Anchored in Mannheim’s theory, the concept of political generations captures how new movement recruits respond to shifting political contexts and become agents of change within a social movement. A key challenge when using this concept in generational analyses is to link context with agency. In this article, I make this link by focusing on the interactions between political contexts and movement agency. My study among two generations of feminist activism in Ecuador and Peru found that both cohorts interacted with two sociopolitical conditions—prevailing gender relations and notions of political action—when they were initially mobilized. These interactions took different forms for each cohort, thereby shaping their distinct understandings and practices of feminist activism, and continuing to have consequences for movement goals, strategies, and relationships over time. For the earlier generation, which became active between the late 1970s and early 1990s, consequences meant practicing militancy to achieve goals, deploying vanguardism to execute a comprehensive strategy, and exerting autonomy to manage the actions of the powerful. I theorize the interactions between movement agency and political contexts as a mesostructure, where process and structure meet, thereby providing a more comprehensive account of the mechanism of change bringing about political generations.

KEYWORDS: feminist activism; interactions; Latin America; mesostructure; political generations; sociopolitical conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary feminist movements in Latin America developed in the 1970s when most countries in the region had highly unequal societies and substantial portions of the population lacked basic rights and suffrage. In fact, because so many inhabitants were categorized as not being subjects with rights, Dagnino (2003)
argues that reversing this status became the primary claim of contemporary social movements, including feminism. Between the 1970s and the early 2000s, research on feminist movements in Latin America concentrated on the contributions of these to democratic transitions and peace processes (Franceschet 2004; Jaquette 1989, 2009; Rios Tobar 2003); the tensions between activism targeting the State and activism rejecting collaboration with the State (Alvarez et al. 2002; Sternbach et al. 1992; Vargas 1989, 1992); and the relationship between feminist movements and the State as neoliberalism, populism, and professionalization expanded (Lind 2003; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Rousseau 2006). Since the new millennium, research has centered on indigenous, black, queer, and rural feminisms (Caldwell 2010; Duarte 2012; Hernandez Castillo 2010), and younger cohorts and their distinct forms of feminist activism (Epelde 2009; Goicolea et al. 2014; Gómez-Ramírez and Cruz 2008; Vega 2012).

Although a few studies examine intergenerational dynamics within the Argentine feminist movement since the late 1990s (Borland 2014; Friedman and Rodríguez Gustá 2023; Sutton 2020), in-depth generational analyses of feminist movements in Latin America are surprisingly rare.

Generational analyses help clarify how and why social movements change and endure over time. Anchored in Mannheim’s (1927/28 [1952]) theory, the concept of political generations captures how new movement recruits respond to shifting political contexts and become agents of change within a social movement. A key challenge for researchers using political generations is to link contexts to agency because Mannheim himself did not fully theorize how this occurs (Pilcher 1994). This challenge exists for any generational analysis grounded in Mannheim’s theory, even those of the wider population beyond social movement activists (see Aboim and Vasconcelos 2014; Woodman and Wyn 2015). Generational analyses of social movements tend to focus either on the formative processes of political generations occurring within movement agency as clearly separate from political contexts (Johnston and Aarela-Tart 2000; Rayner and Morales-Rivera 2020; Reger 2012; Rocca Rivarola 2021; Whittier 1995) or on the political contexts shaping from the outside the formation of political generations inside a movement (Armstrong 2003; Chen 2014).

In this article, I enhance the existing literature by focusing on the interactions between movement agency and political contexts. My study among two generations of feminist activism in Ecuador and Peru found that political contexts were not “out there” but rather experienced deeply by each cohort. Nor were political contexts simply merged into formative processes. Instead, each cohort interacted with political contexts to form a political generation. I theorize the interactions between movement agency and political contexts as a mesostructure where process and structure meet (Maines 1979, 1982). In the mesostructure realm, conditions (i.e., political contexts) are ongoing processes and their consequences for the actions of acting units (i.e., movement agency) develop overtime (Maines 1979, 1982). Theorizing the interactions between movement agency and political contexts as a mesostructure, I argue, provides a more comprehensive account of the mechanism of change forming political generations in social movements and having long-term consequences for movement goals and strategies. It further contributes a new tool to enhance generational analyses not only of activists in social movements but also of wider populations.
My study emerged from two previous ones where I inductively found evidence of generational change on activism around body politics. The first study examined reproductive rights activism in Peru. The second study examined youth-led sexual health activism in Peru and Ecuador. Neither study considered participants in generational terms a priori. Instead, age came into focus when, in the first study, participants were almost all over 40 years old and expressed concern that no younger cohorts were taking up the struggle for reproductive rights. I knew this was not the case due to my own previous employment in this field in Peru during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when feminist and community development organizations led the first efforts to train young people on gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. The second study found that youth-led activism on sexual health had adopted the label “youth” to distinguish their forms of activism from those developed by adult-run organizations. The differences between the two cohorts suggested a cleavage along generational lines and raised the question of why this cleavage had emerged and what consequences it had for movement goals and strategies. My methodological approach followed the “imprint paradigm,” which Hart-Brinson (2018) explains as follows: “if we see some possible evidence of generational change or witness some notable event that could cause it, then we should investigate its causes, its effects, and the boundaries of the cohorts that are affected.” It is considered the most scientifically sound approach to generational analyses compared to the “pulse-rate paradigm” in which generations are created by researchers according to stages in the life-course (Hart-Brinson 2018).

Consequently, for the study presented here, I did consider participants in generational terms a priori. My study aimed to clarify how and why two generations of feminist activism in Ecuador and Peru understood and practiced feminist mobilizing as they did. I purposively selected a new sample that comprised two cohorts of feminist activism (not limited to body politics). The first cohort, which I refer to as the initiator generation, included new recruits who joined the movement between the late 1970s and early 1990s. It was the first to self-identify as feminist in their respective countries, a label that had not been used previously by women’s rights activism. The second cohort included new recruits who joined the movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I refer to this cohort as the innovator generation because even though it had been mobilized into feminist activism by the initiator generation and continued to engage with it, this generation intentionally forged new forms of feminist activism that were distinct from the initiator generation. I will present a combined analysis from both generations along with the in-depth findings of the initiator generation. The in-depth findings on the innovator generation have been published previously (Coe 2015, 2021).

For the analysis of each generation, I combined the interviews from Peru and Ecuador because I did not find large distinctions across the two countries in my data. Ecuador and Peru have shared and divergent historical trajectories, especially concerning the contemporary transition to majority rule. During the 1970s, reformist military regimes in both countries adopted measures to move from longstanding minority rule, in which a few legal political parties represented the interests of a wealthy elite, to majority rule, in which all inhabitants had suffrage and interests represented. Measures included removing literacy requirements for voting, legalizing
all political parties, dismantling oligarchs’ wealth concentration, and stimulating community-based participation. These changes from “above” converged with a widespread demand for majority rule from “below” by mass organizations and previously excluded political parties (mostly left leaning), eventually producing an end to the military regimes. However, in Peru, the Shining Path insurgency emerged in the late 1970s followed by the government counterinsurgency, engendering an internal conflict that persisted until the mid-1990s and had a devastating impact on civil society. In Ecuador, no armed insurgency took hold. Instead, the country’s indigenous population developed into a strong grassroots movement to become a national political actor by the 1990s, which did not occur in Peru.

THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL GENERATIONS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

According to Mannheim (1927/28:303–304 [1952]), a political generation or generation as actuality arises when members of a generation forge a concrete connection with one another through their exposure to and involvement in a disruptive process, and in turn, participate in social change even with differing and opposing reactions. Applied to the study of social movements, new recruits, regardless of age, are understood as mutually experiencing a shifting political context that binds them together as a political generation. New political generations contribute to maintaining and transforming movement goals and strategies.

Most studies of political generations in social movements focus on the formative process occurring within movement agency as clearly separate from political contexts. In her pivotal study of the Ohio radical feminist movement from 1969 to 1992, Whittier (1995, 1997) found that different micro-cohorts of recruits created new collective identities in response to distinct political contexts. Political contexts consisted of internal movement dynamics, the strength of left-wing versus right-wing social movements, and policymakers support for feminism. As collective identities were redefined, new modes of activism developed, resulting in conflict and change within the movement. Turning to the contemporary US feminist movement after the new millennium, Reger (2012, 2015) found that a later generation of activists formed in three communities by disidentifying with an earlier generation. While for Mannheim, disidentification occurs when a disempowered minority responds to a dominant culture, Reger (2015:93) contends that disidentification is in fact a two-way process in which identities are created in opposition to each other. In her study, even the earlier generation engaged in inverted disidentification with the later generation. Political contexts, defined as external support for feminism, shaped the degree of cross-generational collaboration between later and earlier of activism.

Drawing upon this social movement approach to political generations, Rocca Rivarola (2021) shows how distinct generations of political party activists in Argentina and Brazil formed through their experience of activist training. Whereas the generation that became active in the 1960s and 1970s recalled a lengthy learning process, the 1980s generation perceived a decline in training quality. Those of the 1990s and later generations did not recall receiving any training, attending a short course,
or being trained simply to defend government policies. Activist trainings changed with shifting political contexts, defined as internal relations between activists and party organization, and the external relations between party organization and government. Employing collective action framing, Johnston and Aarelaid-Tart (2000) found that the Estonian national opposition during the twentieth century adapted two master frames—a pure Estonian national identity and a Sovietized one—to distinct political contexts. Framing in turn shaped the understandings of what collective action was considered suitable and desirable.

These studies employ different concepts—collective identity, disidentification, activist training, and collective framing—to capture how movement actors respond to shifting political contexts and form political generations. Political contexts, in turn, are treated mainly as changes in conditions external to this movement agency, such as political support or movement relations. Rayner and Morales-Rivera (2020) conclude that the relatively stable political context in Costa Rica throughout the twentieth century explains why they did not find political generations in their study of the antiprivatization/CAFTA movement around the new millennium.

Alternatively, other studies focus on the political contexts shaping from the outside the formation of political generations inside a movement. Armstrong (2003) focuses on a generation of gay/lesbian activists that formed in San Francisco in the late 1960s through experience with a context of collective creativity provided by the New Left. The context of collective creativity brought together a goal of striving for personal authenticity with a strategy emphasizing individual participation. This context allowed the new generation of gay/lesbian activists to develop innovative “coming out” strategies as well as inclusive and diversified organizations focused on identity politics. Meanwhile, Chen (2014) found that the institutionalization of the feminist movement in Mexico provided a conducive context to mobilize a younger generation of feminist activists in the 2000s. This context consisted of providing young people with internships and employment in feminist nonprofit organizations as well as offering them university courses on gender, which in turn developed their feminist consciousness and taught them solidarity with other groups. 4

The studies outlined here draw upon Mannheim’s (1927/28 [1952]) concept of political generations to clarify how change and continuity occurs within social movements. However, a key challenge with using this concept is making the link between agency and context. Mannheim (1927/28 [1952]) emphasized that each person subjectively experiences objective historical circumstances but fell short of theorizing how this becomes a shared experience between people. Recent theorizing proposes moving beyond this subject–object division by complementing Mannheim’s theory of generations with Foucault’s discourses or Bourdieu’s habitus (Aboim and Vasconcelos 2014; Pilcher 1994; Woodman and Wyn 2015). A limitation with these approaches is that attention to movement agency is reduced. My own study found that each cohort of feminist activism interacted with two disruptive sociopolitical conditions to form a political generation and these interactions had long-term consequences for their activism. I therefore propose linking movement agency to political

4 I exclude here studies that focus on the distinct characteristics of political generations in social movements rather than their formative processes (e.g., Borland 2014; Milkman 2017; Sutton 2020).
contexts by focusing on the interactions between them and theorizing these interactions as a mesostructure (Maines 1979:527, 1982).

The concept of mesostructure has its roots in American pragmatism and interactionism. Dewey developed a definition of experience around the same time as Mannheim, but one that was quite different. Whereas Mannheim (1927/28 [1952]) defined experience as entirely subjective, Dewey (1917 [2011]:4) proposed that experience is always a transaction between persons and their physical and social environment (Dewey 1917 [2011]:4). This definition forms the basis of an interactionist view of the interpretive process, whereby acting units (persons, groups, organizations) interact with objects, interpret these objects by making indications to themselves, and based on these indications, determine how to act (Blumer 1969). Here too is a clear difference with Mannheim, who viewed interpretative processes as occurring in each person’s conscious. For interactionism, acting units fit their meanings and actions to other acting units through ongoing interaction, communication, and negotiation. In this way, acting units form shared definitions and joint action that not only create social structures but also constrain future action or agency (Blumer 1969; Maines 1977; Strauss 1978). The concept of mesostructure specifies the domain in which agency and structure meet, where “social structures are enacted, and which, through their enactment, become modified into meaningful patterns of participation” (Maines 1982:275). In place of Mannheim’s subject–object division, mesostructure constitutes “subject–object unity.” Two elements of mesostructure—conditions and consequences—are central for interpreting my findings. In the mesostructure domain, conditions and consequences are understood as processes, rather than events, and are thereby integrated into lines of action (Maines 1982:275). The focus of inquiry is on the interaction between aspects of conditions and consequences, and the acting units who experience these aspects as conditions and consequences (Maines 1982:275). Applied to the formation of political generations in social movements, mesostructure turns attention to the interactions between movement agency and political contexts, and specifically to their conditioning and consequential processes.

METHODS

The overall aim of my study was to clarify how and why two cohorts of feminist activism in Ecuador and Peru understood and practiced feminist mobilizing as they did. I purposively selected a new sample of feminist activists in Peru and Ecuador from the two cohorts described in the introduction. To recruit the initiator cohort in Ecuador, I received help from my colleague who had worked there previously on gender equality and reproductive rights. To recruit the initiator cohort in Peru, I turned to contacts that I had acquired while working there previously on gender equality and reproductive rights. The innovator cohort in Ecuador and Peru was recruited with help from participants in my earlier study on youth sexual health activism. Data were collected during two separate visits, one to Ecuador in January 2012, and a second to Peru in August 2012. During data collection, I asked all participants to recommend other feminist organizations or key activists to include in my
study, allowing me to cross-check my own sample and expand it to include more perspectives. For example, while in Lima, I added interviews with a feminist collective at a private university and with individual activists from the innovator cohort who worked in feminist organizations from the initiator cohort. Most participants were currently members of a feminist organizations that had been formed during one of the two time periods. Those who were not members of a feminist organization worked for either a government agency or an international donor at the time; all were from the initiator generation. While the chronological age of participants in each generation varied, all participants were mobilized into political activism during their young adulthood. All were over 18 years old at the time of data collection. The total sample consisted of 24 activists from the initiator generation and 21 activists from the innovator generation from three cities in Ecuador: Quito, Guayaquil, and Coca, and two cities in Peru: Lima and Arequipa. The names, organizational affiliation, and location of the initiator generation can be found in Table I, and for the innovator generation in Coe (2015).

To gather and analyze data, I chose constructivist Grounded Theory method following Charmaz (2014) because even though I had evidence of a generational cleavage from two earlier studies, I did not know why this cleavage arose or what consequences it had for feminist activism. Grounded Theory method allowed me to focus on inquiry on participants’ actions, meanings, and interactions, and provided tools to create concepts and models based on the empirical materials. A constructivist approach means that I view data collection as a process involving my interactions with participants, the empirical materials as a creation between participants and myself, and my resulting analysis as one interpretation of the empirical materials (Charmaz 2014).

I gathered data through in-depth interviews with individuals, small groups (dyads, groups of three), and two large groups. To give study participants ample room to convey their own experiences and understandings, I used an interview guide comprised of four open-ended questions, three of which were used in the analysis presented here. The first question focused on what participants considered important and in need of political action concerning gender inequalities. With the initiator generation, I asked them to discuss how priorities had changed or remained the same since they began their activism. The second question asked how successful governmental gender equality policies were in addressing gender inequalities and what other changes were needed. The third question asked how participants organized and conducted feminist political action and perceived the feminist movement. I asked every study participant these same three questions and, according to their responses, developed follow-up questions in the moment. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts imported into a qualitative data analysis program, organized in two datasets: one for initiator generation and one for the innovative generation.

I performed the coding techniques of Grounded Theory method separately for each data set (Charmaz 2014). Initial coding entailed first going through each interview entirely, interpreting and comparing different portions of text, and creating and assigning codes to these portions. Next, I compared codes with one another, sorted them and grouped them into clusters, working back and forth between the emerging
clusters, the codes, and the interview texts. I then refined my clusters into categories by organizing subcategories within them or merging categories together, and finally theorized the relationship between the categories. These steps were conducted first with the data set on the innovator generation and four main categories were developed: *politicizing the sociocultural*, *developing an emergent feminist movement*, *responding to blurred gender inequalities*, and *facing a well-developed feminist movement*. The four categories were related to one another as follows: the innovator generation pursued a strategy of politicizing the sociocultural in response to blurred gender inequalities as an emergent social condition (Coe 2015), and it mobilized as an emergent feminist movement in response to a well-developed feminist movement (Coe 2021). I theorized and published these findings on their own because few published studies existed on young people’s feminist activism in Latin America.

### Table 1. Participants’ Location, Name, and Organizational Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City, country</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organizational affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quito, Ecuador</td>
<td>Dolores Padilla</td>
<td>Fundación Esquel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercy Lopez</td>
<td>Program Coordinator, Justice and Human Rights Program, Nation Council of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soledad Guayasamin (Passed 2020)</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund Ecuador (previously Sendas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guayaquil, Ecuador</td>
<td>Virginia Gomez La Torre</td>
<td>Fundación Desafío</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maria Quispe</td>
<td>Mujeres por la Vida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca, Ecuador</td>
<td>Sonia Rodríguez</td>
<td>Centro Ecuatoriano para la promoción y acción de la Mujer (CEPAM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lima, Peru</td>
<td>María Inés Ramírez Maldonado</td>
<td>Fundación Ayllu Huarmicuna, Mujeres y Familia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cecilia Olea</td>
<td>Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaby Cevasco</td>
<td>Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ana María Yanez Malaga</td>
<td>Movimiento Manuela Ramos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>María Yasbel Cedano</td>
<td>Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (DEMUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gioconda Dieguez</td>
<td>Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossina Guerrero</td>
<td>Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos (Promsex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George Liendo</td>
<td>Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos (Promsex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arequipa, Peru</td>
<td>Mercedes Cruz Diaz (Meche)</td>
<td>Asociación Humanidad Libre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercedes Neves (Meme)</td>
<td>Ministerio de Salud, UNSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosa Dominga Trapazo (Passed 2019)</td>
<td>Maryknoll Sister, Founding member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maria Elena Alegre Chalco</td>
<td>Creatividad y Cambio &amp; Talitha Cumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberta Marmanillo Aguayo</td>
<td>Grupo Cultural “Adela Montesinos”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicolás Perry Palomino Carreno</td>
<td>Leftist Feminist and LGBTQ activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teresita Mercedes Belón Malaga</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angela Huaquipaco Zagarra</td>
<td>Feminist activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deysi Lozano Meza</td>
<td>Feminist activist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aAt the time of data collection.*
I subsequently conducted the coding steps with the data set on the initiator generation and developed four new categories: journey to and within feminism, paving the way to influence policy change, developing a comprehensive, long-term strategy, and managing powerful actors. These categories were related to one another as follows: the journey of the innovator generation to and within feminism was shaped by living in and breaking with blatant gender hierarchies and Leftist modes of political action, which in turn had consequences for its goals (militancy), strategies (vanguardism), and relationships (autonomy), reflected in three remaining categories. I integrated the categories from both cohorts to construct an overarching model, presented next followed by the substantive model of the initiator generation to illustrate the overarching model.

RESULTS

The two generations prioritized similar issues but understood and practiced feminist activism differently. The initiator generation prioritized policy change by targeting institutions such as government, mass media, and professional associations. In contrast, the innovator generation prioritized sociocultural change by targeting discourses and practices concerning the family, household, and intimate relations. To clarify why generational differences emerged and what they had for consequences, I constructed an overarching model that represents the relationship between four concepts (Fig. 1). The first concept Living in and breaking with sociopolitical conditions depicts interactions between each cohort of feminist activism and the disruptive sociopolitical conditions that the cohort experienced when it was first mobilized. These interactions can be understood as a mesostructure where process and structure meet (Maines 1979, 1982). Living in and breaking with sociopolitical conditions encompasses a conditioning processes that did not end once the cohort was mobilized but rather continued overtime, and had long-term consequences for the development movement goals, strategies and relationships, portrayed

![Fig. 1. Interactions between feminist activism and sociopolitical conditions, and their consequences—overarching model.](image-url)
respectively in the three remaining categories in the model: Paving the way to achieve goals, Executing a comprehensive strategy, and Managing the actions of the powerful.

Living In and Breaking from Sociopolitical Conditions

Around the time that they were mobilized into feminist activism, each cohort interacted with two sociopolitical conditions: prevailing gender relations and notions of political action. Participants described these conditions not as external factors separate from themselves, but rather as lived experiences that they interpreted and based on their interpretations, developed shared lines of action. Furthermore, instead of mere subjective experiences, participants experienced these conditions by interacting with society and with other collective actors. Interactions took two opposing directions: one drawing them in and another pushing them out. The interactions between each cohort with the two sociopolitical conditions took different forms depending on the period in which they were mobilized.

For the initiator generation, the first sociopolitical condition was experienced as blatant gender hierarchies. Growing up in middle-class and lower middle-class urbanized families and schools, participants depicted interacting with gender relations that were unambiguously sex-segregated and authoritarian, as the following quote from Meche in Arequipa conveys:

I could not understand how my mother accepted the imposition of my father. I could not understand how, with six children, she was the only one responsible for their upbringing, nurturing, nutrition, education, and my father just gave orders. I could not accept it, why did I have to attend my brothers, why did I have to help her, and why did she have to attend my father.

Blatant gender hierarchies meant that as children and adolescents, they were not only restricted to closed physical spaces (household, school) and mundane domestic tasks but also expected to be subservient to men and boys. As they recollected their personal journey to feminism, participants’ accounts were filled with pain and anger from being imprisoned in their families and schools, which cannot be understood as mere rhetorical responses to dominant discourses regarding their generation. Instead, they recounted struggling with their physical and social environment in the same way that Dewey (1917 [2011]) defined the essence of human experience. Those study participants who were mobilized toward the end of the initiator generation, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, portrayed a similar struggle with their environment, even when they perceived slightly more openings, as Mary Ysabel in Lima described: “In my home, there was a contradiction, a paradox. On the one hand, we were motivated to think independently, to have our own ideas, but on the other hand, there was a hierarchy, a culture of submission.”

What made blatant gender hierarchies a disruptive sociopolitical condition for this cohort was that they were among a minority of women who had the opportunity to study at the university, acquire a meaningful profession, and participate in political action. They realized that this opportunity afforded them the means to break from an oppressive world and set a different course. Nonetheless, they also understood that this opportunity had not been readily available to their own mothers’ cohort. Indeed, as they began to interact with the wider society around them, the
initiator generation saw that this opportunity was still not available to most women in their countries and that blatant gender hierarchies existed in all spheres of society, that is education, work, church, medicine, and politics. Zaida in Quito explained:

It was different when we began to participate in feminism. There were a million unresolved things. Just to be in a public space was costly. Women at the time had to ask their husband for permission to work as a professional, to study a higher degree. We (women) were not congresspersons, UN delegates, presidents, or vice-presidents. We had to begin at zero.

For this cohort, class hierarchies in Ecuador and Peru were also blatant. To grasp the starkly different experiences of women from other sectors, especially urban and rural popular sectors, participants recounted integrating a class perspective.

The mutual experience portrayed by participants from the initiator generation contrasted with that depicted by informants from the innovator generation. The cohort of the innovator generation experienced prevailing gender relations as blurred gender hierarchies, consisting simultaneously of progressive and regressive changes (Coe 2015). Progressive changes included the widespread incorporation of women in education, employment, and politics whereas regressive change consisted of retrenchment in the family, domestic work, and intimate partnerships. Moreover, university education, professional occupations and political participation were experienced as quite available especially to the young people of diverse class backgrounds, including popular sectors, suggesting that even class hierarchies had become blurred. The initiator generation was also able to discern these changes to gender relations overtime, even though its own formative experience was different. Both generations acknowledged progressive changes to gender relations, many of which the initiator generation had helped bring about. Yet, they too identified a backlash to these changes, through brutal acts of violence, such as femicide, as George in Lima explains:

In the past, [men’s] chivalry combined with women’s submission maintained a tense calm. Not any longer. Women are killed for leaving their house, for standing up for equal rights, for expressing a different point of view. It is a strong reaction and a substantial change.

For the initiator generation, the second sociopolitical condition was experienced as Leftist modes of political action. Participants began to interact with Leftist modes of political action while studying at the university, and through these modes, encountered feminism. Two participants’ journeys to feminism illustrate this. During university, Cecilia in Lima joined a Trotskyist political party that was part of an international network. She recounted, “I became a feminist in my political party. At an international congress, one of the sessions was on socialist revolution and women’s emancipation.” She described learning about experiences from all over Latin America and Europe. Meanwhile, Dolores was exposed to the Leftist student and women’s liberation movements during university studies in France in the early 1970s, and explained, “I returned [to Quito] very red, on-fire red and searched for a Leftist party to join and be a militant in.” She continued:

When I proposed [to the party] to reach out to women, they told me that it was impossible; it would divide the proletariat and asked me why. I said ‘well, it is obvious, of three hundred members, only two are women. A campaign directed towards women is needed.’
This opposition did not stop Dolores from writing an internal document on ideas about women’s subordination among key leftist thinkers and leading outreach to popular women’s organizations. Even though participants described specific interactions in Leftist parties, Leftist modes of political action were overall tied to the widening notions of political action linked to the transition to majority rule in Ecuador and Peru described in the introduction. In the 1970s and 1980s, Leftist political parties worked most closely with organizations of the masses—laborers, farmers, indigenous populations, and student unions, having built ties with these over the course of decades prior.

What made Leftist modes of political action a disruptive sociopolitical condition for this cohort was that they encountered similar blatant gender hierarchies to those in their families of origin and schools. The following quote from Cecilia in Lima conveys how the Congress session on socialist revolutions and women’s emancipation changed her and other women party members:

It explained our feelings of injustice within the party. Of why women were not in decision-making positions, of why we had to dedicate ourselves to typing, administration and meal preparation, and of why, if we did not do these tasks, we were frowned upon as less militant. Before this, we did not know how to explain this feeling.

Similarly, Dolores in Quito depicted how as soon as she stated her support for women’s right to abortion, doors within the party closed. Zaida from Quito summarized how feminist activism of the initiator generation emerged through a break from Leftist parties: “In Ecuador, feminism experienced a divorce from Marxism because the majority of women who became feminists did so due to the inequities they experienced in the party, leading them to pursue their own space.” Another quote from Virginia in Quito illustrates their disappointment and frustration when Leftist political parties abandoned its militant women members who had become feminists: “We rejected how Leftist parties pursued politics without valuing women’s contribution and the lack of analysis or debate about why feminism was not valued. The Left did not consider feminism a political option.” Importantly, this break with the Left occurred already in the early 1980s when Leftist parties in Peru and Ecuador had both strength and influence well before the fall of the Soviet Union and the global decline in organizational forms tied to communist and socialist international networks. Again, participants described their interactions with Leftist modes of political action as filled with struggle between being liberated to act collectively upon their convictions while being constrained by blatant gender hierarchies.

The mutual experience with notions of political action portrayed by participants from the initiator generation diverged with that depicted by informants from the innovator generation. The cohort of the innovator generation described being mobilized by activities organized by the initiator generation of feminist activism. They experienced these encounters with the initiator generation as simultaneously inclusive and exclusionary (Coe 2021). Instead of Leftist modes of political action, the innovator generation lived in and broke from the feminist modes of political action, and it did so in the early 2000s when the initiator generation had both strength and influence. The innovator generation publicly critiqued the initiator generation, for instance, of having bureaucratized feminist activism and depoliticized
feminist ideas. There was a clear fissure between the two generations that persisted at the time of data collection in 2012, even if the initiator generation showed acceptance of this critique, as Meme from Arequipa expressed, “We need to be self-critical of the women’s movement and as feminists, as ourselves: what have we gained, what limitations have we had, and how can we support the new generations, because the future depends upon them.”

To summarize, both cohorts of feminist activism in Peru and Ecuador formed into a political generation by living in and breaking with the same two sociopolitical conditions in society and in collective actors: prevailing gender relations and notions of political action. However, each cohorts’ interactions with these two sociopolitical conditions were different, thereby forming two distinct political generations within the feminist movement in their respective countries. Moreover, the conditioning processes of living in and breaking from these two sociopolitical conditions did not end once participants were mobilized into feminism but rather continued to shape how each cohort defined their goals, strategies, and relationships overtime. For the initiator generation, this meant that even with the decline of the Left nationally and globally in the 1990s alongside improvements to gender hierarchies, it was still influenced by these original experiences. The consequences of living in and breaking from sociopolitical conditions are illustrated through three categories: practicing militancy to achieve goals, deploying vanguardism to execute a comprehensive strategy, and exerting autonomy to manage the actions of the powerful (Fig. 2).

Practicing Militancy to Achieve Goals

The initiator generation practiced militancy in elaborating, pursuing, and achieving its goals. Militancy consisted of two properties: commitment to a cause and commitment to an organization. Study participants were committed to the cause

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**Fig. 2.** Interactions between the initiator generation and sociopolitical conditions, and their consequences—substantive model.
of transforming the blatant gender hierarchies with which they interacted in society. Even though they acknowledged the need to change every aspect of society, three issues would come to dominate goals over the course of three decades: eliminating men’s violence against women, ensuring women’s right to decide over their bodies (reproduction and sexuality), and promoting women’s political participation. These three issues were portrayed as providing the clearest path to expose blatant gender hierarchies, as the following two quotes on violence illustrate. Virginia from Quito recounted, “The issue of violence against women, I believe, was the fundamental axis; it was the most important, because its association with subordination is very evident.” Maria Ysabel in Lima recalled, “During the first ten years of DEMUS, we fought against violence towards women as a form of sex or gender-based discrimination, that is, as evidence of gender inequalities.” Rosa Dominga in Arequipa explained this regarding reproductive rights:

Women must have the power to control their fertility to have other life options and not be limited exclusively to motherhood – if we are going to be able to talk about gender relations that offer different life options.

Finally, George in Lima, commented on political participation:

I remember when I still worked at (Movimiento) Manuela Ramos, it was constantly struggling for women’s political participation. This has changed in recent years in Peru. It is no longer a surprise after two electoral cycles with both Lourdes (Flores) and Keiko (Fujimori) as presidential candidates.

Moreover, these three issues were linked together because getting more women involved in politics, regardless of their ideological orientation, was seen as needed to advance the other two issues. From its inception until the 1990s, the initiator generation was the only sector clearly advocating for these issues, filling a crucial gap, and allowing it to acquire unique expertise regarding these issues. This generations’ commitment to these issues remained evident at the time of data collection.

Another property of militancy was commitment to an organization. The type of women’s organizing that existed prior to this generation, such as Women’s Clubs, was an important reference point. Yet, the initiator generation had been exposed to a particular model of organization based on their experience in Leftist political parties that was well suited to the broad-based transformations of the time. After the break with Leftist political parties, this generation replaced the party with its own organizations dedicated exclusively to feminism, that is, the first ones to self-identify as feminist in their countries. Like Leftist parties, these were never intended to be mass organizations, but rather from the beginning, were close-knit, specialized organizations capable of providing support to mass organizations (discussed in next section). From within these organizations, the initiator generation developed feminist positions by learning about issues and conducting research, feminist materials by producing radio programs and magazines, feminist methods by preparing and providing trainings and popular education, and feminist mobilization by holding demonstrations and giving testimony. Like Leftist parties, they built networks of organizations and individual activists across their countries as well as across Latin America. Evidence of this generations’ militancy to these organizations consists of
that its members continued to work for many of the original organizations, such as Centro Ecuatoriano para la Promoción y Acción de la Mujer (CEPAM) in Guayaquil and Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán in Lima, and these original organizations continue today, which could have only been possible by attracting new cohorts.

Once established, these feminist organizations provided a direct and indirect institutional context for mobilizing others into feminist activism, as Chen found in Mexico (Chen 2014). Sonia in Guayaquil was involved church-based community organizing and worked for an international nonprofit organization prior to joining CEPAM in 1994:

In CEPAM, I realized that I had been completely unaware of how terrible the situation for women was; situations that were completely disrespectful, that affected their expectations, their dreams ... we worked on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and this opened the door to working with young people’s health and rights.

While some participants, like Sonia, remained in the established feminist organizations, others used their experience working in an established feminist organization to start their own. Gioconda in Lima worked first for Movimiento Manuela Ramos in the 1990s before eventually helping to start Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir in the late 2000s. Ines in Coca, who previously worked in a local nonprofit organization that offered leadership training to rural and indigenous women, started a feminist organization dedicated to men’s violence against women in 1999, “Because the women who arrived at the training had been beaten.”

Militancy was crucial for this generation to elaborate, pursue, and achieve its goals. When it began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it had very few supportive conditions and would have to work over a decade to exert influence to obtain outcomes. While militancy was understood as fulfilling and stimulating, it had a personal toll, as Rossina in Lima explained:

As a feminist at my age with a family and all, it is a high cost to pay, being out in public, even though I have a husband who is incredibly supportive, who is at home and takes responsibility, there is a cost to doing professional activism.

**Deploying Vanguardism to Execute a Comprehensive Strategy**

The initiator generation deployed vanguardism in directing their strategy. Vanguardism consisted of two properties: being a frontrunner on feminism when collaborating with allies and being a frontrunner on feminism when targeting powerful actors. Together, these two properties made up the base of a multi-prong, multi-scale advocacy strategy.

The first prong of this strategy consisted of grassroots advocacy. Feminist activists borrowed not only an organizational model but also an organizing model from Leftist political parties. Leftist parties in both countries had collaborated with labor organizations in urban and rural areas through much of the twentieth century by supporting workers’ demands and gaining their support for Leftist orientations. The initiator generation followed a similar model to reach three other forms of women’s
activism at the start: women in political parties, popular women’s organizations, and women in labor unions. Cecilia from Lima explained: “Latin American feminism had the characteristic of, from the very beginning, intentionally attempting to work across different social classes.” These early efforts led to the creation of coalitions and networks, such as the Coordinadora Política de Mujeres Ecuatorianas, which Virginia described as follows: “the Coordinadora was a very plural, broad movement in which everyone participated, those from the right and those from the left, those against some things and those in favor of these.”

Vanguardism at the grassroots was bidirectional. On one hand, it consisted of the initiator generation bringing feminist ideas and issues to other forms of women’s activism. Specifically, the self-identified feminist organizations provided trainings to these collective actors, delivered services for them and their communities on reproductive health and legal assistance, and conducted joint campaigns together with them. Gaby in Lima described participants in a leadership training that Flora Tristan offered women leaders of urban popular organizations to prepare to run for political office at the time of data collection in 2012. “There is a tremendous demand to learn, they have political intentions because they know that they can better serve their community and attain more goals from a political office.” On the other hand, the vanguard model entailed the initiator generation learning about the conditions faced by other sectors of women in society as well as the priorities identified by other forms of women’s activism, and subsequently integrating this knowledge into its own strategy and thereby supporting their goals. The collaboration proved to be mutually enhancing as Meme from Arequipa described regarding urban popular women’s organizations: “Over the decades, change has occurred thanks to the dedication and work not only of feminist groups but also of women’s groups from community kitchens, community-based organizations, where another alternative emerged to address existing gender relations.” Although originally focused on urban areas where it too was based, the initiator generation expanded to encompass rural and indigenous movements as it acquired more capacity.

Nonetheless, collaboration was not without difficulties, especially due to the rigid social hierarchies that reinforced differences between women from diverse classes and racialized groups. Soledad in Quito, who began working with rural and indigenous women’s organizations in the early 1990s, described these difficulties:

My focus was on reproductive rights over sexual rights, and it was because indigenous women still could not exercise their reproductive rights. The discourse about the right to your body and to pleasure should not be abandoned. However, there were basic things that needed attention, like that urban and rural women continued to die in childbirth.

Soledad’s depiction exposed a crucial contradiction within the initiator generation of feminism. It acknowledged prevailing class and racial hierarchies in society and challenged these by indicating the need for different feminisms, which women from indigenous, black, and popular movements in both countries have championed. Yet, it also reinforced class and racial hierarchies by portraying a singular emancipation process along which urban, middle-class women were more advanced than indigenous and rural women.
In the second prong of this strategy, vanguardism meant targeting powerful actors, namely professionals, the media, and the State, and getting them to address feminist goals. Professional advocacy consisted of targeting specific groups of professionals—health care professions (doctors, nurses), lawyers, journalists—through professional associations and the curriculum of higher education institutions. Media advocacy focused on mass media outlets in terms of both commenting sexist content and getting feminist content included. Finally, policy advocacy consisted of targeting all branches of government as well as international organs. Advocacy targeted organizations at various scales, from the municipal/local level all the way to the global level, and at different points in time. Advocacy was begun early on, built up over time and linked to one another such that the move between them was seamless. Moreover, it was done side by side with the grassroots advocacy above. This pattern departs from previous observations that Latin American feminisms shifted from an “anti-institutional” to “institutional” strategy in the 1990s (Alvarez 1999).

For my study participants, the 1990s represented a significant change compared to other periods before and even after because their advocacy efforts had significant influence on powerful actors, especially the State. The following two quotes, one from each county, depicts the experience of negotiating with politicians in the highest levels of government during the 1990s and getting demands met. Dolores in Quito recounted:

The struggle for the Law on Gender Quotas (of political candidates) is an extraordinary, magnificent example of what we achieved through sophisticated negotiations with public officials (mostly men), the famous congresspersons. Many of them said they did not know what they signed, that we made them sign it, but it resulted in a compulsory thirty percent quota with five percent increase with each (five-year) electoral period. Ten years later we had already reach fifty percent in practice.

Ana Maria in Lima:

The main outcomes have been at the normative level, and well, Peru wins the competition! Because even though we feminists are from the middle classes, we have had the privilege to interact with those in power and with government authorities on the same level, we have never been afraid, and we have achieved almost all the laws we wanted.

Influence resulted in visible, concrete outcomes in which the State and other institutions took on the role of addressing feminist goals, what my study participants referred to as “institutionalization”, as Zaida in Quito conveyed, “During the 1990s, we achieved important influence and worked on public policies, and as a result from all this work, today the response to violence against women is completely institutionalized.” Evidence of institutionalization of feminist goals encompasses the creation or passing of a National Women’s Council/Ministry, a Violence against Women Law, sexual and reproductive health policies, Women’s Police Stations, gender quotas for political parties and candidates, gender-based violence integrated into health services in Ecuador, and Municipal Defense of Women, Children and Youth Rights (DEMUNA) in Peru. Once again, this strategy mirrors closely that of the Leftist political parties in which study participants began their own mobilization. In both countries, Leftist political parties worked for decades combining different tactics, but it was first in the late 1970s that they were able to exert considerable influence, mobilizing mass demonstrations and ending military rule in 1979.
Consequently, that targeting powerful actors was part of the initiator generations’ long-term comprehensive strategy, even if it would take years or decades to achieve, is not surprising given participants early experience within Leftist parties.

*Exerting Autonomy to Manage the Actions of the Powerful*

The initiator generation exerted autonomy in managing the actions of the powerful. Autonomy consisted of two properties: self-determination for women from gender hierarchies and self-determination of feminist organizations from powerful collective actors. For the first property, autonomy was understood as the solution to the blatant gender hierarchies that participants themselves experienced and that they observed other women experienced in their societies at the time when they came of age and began their activism, as Rosa in Arequipa explained:

> Feminism meant that women began to see themselves, to distinguish themselves, define themselves not in function of being daughters or mothers, but rather as women. We had to be able to see ourselves before society could see us, because by feeling our visibility and insisting we are persons, women, it became apparent that we were not included in the term “men”.

Autonomy, as described by Rosa, was tied into a demand of global feminism movement, expressed by synonyms such as liberation, emancipation, and self-determination. Yet, in the context of Ecuador and Peru, autonomy meant not merely breaking out of restrictive relations to gain options and mobility, but also rejecting authoritarian relations that were inherently hierarchical and suppressive, what Dagnino (2003) refers to as social authoritarianism. This notion of autonomy shaped the increasing focus over time of the initiator generations on concrete goals related to the three key issues mentioned earlier—gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, and women’s political participation. These issues clearly challenged authoritarian relations and feminism in these two countries had become known for making this challenge, as part of its trademark or insignia, as Virginia in Quito stated, “Today it is clear that feminism is a political option that values women’s autonomy, women’s capacity to decide.” Of course, this political option had its detractors, as Mercy in Quito explained: “Because feminism is tied to sexual liberation and decisions over one’s own body, there is a moral interrogation of those of us who identify as feminist, and this has not changed.” In practice, this has resulted in contemporary times in contradictions where on the one hand, increasing numbers of women exert their autonomy, making it more socially acceptable, yet on the other hand, resistance to women’s autonomy has taken the form of serious even fatal violence, as rising femicide rates indicate. Nicolás in Arequipa spoke to the importance of changing masculinities: “To see the characteristics of boys today, their capacity and intelligence to give and receive love, it makes me so happy. Throughout my journey [in feminism], I have worked to overcome the characteristics associated with being sexist, imposing, authoritarian, and dominant.”

The second property of autonomy referred to self-determination among feminist organizations from powerful collective actors, especially the State, international donors, and the Catholic Church. If personal autonomy was a central notion in the first property, then being able to conduct activism independently was a central
notion in this second property. These two issues were linked because in fact not all powerful collective actors wanted a feminist movement conducting activism on personal autonomy. Relationships with each of the three actors were qualitatively distinct. Diverse types of international donor agencies supported feminist organizations from the early years onward and tended to be seen by the initiator generation as allies. Moreover, the work done by the initiator generation nationally contributed to progress in the international sphere, for example, through preparations for and participation in UN conferences on women, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence. Yet, donors were obligated to fulfill their own goals, those of their home countries or international agreements, which meant that they shaped the local/national agenda through the types of actions they funded, as Soledad in Quito described, who at the time of the interview was working at a UN agency:

The movement depended on external funding and in the 1990s after Cairo and Beijing (UN conferences), we received a lot of resources from international donors. However, international donors also set the agenda – they do not tell you to ‘move over here’ or ‘do this’. But, in the end, they set the agenda in a direct or indirect way, I know this now because I work in this sector.

Abortion rights was the main issue that was constrained by international donors, especially through US-imposed restrictions (i.e., the Global Gag Rule) and feminist organizations had to choose between receiving funding or being restricted in conducting advocacy, which in turn provoked significant divisions within the initiator generation.

In contrast, the Catholic Church hierarchy was clearly an opponent from the beginning because it fought most feminist issues, especially reproductive rights, and had an immensely powerful role in the political life of both countries, as Gioconda in Lima explained: “The Catholic Church hierarchy exercises very visible, strong power; the hierarchy itself. Because, here in Peru, it has great power over the State overall and influences government agencies such as education and justice.” Even though feminist activism became more skilled at managing the Church hierarchy, and thus less constrained in their activism, this was a setback with the proliferation of internationally funded antiabortion groups in the 2000s that directly targeted reproductive rights issues, as Maria in Quito described:

Many right-wing groups emerged tied to the Church and Opus Dei. They portrayed contraceptives as something from the Devil and argued that it was necessary to have all the children that God wanted. They tried to get the right to therapeutic abortion reversed in the 2008 constitution.

Finally, the State was by far the most complex, in part because its very organization was vast, diverse, and multi-level, which meant the support from one part did not ensure support from another. Among the conclusions drawn by participants from targeting the State was just how difficult it was to change government institutions in practice and not merely in a policy or legal sense. Getting policies implemented required long-term engagement in different forms: sometimes it meant working in close collaboration to provide public institutions with technical support and other times it meant mobilizing grassroots organizations to pressure public institutions to fulfill their obligations.
In both countries, participants pointed to specific incidents where the initiator generation had clearly lost its autonomy during close collaborations with the State that, like with international donors, provoked significant divisions within the initiator generation. In Peru, this occurred during President Fujimori’s second term, from 1995 to 2000, when feminist organizations participated in different advisory committees to the government, including on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Fujimori government not only became more authoritarian overall but also pressured health care workers to meet quotes in the number of sterilizations performed each month, which led to abuses in reproductive rights especially among poor and indigenous communities. Feminist organizations were caught in between this, as Maria Isabel in Lima described, “Then came the first condemnations of forced sterilizations during the Fujimori government. I participated in intense debates, even with other feminist organizations.” For the initiator generation in Ecuador, this occurred during President Correa’s first term, in 2006, when key leaders of feminist organizations were invited to join his Leftist government. Mercy described it as follows, “There is a tremendous retreat, a demobilization of women, because with a government that appears to be leftist, where all the policies are crosscutting for men and women, gender inequity is stagnated with a discourse that everyone is equal.” Zaida described the situation as quite direct “right now you could say that the women’s movement does not exist, everyone has become government functionaries.” Of course, several feminist organizations were still functioning as normal, but Zaida’s comment was intended to illustrate how dire the situation for the feminist movement when crucial leadership capacity is moved from civil society into the government.

CONCLUSION

The two cohorts in my study formed into distinct political generations within the feminist movement in Peru and Ecuador by interacting with two sociopolitical conditions, and these interactions had long-lasting consequences for their activism. By focusing on the interactions between movement agency and political contexts, my findings enhance existing research. Most existing research focuses on the formative processes of political generations occurring within movement agency as clearly distinct from political contexts (Johnston and Aarelaid-Tart 2000; Rayner and Morales-Rivera 2020; Reger 2012; Rocca Rivarola 2021; Whittier 1995), while other studies focus on the political contexts shaping from the outside the formation of political generations inside a movement (Armstrong 2003; Chen 2014; McCammon and Brockman 2019). A challenge that remains with using Mannheim’s (1927/28 [1952]) concept of political generations is to explicate the link between movement agency and political contexts.

Political contexts and movement agency change over time. At the time of data collection, both cohorts understood prevailing gender relations as no longer blatant but blurred. Notions of political action were not limited to Leftist modes or the feminist modes of the initiator generation but encompassed a much wider range of modes tied to diverse social and political movements. Regarding movement agency, the two cohorts too had developed new forms of joint action, for example, to expand key
issues, such as femicide in work on gendered violence and to extend to new groups, including youth, men, and rural communities. On their own, each set of changes is insufficient to spur the formation of political generations.

Why then did each cohort understand and practice feminist activism differently? Following Mannheim (1927/28 [1952]), despite living in the same historical period (i.e., at the time of data collection), different cohorts experienced “time” differently in a qualitative sense, which he meant subjectively. Drawing upon Maines’ (1979, 1982) concept of mesostructure, I propose instead that this results from each cohort having different interactions with the sociopolitical conditions at the time when each cohort was mobilized into the movement. Focusing on interactions considers not only that the same sociopolitical conditions can look quite different in distinct time periods, but also that the shared definitions and joint actions created by cohorts as they interact with these conditions can take different forms. What is more, a focus on interactions explains the enduring consequences of sociopolitical conditions on each cohorts’ goals, strategies, and relationships, without resorting to determinism.

Generational analyses offer crucial insights to understand change and persistence in social movements. However, the literature on political generations in social movements tends to apply Mannheim’s theory without developing it further. Outside the social movement literature, scholars complement his theory with the concepts of discourses or habitus to link agency and contexts (Aboim and Vasconcelos 2014; Pilcher 1994; Woodman and Wyn 2015). The concept of mesostructure, I propose, offers a better solution to this subject–object division by maintaining one of the key strengths of Mannheim’s original theory, which was to emphasize actor’s agency. Importantly, my model is constructed through in-depth empirical analysis, and can be tested and modified in future generational analyses of social movements.

Finally, my generational analyses of two cohorts of feminist activism makes an important contribution to the literature on feminist movements in Latin America. Generational analyses are scarce, and those that do exist focus either only on the innovator generation (Chen 2014) or on the dynamics between different generations (Borland 2014; Friedman and Rodríguez Gustá 2023; Sutton 2020). My study adds important insights on the mechanism of change forming political generations in feminist movements and having the long-term consequences on forms of activism.

REFERENCES


