.037	.142	-.018, .127
Two-way interaction	Utopian Thinking x Pragmatism	-.028	.058	.625	-.142, .085	.045	.058	.438	-.069, .158
Three-way interaction	Despair x Utopian Thinking x Pragmatism	**.076**	**.037**	**.039**	**.004, .149**	.014	.037	.715	-.059, .086

Note. **Bold** denotes significant effects.

Table 17.

Study 7 Simple Slopes of the Three-Way Interaction.

Utopian thinking coding	Pragmatism coding	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*95% CI*
1	-1	.364	.074	<.001	.219, .509
-1	1	.380	.073	<.001	.237, .523
-1	-1	.459	.073	<.001	.315, .603
1	1	.590	.075	<.001	.442, .738

Note. 1 = present, -1 = absent

Testing the Exacerbating and Attenuating Factors Driving Climate Disengagement

I adopted a similar analytical strategy to test the relationship between climate despair and disengagement, as well as the independent and joint effects of utopian thinking and pragmatism on the climate despair-disengagement relationship (Model 3, see Table 16 for analysis results). Unexpectedly, Climate despair was not related to disengagement (consistent also with the zero-order correlations in Table 15), indicating that despair was not related to this facet of burnout. There was also no main effect of utopian thinking on disengagement. However, I found a main effect of pragmatism such that pragmatism on its own reduced disengagement (see Table 16). Moreover, there was no evidence of a two-way interaction between despair and utopian thinking, or between despair and pragmatism. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, there was no evidence of the predicted three-way interaction between despair, utopian thinking, and pragmatism (see Table 16). Therefore, neither utopian thinking on its own, or in combination with pragmatism attenuated the link between political despair and disengagement.

Discussion

Study 7 showed that, separately, utopian thinking and pragmatism may attenuate the link between climate despair and exhaustion. However, only pragmatism was beneficial for

disengagement. Unexpectedly I found that the combination of the two tasks did not have buffering effects on burnout. Rather, it appears that when combined, utopian thinking and pragmatism strengthened the link between despair and exhaustion (thus making people more exhausted). However, the combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism did not have a significant effect on the relationship between climate despair and disengagement.

Study 8 seeks to replicate and extend the methods of Study 7. One potential methodological reason for the unexpected results of the combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism maybe be due to the way the task was administered. That is, in the utopian thinking + pragmatism condition, the participants completed two tasks (for a total of 6 minutes) whereas the participants in the utopian thinking or pragmatism tasks only completed one task (3 minutes). As such, perhaps simply engaging in an objectively longer task is more taxing and requires more concentration which, in turn, is more exhausting. Study 8 will address this alternative explanation and provide a further test of the role of climate despair, utopian thinking, and pragmatism on overall burnout (exhaustion and disengagement).

Study 8

Study 8 is a replication of Study 7 with a key methodological change to the way the utopian thinking + pragmatism task was conducted. Specifically, instead of participants completing the two separate tasks (utopian thinking task, pragmatism task), they will instead complete a 3-minute task that integrates the two tasks. I therefore test the effects of the updated utopian thinking + pragmatism condition on the climate despair-exhaustion relationship. I am particularly interested in examining whether the revised utopian thinking + pragmatism method has the hypothesised effect of attenuating despair-induced burnout.

Conversely, I am also testing if the results from Study 7 are replicated. That is, does the combination of utopian thinking + pragmatism exacerbate the link between despair and exhaustion. I also explore the simple slope effects of pragmatism and utopian thinking (separately) reducing

despair-induced exhaustion, as seen in Study 7. Finally, I test if pragmatism again reduces disengagement.

Method

Participants and Design

As per Study 7, I used a 2 (utopian thinking: present, absent) x 2 (pragmatism: present, absent) between groups experimental design with the independent variable of climate despair and the outcome variables of exhaustion and disengagement. Participants were again removed if they used a duplicate WorkerID (n = 4), if Qualtrics data quality metric Recapture score is below .8 (n = 5), or they did not respond attentively (n = 12). I was left with a final sample of $N = 610$. As per Study 7, a power analysis was conducted in G*Power determined a sample size of $N = 612$, $n = 153$ per condition (I again added a buffer of 20 participants and aimed to collect $N = 632$). The power analyses accounted for the moderator and included the parameters of a small effect size, Cohens $f = .02$, at 80%, $\alpha = 0.05$, and numerator $df = 4$. There were more male participants (52.1%) compared to female (46.9%; non-binary 0.5%, other 0.2%, prefer not to say 0.3%), aged 21 or older ($M = 42.72$, $SD = 11.99$), majority identified as white (71%), the majority identified as at least somewhat liberal (59.1%, compared to moderate 16.9%, at least somewhat conservative 24%), and most supported the Democratic party (51.6%, Republican 19.2%, independent 24.3%, uncertain/ swing voter 4.9%).

Design, Measures, and Procedure

The materials and procedure were identical to Study 7, unless otherwise stated. After completing the pre-measures of emotions, participants were again randomly allocated to one of four experimental conditions and then completed the remainder of the questionnaire. To address the methodological concern from Study 7 that time may have been a confound for the combined utopian thinking + pragmatism condition (combined task took 6 minutes, whereas the separate tasks took 3), in the current study the two tasks were integrated. That is, participants engaged in both

utopian thinking and pragmatism in the one task, rather than completing them as two separate tasks as done in Study 7. By integrating utopian thinking and pragmatism into the one task, participants only spent 3 minutes on the task (same as the separate tasks), thus removing time as a confound. The measures of political despair (α = .855), C-OLBI exhaustion (r = .748, p < .001), C-OLBI disengagement (r = .519, p < .001), were the same as the previous studies.

Results

There was no missing data. The means (standard deviations) and correlations for the key variables are presented in Table 18. As in Study 7, participants reported experiencing a moderate level of political despair, with exhaustion and disengagement levels around the mid-point (see Table 18). The correlations were very similar to those reported in Study 7 (see Table 18). For all of the following moderation analyses, I used the same analytical approach to Study 7, that is I used Hayes PROCESS Model 3.

Table 18.

Study 8 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Variables.

	M (SD)	Political despair	C-OLBI exhaustion	C-OLBI disengagement
Political despair	4.02 (1.53)	1		
C-OLBI exhaustion	3.60 (1.64)	.437**	1	
C-OLBI disengagement	3.46 (1.44)	-.080*	.330**	1

Note. ** denotes $p < .001$ * denotes $p = .049$

Testing the Exacerbating and Attenuating Factors Driving Climate Exhaustion

First, I sought to test the effect of climate despair on exhaustion, as well as the three-way interaction (despair, utopian thinking, pragmatism) on exhaustion. As per Study 7, there was a main effect of climate despair, such that those who felt more despair also felt more exhaustion (see Table 19 for unstandardised regression weights). I again found there was no evidence of main effects of utopian thinking or pragmatism on exhaustion, thus replicating the Study 7 findings. Moreover, there was again no two-way interactions between despair and utopian thinking or despair and pragmatism on exhaustion. Contrary to Study 7, there was no evidence of a three-way interaction on exhaustion (see Table 19). Therefore, in Study 8, there was no evidence of utopian thinking or pragmatism separately or in combination, attenuating exhaustion. As such, engaging in any of the thinking tasks did not appear to affect people's levels of exhaustion. These findings diverge from those reported in Study 7 and are contrary to Hypotheses 3 and 5.

Testing the Exacerbating and Attenuating Factors Driving Climate Disengagement

I again took a similar analytic approach to test the relationship between climate despair and disengagement, as well as the three-way interaction on disengagement. Despair had a weak, negative relationship with disengagement (see Table 19) which, contrary to expectations, suggests that as despair increases, people's desire to disengage decreases. This pattern of effects differs to

Study 7, which found a non-significant relationship. The results showed that pragmatism again had a negative main effect on disengagement, thus supporting Hypothesis 6 and replicating the findings in Study 7, where people who completed the pragmatism task consistently had decreased levels of disengagement, regardless of despair levels. In the present study, I also found that utopian thinking had a negative main effect on disengagement, such that engaging in utopian thinking reduced people's level of disengagement. I again found no evidence for the two-way interactions of despair and utopian thinking, or despair and pragmatism on disengagement. There was no three-way interaction (replicating Study 7), which indicates the relationship between despair and disengagement was not moderated by engaging in the utopian thinking + pragmatism task.

Table 19.

Study 8 Unstandardised Regression Weights - Main Effects and Interactions.

		Exhaustion				Disengagement			
		B	*SE*	*p*	*CI*	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*CI*
Main Effect	Climate Despair	**.467**	**.039**	**<.001**	**.390, .544**	**-.075**	**.038**	**.046**	**-.149, -.001**
Main Effect	Utopian Thinking	-.096	.060	.111	-.213, .022	**-.207**	**.057**	**.003**	**-.319, -.094**
Main Effect	Pragmatism	-.041	.060	.498	-.077, .158	**-.133**	**.057**	**.021**	**-.246, -.021**
Two-way interaction	Despair x Utopian Thinking	-.004	.039	.921	-.081, .073	.026	.038	.488	-.048, .100
Two-way interaction	Despair x Pragmatism	-.027	.039	.496	-.104, .050	.005	.038	.898	-.069, .079
Two-way interaction	Utopian Thinking x Pragmatism	-.055	.060	.359	-.173, .063	-.043	.057	.455	-.156, .070
Three-way interaction	Despair x Utopian Thinking x Pragmatism	.019	.039	.627	-.058, .096	.017	.038	.657	-.057, .091

Note. **Bold** denotes significant effects.

Discussion

In Study 8 I sought to replicate the method from Study 7 with a refined utopian thinking + pragmatism condition to address time as a methodological confound. This adjustment resulted in the combination task having no effect on the relationship between despair and exhaustion, contrary to the positive effect found in Study 7. By the same token, the refined combination task of utopian thinking + pragmatism did also not attenuate the link between despair and exhaustion. Similarly, the combined task did not attenuate the despair-disengagement relationship (replicating Study 7).

Indeed, notably, there were some points of consistency between Study 7 and Study 8. Specifically, climate despair led to increased exhaustion in both studies. Across both studies, pragmatism (alone) reduced people's desire to disengage. In Study 8 (unlike Study 7) utopian thinking also reduced disengagement. Thus, both utopian thinking and pragmatism separately and regardless of despair, were found to decrease people's desire to disengage from the climate movement. See Table 20 for an overview of the findings across both studies.

Table 20.

Overview of the Findings.

	Exhaustion				**Disengagement**			
	Main Effect Despair	Main Effect Utopian Thinking	Main Effect Pragmatism	3-way Interaction	Main Effect Despair	Main Effect Utopian Thinking	Main Effect Pragmatism	3-way Interaction
Study 7	✓	X	X	✓ Utopian Thinking reduced exhaustion (relative to control) Pragmatism reduced exhaustion (relative to control) Combined task increased exhaustion (relative to control)	X	X	✓	X
Study 8	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X

General Discussion

Burnout appears to be becoming an increasingly prevalent response to the climate crisis (e.g., Heglar, 2022; Wood, 2022). If people continue to feel burned out by the climate action movement, then they are likely to disengage from the actions that are essential to bringing about climate justice (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen 2015). Given the need to keep people involved in the movement for climate action, we need to mitigate people's climate related burnout (see also Vandermeulen et al., 2023). As such, in this chapter I examined intervention methods for attenuating the link between despair about the climate crisis and the two facets of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). Specifically, I considered the impact of engaging in utopian thinking, pragmatic thinking, and a combination of the two, on the relationships between despair and exhaustion, as well as despair, and disengagement.

Overall, the pattern of results across the two studies is mixed (see Table 20). In this research I found that climate despair consistently exacerbates exhaustion. That is, in both studies, despair was positively associated with the exhaustion facet of burnout. However, despair was not associated with disengagement in Study 7, and had a weak, negative association with disengagement in Study 8, such that feeling despair surprisingly decreased participants desire to disengage from the climate movement.

The results consistently found that pragmatism (alone) decreased disengagement, regardless of level of despair (main effect). In Study 7 there was evidence that pragmatism buffered the despair-exhaustion relationship (simple slope), however this effect was not replicated in Study 8. These results suggest that pragmatism has the potential to reduce both facets of climate burnout, but the findings were only consistent for reducing disengagement.

The effects of utopian thinking on both facets of climate burnout were mixed. In Study 7 the results indicated that utopian thinking attenuated the despair-exhaustion link (simple slope), but Study 8 did not replicate this finding. Moreover, utopian thinking (alone) decreased disengagement,

regardless of despair levels in Study 8 (main effect), but not in Study 7. Accordingly, utopian thinking does not consistently buffer against despair-induced burnout.

The utopian thinking + pragmatism combined task was of particular interest in this chapter. In Study 7, the combination task unexpectedly increased the relationship between climate despair and exhaustion. That is, when both the utopian thinking and the pragmatic tasks were completed, the relationship between participants' despair and exhaustion was strengthened, suggesting that participants in this condition felt more exhausted as a function of despair (disconfirming H1). However, when the methodological confound of time was addressed in Study 8, the combination task no longer impacted the despair-exhaustion link. Moreover, the combination task unexpectedly did not attenuate the despair-disengagement relationship in either study (disconfirming H2). As such, there was no evidence that the combined utopian thinking + pragmatism task attenuates climate despair-induced burnout.

Considering the significance of climate related burnout, it is also important to have measures that can capture climate burnout, such as the newly adapted C-OLBI. The C-OLBI allows us to gain greater insight into where the burnout stems from (i.e., climate despair), but also how climate burnout can be addressed in the literature. In this research I first adapted The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI, Demerouti et al., 2003) to the climate context and validated it in the context of existing measures. I found the two burnout dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement were relevant to the climate context and therefore I used this measure throughout the studies.

Mixed Effects of Pragmatism and Utopian Thinking on Climate Burnout

In this chapter I expected that asking people to imagine a positive future where the climate crisis has been addressed and/or envisaging the pragmatic steps required to achieve this future, would be beneficial interventions to reduce the effects of climate burnout. Yet, based on prior work, these intervention methods would likely differ for the two dimensions of burnout. The results from this chapter partially support this proposition, in that the different intervention methods affect exhaustion and disengagement in different ways, but not necessarily how I expected.

Utopian Thinking has Inconsistent Effects on the Facets of Climate Burnout

Utopian thinking may reduce people's levels of exhaustion because positive visions of the future can feel good (e.g., Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen & Sevincer, 2018). Surprisingly though, utopian thinking (in isolation) had an attenuating effect on the despair-exhaustion relationship only in Study 7, it had no effect in Study 8. As such, utopias do not appear to consistently provide a "feel good" response that people can "escape" to (Fernando et al., 2018; Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990). Based on the work by Fernando and colleagues (2018), there are two potential reasons why utopian thinking may not consistently reduce exhaustion as I had expected.

First, utopian thinking may automatically compel people to mentally contrast reality with their imagined utopia (Oettingen, 2012). Noticing discrepancies between the desired future and reality could mean the participants did not get the satisfaction that utopian thinking can be associated with (Fernando et al., 2018). Moreover, people may 'escape' to their utopias more when the utopia is considered distant, that is when it appears very different to and far from reality. However, people may recognise that their climate focused utopia does not necessarily need to be distant given that the technologies already exist, and the ability to attain the utopian future is possible (though difficult). That is, the utopia does not appear distant and instead appears to be 'within-grasp'. As such, people do not escape to the utopia and instead feel exhausted about the immense amount of work that is required to reach their utopia that they see as within their grasp (Fernando et al., 2018).

However, another second explanation may be that utopian thinking does indeed lead to escapism, but that escapism can be considered both a form of avoidance (e.g., Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Rohde et al., 1990) and a form of emotional regulation (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2016; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1994). Avoidance has been found to be related to poorer well-being (e.g., Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Rohde et al., 1990), whereas emotion-focused coping can be beneficial (e.g., Ryan, 2013; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1994). As such, the emotion-focused coping and avoidance

tendencies that utopian thinking can promote, may be counteracting each other. Furthermore, utopias may distract people and act as a form of emotional regulation and coping mechanism, but without actually improving emotional regulation or promoting engagement (e.g., Ford et al., 2023; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Goldenberg et al., 2016). Therefore, future research could further investigate the mixed and potentially counteracting effects of utopian thinking on despair induced exhaustion (Fernando et la., 2018). Moreover, there is some literature that indicates that only imagining positive futures may sap energy (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Kappes & Oettingen 2011). Given that utopian thinking appears to be a limited and conditional means of reducing climate burnout, I also considered the effects of pragmatism in general and pragmatic prospection specifically.

Pragmatism can Attenuate the Facets of Climate Burnout

There was consistent evidence that pragmatism on its own reduces disengagement, suggesting that perhaps it is the focus on specific steps and goals, and the planning of what to do, that is particularly motivating and engaging (as per Goal Setting Theory, e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990; 2013, see also Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). Setting and planning out steps to attain goals has previously been found to be motivating and make people more likely to take actions to achieve their goals (e.g., Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). However, pragmatically planning goals can also be beneficial for well-being, which may be why pragmatism (separate from utopian thinking) was also found to attenuate the relationship between despair and exhaustion in Study 7 (e.g., Gamble et al., 2021). Perhaps a reason pragmatism alone (compared to when it is paired with utopian thinking) is better at buffering against both facets of climate burnout is because having attainable, controllable goals is especially beneficial for well-being (Gamble et al, 2021). However, if time is spent imagining a utopian future, the goals may become more elaborate, 'other-worldly' and seem less achievable, compared to if time is not spent imagining the future and rather just focuses on accepting the idea of the climate crisis being averted (as was done in the pragmatic task).

Moreover, recent findings suggest that engaging in small adaptations to climate change (e.g., recycling or riding bike) can help reduce climate anxiety and improve well-being. Engaging in these behaviours can provide feelings of efficacy which in turn leads to engaging in even more adaptive behaviours (Fyke & Weaver, 2023; Mortreux et al., 2023). The current results may support those other findings, such that, just planning to take steps towards climate justice, whether it be personal adaptations, or collective actions, may also increase efficacy and improve some aspects of well-being (i.e., the disengagement facet of burnout).

Utopian Thinking + Pragmatism Does Not Attenuate Climate Burnout

Conceptually, pragmatic prospection suggests that encouraging people to contemplate ways of achieving their desired change, after utopian thinking, may be more motivating and therefore have benefits for well-being (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al. 2023; Kappes et al., 2013; Oettingen et al., 2001). Unexpectedly however, I found that when people first engaged in utopian thinking and then a pragmatic task (Study 7), they evidenced higher levels of climate exhaustion. However, in Study 8, when participants engaged in an integrated utopian thinking + pragmatism task there were no effects on climate exhaustion (Study 8). These results suggest that perhaps merely engaging in more work, as they did in Study 7, was the exhausting element, but that the tasks themselves had minimal impact on exhaustion.

Moreover, I anticipated that utopian thinking + pragmatism would have a particularly beneficial effect on disengagement given its potential to provide a benchmark for action that anchors and orientates cognitions and behaviours (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Kappes et al., 2013; Oettingen et al., 2001). But again, there was no evidence that utopian thinking + pragmatism attenuated the despair-disengagement link. Perhaps, similar to what I discussed above, engaging in in-depth visualisation of a utopian future and then thinking about all the necessary steps needed, highlights the large discrepancy. Emphasis on the discrepancy may not only be exhausting, but also demotivating, which overrides the potentially beneficial aspects of engaging in pragmatic utopian thinking (Fernando et al., 2018).

When utopian thinking and pragmatism are combined, they appear to work differently compared to when they are completed separately. That is, utopian thinking (inconsistently) and pragmatism (consistently) reduced disengagement, regardless of despair. Moreover, both utopian thinking and pragmatism reduce the despair-exhaustion link in Study 7, but not in Study 8. However, when combined, utopian thinking and pragmatism have no attenuating effects. Accordingly, it may be that utopian thinking and pragmatism work through different psychological mechanisms and as such, counteract each other. That is, engaging in both tasks which separately may have some beneficial implications but in different ways, may cancel each other out when completed in combination.

Recommendations for Practitioners

There is increasing recognition that climate change is affecting people's mental health (e.g., Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Hayes et al., 2018). As such, it is important that mental health clinicians have the tools to address their clients' concerns (Monsell et al., 2021). Seeing climate change as an existential threat and thus responding with despair and burnout is not necessarily a distorted or psycho-pathological response (e.g., Pihkala, 2020). Moreover, as I have theorised in this chapter, there are two facets of burnout, and different therapeutic methods may affect them in distinct ways. Accordingly, the typical clinical therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) may not be as relevant in the context of climate despair induced burnout.

Although individually focused therapies (e.g., CBT) have the potential to improve people's exhaustion, it is likely that they will also lead to increased disengagement due to their focus on improving the regulation of people at the individual level, but without critical engagement of the social level (e.g., climate change). Given that continued engagement in the climate movement is vital for climate justice, utilising interventions that increase disengagement would be detrimental (e.g., Bingley et al., 2022; Mah et al., 2020). The intervention methods I considered as having the potential to reduce both the exhaustion and disengagement facets of burnout, given the existing

literature were utopian thinking and pragmatism, with a specific focus on a combination of the two (pragmatic utopian thinking).

Based on the results of this chapter, I do not recommend utopian thinking + pragmatism as an intervention to practitioners who are seeking to support the wellbeing of people engaged in the ongoing struggle for climate justice. Pragmatism consistently reduced disengagement and sometimes diminished the despair- exhaustion link. Whilst utopian thinking also sometimes reduced despair-induced exhaustion and disengagement. As such, the data provided mixed evidence on the effectiveness of utopian thinking and pragmatism as separate tasks, and more research is required. However, considering the more consistent results of pragmatism on disengagement, I suggest that encouraging clients to engage in pragmatism may be beneficial as it appears to be a more reliable intervention method (although there is no evidence pragmatism affects despair). Moreover, getting people to continue engaging in actions that promote social change has also been found to have positive outcomes for well-being, such that it provides social connections and support, a sense of purpose, power, and efficacy (e.g., Fyke & Weaver, 2023; Mortreux et al., 2023; Vestergren et al., 2017; 2019). As such, it may be that using pragmatism as an intervention allows people to continue engaging in actions to bring about positive change, which could have flow on effects of also reducing the exhaustion element of burnout.

Limitations and Future Research

Baumeister (2016) suggests that futures that are socially constructed may be more effective. That is, participants may be more engaged and energised when they co-construct their desired future with others. Individually, people may feel they cannot achieve much because the situation is too much for them to control or change by themselves (i.e., the climate crisis is seen as intractable). This perception of intractability may in part lead to experiencing burnout. However, participants may perceive they have greater ability to effect change when they are part of a collective working towards climate justice (e.g., Baumeister, 2016). Moreover, there has been recognition that group-based interventions may be particularly beneficial for those experiencing poor well-being due to

their concerns about climate change (e.g., Haddaway & Duggan, in press; see al., Doherty & Clayton, 2011). Therefore, future directions could consider co-constructed utopias or group-based pragmatism tasks as interventions for climate related burnout.

One further limitation is that the order of tasks in the combination task was not counterbalanced. The current literature on pragmatic prospection and mental contrasting suggests it is important to first engage in utopian thinking before the pragmatic element (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Kappes et al., 2013; Oettingen et al., 2001). As such, participants were first asked to engage in the utopian thinking task, followed by the pragmatic task. However, it may be the case that people burnout when they are left with an overwhelming "to-do" list by finishing with the pragmatism task. Perhaps thinking of all the necessary steps and then thinking about the future they desire will leave people feeling more positive and energised at the end of the task. As such, future research should counterbalance the order of the tasks to test if the reverse order is more beneficial for attenuating climate burnout.

Conclusion

Climate change is popularly coined the challenge of our generation, and in order to prevent the catastrophic outcomes, we need people to be committed to bringing about change. If people are feeling burnt out by the climate movement however, then their ability to continue engaging is at risk. This research confirms that despair about the climate crisis appears to be an exacerbating factor of the exhaustion facet of climate burnout, although not the disengagement facet. These findings suggest that the link between despair and exhaustion/disengagement needs to be addressed. There was inconsistent evidence that utopian thinking and pragmatism (but not the combined task) attenuated the link between despair and exhaustion. There was also mixed evidence that imagining a positive future where the climate crisis is addressed (utopian thinking), buffered against disengagement. However, I found that getting people to consider the necessary steps required to bring about climate justice (pragmatism alone), consistently reduced people's desire to disengage from the movement. This message is reflected in street artist Banksy's mural near London's Hyde

Park in support of Extinction Rebellion protests in 2019, “From this moment despair ends and tactics begin”.

Chapter 5

General Discussion

Throughout the tumultuous and dramatic socio-political events that have transpired over the last few years, there have been frequent reports of feeling despair. These anecdotal reports of despair about socio-political issues have appeared both online and in mainstream media (see Figure 1; see also Goldberg, 2018; 2019; Guilford, 2016; Taub, 2019; Foiles, 2018; Pidd, 2020), yet the scholarly literature on (what I term) political despair has been little addressed. Therefore, the broad aim of my thesis was to explore the novel construct of *political despair*, its cognitive antecedents and the outcomes for individuals and society. Specifically, I explored political despair in the contexts of ongoing racial inequality between People of Colour and White People (Chapter 2 Study 1, Chapter 3 Studies 3 & 4) and the climate crisis (Chapter 2 Study 2, Chapter 3 Study 5, Chapter 4 Studies 6, 7 & 8), to understand what it is about these situations that causes people to experience despair and what impacts despair has.

Throughout this thesis I have provided evidence that political despair is a prevalent group-based emotion experienced by those who support racial equality/climate justice but perceive the status-quo as illegitimate and intractable. I have shown that, as I anticipated, experiencing political despair is associated with lower well-being (Studies 3, 4 & 5). However, well-being is a multi-faceted construct and not all forms of well-being were related to political despair: political despair has implications especially for stress, burnout, and lack of optimism about the future. As hypothesised, the results show a positive association between political despair and radical collective action engagement. Thus, experiencing despair is related to engaging in non-normative and potentially illegal actions to bring about change, potentially indicating that people believe they have 'nothing to lose' by engaging in radical tactics (e.g., Jiménez-Moya, et al., 2015; Scheepers, et al., 2006). However, political despair was also unexpectedly associated with engagement in conventional forms of collective actions. I had anticipated that, in keeping with the insight of the

activist burnout literature (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Vandermeulen et al., 2023), and the limited research on despair (e.g., Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gould, 2012), political despair would be associated with reduced conventional action. Yet, political despair was consistently positively associated with conventional action (Studies 3, 4 & 5), and negatively associated with disengagement (Study 8), suggesting that despair and social movements are co-existing. Importantly, I demonstrated that engaging in pragmatism and imagining a utopian future have some potential to be used as intervention methods to compensate for the negative implications of political despair, namely climate burnout (Studies 7 & 8).

The findings from the present thesis have implications for both theory and practice regarding what exacerbates and attenuates people's experiences of political despair. The current chapter discusses the implications of these findings for our understanding of an understudied but important political emotion, despair, and considers how despair relates to the current emotion literature. As such I will first discuss the evidence in relation to the antecedent appraisals of political despair followed by the outcomes of despair. I also discuss the implications for mitigating the negative implications of political despair, in order to encourage continued engagement in social change movements, whilst not diminishing people's personal well-being (see also, Bingley et al., 2022; Fyke & Weaver, 2023; Morteux et al., 2023). Finally, the limitations of the research in this thesis are considered and I suggest some potential directions for future research.

Cognitive Antecedents: Political Despair as a Distinct, Discrete Emotion

One key contribution of the current thesis is the recognition that political despair is a discrete emotion that is worthy of further investigation. For those who self-reported that they support racial equality, 53.55% also reported feeling a level of despair about the current state of racial inequality in the US. Whilst for those who reported that they support action on climate change, 60.07% reported they experience despair about the status-quo of climate action in Australia. These results suggest that for those who support action on racial inequality and climate change,

feeling despair is a prevalent, although not universal emotion. As such, it is important to understand this emotion. Therefore, in the following section I discuss the evidence that despair is indeed a discrete emotion. I first discuss despair as a group-based emotion and the antecedent appraisal associated with experiencing despair. I also highlight that political despair is distinct from other related concepts such as other forms of despair, anger, low hope, efficacy, and anomie.

In the current thesis, I conceptualised political despair as a group-based emotion (e.g., E. R. Smith, et. al., 2007; E. R. Smith, & Mackie, 2015; Mackie, et al., 2016). That is, I theorised that political despair stemmed from social identification as a supporter of specific socio-political issues (i.e., racial equality/climate action). As such, I specifically sampled participants based their support for racial equality or climate justice, because people reporting that they support these issues can be considered a marker of social identification as a supporter of this issue (Mackie et al., 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, experiencing despair over these issues further instils this identification, as one would not despair about an issue one does not care about, or is not invested in. Furthermore, the findings support my theorising that political despair stems from identifying with an underlying group based on opinions that black and white Americans should be equal or that actions should be taken for climate justice (see McGarty et al., 2009).

As I conceptualised and sampled on the premise of political despair being a group-based emotion, it was then important to understand where the emotion of political despair was coming from. That is, I sought to understand the antecedent appraisals of political despair using the insights of intergroup emotion theory (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie, 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016). As an appraisal theory of emotions, it considers the cognitive evaluations of a situation, which in view of one's group's goals, values or motives, elicit certain emotional reactions among group members. Therefore, in Chapter 2 I sampled participants who self-reported their support for racial equality/action on climate change, and then asked if they felt despair about this issue. Those who reported that they felt despair, were asked to write about why they felt despair about this issue.

Using qualitative framework analysis (e.g., Spencer et al., 2003; Gale et al., 2013), I identified two core themes that reflect antecedent cognitive appraisals that may be associated with political despair. First, that people see the status-quo for racial inequality and the climate crisis as unjust and systemic, that is, the situation is apprised as *illegitimate* (see also Bagneux et al., 2022; Dirth & Branscombe, 2019; Jetten et al., 2011; Livingstone et al., 2009). Second, respondents saw the situations as unable to change and outside of their control, that is, they perceived the issues as *intractable* (see Bar-Tal, 1998; Gross et al., 2013; Halperin et al., 2013). As such, Chapter 2 provides preliminary inductive evidence that political despair can be considered a discrete emotion that is characterised by a core-relational theme of *unchangeable systemic injustice* (C.A. Smith & Elsworth, 1985). These findings add to the appraisal and intergroup emotion literature that previously had limited research on despair. Given that the framework analysis suggested intractability and illegitimacy were the core themes identified as appraisals of despair, Studies 1 and 2 provided initial confirmatory evidence for the theoretical model of political despair (Figure 2). Therefore, the next step was to triangulate the findings by testing it quantitatively.

In Chapter 3 I test the theoretical model of political despair (Figure 2) that theorises the appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability are the antecedents of political despair. Using structural equation modelling I quantitatively tested the relationships between the appraisals and despair and found that both appraisals were indeed positively and uniquely associated with despair. As such, perceiving the current social and political status-quo is unjust and systemic (illegitimate), as well as uncontrollable and unchanging (intractable) seems to be associated with experiencing despair, supporting my theoretical model (E.R. Smith, 1993; E.R. Smith et al., 2007; Mackie et al., 2000). However, as I discuss below in the limitations and future directions section, due to the cross-sectional correlational nature of the evidence causality in the relationship between appraisals and despair cannot be inferred.

Not only does understanding the appraisals of political despair extend the emotion literature, but it also offers support for and extends the small existing literature examining political despair. Sociologist Gould (2012, p. 95) suggested that despair was due to a "sense that nothing will ever change, no matter what some imagined collective 'we' does to try and bring change". Gould's definition reflects the appraisal of intractability that was apparent in the current research, borne out in both my inductive (Chapter 2) and deductive (Chapters 2 & 3) research. I extend this definition however by highlighting the importance of seeing the current state of the world (regarding specific issues) as illegitimate due to their unjustified, systemic nature. The illegitimacy appraisal is aligned with the justice pathway in the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

An important aspect of my conceptualisation of political despair is that it is a discrete, novel emotion that is distinguishable from anger and hope. To test these possibilities, in Studies 3, 4 and 5, I controlled for anger and hope in the structural equation models. I also controlled for other emotions and related constructs. Firstly, my analysis controlled for the effects of anger, as anger has consistently been found to be a prominent, action-oriented emotion in the collective action literature (e.g., Shi et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2004; 2008; 2012; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). The findings show that the appraisal pattern for despair differed from that of anger, such that illegitimacy was associated with both emotions, but only intractability was associated with despair (Chapter 3). As intergroup emotion theory stipulates that distinct patterns of appraisals elicit discrete emotions (e.g., E.R. Smith & Mackie, 2008; 2015; Mackie et al., 2008; 2016), the differing patterns for despair and anger provides further support to the claim that despair is a discrete emotion. Moreover, I also found despair to be related to, but distinct from, hope (see Appendix A), and that despair was not just the opposite or lack of hope. Given the similarity between intractability and the efficacy route of SIMCA (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2008), Appendix A also differentiates political despair from a lack of efficacy. Moreover, in Chapter 1 I conceptually

distinguished political despair from anomie, general/clinical despair, and depression (see also Chapter 3), as well as other climate/eco related emotions. Thus, it appears that political despair is a discrete emotion, with its own signature of antecedent appraisals.

Political Despair as a Driver for Collective Action

Political despair as a discrete emotion had specific outcomes. Of particular interest in the current thesis were the outcomes of engagement in both conventional and radical forms of collective actions. As such, another key contribution of this thesis is the finding that, contrary to my predictions (Figure 2), political despair appears to be a *driver* of both conventional and radical forms of collective action. I had anticipated that despair would be associated with an increase in radical action engagement (see also Diamond & Bachman, 1986; Gerbaudo, 2013). The positive association between despair and radical actions may reflect the lack of control and powerlessness that embodies appraising the situation as intractable (Greenaway et al., 2015b; Ransford, 1968; Tausch et al., 2011). Moreover, feeling despair about social and political issues like racial inequality and climate change may make people feel as though they have 'nothing to lose', by engaging in more drastic, radical, sometimes illegal actions (Scheepers et al., 2006). Furthermore, following the DIME Model (Louis et al., 2020) feeling despair, and the associated feelings of failure, may inspire people to seek "alternative visions of what is to be done and how to do it" (Gould, 2012, p. 107). The DIME Model asserts that people respond differently to failures for their social change movement (Louis et al., 2020). That is, some may disidentify and disengage (D) from the movement, but there are some that innovate (I) and tackle the issue with new tactics (i.e., radical tactics like gluing their hands to famous artworks to protest big oil companies, Lim, 2022), others will moralise (M), and some will re-energise (E) around longstanding tactics. In keeping with the innovation pathway of the DIME model, feeling despair about overwhelming social justice issues may lead people to look for new tactics to address the issues, as they see their current actions as

failing. I found consistent support for a positive association between political despair and commitment to radical action (Studies 3, 4 & 5).

One unexpected but consistent finding was that political despair was positively associated with conventional collective action. That is, although people are feeling despair, they still appear to be engaging in conventional actions, within a democratic system, to bring about change. I had expected that despair would be associated with a decrease in conventional action engagement based on the prior literature. That is, Gould (2012) suggested that political despair may lead to political withdrawal, and similar constructs (nuclear despair, Diamond & Bachman, 1986; distress, Thomas et al., 2018) have also been associated with decreased interest and engagement in political actions. Yet, Studies 3, 4 and 5 showed that feeling despair about the political status-quo was positively associated with conventional action engagement. Furthermore, in Chapter 4 I canvassed whether political despair leads to active disengagement from the movement specifically (not just engagement in action, or lack of action, as considered in Studies 3, 4 & 5). However, I again found that political despair was not associated with intention to disengage. In Study 7 there was no link between despair and disengagement, whereas in Study 8 the relationship was surprisingly positive, suggesting that feeling despair makes people less likely to disengage. As such, the results rather consistently suggest that political despair is associated with engagement in collective actions and not disengagement.

One explanation for why political despair may be positively associated with engagement in conventional actions is that engaging in actions functions as a coping mechanism against despair (e.g., Ford et al., 2023; Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Goldenberg et al., 2016; Greenaway, 2022; Halperin et al., 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; van Zomeren et al., 2012). That is, engaging in actions may be a way of re-gaining control over the current political situation, and therefore a means through which people cope with their political despair (Greenaway, 2022). Moreover, engaging in adaptations to climate change has been found to improve well-being for those concerned about

climate change (Fyke & Weaver, 2023, see also, Mortreux et al., 2023). A news poll showed that people engage in political actions specifically to cope with their feelings of despair (Taub, 2019). There are also several lines of research that suggest engagement in social movements can be associated with purpose, meaning and positive well-being (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Jetten et al., 2012; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2016; Vestergren et al., 2017; 2019). Moreover, feeling despair about an issue signifies a profound emotional commitment to that cause, and when people care about issues, they often do act (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2008; see also Thomas et al., 2022).

Political Despair Can Diminish People's Well-Being

Although political despair did not have the anticipated negative effects on collective actions or disengagement, despair does seem to have negative implications for people's well-being (confirming the negative path theorised in Figure 2). Therefore, another key contribution of the current thesis is the understanding that political despair can be detrimental to people's well-being. In Chapter 2, when asked why they felt political despair, some respondents went on to say that despair was affecting their mental health and "taking a toll on [their] daily life" (see Table 2, Negative outcomes of despair). One complexity of well-being research lies in the multifaceted nature of the construct and that there is a lack of consensus on how to define and measure well-being (Marsh et al., 2020). As such, in Chapter 3, I measured many different aspects of well-being and showed that the important facets regarding despair were stress (DASS-21, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, Study 3 & 4), burnout (Malach-Pines, 2005, Studies 4 & 5) and a lack of optimism about the future (one aspect of the Well-being Profile, Marsh et al., 2020, Study 5). However, as seen in Appendix A, despair was not associated with vitality (Ryan & Fredrick, 1997), resilience (B. W. Smith et al., 2008), mental health (Mental Health Continuum- Short Form, Keyes, 2006), or the other components of the Well-being Profile (Marsh et al., 2020). That is, political despair was

associated with feeling stressed and burned out (and sometimes feeling a lack of optimism about the future).

Some prior research had suggested that despair may have negative effects on well-being and mental health. For example, Gould (2012) suggested that political despair can cause both physical and emotional exhaustion and may be linked to experiencing burnout as well as a reduction in resilience and vitality. Diamond and Bachman (1986) found nuclear despair (a form of political despair related to the extinction of humanity due to nuclear war) was related to mental health problems. Moreover, the emotion literature shows that well-being can be decreased by negative emotions (e.g., Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Larsen, 2009; see Oh, 2022, for ambivalence and mixed emotions). However, despair had not previously been specifically examined in this literature. The findings of the current research show that political despair does indeed negatively affect some aspects of well-being.

But why are only some facets of well-being affected by political despair and not others? Prior research suggested that stress and exhaustion facet of burnout may be particularly affected by experiencing political despair. In work led by Chen and Gorski, supporters of social change movements often reported feeling stressed and burned out from their relentless fight for their cause (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen 2015). One reason stress and burnout may be particularly impacted by despair may be due to the intractable nature of the situations. That is intractable situations where people do not see there is a positive outcome coming, may feel stressed and burnout due to a lack of control and inability to cope with an unjust situation for the foreseeable future (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1998; Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Greenaway et al., 2015b; Halperin, et al., 2013; Malterud & Nicotera, 2020). Contrastingly, more general markers of well-being such as vitality and mental health (i.e., depression, anxiety) may be buffered by the presence of other factors (i.e., social support, identities) and, therefore, the effects of despair on these factors would be relatively small.

Implications for Practice: Tools for Combatting Despair

Given that I found political despair to be associated with diminished well-being, it was important to not only understand political despair, but to consider means of addressing the negative implications of political despair. Accordingly, in this section I discuss the efficacy of the intervention methods that were considered in this thesis. Based on the findings, I also offer advice for practice on ways to potentially combat despair.

In Chapter 4, I further developed my theoretical model to suggest that the umbrella concept of burnout may be an appropriate way of conceptualising the role despair plays in people's sustained engagement in action and their personal well-being. That is, while in Chapter 3, I considered (conventional and radical) collective actions and reduced well-being as outcomes of despair, in Chapter 4 I considered a cognate theoretical model through the lens of burnout. Burnout is defined by two aspects: exhaustion (akin to personal well-being) and disengagement (the opposite of commitment to collective action; Demerouti et al., 2003). I was specifically interested in burnout due to its implications for not only well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) but also people's continued engagement in actions to bring about social change (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015). The primarily qualitative work by Chen and Gorski highlighted the importance of recognising burnout within social change movements and the impacts it is having on people's need to step away from the movement in order to protect their mental health (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen 2015). Burnout can make people feel exhausted but may also lead them to disengage from the social movement, which, in turn, would have societal level implications because it reduces support for the societal cause. As such, it was important to consider intervention methods that could address the multi-level implications of burnout. That is, I wanted to explore interventions that could buffer against the individual and societal implications of burnout (consistent with the multiple needs framework; Bingley et al., 2022).

I experimentally tested three intervention methods in Chapter 4. *Utopian thinking* required participants to imagine a positive future for climate change (e.g., Fernando et al., 2018; Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990). I reasoned that utopian thinking may make people feel less exhausted because the utopia offers them a positive alternative to 'escape' to, which in turn provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction about reality (e.g., Kashima & Fernando, 2020; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen & Sevincer, 2018). *Pragmatism* required participants to consider the necessary steps that were needed to achieve climate justice and the actions they would be most inclined to take (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Gamble et al, 2021). I expected pragmatism to be especially beneficial for reducing disengagement because the planning and focusing on the specific steps required to achieve goals can be motivating and lead to successful attainment of goals through engaging in those planned steps (e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990; 2013; Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). Then finally, a combination task of *utopian thinking + pragmatism* was based on the concept of pragmatic prospection (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016). It seemed possible that first imagining the desired outcome (utopian thinking) before engaging in pragmatism would provide a desired future as a starting point, which could anchor people's thoughts and actions, allowing for more meaningful motivation for attaining their utopian future (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2023; Kappes et al., 2013; Oettingen et al., 2001). Thus, in the combined task, participants were asked to first imagine the future and then consider the pragmatic steps to achieving that future (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2016; Kappes et al., 2013; Oettingen et al., 2001). I expected that the combined task would produce the most positive impacts overall such that it would attenuate the relationship between pre-measured political despair and both facets of burnout (disengagement, exhaustion).

The overall pattern of results was mixed (see Table 20 in Chapter 4). Unexpectedly, the combined pragmatic + utopian thinking condition did not buffer the relationship between despair, exhaustion, or disengagement. Rather, in Study 7 the combined task actually strengthened the

relationship between despair and exhaustion such that people felt more exhausted. Though, in Study 8, using a revised manipulation that avoided a possible confound, that is, the doubling of mental effort (or time investment) for the combination of both tasks, the relationship was non-significant. Given that the combination of utopian thinking and pragmatism was not beneficial in reducing people's exhaustion, and may actually be detrimental, I would not recommend it as a tool for combatting despairs effect on exhaustion.

The pragmatic + utopian thinking condition did not significantly affect despair-induced disengagement in either study. It is possible that the theorised benefits of engaging in utopian thinking followed by pragmatism (e.g., Fernandno et al., 2018; Oettingen et al., 2001), such as buffering the negative effects of despair, are counteracted by highlighting the discrepancy between utopian ideal and reality. Acknowledging the discrepancy and then struggling to think about the steps required to attain the desired future may be overwhelming and demotivating. Moreover, it may be that utopian thinking and pragmatism counteract each other because they work through separate mechanisms. Based on these findings, utopian thinking + pragmatism would not be a recommended intervention method for buffering against disengagement.

I had anticipated that utopian thinking would buffer against exhaustion due to its potential to provide a feel-good 'escape' for participants. However, I found mixed support for this hypothesis. That is, in Study 7, utopian thinking did indeed buffer the relationship between despair and exhaustion, however, there was no effect on exhaustion in Study 8. The lack of consistent findings from utopian thinking on exhaustion may suggest that in the context of climate change, utopias provide less of an escape because people can see the utopia as within-grasp due to the necessary technologies already existing. As such the ability to attain the utopian future is possible (albeit difficult) and as such may be overwhelming and exhausting due to the sheer amount of work that is necessary for their desired outcome. Therefore, people are not escaping and feeling good about their utopia, instead they are exhausted by the idea (Fernando et al., 2018).

Moreover, utopian thinking may act as two forms of coping/ emotional regulation that seemingly cancel each other out. That is utopias may provide the expected escape that could act as a form of avoidance, which (in the knowledge that one has not really dealt with the issue and the threat is ongoing) can be associated with diminished well-being (e.g., Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Rohde et al., 1990). But 'escaping' can also be an emotion-focused coping that has beneficial effects on well-being (e.g., Ryan, 2013; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1994). As such these two forms of emotional regulation may be counteracting each other and thus produce inconsistent effects for exhaustion. Given that there are mixed results on the benefits of utopian thinking in reducing exhaustion, utilising utopian thinking as an intervention would not be recommended until more research clarifies the boundaries for when it is or is not effective.

Utopian thinking was also found to have no effect on disengagement in Study 7, but had a significant main effect in Study 8, such that engaging in utopian thinking reduced people's level of disengagement. Again, the mixed results may be due to the counteracting effects of emotion regulation. That is, utopias may act as a distraction that does not promote engagement in action (e.g., Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Ford et al., 2023; Goldenberg et al., 2016). But they may also act as an emotion-focused coping mechanism which can have beneficial effects (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2016; Ryan, 2013; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1994). As discussed above, given that there were mixed results on the benefits of using utopian thinking to attenuate disengagement from the climate movement, more research would be required before utopian thinking could be recommended as an intervention.

Employing pragmatism was found to reliably decrease the disengagement aspect of climate burnout. Focusing on specific, pragmatic steps and goals can keep people motivated and has previously been found to have positive implications for well-being (e.g., Gamble et al, 2021; Locke & Latham, 1990; 2013; Wieber et al., 2012; Zwikael et al., 2014). As such, if we want to keep people engaged in the climate movement when they are experiencing burnout due to the lack of

progress on actions to address climate change, we should get people to focus on the specific steps that are needed to achieve the desired future (e.g., Bingley et al., 2022; Fyke & Weaver, 2023; Morteux et al., 2023). Therefore, social change leaders, movement organisers as well as practitioners could use pragmatism as a tool for combatting the disengagement facet of burnout.

Although Chapter 4 focussed on the role of utopian thinking and pragmatism, findings in the thesis do hint at another potential path for mitigating the effects of despair on well-being especially. Specifically, in Chapter 3, I found that feeling anger about climate change and racial inequality was associated with engagement in actions to bring about social change (akin to low disengagement), but anger did not have the same negative implications for well-being. Indeed, anger was not associated with burnout (Studies 4 & 5) or a lack of optimism about the future (Study 5). Moreover, anger was actually negatively associated with stress (Studies 3 & 4), suggesting that anger may be linked to an active reduction in stress levels once the effects of despair were accounted for.

Given the findings in Chapter 3, eliciting anger may be a useful means of reducing both exhaustion and disengagement. Anger, as an emotion-focused approach form of coping (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2012) may energise people to engage in action to bring about climate justice. Moreover, focusing on messaging that targets people's anger about social and political issues (rather than focusing on messages designed to elicit despair) may reduce the negative implications on well-being altogether. That is, as anger was not associated with poor well-being (with the measures used in Chapter 3), perhaps focusing on anger about the illegitimacy of the current situation, but that the situation is changeable (i.e., is not intractable, akin to the efficacy in the Dual Pathway Model of Coping, van Zomeren et al., 2004), will mitigate against despair before it has the potential to make people burnout in the first place. Furthermore, the main difference between anger and despair was that whilst despair was associated with appraising the situation as intractable (low coping potential), anger was not (high coping potential, see Lazarus, 1991b; C. A. Smith & Lazarus, 1993). That is, people who feel angry may also feel that they have the ability to re-gain control over

the situation (Greenaway, 2022). Moreover, considering the pragmatic steps that could change the status-quo may improve the sense of control people feel, and therefore elicit anger, rather than despair. Based on the findings from Chapter 3, I would recommend finding ways to legitimise people's anger at the socio-political status-quo, and harnessing the energy that can come from anger, as a means for sustaining actions in social movements whilst protecting people's well-being.

One caveat of harnessing anger however is that, as Chapman et al. (2017) argues, emotion focused messaging is more nuanced than just simply eliciting an emotion and yielding a specific outcome. Emotions are notoriously difficult to manipulate in laboratory settings (as discussed below in the limitations section) and therefore are likely to be even more difficult to deliberately alter 'in real life'. As such, messaging needs to be targeted, tailored to specific audiences, and consider several aspects of the messaging. However, social change leaders, movement organisers as well as mental health practitioners and clinicians may consider seeking to evoke anger as a tool to buffer against political despair, whilst avoiding despair messaging.

Methodological Triangulation to Understand Political Despair

A key strength of my thesis was the utilisation of methodological triangulation to understand political despair. I used a combination of qualitative (Chapter 2), cross-sectional (Chapters 3), and experimental approaches (Chapter 4). Given that all methods have their own limitations and strengths, adopting a mixed-method approach allows the strengths and limitations of one approach to be off-set by the others, as I explain below.

In Chapter 2 I used a qualitative method to elicit open-ended responses to the question "Earlier you indicated that you feel a level of despair about racial inequality [climate change]. Please tell us, briefly below, why you feel despair about this situation." Qualitative methods can give rich and detailed responses about people's experiences. That is, by asking respondents, albeit briefly in this open-ended response, to explain why they experience despair about issues like racial inequality and climate change, I was able to examine the antecedent appraisals of despair based on

what people reported experiencing. Using qualitative methods allowed me to ensure that I was not imposing a-priori constructs that did not have subjective relevance for the population at hand. The themes determined from this more inductive qualitative research provided support for the theoretical model (Figure 2), which then then laid the framework for the empirical testing in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3 I use cross-sectional methods, which allowed me to quantitatively test the antecedents and outcome of political despair in an efficient way that provided a 'snapshot' of people's experiences of political despair regarding live episodes of contention (e.g., the Black Lives Matter protests, Mcadam et al., 2003; Polletta, 2002). However, the cross-sectional work in Chapter 3 could not determine causality. This means that I cannot conclude that the appraisals *cause* people to feel despair, and despair in turn causes people to engage in collective actions and have diminished well-being. As discussed below, experimental methods are required to test the causality of the theoretical model of political despair (Figure 2).

Finally, in Chapter 4 an experimental methodology was utilised to test the effects of despair on burnout and ways to mitigate this relationship. However, as I discuss in the limitations section below, I did not conduct a manipulation of political despair itself, but instead conducted manipulations on ways to attenuate the negative outcomes of despair. Experimental methodologies can test causality, rule out reverse causality and have good internal validity; however, the external validity tends to be lower. Therefore, the experimental findings may have limited generalisability, such that these results may not replicate in real world situations or apply to broader populations and socio-political issues. However, by using methodological triangulation, rather than relying on a singular methodology, the current thesis provides a more robust understanding of political despair by offsetting the limitations of the methodologies used.

A final contribution of the current thesis is the adaptation and validation of a new measure of climate-oriented burnout (Chapter 4). Within the current literature there appeared to be no measure of burnout that was applicable to social change movements, despite increasing prominence

of the construct for the climate justice movement. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI, Demerouti et al., 2003) that encapsulates two facets of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement) appeared to be the most applicable measure of burnout. Therefore, I adapted and validated a climate-oriented burnout measure (C-OLBI) based on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory. The climate burnout measure reflected people's exhaustion from being involved in the climate movement, and a desire to disengage from the climate action movement due to their burnout. This new measure of climate burnout allowed me to further explore the implications despair may have for individuals (exhaustion) and society (disengagement from the movement). Furthermore, the C-OLBI could be beneficial for future research to further investigate burnout amongst supporters of social change movements.

Limitations and Future Directions

All research has methodological limitations, and this thesis is no different. One of the main limitations of this thesis is that it does not contain a manipulation of political despair and as such it is not possible to discern causality of the theoretical model. The cross-sectional methods of Chapter 3 only allowed me to test the associations between the variables, rather than the causal relationships. I opted not to attempt a manipulation of despair as emotions are notably difficult to manipulate in research, as emotions are context dependent (see Greenaway et al., 2018) and often require complex (and potentially unethical) manipulations in order for them to be impactful (see Amodio et al., 2007). However, future research should still attempt to manipulate the appraisals and/or political despair to allow for a test of the causal relationships. That is, an experiment could rule out reverse causality, such as, if feeling despair makes people perceive the situations as intractable and illegitimate rather than the appraisals preceding the emotion, as hypothesised. Similarly, manipulations could test whether political despair does indeed cause people to engage in collective actions and to have poorer well-being; or, if in fact having poor well-being makes people feel despair, and that engaging in collective actions leads to experiencing despair.

Moreover, longitudinal research could also test directionality of the relationships of the theoretical model of political despair. Future research could test the appraisals, despair, and the outcome variables over multiple time-points to see how they change. Of particular interest in a longitudinal study would be to test if despair has a cumulative effect over time. Although in Chapter 3 I found political despair to be positively associated with political despair, the finding that despair also links to diminished well-being may suggest that if people continue to feel despair over long periods of time, despair could deplete people's ability to continue engaging. Indeed, previous literature suggests when people involved in social change movements continue to experience poor well-being, they often disengage from the movement (e.g., Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen 2015). The effect of despair overtime would only become apparent in a longitudinal study whereby the stable (time-invariant) relationships between despair, well-being and action could be controlled for using a Random-Intercept Cross Lagged Panel Model.

A limitation of the qualitative research conducted in Chapter 2 is the use of open-ended responses to one question. That is, although I was able to conduct the necessary inductive work to understand the appraisals of political despair, the responses were generally short with the average number of words per respondent being 39.6 for racial inequality and 38.5 for climate change. Therefore, this data had less richness and potentially less detail on the nuances of why people were feeling despair. Future research could use interviews to further understand people's experiences of despair and use follow up questions to seek clarification and more detail. Moreover, interviews allow for more contextual information, flexibility in exploring emerging topics and also allows for non-verbal cues to be detected which can offer further information to people's experiences of despair.

Another limitation of this research is that only contexts that are left-leaning, progressive issues have been explored (i.e., climate justice and racial equality). This limitation is reflective of the tendency to primarily study progressive issues in the collective action literature (e.g., racial

justice, Lizarazo Pereira, et al., 2022; Selvanathan & Lickel, 2019, climate justice, Bührle & Kimmerle, 2021; Rees & Bamberg, 2014, see also, Thomas & Osborne, 2022). Nevertheless, I expect that a similar pattern could occur for right-wing, conservative issues too. For instance, people who see the political status-quo as illegitimate and intractable on issues like abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights may also experience political despair. Future research could test if people on the conservative side of the political spectrum also experience political despair and, if so, whether it has the same implications for well-being and collective action engagement.

A final limitation of the current research is in relation to the generalisability of the findings. That it, we do not know based on these empirical data whether the experience of political despair is a cross-cultural phenomenon, or if it is only evident in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic countries (WEIRD, Henrich et al., 2010; Muthukrishna et al., 2020). The data in this thesis was collected in Australia and the US and as such the participants do not reflect the variety of experiences from non-western/non-WEIRD countries. However. I expect that political despair is likely to be experienced in non-WEIRD countries, given that Gerbaudo (2013) suggested, based on observations of dissent and discontent, that political despair in part led to revolutionary coups in Egypt (a non-WEIRD country). Therefore, future research could consider how being in a western democracy may contribute to experiences of political despair, or if political despair is also experienced in a similar way in other national and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

We are in an era of dramatic social and political change, but also a time where many feel that vital change is not occurring fast enough (e.g., Carmichael, 2023; Croft, 2022; United Nations, 2022). In order to bring about positive social change, we need people to be committed to the cause and continue to engage in actions to promote change. Despair has the potential to impact continued participation in these important movements due to its effects on people's stress and burnout. However, I hope that the findings from my thesis can help to bring about positive social change by providing greater understanding of the role of political despair and how we can address it. As former US President Barack Obama said in a 2008 speech "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we are waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

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Appendix A

Chapter 3- Supplementary Materials

Study 3: Racial inequality in the United States.

Regressions of Well-Being onto Despair and Anger

Given the complexity of the many facets of well-being, and the little consensus regarding the definition and measurement, I took an explicitly data driven approach to well-being and measured several facets I thought may be relevant to political despair. The facets I measured were stress (DASS-21, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), vitality (Ryan & Fredrick, 1997), resilience (B. W. Smith et al., 2008) and the Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (Keyes, 2006). As part of the preliminary analyses, I regressed the well-being facets onto despair and anger in IBM SPSS Version 27. Since it is not possible to regress an IV (despair / anger) on multiple DVs (stress, vitality, resilience, Mental Health), I adopted the alternative approach of instead regressing the well-being facets onto the emotions (despair / anger) in two separate multiple regression analyses. This approach allowed me to determine which of the dimensions of well-being uniquely related to the two emotions, taking into account the shared variance between the well-being measures themselves.

Table S1 displays the results for the multiple regressions for despair and anger, respectively. I found that stress was the only well-being measure uniquely related to political despair, and none were uniquely associated with anger (Table S1). Therefore, the main analyses focused on testing effects of despair on stress.

Table S1.

Study 3 Multiple Regression Results for Well-Being on Political Despair and Anger.

	Political Despair		Anger	
	b	*p*-value	b	*p*-value
Stress	.41	< .001	-.01	.914
Vitality	-.21	.119	-.06	.656
Resilience	.10	.311	-.21	.056
MHC-SF	.06	.626	.10	.476

Additional measures in the questionnaire. The questionnaire for this study also included other measures: Additional appraisals of racial inequality, Likelihood/ possibility of racial equality, Group emotions: helpless, guilty, ashamed, grief, sad, anxious, stressed, happy, hopeful, optimistic, proud, satisfied, Identification as a supporter of racial equality, Identity fusion, Group efficacy in creating racial equality, Collective efficacy in creating racial equality, Strength of support for racial equality, Moral conviction regarding opinion on racial equality, Anomie, Political efficacy, Social mobility, Moral norms of support for racial equality, Demographic information: Age, Gender, Born in America, Ancestry, Education, Political orientation, Preferred political party and quasi manipulation of utopian thinking. Please see OSF link https://osf.io/skwv3/?view_only=c169995052cc442983961f74ca90fc53 for the verbatim questionnaire.

Moderation of Group Membership (Black American / Other). In the primary manuscript I anticipated that, although I conceptualise political despair as based on opinions about desired social change (e.g., pro-equality), the feelings of despair may nevertheless be amplified for people who themselves directly experience disadvantage. This implies that the links between appraisal and despair, despair, and outcomes (well-being, action) may be greater for people who identify with the disadvantaged group (Black Americans).

To provide a test of this idea, I conducted moderation analyses using Hayes PROCESS Model 1, to examine whether the strength of the effects were reliably different for people who self-reported that they were Black American (coded 1), compared to participants who did not (coded -1; see Table S2 for the interaction results and unstandardised regression weights). The analyses indicated that identifying as a Black American (compared to identifying as any other ethnicities) did not moderate any of the key paths in the model. These findings suggest that identifying as a Black American, that is, identifying as the disadvantaged group, does not make the pathways stronger.

Table S2.

Study 3 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Disadvantaged Group Membership on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Group membership x Intractability	Political despair	-.068	.083	.408
Group membership x Illegitimacy	Political despair	.037	.177	.833
Group membership x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	-.039	.166	.816
Group membership x Political despair	Radical action intentions	.029	.194	.882
Group membership x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	-.031	.037	.403
Group membership x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	-.011	.041	.793
Group membership x Political despair	Stress	.125	.217	.566

Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Racial Equality. I recognise that those who are strongly committed to the cause (i.e., people who identify as activists) may respond differently to those who were more nominally committed. However, I did not measure activist identity because there is other evidence that a number of people who engage in activist-like behaviours explicitly

eschew that label (see Stuart et al., 2018) partly because of negative stereotypes associated with the 'activist' label. One principled way of examining the distinction between those who are deeply committed to the issue and those who are more moderately committed, is to examine whether social identification as a supporter qualifies any of the paths. As anticipated in the primary manuscript, I test if the role of political despair is enhanced for those who more strongly identify as a supporter of the movement for racial equality.

To empirically test the impact social identification as a supporter has on the model's pathways, I conducted moderation analyses using Hayes PROCESS Model 1. That is, I tested if the strength of effects differed based on if someone was highly identified with the movement, compared to those who scored lower on identification. I found identification as a supporter did not moderate any key pathways of the theoretical model (see Table S3 for the interaction results and unstandardised regression weights). As such it appears that being more strongly identified does not strengthen (or diminish) the paths to and from political despair.

Table S3.

Study 3 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Racial Equality on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Supporter ID x Intractability	Political despair	-.008	.051	.871
Supporter ID x Illegitimacy	Political despair	.017	.052	.739
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	.005	.036	.896
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical action intentions	.054	.055	.329
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	.012	.011	.268
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	.021	.013	.113
Supporter ID x Political despair	Stress	-.036	.070	.603

The role of efficacy. There is reason to suggest that efficacy may play an important role in understanding political despair. That is, it is possible people may feel political despair when they perceive a lack of efficacy in changing the current situation (Gould, 2012). Given that the existing literature that suggests that the perception of being ineffective at changing the ongoing social/political situation may be an aspect of political despair (Gould, 2012), as well as an established relationship between efficacy and engagement in action, it is important to test the relationship between political despair and efficacy. These tests allow us to distinguish between political despair and efficacy by considering their relationship with each other. Moreover, I test whether political despair, group efficacy and political efficacy have similar or different relationships with the key variables. Thus, I conducted correlations between the key variables (appraisals, emotions, conventional and radical action, well-being) of this study and efficacy (both group efficacy and political efficacy). See Table S4 for the correlation coefficients.

As can be seen, neither group efficacy nor political efficacy correlated significantly with political despair. Therefore, political despair is able to be differentiated from efficacy. Additionally, unexpectedly, group and political efficacy also did not correlate with any of the key variables of this study. Despair however, correlated with all key variables. This finding contradicts the literature that has found efficacy to be an important predictor of collective action (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011; van Zomeren, et al., 2004; van Zomeren, et al.,2012). Efficacy may have played a more muted role during this "live" and tumultuous context of protest. It may be the case that in this context, emotions, such as despair, had a more important role. The differing pattern of relationships highlights that political despair is a separate construct to that of just perceiving actions as being ineffective at changing the social/political situation.

Table S4.

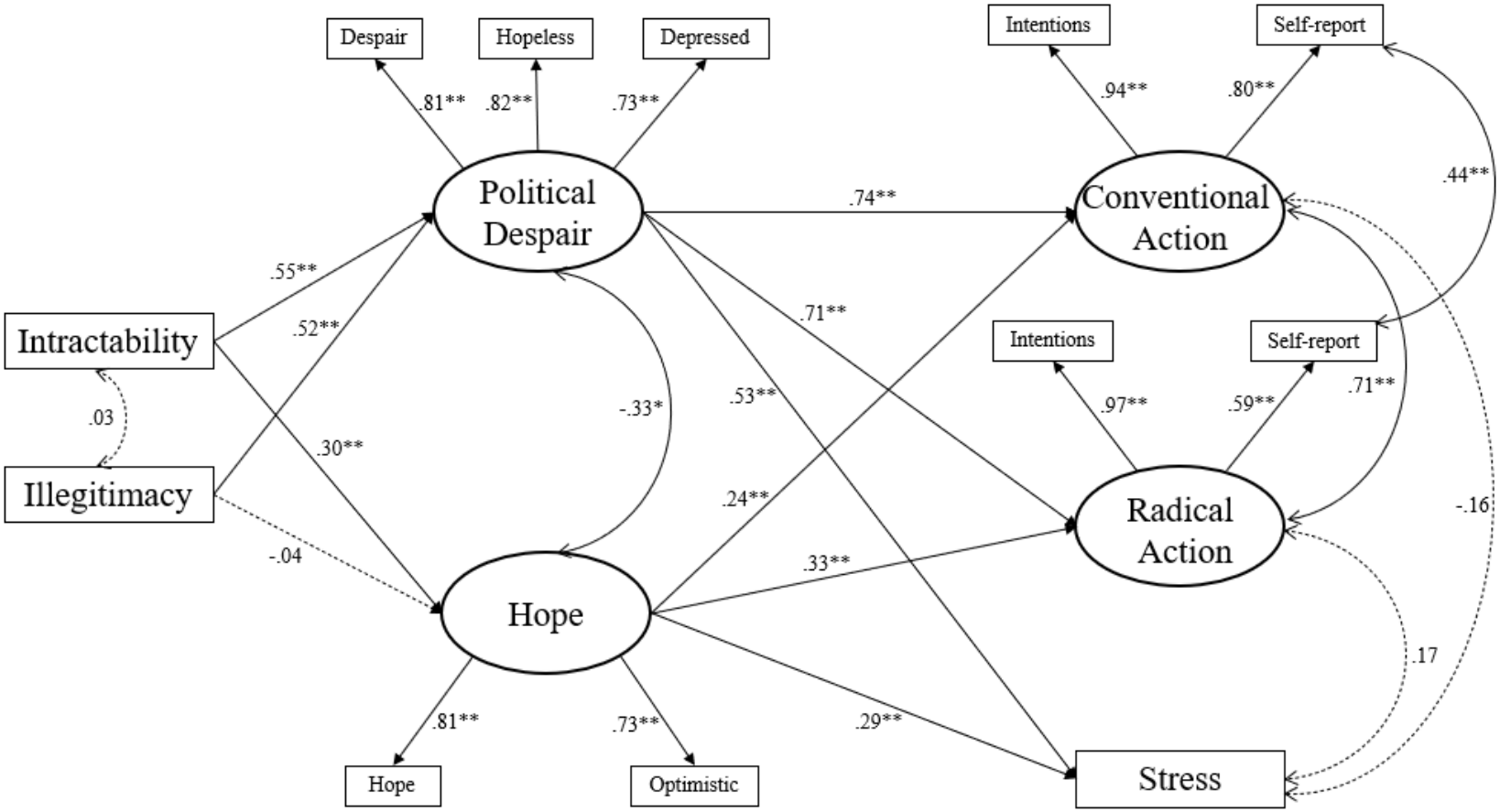
Study 3 Correlations of Key Variables, Group Efficacy and Political Efficacy.

	Group Efficacy		Political Efficacy	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Political Despair	.014	.859	.010	.902
Intractability	.042	.604	.036	.650
Illegitimacy	-.054	.497	-.118	.141
Anger	.018	.825	.005	.953
Conventional action intentions	.013	.872	-.043	.590
Conventional self-reported actions	-.022	.782	-.014	.858
Radical action intentions	015	.848	.017	.836
Radical self-reported actions	-.106	.185	.068	.395
Stress	-.048	.550	-.089	.264

Testing effects of despair relative to hope. As suggested during the peer-review process, I also tested the model whilst controlling for hope (rather than anger). The SEM indicated that the despair and hope model had mediocre fit with the data (X^2 (41) = 133.731, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .120, CFI = .918, SRMR = .0687). I found the same pattern of results for the pathways to and from political despair (see Figure S1) as were reported in the primary manuscript. The standardised regressions (see Figure S1) show despair and hope were moderately, negatively related. I found illegitimacy was not related to hope, but intractability was moderately, positively related. I also found hope to have a weak-moderate relationship with all outcome variables (conventional action, radical action, and stress). These results suggest that the effects of despair on outcomes (well-being and action) are not reducible to the effects of hope.

Figure S1.

Study 3 Standardised Regression Coefficients for The Tests of The Effects of Appraisals, Despair, Hope, and Outcomes.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

Separating collective action intentions and previous actions. During the review process, a Reviewer suggested that intentions to engage in action (as a future-oriented behavioural response) may have different outcomes relative to self-reported prior behaviour (actions already taken). Given the researcher degrees of freedom in the modelling of action as a latent variable (with the parcels of intentions and self-reported behaviour, respectively), I conducted a sensitivity test of the core model substituting the latent (conventional and radical) action variables with a manifest/ observed variable measuring intentions and self-reported actions, respectively. Table S5 displays the model fit indices. Figures S2 and S3 show that the patterns of effects are unchanged when action is modelled as a manifest variable. There is a minor departure from the primary results such that in the intentions model, the pathway from anger to radical intentions is non-significant (β = -.23) whereas the relationship between anger and the radical action latent variable is significant (β = -.26). However, the standardised coefficients indicate there is very little change in these paths. Additionally, for the self-report model, the relationship between anger and radical actions becomes stronger (β = -.53). Nevertheless, these results suggest that modelling the two forms of action separately does not materially affect the conclusions.

Table S5.

Study 3 Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Models Separating Action Intentions and Self-Reported Actions

		X^2 (df) =, p =	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Action intentions model	Study 1	X^2 (27) = 83.710, p < .001	.116	.941	.0520
Self-reported actions model	Study 1	X^2 (25) = 45.344, p = .008	.072	.975	.0364
Action intentions model	Study 2	X^2 (31) = 150.444, p < .001	.103	.945	.0549
Self-reported actions model	Study 2	X^2 (30) = 91.912, p < .001	.075	.968	.0422
Action intentions model	Study 3	X^2 (30) = 111.010, p < .001	.095	.939	.0486

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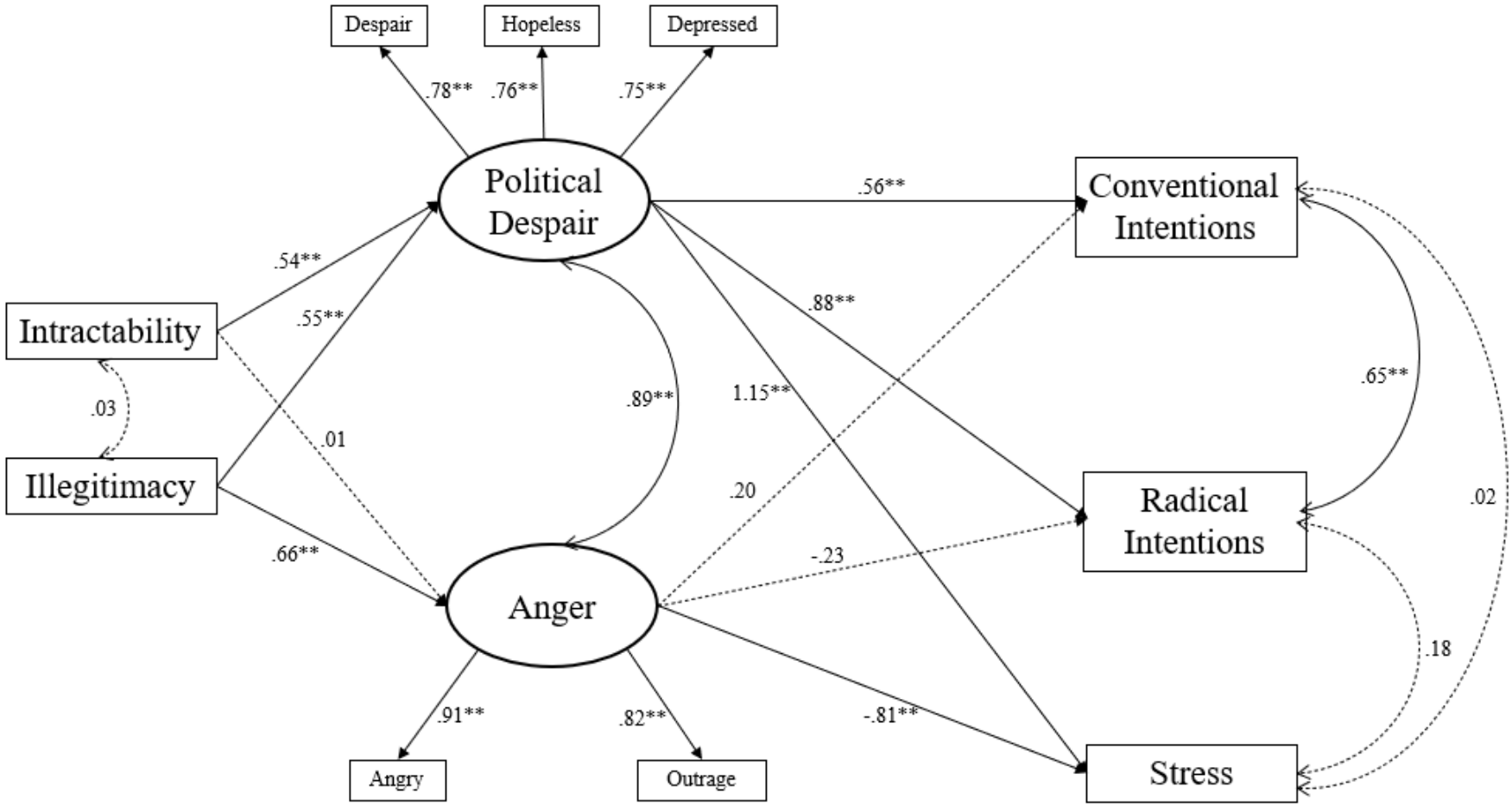
Figure S2.

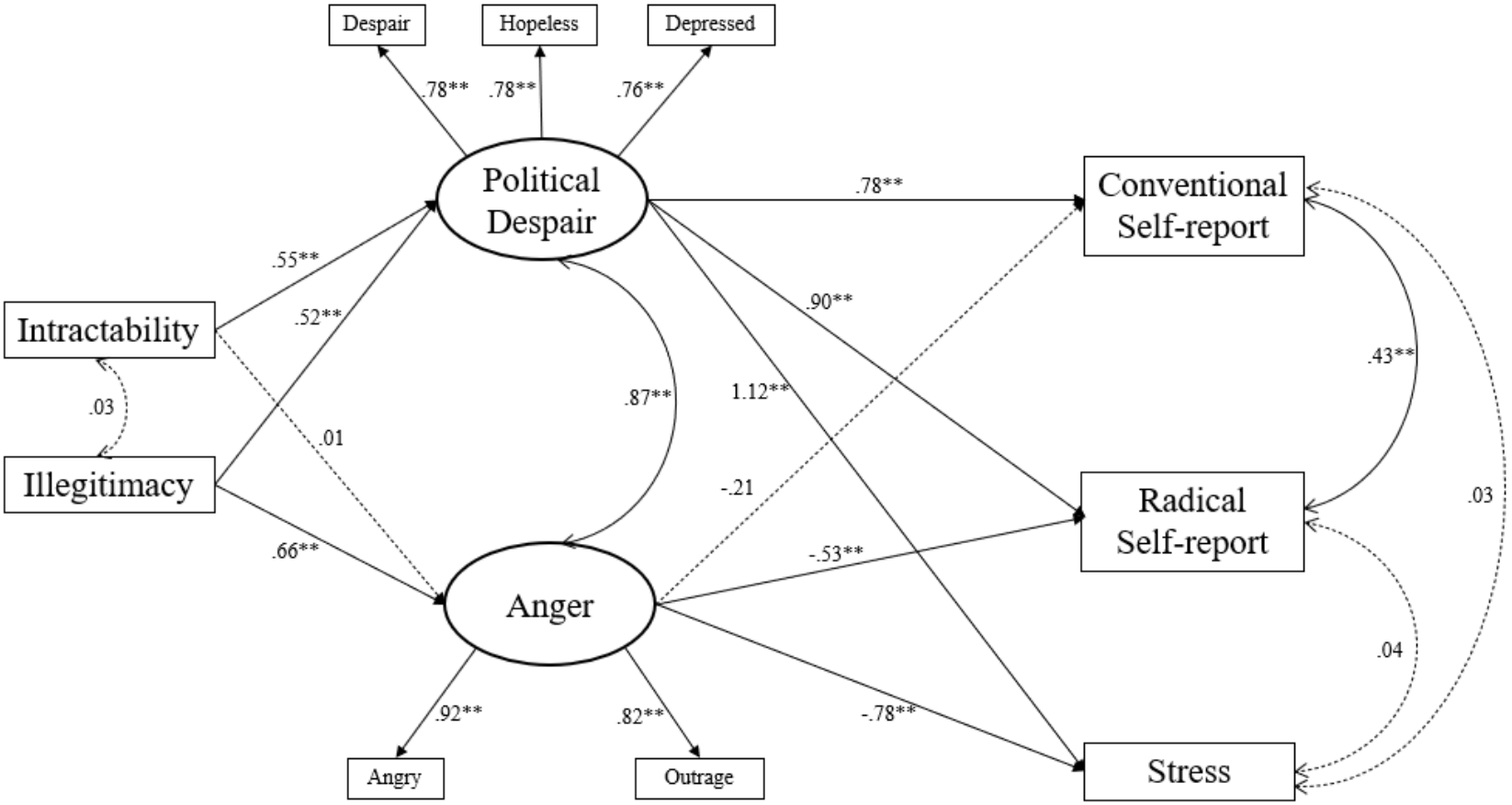
Study 3 Standardised Regression Coefficients for The Tests of The Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, Action Intention and Stress.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

Figure S3.

Study 3 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, Self-Reported Actions, and Stress.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

The role of utopian thinking. I conducted a quasi-manipulation of utopian thinking in this questionnaire whereby half of the participants were randomly allocated to do a utopian thinking task at the start of the questionnaire (coded 1) and the other half completed the task at the end of the questionnaire (coded 2). I conducted an independent samples t-test and found that the utopian thinking task had no effect on the key variables (see Table S6). Therefore, I collapsed across the data set and conducted all analyses with the combined data.

Table S6.

Study 3 Independent Samples T-Test for Utopian Thinking Task.

Outcome variable	t-tests	Condition	Means	SD
Intractability	t (156) = -.776, p = .439	Utopian Task First	3.314	2.019
		Utopian Task Last	3.549	1.788
Illegitimacy	t (156) = 1.112, p = .268	Utopian Task First	5.458	1.427
		Utopian Task Last	5.218	1.276
Political Despair	t (156) = .1.519, p = .131	Utopian Task First	4.584	1.460
		Utopian Task Last	4.201	1.520
Anger	t (156) = .101, p = .920	Utopian Task First	5.218	1.511
		Utopian Task Last	5.192	1.637
Stress	t (154) = -.193, p = .847	Utopian Task First	4.062	1.894
		Utopian Task Last	4.120	1.862
Conventional action intentions	t (153) = 1.155, p = .250	Utopian Task First	4.861	1.689
		Utopian Task Last	4.556	1.592
Conventional self-reported actions	t (155) = -1.402, p = 163	Utopian Task First	1.508	.351
		Utopian Task Last	1.586	.343
Radical action intentions	t (152) = 1.503, p = 135	Utopian Task First	4.307	1.801
		Utopian Task Last	3.857	1.890
Radical self-reported actions	t (156) = -1.055, p = 293	Utopian Task First	1.732	.376
		Utopian Task Last	1.793	.346

Additionally, using Hayes PROCESS Model 1, I found the utopian thinking task did not moderate any of the paths. That is, completing the utopian thinking task at the start of the questionnaire compared to the end, did not affect the relationships between the variables (see Table S7 for the interaction results and unstandardised coefficients).

Table S7.

Study 3 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Utopian Thinking Task on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Utopian thinking x Intractability	Political despair	.182	.115	.116
Utopian thinking x Illegitimacy	Political despair	.133	.147	.366
Utopian thinking x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	-.145	.131	.270
Utopian thinking x Political despair	Radical action intentions	-.071	.157	.650
Utopian thinking x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	-.009	.030	.756
Utopian thinking x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	.006	.034	.870
Utopian thinking x Political despair	Stress	.333	.174	.057

Study 4: Racial Inequality in the United States.

Regressions of well-being onto despair and anger. In Study 3 I found the well-being facets of vitality, resilience and Mental Health were not associated with political despair, therefore in Study 4 I added new, exploratory facets of well-being. In Study 4 I included an adapted scale of the Well-being Profile which included the measures of positive emotions, optimism about one's future, emotional stability, meaning, autonomy, resilience, and vitality (Marsh et al., 2020). I also adapted the Burnout Measure Short Version (Malach-Pines, 2005). Finally, I continued to include the measure of stress from Study 3. As in Study 3, I conducted regressions to test which well-being facets were uniquely associated with political despair and anger. I found stress and burnout were the only well-being measures that uniquely related to political despair, and burnout was the only facet to be uniquely associated with anger, see Table S8. Therefore, I only included stress and burnout in the main analyses for the study.

Table S8.

Study 4 Multiple Regression Results for Well-Being on Political Despair, and Anger.

	Political Despair		Anger	
	b	*p*-value	b	*p*-value
Positive Emotions	.05	.609	.07	.482
Optimism about one's future	-.07	.461	-.10	.315
Emotional Stability	.11	.101	.07	.298
Meaning	< .01	.967	-.05	.564
Autonomy	.01	.893	.05	.483
Resilience	-.02	.795	.07	.365
Vitality	.01	.864	-.10	.252
Stress	.18	.009	.01	.851
Burnout	.46	< .001	.38	< .001

Additional measures in the questionnaire. As in Study 3, the questionnaire for this study also included other measures: 'Bot' identifiers, Additional appraisals of racial inequality, Likelihood/ possibility of racial equality, Group emotions: sad, anguish, misery, distressed, desperate, disheartened, helpless, happy, hopeful, optimistic, ashamed, guilty, grief, anxious, stressed, proud, satisfied, Identification as a supporter of racial equality, Identity fusion, Group efficacy in creating racial equality, Strength and importance of support for racial equality, Moral conviction regarding opinion on racial equality, Anomie, Political efficacy, Collective autonomy, Moral norms of support for racial equality, Demographic information: Age, Gender, Born in America, Ancestry, Education, Political orientation, Preferred political party, Previous vote based on racial equality policies, Intention to vote based on racial equality policies. Please see OSF link https://osf.io/skwv3/?view_only=c169995052cc442983961f74ca90fc53 for the verbatim questionnaires.

Furthermore, I included in this study a written response question for all participants who indicated they felt a level of despair regarding racial inequality. The question was "Earlier you indicated that you feel a level of despair about racial inequality. Please tell us, briefly below, why you feel despair about this situation:". This measure was not included in the analyses for this study.

Expanding the measurement of political despair. The questionnaire for Study 4 included additional, a-priori 'filler' items and several of these items could be considered related to despair. Therefore, I assess whether the pattern of results remains the same if the additional items were included, to ensure the items I selected to represent political despair were reflective of all related items. I included the items that are synonyms of despair according to the Collins dictionary (desperate, disheartened, anguish, misery). I first conducted a factor analysis in AMOS by modelling political despair as a latent factor with all synonym items (including the primary items: despair, depressed, hopeless). The model with all indicators had poor fit with the data (X^2 (14) = 550.419, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .324, CFI = .627, SRMR = .2164). In the model with all items

included those items that we, a-priori, had conceptualised as best reflecting political despair (despair, depressed and hopeless) did not load onto the factor, but the other items (disheartened, desperate, anguish, misery) did. These results highlight that the primary despair items did not load with the newly included ones, while modification indices pointed to strong residual correlations between the three items originally included in the model. This indicates that the three a-priori items (which include the marker item "despair") represent despair, distinct from the latent factor formed by the added variables, which revolved around feelings of 'anguish' and 'misery'. Due to model mis-fit, I was not able to determine whether inclusion of the additional items affects the pattern of effects on the antecedent and outcome variables. Overall, the findings support the a-priori considerations about the concept and measurement of despair.

Moderation of Group Membership (Black American / Other). As in Study 3, I address the effect of identifying as disadvantaged (Black Americans) on the pathways between appraisal and despair, despair, and outcomes (well-being, action). I suggest despair may be amplified for people who themselves directly experience disadvantage and that the relationships between appraisals despair, and outcomes may be greater for those who identify as Black Americans. To test this idea, I conducted moderation analyses (see Table S9 for the interaction and unstandardised regression weights). The analyses indicated that identifying as a Black American (compared to identifying as any other ethnicities) moderated only the pathways between despair and conventional action intentions. The relationship between despair and conventional action intentions is weakened when someone identifies as a Black American (Black American, b = .336, p = .013, Other ethnicities. b = .415, p <.001). That is, disengagement from action appears to be more likely for the people who have to live with the outcome of the inequality (Black Americans).

Table S9.

Study 4 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Disadvantaged Group Membership on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Group membership x Intractability	Political despair	.097	.110	.378
Group membership x Illegitimacy	Political despair	-.107	.183	.561
Group membership x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	-.263	.094	.005
Group membership x Political despair	Radical action intentions	-.010	.089	.262
Group membership x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	-.015	.017	.375
Group membership x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	.013	.010	.211
Group membership x Political despair	Stress	-.002	.094	.979
Group membership x Political despair	Burnout	-.040	.070	.571

Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Racial Equality. As I discuss above in Study 3, strength of identification as a supporter of racial equality may moderate the key pathways of the model. As such, I conducted moderation analyses using Hayes PROCESS Model 1 and again found identification as a supporter did not moderate any of the pathways (see Table S10). These results support those from Study 3, indicating being more strongly identified with the movement does not impact the antecedents (appraisals) or outcomes of political despair.

Table S10.

Study 4 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Racial Equality on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Supporter ID x Intractability	Political despair	.012	.057	.834
Supporter ID x Illegitimacy	Political despair	.028	.031	.369
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	.006	.028	.840
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical action intentions	.041	.030	.174
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	.005	.006	.368
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	.006	.004	.086
Supporter ID x Political despair	Stress	-.025	.034	.465
Supporter ID x Political despair	Burnout	-.015	.026	.560

Role of efficacy. As in Study 3, it is important to differentiate political despair from efficacy to consider whether are different constructs that have diverging relationships with the key variables (appraisals, emotions, conventional and radical action, well-being). See Table S11 for the correlation coefficients. As seen in Table S11, political despair is not correlated with group or political efficacy, thus again indicating they are different constructs. Additionally, although political despair is correlated with all key variables, group and political efficacy are only related to self-reported conventional actions. Therefore, despair and efficacy have different relationships with the key variables, again highlight that they are indeed separate constructs.

Table S11.

Study 4 Correlations of Key Variables, Group Efficacy and Political Efficacy.

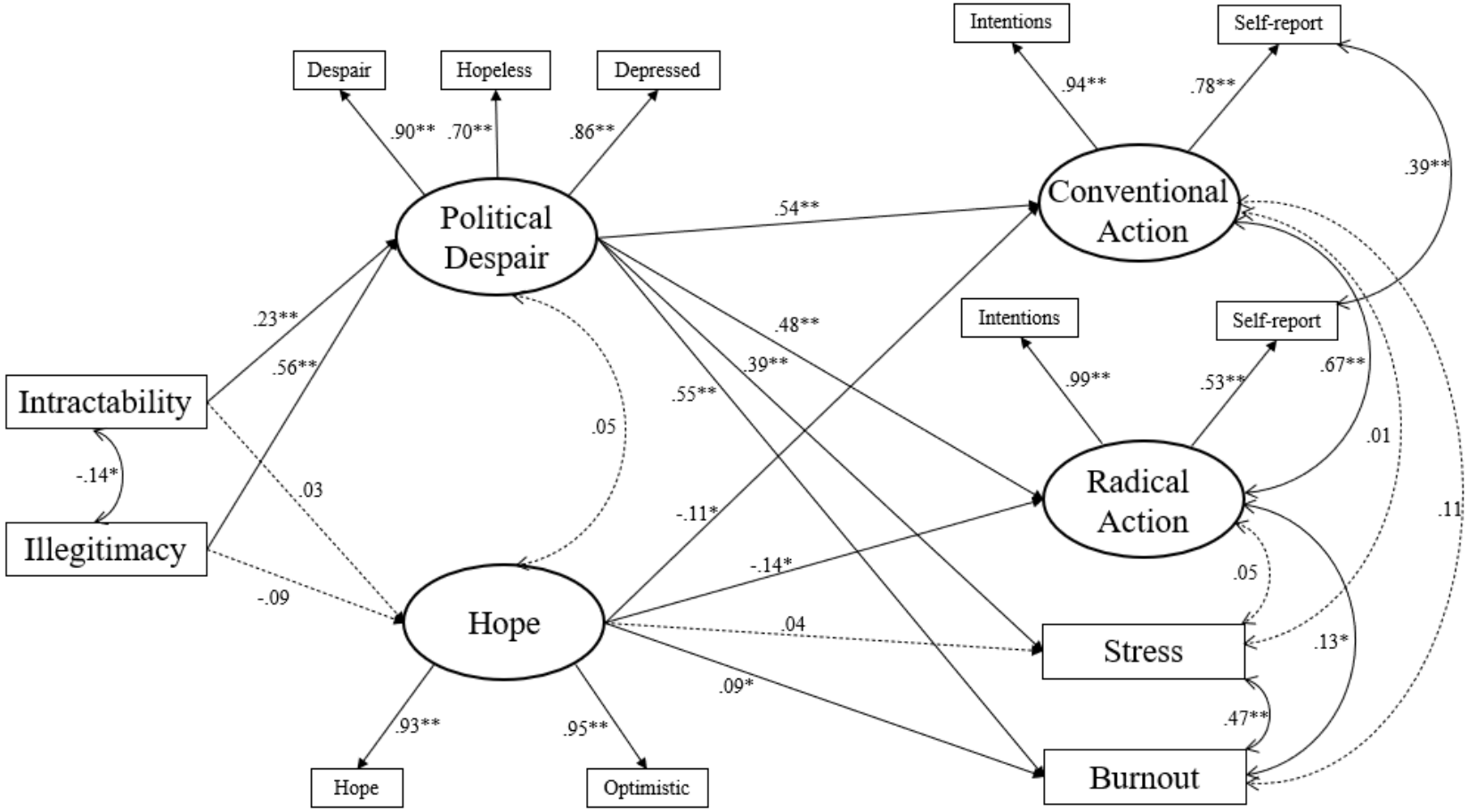
	Group Efficacy		Political Efficacy	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Political Despair	-.001	.980	.038	.471
Intractability	-.095	.071	-.101	.053
Illegitimacy	-.064	.220	-.017	.744
Anger	.006	.903	.009	.864
Conventional action intentions	.046	.376	.023	.656
Conventional self-reported actions	.116	.027	.429	<.001
Radical action intentions	.092	.079	.039	.462
Radical self-reported action	.060	.248	.006	.902
Stress	.009	.869	.042	.426
Burnout	.009	.866	-.020	.703

Testing effects of despair relative to hope. As in Study 3, I tested the model while controlling for hope. I again found the pattern of results for political despair held consistent with the primary analyses, although the regressions to action were stronger when controlling for hope compared to anger and the relationship between despair and stress was weaker (See Figure S4). The SEM found the model had adequate fit with the data (X^2 (48) = 171.359, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .084, CFI = .949, SRMR = .0569). The standardised regressions (see Figure S4) showed political despair and hope were not significantly related. The analyses found the appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability were both not related to hope, and that hope also did not have a significant relationship with conventional actions or stress but had weak relationships with radical action (negative) and burnout (positive). These results are inconsistent with the findings from Study 3 that showed

intractability to be positively related to hope and hope to be positively related to the outcome variables. But as I argue in the primary manuscript, the differences in the contexts (period of live and tumultuous in Study 3, the civil unrest had somewhat subsided in Study 4) may explain why the effects found were generally weaker compared to those found is Study 3.

Figure S4.

Study 4 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Despair, Hope, and Outcomes.

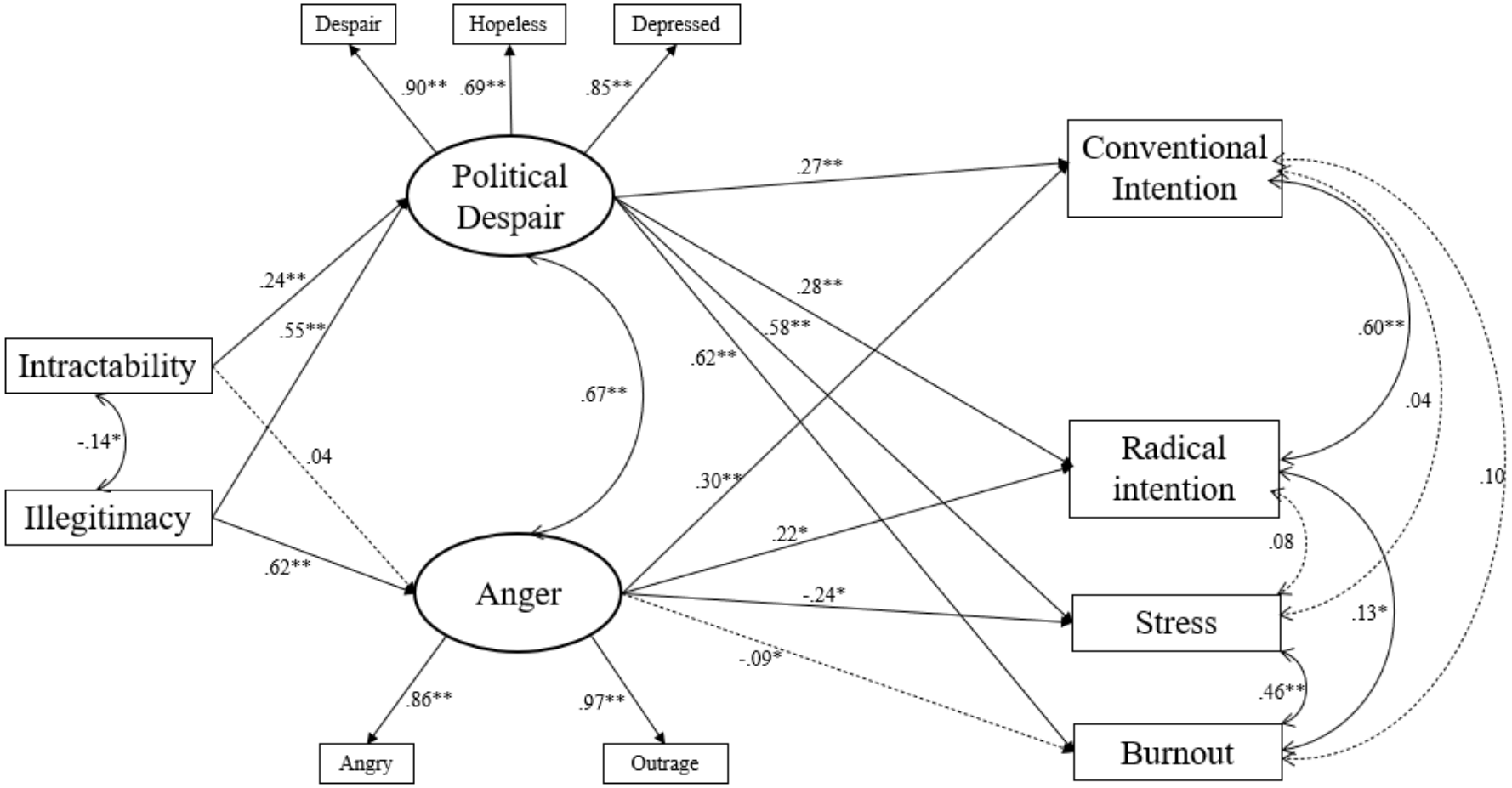


Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

Separating collective action intentions and previous actions. As in Study 3, I conducted the SEM with action intentions and self-reported actions modelled separately. I again found the patterns of results to be consistent with the conclusions drawn from the full theoretical model reported in the primary manuscript. However, for the self-reported model, the path from anger to radical action was not related whereas it was moderately positively associated in the primary model. See Figure S5 for the action intentions model, and Figure S6 for the self-reported actions model. See Table S5 for the model fit indices.

Figure S5.

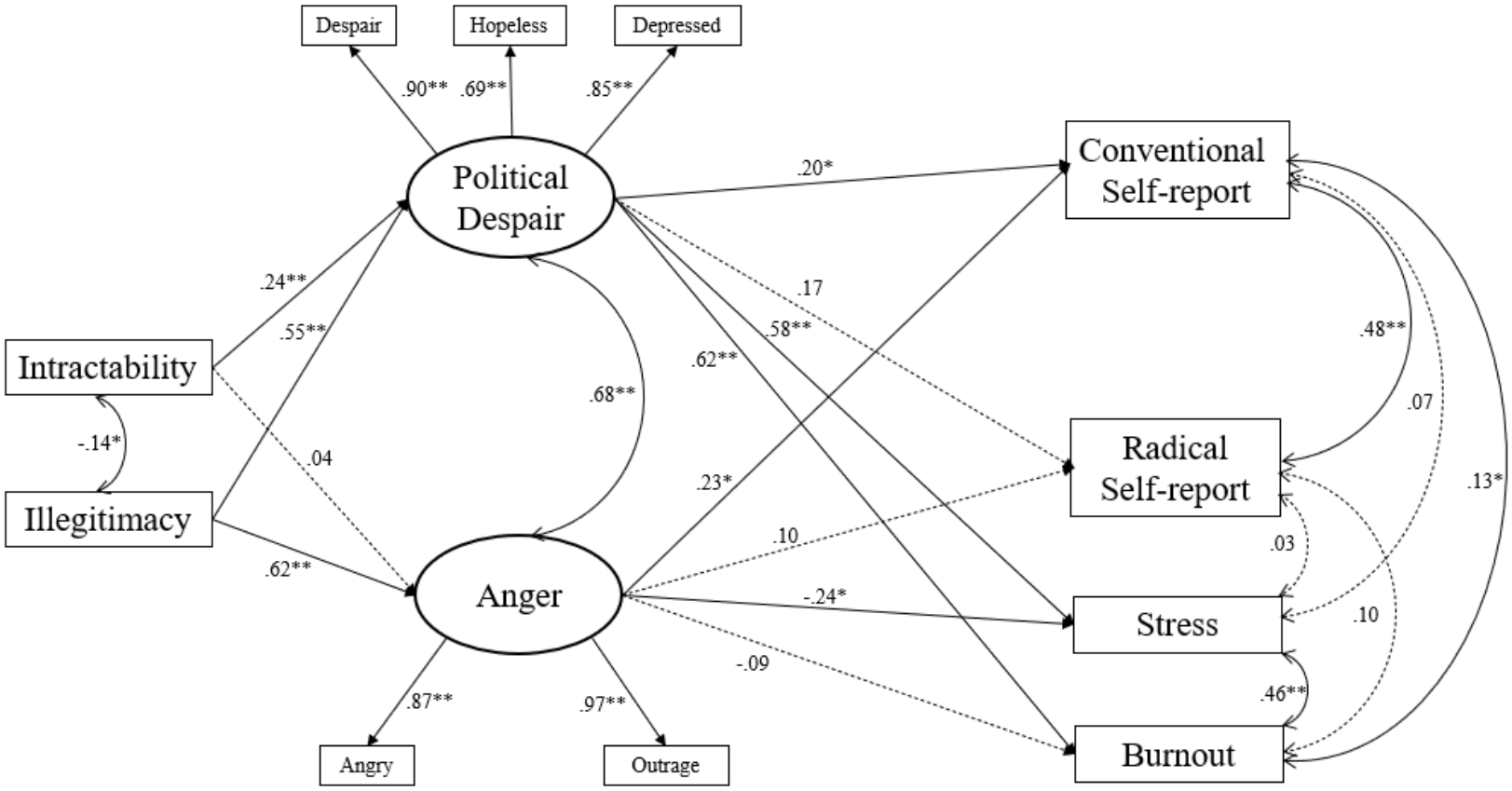
Study 4 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, Action Intentions and Well-Being.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

Figure S6.

Study 4 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, Self-Reported Actions and Well-Being.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

Study 5: Climate change in Australia.

Regressions of well-being onto despair and anger. I utilised the same well-being facets from Study 4 which includes an adapted scale of the Well-being Profile (positive emotions, optimism, emotional stability, meaning, autonomy, resilience, and vitality), burnout and stress. I again conducted regressions to test which well-being facets were uniquely associated with political despair and anger. I found optimism about one's future and burnout were the only well-being measures that uniquely related to political despair, whereas positive emotions, optimism about one's future and burnout were the facets to be uniquely associated with anger (see Table S12). I included optimism about one's future and burnout in the main analyses for the study.

Table S12.

Study 5 Multiple Regression Results for Well-Being on Key Emotions, Political Despair, and Anger.

	Political Despair		Anger	
	b	*p*-value	b	*p*-value
Positive emotions	.15	.058	.20	.019
Optimism about one's future	-.32	< .001	-.20	.026
Emotional stability	.11	.093	-.06	.414
Meaning	.15	.051	.09	.309
Autonomy	-.07	.280	-.07	.306
Resilience	-.02	.763	-.01	.851
Vitality	.08	.244	.03	.719
Stress	.06	.322	.06	.358
Burnout	.44	< .001	.38	< .001

Additional measures in the questionnaire. Similarly to Study 3 and 4, the questionnaire for this study also included other measures: 'Bot' identifiers, Additional appraisals of climate change, Likelihood/ possibility of combatting climate change, Group emotions: sad, anguish, misery, distressed, desperate, disheartened, helpless, happy, hopeful, optimistic, ashamed, guilty, grief,

anxious, stressed, proud, satisfied, Identification as a supporter of action to combat climate change, Identity fusion, Group efficacy in combatting climate change, Strength and importance of supporting action to combat climate change, Moral conviction regarding opinion on climate change, Anomie, Political efficacy, Collective autonomy, Moral norms of support for action to combat climate change, Demographic information: Age, Gender, Born in Australia, Ancestry, Education, Political orientation, Preferred political party, Previous vote based on racial equality policies, Intention to vote based on racial equality policies. Please see OSF link https://osf.io/skwv3/?view_only=c169995052cc442983961f74ca90fc53 for the verbatim questionnaires.

Furthermore, I again included in this study a written response question for all participants who indicated they felt a level of despair regarding climate change. The question was "Earlier you indicated that you feel a level of despair about climate change. Please tell us, briefly below, why you feel despair about this situation:" This measure was not used in the analyses for this study.

Expanding the measurement of political despair. As I did in Study 3, I tested if the pattern of results remained stable if all items synonymous to despair were included. I again conducted a factor analysis in AMOS by modelling political despair as a latent factor with all items related to despair included as indicators (despair, hopeless, depressed, desperate, disheartened, anguish, misery). The model with all indicators had poor fit with the data (X^2 (14) = 105.795, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .149, CFI = .930 SRMR = .0537). The disheartened item was causing a lot of the mis-fit within the model due to it cross loading with several items, as such I removed this item and ran the model with 6 items. The 6-item latent factor had acceptable fit with the data (X^2 (9) = 52.213, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .127, CFI = .962, SRMR = .0334). I then conducted a SEM on the full model with the 6-indicator latent variable included. The full model had mediocre fit with the data (X^2 (75) = 255.331, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .090, CFI = .926 SRMR = .0555). The pattern of effects in this model are consistent with those in the primary manuscript. As such the researcher's degrees of freedom

did not appear to impact the pattern of effects when compared to the inclusive measure of political despair.

Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Climate Justice. Similar to Studies 3-4, strength of identity as a supporter of the movement, in this case climate justice, may qualify the pathways in the model. I again utilised a moderation analysis in Hayes PROCESS (Model 1). The results indicated that identification had a significant impact on the relationship between intractability and political despair, such that those who more strongly identified as a supporter of the climate action movement, had a decreased relationship between intractability and despair compared to those who weakly identified with the movement (see Table S13). That is, being highly identified with the climate movement appears to buffer the relationship between despair and intractability. However, the rest of the pathways were non-significant, consistent with Studies 3-4.

Table S13.

Study 5 Interaction and Unstandardised Regression Weights for Moderation of Identification as a Supporter of Climate Justice on Key Paths.

Interaction term	Outcome variable	B	SE	*p*
Supporter ID x Intractability	Political despair	-.129	.062	.038
Supporter ID x Illegitimacy	Political despair	-.028	.071	.689
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional action intentions	-.025	.030	.409
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical action intentions	.013	.046	.780
Supporter ID x Political despair	Conventional self-reported actions	.001	.007	.876
Supporter ID x Political despair	Radical self-reported actions	.005	.004	.206
Supporter ID x Political despair	Burnout	-.016	.039	.680
Supporter ID x Political despair	Optimism	-.006	.049	.896

The role of efficacy. As in Study 3 and 4, I tested the relationships between political despair and efficacy (group and political efficacy). I also tested the associations between efficacy and the other key variables of the study (appraisals, emotions, conventional and radical actions, well-being). See Table S14 for the correlation coefficients. As in Study 3 and 4, political despair does not correlate with group or political efficacy, once again differentiating the constructs. However, contrary to Study 3 and 4, group efficacy was associated with most of the key variables. Political efficacy was (weakly) correlated with conventional intentions and optimism about one's future. The inconsistency in these results compared to Study 3 and 4 may be due to being a different context (climate change in Australia, rather than racial inequality in the US in Study 3 and 4) may have an effect on the relationships efficacy has with the key variables. Nevertheless, the results indicate political despair and efficacy are separate constructs.

Table S14.

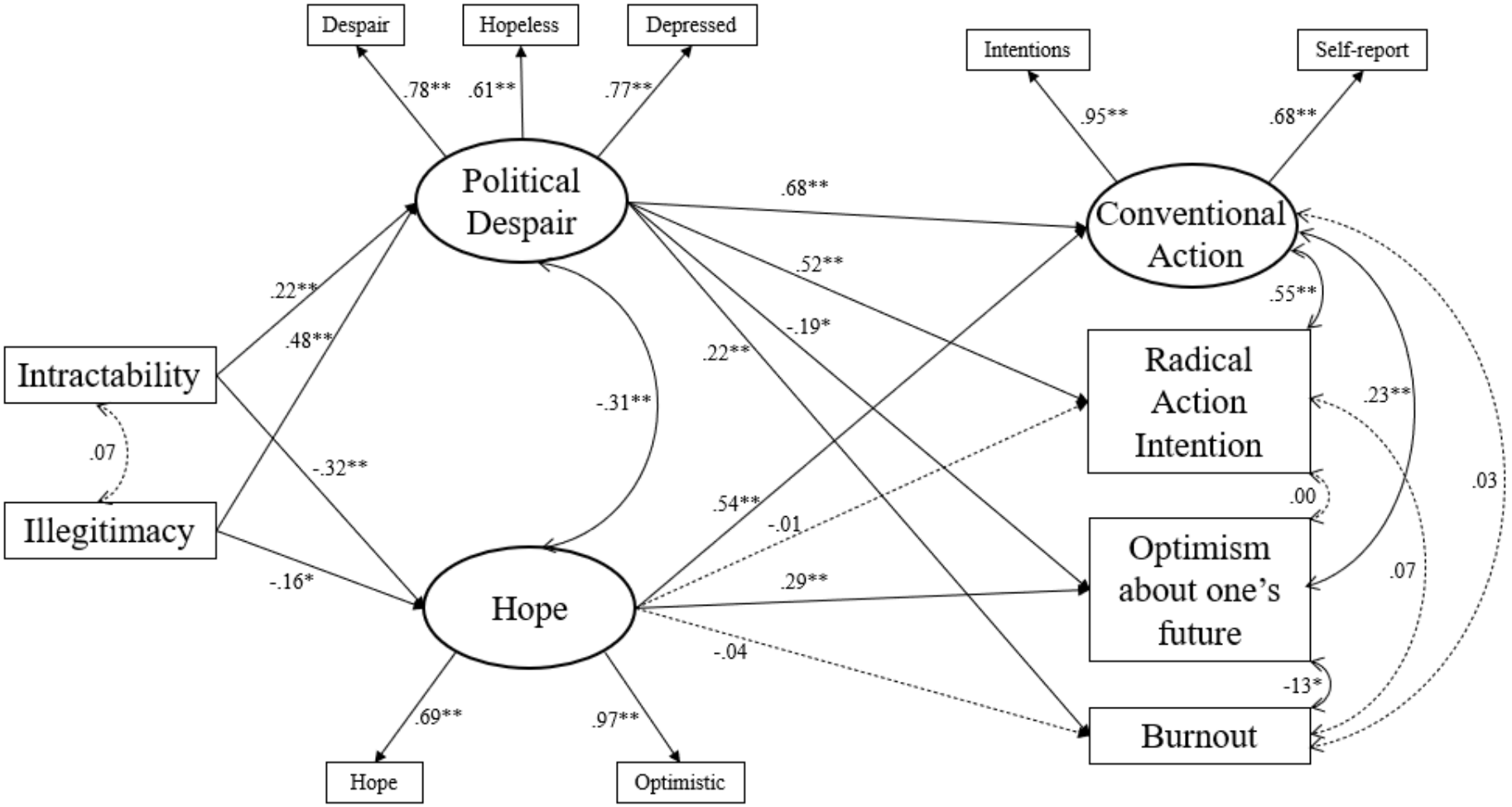
Study 5 Correlations of Key Variables, Group Efficacy and Political Efficacy.

	Group Efficacy		Political Efficacy	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Political Despair	.049	.398	-.063	.276
Intractability	-.291	<.001	-.084	.150
Illegitimacy	.254	<.001	-.058	.319
Anger	.161	.005	-.043	.456
Conventional action intentions	.412	<.001	.116	.045
Conventional self-reported actions	.255	<.001	.078	.177
Radical action intentions	.209	<.001	.064	.274
Radical self-reported action	.106	.067	.009	.882
Burnout	.040	.489	-.032	.580
Optimism about one's future	.221	<.001	.117	.043

Testing effects of despair relative to hope. As in the previous studies, and as indicated in the manuscript, I tested the model while controlling for hope. The SEM found the model had adequate fit with the data (X^2 (39) = 121.417, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .084, CFI = .932, SRMR = .0566). I again found the pattern of results for political despair held consistent with the primary analyses, although the regressions from political despair to both forms of action were stronger when controlling for hope compared to anger. Conversely, the relationships between despair and well-being (optimism about one's future and burnout) were weaker when controlling for hope compared to anger (See Figure S7). The standardised regressions (see Figure S7) showed political despair and hope were negatively, moderately related. The analyses found the appraisals of illegitimacy and intractability were both negatively related to hope. Hope did not have a significant relationship with radical action intentions or burnout but was positively associated with conventional actions and optimism about one's future.

Figure S7.

Study 5 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Despair, Hope, and Outcomes.



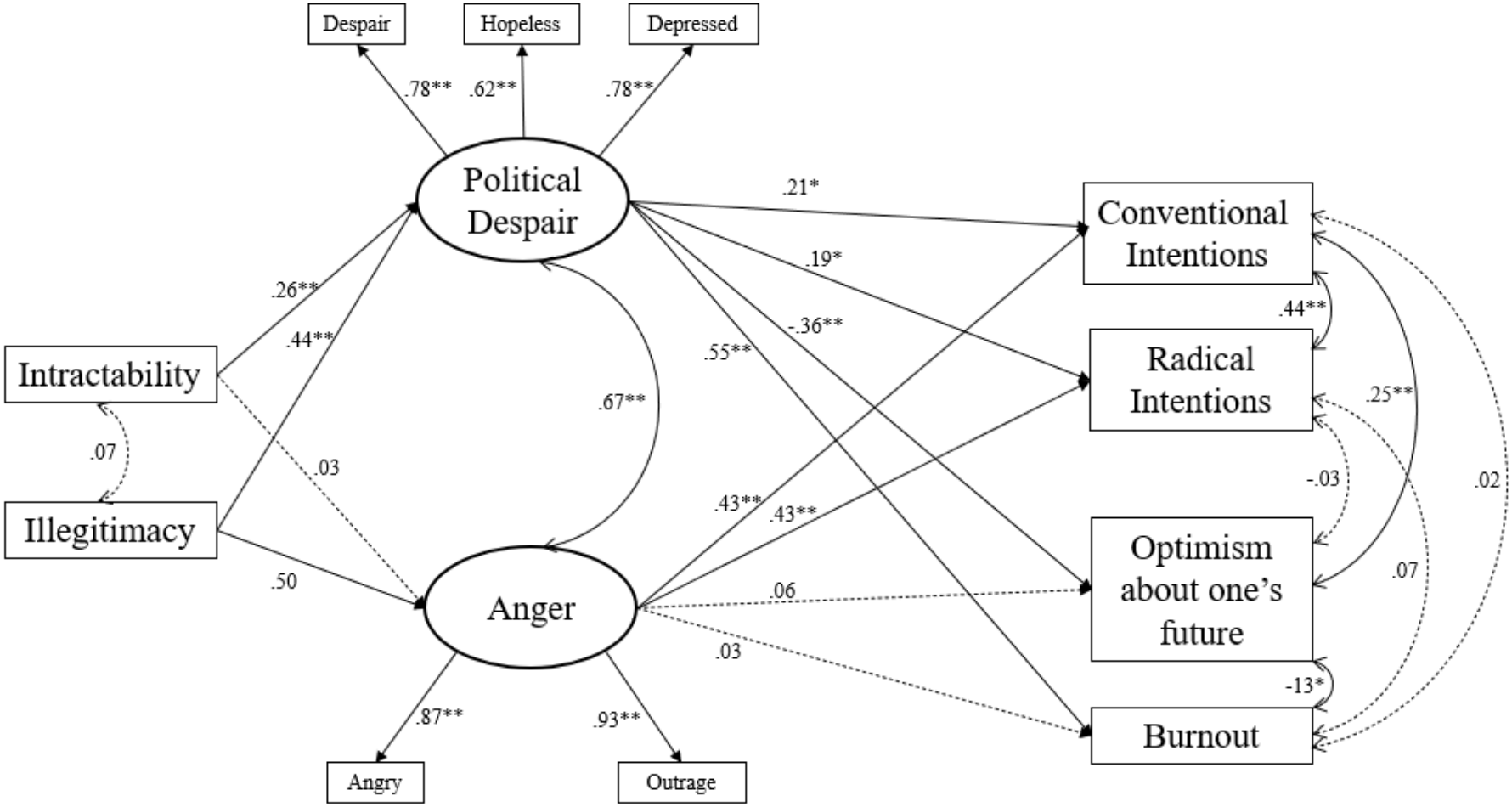
Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .0$

Overview of hope across the three studies. Overall, there are inconsistent relationships between hope and the appraisals and outcome variables across the three studies. Illegitimacy generally was not related to hope, although in Study 5 there was a weak negative relationship. However, the relationship between intractability and hope is very inconsistent suggesting that context may have an important relationship with this pathway (Study 3: moderately positive relationship, Study 4: no relationship, Study 5: moderately negative relationship). The relationships between hope and the outcome variables were also inconsistent across the three studies. The relationship between hope and conventional action was weak-moderate positive in Study 3, weak negative in Study 4 and moderate-strong positive in Study 5. The association between hope and radical action was weak-moderate positive in Study 3, weak negative in Study 4 and non-significant in Study 5. The relationship between hope and well-being was also inconsistent but less comparable due to the differing facets measured in the model. Overall, the results suggest that hope's antecedents and outcomes are highly contextually influenced, whereas despair had more stable appraisals and set of effects.

Separating collective action intentions and previous actions. I again tested if the pattern of effects remains stable when action intentions and self-reported actions are separated, however, as I did not include self-reported radical actions in the primary model, I only test the model with action intentions. I again found the patterns of results of the intentions model to be consistent with the primary model. See Figure S8 for the action intentions model and Table S5 for the model fit indices.

Figure S8.

Study 5 Standardised Regression Coefficients for the Tests of the Effects of Appraisals, Emotions, Action Intentions and Well-Being.



Note. dashed line denotes non-significant paths. * Denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .001$

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Appendix B

Chapter 4 - Supplementary Materials

As indicated in the Chapter 4, there is a clear link between active disengagement (fact of burnout) and a lack of engagement in collective actions to bring about climate justice. Furthermore, previous research has found political despair is related to engagement in collective action. As such, I am also interested in exploring the links between climate despair, pragmatism, and utopian thinking in the context of support for collective actions. There are two forms of collective actions that I am interested in, *conventional*, legal, political actions such as signing petitions and attending peaceful protests (Leach et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2020). On the other hand, there are *radical* actions that are often illegal and potentially violent such as rallies that have confrontation with the police (Jiménez-Moya et al., 2015). With similar theorising to that of disengagement (see Chapter 4), I suggest that the use of utopian thinking and pragmatism may also be beneficial in bolstering individuals' engagement in conventional actions. As such for Study 7 I hypothesise:

H3: a three-way interaction such that people high in despair will report higher conventional collective action when they engage in the pragmatic + utopian thinking condition, compared to the other conditions.

I am also interested in exploring the links between climate despair, pragmatism, and utopian thinking in the context of support for radical collective actions. Chapter 3 found that despair was associated with increased intentions to, and self-reported engagement in, radical collective action. This may be due to seeing issues like climate change as intractable, which may mean people feel as though they have 'nothing to lose' by engaging in more extreme actions to bring about change (Chapter 2 and 3; Scheepers et al., 2006; Tausch et al., 2011); and that nothing will change unless they resort to more radical tactics (see Saab et al., 2016; Louis et al., 2022; Lizzio-Wilson et al., 2021). Regarding the relationship between high despair and support for radical action, in the context of exposure to utopian thinking and pragmatism, there are two discrete possibilities (competing

hypotheses reflected in H4a and H4b respectively). First, as the combination of pragmatism and utopian thinking potentially provides a pathway to action and resolution through conventional, legal avenues, the use of illegal and/or violent means may be considered unnecessary. Based on this argument, I would expect:

H4a: a three-way interaction in which people high in despair will report lower radical collective action if they engage in the pragmatic + utopian thinking condition, compared to the other conditions.

However, engaging in pragmatism as well as utopian thinking may alternatively make people more inclined to engage in radical tactics as they perceive their utopia a significant departure from the present (as per the criticism function of Utopian thinking; Fernando, et al., 2018; Kashima, & Fernando, 2020; Levitas, 1990). Thus, people may believe they require the use of radical actions in order to bridge the gap between the status quo and the desired future. In this case, I would again predict:

H4b: a three-way interaction, whereby people high in despair will report greater support for radical collective action if they engage in the pragmatic + utopian thinking condition, compared to the other conditions.

Conventional and radical collective action engagement was measured the same was as in the Pilot Study of Chapter 4, for Study 7: conventional actions ($\alpha = .907$) and radical actions ($\alpha = .892$), Study 8: conventional actions ($\alpha = .903$) and radical actions ($\alpha = .898$).

In this supplementary material I employ the same analytical approach as Chapter 4, whereby I test the moderating effects of utopian thinking and pragmatism on the relationship between climate despair and conventional [radical] collective actions.

Study 7

I found participants tended to be moderately engaged in conventional actions whereas their engagement in radical actions was below the mid-point. Climate despair was also moderately

correlated with both conventional and radical collective actions. Exhaustion was associated with engaging in radical collective actions but was not correlated with conventional actions, whereas disengagement was negatively related to both conventional and radical collective actions. See Table S15 for descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

Testing the exacerbating and attenuating factors driving conventional collective action

To test the effect of climate despair on engagement in conventional collective actions, as well as the hypothesis that people high in despair will report higher conventional action intentions when they engage in the pragmatic + utopian thinking condition, compared to the other conditions (H3) I used Hayes PROCESS Model 3. I found climate despair had a main effect on conventional actions (B = .33, SE = .04 p <.001) whereby an increase in despair was associated an increase in conventional actions. Similar to the results in Chapter 4, I again found no evidence for a three-way interaction, thus not supporting Hypothesis 3 (B = -.02, SE = .04 p =.62). Neither of the moderating conditions had a significant main effect on conventional actions (utopian thinking B = -.02, SE = .06 p = .67, pragmatism B = .05, SE = .06 p = .36).

Testing the exacerbating and attenuating factors driving radical collective action

To test the effect of climate despair on radical collective actions as well as the competing hypotheses of radical collective action (H4a&b), I again used Model 3. The analysis indicated that there was a main effect of climate despair on radical collective actions, such that when despair increases, so too does radical action engagement (B = .26, SE = .03 p <.001). Again, contrary to my hypotheses, there was no three-way interaction (B = .03, SE = .03 p = .39). That is, I did not find that utopian thinking + pragmatism had attenuating or exacerbating effects on the climate despair-radical collective action relationship. Utopian thinking did not have a moderating effect on radical actions (B = -.01, SE = .05 p = .68). However, pragmatism had a facilitative effect on radical actions (B = .13, SE = .05 p = .01). That is, those who completed the pragmatism task had greater intentions to engage in radical actions, compared to the other conditions.

In Study 7 I found climate despair was positively associated with engagement in both conventional and radical collective action. That is, when people felt more despair, they were more likely to engage in actions, which reflects the findings from Chapter 3. It appears that when combined, utopian thinking and pragmatism have no effect on people's engagement in both forms of collective actions. Moreover, the separate task of utopian thinking had no effect on engagement in either form of action, but pragmatism did have a facilitative effect on radical collective actions (but no relationship with conventional actions).

Table S15.

Study 7 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of All Supplementary Variables.

	M (SD)	Climate despair	Exhaustion	Disengagement	Conventional action intentions	Radical action intentions
Climate despair	4.08 (1.56)	1				
Exhaustion	3.58 (1.60)	.437**	1			
Disengagement	3.32 (1.45)	-.033	.336**	1		
Conventional action intentions	4.10 (1.50)	.348**	.014	-.534**	1	
Radical action intentions	2.42 (1.39)	.286**	.181**	-.262**	.617**	1

Note. ** denotes $p < .001$.

Study 8

In Study 8 I employ the same approach and am again interested in testing the relationship between climate despair and engagement in both conventional and radical actions. In Study 8 (as described in Chapter 4), I addressed a methodological confound of time and integrated the utopian thinking and pragmatic tasks into one task (instead of the separate tasks done in Study 7). Given the findings from Study 7, I also specifically test the following hypothesis:

H5: Pragmatism (relative to the control) will increase the relationship between despair and radical actions.

In Study 8, participants reported moderate engagement in conventional collective actions but their engagement in radical actions was well below the midpoint. Despair had a weak-moderate positive relationship with both conventional and radical collective actions. Exhaustion was positively, moderately associated with radical collective actions but was not related to conventional actions, whereas disengagement was negatively associated with both conventional and radical collective actions. See Table S16 for descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

Testing the exacerbating and attenuating factors driving conventional collective action

Replicating the findings of Study 7, I found climate despair had a main effect on conventional actions (B = .40, SE = .04 p <.001), such that an increase in despair was associated with an increase in conventional action engagement. I again found no evidence of the three-way interaction, (B = .01, SE = .04 p =.69), therefore indicating the combined task did not attenuate or exacerbate conventional action engagement. Unlike Study 7, there was a positive main effect of utopian thinking (B = .12, SE = .06 p = .03) on conventional actions. However, as I found in Study 7, there was no main effect of pragmatism (B = .06, SE = .06 p = .28). These results suggest that only engaging in utopian thinking by itself has the potential to bolster engagement in conventional collective action.

Testing the exacerbating and attenuating factors driving radical collective action

Finally, I tested the climate despair-radical collective action relationship and found there was a main effect of political despair (B = .28, SE = .04, p <.001), whereby an increase in despair relates to an increase in radical actions (replicating the Study 7 finding). I again tested the three-way interaction and replicated the Study 7 results as there was no three-way interaction (B = .02, SE = .04, p = .64). Additionally, there was again no main effect of utopian thinking (B = .07, SE = .06, p = .19). However, unlike Study 7 and contrary to Hypothesis 5, pragmatism also did not have a main effect on radical actions (B = .05, SE = .04, p = .64). The results indicated that none of the conditions impacted people's willingness to engage in radical actions in Study 8.

In Study 8, I found climate despair was positively related to engagement in both forms of action. The integrated version of the utopian thinking + pragmatism task appears to also have no effect on engagement in either form of collective action. Utopian thinking was found to increase engagement in conventional forms of action but did not impact radical actions. Finally, pragmatism had no effects on either form of collective actions.

Table S17 shows an overview of the findings for conventional and radical collective action engagement. Overall, in these studies, I found climate despair was positively associated with engagement in conventional and radical forms of collective action in both studies. These findings also reflect findings from Chapter 3 that also show a positive relationship between despair and action engagement. I also found that the utopian thinking + pragmatism task had no effect on conventional or radical collective action engagement in either study, similar to the findings in Chapter 4 that show disengagement is also not affected by the combination task. The separate effects of utopian thinking and pragmatism were inconsistent across the two studies. That is, in Study 7 (but not Study 8), pragmatism was found to increase people's willingness to engage in radical actions (but not conventional actions). Whereas in Study 8 (but not Study 7), I found

engaging in utopian thinking increased people's engagement in only conventional collective actions.

Table S16.

Study 8 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of All Supplementary Variables.

	M (SD)	Climate despair	Exhaustion	Disengagement	Conventional action	Radical action
Climate despair	4.02 (1.53)	1				
Exhaustion	3.60 (1.64)	.437**	1			
Disengagement	3.46 (1.44)	-.080*	.330**	1		
Conventional action	4.09 (1.48)	.407**	.128**	-.534**	1	
Radical action	2.43 (1.41)	.299**	.220**	-.257**	.628**	1

Note. ** denotes $p < .001$

Table S17.

Overview of the findings

		3-way interaction	Main effect of despair	Main effect of utopian thinking	Main effect of pragmatic thinking
Study 7	Conventional actions	X	✓	X	X
	Radical actions	X	✓	X	✓
Study 8	Conventional actions	X	✓	✓	X
	Radical actions	X	✓	X	X