

Reimagining Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care

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Abstract

This thesis explores young people's lived experiences of food insecurity. Building upon Sodero's (2019) concept of vital mobilities, the thesis views food as a vital mobility with complex circuits of care. Through a multi-method, participatory approach, it builds upon this literature to expand the meaning of food circuits of care and applies this meaning to investigate how young people experience food insecurity and participate within food systems. By investigating food as a vital mobility with young people as the entry point to the analysis, the thesis highlights the fragilities of circuits of care and works to explore how these fragilities are formed, experienced and adapted by young people.

The thesis is based on an empirical study of the services and members of a community centre in the north-west of the UK. Using a multi-method, creative and participatory approach, the project works alongside young people that attend the community centre's youth group, to understand their lived experiences of food insecurity, consider the social constructions that they encounter, and evaluate their agency within systems that affect them. Through embedding its novel conceptualisation of circuits of care, the thesis contributes to food insecurity practice by exploring how principals of care can be integrated with a participatory methodology. Through this methodology, the project creates opportunities for young people's empowerment within local food systems and circuits.

An exploration of food circuits of care identifies young people as a diverse group with complex and volatile lives. The thesis argues that these complexities and the individual responsibilities associated with food security result in the vital mobilities of food being more fragile and susceptible to inequalities than Sodero's blood vital mobilities. These inequalities are analysed through the definition and distribution of vital tactics: methods used by young people to create their own agency and access food outside of ineffective formal structures.

Alongside its contributions to mobilities and food insecurity practice, through its discussions around disruption and food insecurity, the thesis creates opportunities for discussion of young people's participation in wider policies relating to climate change.

Specifically, the thesis creates a manifesto for young people's participation in food circuits of care that is robust and resilient to the threats that climate change and other disruptions pose to young people's (participation in) food futures.

Key words: circuits of care, vital mobilities, young people's participation, food insecurity.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis focuses on exploring how young people in the north-west of England experience food insecurity. Working alongside a group of young people, it values and explores the lived experiences of young people to evaluate their agency within and the effectiveness of food circuits of care.

The key themes of interest within this thesis are: (young people's experiences of) food insecurity, young people's participation and agency, care, and vital mobilities. With a focus on food insecurity, the thesis draws from vital mobilities literature (Sodero, 2019) to identify food as a vital material with complex circuits of care. It builds upon this literature to expand the meaning of food circuits of care and uses this to investigate how young people experience food insecurity and participate within food systems.

Pillars of the Research Project

Before I expand upon the details of this thesis, I reflect upon the two pillars that informed the instigation and development of this study. This study took place from 2020-2024, with empirical research carried out from the end of 2022 to mid-2023. Running in parallel with (and just prior to) this research timeline, two significant events influenced my thinking and initiated the development of this project to think about young people's participation in food systems, these were: the increased traction of the youth strikes for climate movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section of the chapter, I will introduce how these events acted as fundamental pillars to the development of this research project, provided economic, social and political context to the research and introduced questions and areas of interest that each event prompted me to consider.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the United Kingdom enter its first lockdown in March 2020. Food insecurity levels had been increasing in the UK since 2010, this has been linked with the 2008 recession and the implementation of austerity measures (Loopstra and Lambie-Mumford, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further aggravated this situation (Pautz and Dempsey, 2022) with some individuals experiencing food insecurity for the first time and even more severe consequences for the most vulnerable. Levels of food insecurity drastically increased in the UK between April and July 2020 (Koltai *et al.*, 2021) as a result of changes to the food system including: the loss of open air markets, lack of stock in supermarkets and changes to employment situations and income crises. The heightened visibility of food inequalities and levels of food insecurity led to my interest in researching food insecurity and inequalities.

During the conceptualisation of this research project, the impact of COVID-19 on young people, particularly their access to food because of school closures was a high-profile topic of discussion in the media. Children in low-income families were most at risk of food insecurity because of reduced access to their Free School Meals (FSM), as only keyworkers' children could go into schools and eat there (Pautz and Dempsey, 2022). With the closures of schools, the government introduced £15 per week vouchers for FSM eligible children however, schools were responsible for applying for and distributing these and provision widely differed (Pautz and Dempsey, 2022). As a result, "in the month after the COVID-19 lockdown, 49% of eligible children did not receive any form of FSMs" (Parnham *et al.*, 2020, p. 161). This also increased food bank use, with Pautz and Dempsey (2022) finding a relationship between families who qualified for free school meals and needing to use a food bank during the pandemic.

The unreliable distribution of FSMs during COVID-19 was captured within the news; popular footballer Marcus Rashford, drew further attention to the situation and partnered with food charity FareShare to lobby for change and the continued provision of FSM vouchers into the summer (FareShare, 2021). The role of the pandemic in exacerbating inequalities in food security as well as making them more visible resulted

in my decision to research food insecurity, particularly food insecurity experienced by young people.

The height of the pandemic was at the beginning of this research project. In the UK, the peak of the pandemic was considered to be over by February 2022 when the government published a roadmap out of the pandemic and in May 2022 there was no longer a dedicated coronavirus team within the government's digital services (Sherrington, 2022). By May 2023, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared to no longer fit the definition of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (World Health Organisation, 2023). However, levels of food insecurity continued to rise throughout the research project's timeline. The increasing levels of food insecurity within the UK include a high proportion of children and young people being food insecure. In 2023-2024, 1.1 million food bank parcels went to children (Trussel Trust, 2024) and in 2022-2023 approximately 17% of all children in the UK were living in food insecure homes (Loopstra, 2024). Therefore, as the thesis progressed, it also became necessary to explore the short-term and long-term effects of the pandemic on its participants' access to food. To do so, I decided that it was important to explore young people's experiences of food insecurity in the everyday (to understand the complexities and nuances of how food insecurity is experienced in the normal running of food systems and processes) as well as during times of disruption (to consider how already ineffective food systems are impacted or adapt to times of disruption).

Not only did the pandemic make inequalities in food security more visible, but it also made mobilities (and immobility) more visible. The pandemic disrupted food systems through lockdowns impacting household income and physical access to food (Devereux, Béné and Hoddinott, 2020), the sudden disruption and restriction to mobility highlighted the importance of exploring the relationship between mobility and food security. Policies introduced during and as a consequence of the pandemic like the Winter Grant Scheme (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021) and the Household Support Fund also demonstrated the implications of seemingly unrelated policies and systems as an additional aspect of food insecurity to investigate further. For many academics, the impacts of the pandemic on the food system resulted in a renewed interest in the role of local food systems on food security and opportunities to learn from the pandemic

(Jones, Krzywoszynska and Maye, 2022). For me, it highlighted the need to research the relationship between food security and mobilities as well as the inequalities of young people's experiences of food insecurity. I detail my decision to develop this thesis through an application of mobilities, and more specifically vital mobilities in the *Mobilities* section of this chapter.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic was a fundamental pillar to the development of this research project. It highlighted the vulnerabilities of food systems, the inequality in food security, and the importance of mobilities to any consideration of food security. It inspired me to further explore how young people experience food insecurity through a mobilities lens. The pandemic highlighted the severe inequalities in food insecurity across the UK as well as the vulnerabilities of the existing food systems. It stressed the need to investigate the complex dimensions that influence food insecurity in the everyday as well as in times of crisis. Similarly, the pandemic demonstrated that young people were significantly impacted by the disruptions to the food system caused by the pandemic. It identified (low-income) young people in secondary schools as vulnerable to food insecurity during and post-pandemic and this led to my decision to carry out my research with young people of an older age range (12-17). I explain this decision in more detail in the *Research Design and Methodology* Chapter (3). All these aspects identified in the initial consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on food security have been carried forward as key elements of discussion within this thesis.

Youth School Strikes for Climate

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, the school strikes for climate were the second pillar to the development of the thesis and its research focus. The school strikes for climate also known as the Fridays for Future movement began in 2018, organised by Greta Thunberg. The popularity of the strikes grew to become an international movement with its peak in 2019 and 2020 with Global Weeks for Future taking place in the September of both years (Biswas and Mattheis, 2022). The strikes were organised by children and were aimed at national governments and international government bodies in protest of

their lack of commitment to climate action and have been described as “politically motivated defiance of school attendance” (Biswas and Mattheis, 2022, p. 148).

The strikes were covered widely by the media who portrayed the young people who took part in the strikes in several different ways. Raby and Shepard (2021) provide a detailed summary of how young people were portrayed in different media outlets and highlight that although many mainstream media outlets viewed the participating young people as competent activists, another common depiction was one of disruption and naivety. The school strikes were criticised with media portraying ‘adultist’ tendencies, in which they viewed children as the ‘child-other’ with limited socio-political power (Biswas and Mattheis, 2022). Discourse focussed on young people’s disobedience as well as missing out on essential education.

The controversy in media reactions to the school strikes for climate highlighted the disparity of young people’s right to participate compared to adults. Greta Thunberg was satirical about this in some of her speeches; in one speech she said “I’m just a child and we shouldn’t be listening to children. But that is easily fixed – just start to listen to the rock-solid science instead” (Thunberg, 2019, p.30). In another Thunberg shared that “people always tell us that they are so hopeful. They are hopeful that the young people are going to save the world, but we are not. There is simply not enough time to wait for us to grow up and become the ones in charge” (2019, p. 33). In my initial work towards the development of this thesis I critiqued this construction of children as future adults and Thunberg’s use of it in her speech and this led me to engage further with literature on young people’s participation and agency as well as the concept of childhood as a social construction. Some of the examples of literature I explored includes literature on children’s citizenship (Larkins, 2014) and how the concept of childhood impacts young people’s opportunities to engage with policies (Mayall, 2006).

In relation to young people’s agency and participation, existing literature focuses on young people’s rights and responses to significant events such as flooding (Mort *et al.*, 2018a; Mort, Rodriguez-Giralt and Delicado, 2020) and more recently surrounding the changing climate (Horton *et al.*, 2013; Gibbons, 2014; Josefsson and Wall, 2020; Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020). There is also a significant amount of research on

young people's participation in a research and methodology context (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001; Checkoway, 2011) which has been considered and critiqued in Chapter 3 of this thesis. In this thesis, I expand upon and move away from these topics to further explore young people's agency and participation within food systems.

In addition to young people's rights to participation, the school strikes for climate highlighted another key element for consideration within this thesis. In the beginnings of this research project, I acknowledged that Thunberg as the spearhead of the movement and many other participants were all from similar backgrounds. Thunberg comes from non-minority background, a high-income country and a wealthy family, putting her in a position of privilege. I considered the implications that this had on the school strikes for climate and how both the repercussions and opportunities for different young people to participate in the school strikes might differ according to their backgrounds. This brought me to consider not only the intergenerational differences in opportunities for participation, but the intragenerational inequalities as well. Intragenerational equity refers to the need for equal opportunities and access to resources within a generation (Wiles and Kobayashi, 2020). In relation to the school strikes for climate, I recognised that individuals with different backgrounds might be less able to take part, with more severe consequences to their education, I also reflected that outside of the UK context, the right to attend school is not universal. In Chapter 6 I discuss how one of my participants didn't attend school for a substantial amount of time because she was required to work in her family's café. These intragenerational differences are important to consider in any discussions of young people's agency and participation and resulted in my decision to view young people as a diverse group rather than a homogenous one in my analysis of their experiences of food insecurity and agency within food systems. The inequalities in opportunities for and the repercussions of participation in the climate strikes resonated with the inequalities I identified in food security through my consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted an avenue for further exploration within this thesis.

In summary, the school strikes for climate movement were an essential element to the identification of key themes for exploration within this thesis. It highlighted how young people can be active citizens but the discourse about the strikes in the media identified

the need for further investigation into the social constructions of childhood and how these constructions impact their capacity to participate (this is explored in detail in Chapter 6). My critique of the school strikes also identified the importance of viewing young people as a diverse group in my analysis of their experiences of food insecurity. Finally, by bringing the considerations of agency and food insecurity together, these two events acted as pillars to the development and conception of this thesis.

Summary of Pillars

By bringing the two pillars together, my research combines my interests in young people's participation with an exploration of (inequalities within and experiences of) food insecurity.

The impacts and changes to the food system as a result of the pandemic renewed academic and political interest into the role of local food systems (Jones, Krzywoszynska and Maye, 2022). These interests largely focussed on understanding learning opportunities from the pandemic as well as the health impacts of food insecurity on young people (Fram *et al.*, 2011; Knight, O'Connell and Brannen, 2018; Parnham *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2022). As discussed above, existing scholarship on young people's participation focuses on responses to significant events and the changing climate. There is less research on young people's participation in everyday circumstances, particularly in relation to food insecurity and food systems. By building on the initial observations and identification of key concepts from the two pillars of COVID-19 and the school strikes for climate, my research addresses gaps in existing research to extend discussions on food insecurity by working with young people to explore how they participate in food structures. I bring together considerations of social constructions of childhood and agency into conversation with young people's experiences of food insecurity.

The thesis contributes to existing food insecurity and youth participation scholarship by engaging with mobilities scholarship, particularly the concept of vital mobilities. The pandemic highlighted the importance of mobilities and led to my engagement with mobilities literature. Combining this with a participatory methodological approach, the

thesis moves away from a narrow focus on the effects of food insecurity to understand the complexities and nuances of being a young person experiencing food insecurity, viewing food as a vital material. By bringing together a consideration of food insecurity, circuits of care and vital mobilities, the thesis offers a novel insight into how young people experience food insecurity and can participate within food circuits of care. The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis is explained in greater detail in the conceptual framework.

Engaging with Mobilities

In a time of heightened immobility, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both the existence and the importance of mobilities within food systems and individuals' access to food. The closure of borders and national lockdowns made the existence of international food supply chains visible as well as the need for essential travel for individuals to access food. Discussions of food security are traditionally aligned with fields of political economy or social care scholarship. However, the pandemic put a spotlight on the "contingent relations between movements" (Adey, 2006, p. 75) associated with food systems and food security. These observations led to my decision to engage with mobilities literature to aid my exploration of young people's experiences of and participation within food insecurity. The thesis' focus on young people's experiences of food insecurity and participation within food systems needed a mobilities outlook to understand how young people get to food and vice versa (or not).

The field of mobilities is a movement driven social science (Urry, 2007). Urry argues that social science has inadequately examined mobilities and different movements. The new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) integrates social practice theories and mobilities research and offers a way of re-thinking considerations of inequality as well as the "changing nature of places and complex systems" (Urry, 2007, p. 7). This focus on re-thinking inequality and the complexity of systems through a mobility lens resonated with my initial research beginnings. In his book *Mobilities*, Urry (2007) outlines the breadth and depth of mobilities research through its range of applications on the movement of things as well as the movement of people: research

has included exploration of transport systems and decarbonisation through transport; communications and how technology has created a more mobile world; and the movement of people through tourism and migration. The field of mobilities offered a way for me to consider young people's experiences of and participation within food systems as complex and constantly changing. The focus of mobilities in moving away from a sedentary ontology provided ways for me to explore the volatile and constantly changing nature of young people's lives, food systems and being food insecure.

The rest of this section details some of the scholarship within the mobilities field that I engaged with. It outlines how I interacted with key concepts within the field like emergency mobilities (Adey, 2016) and mobility justice (Sheller, 2018) and explains how I have carried forward aspects of these concepts into the development of the thesis. However, it ultimately explains why these concepts were not chosen as key concepts within the thesis and outlines why I decided to engage with vital mobilities (Sodero, 2019) as a key concept and lens for the analysis of food insecurity within this thesis.

In my exploration of mobilities literature I engaged with Adey's (2016) concept of emergency mobilities, in which he introduces the idea that "mobilities and immobilities occur in, because of, or through emergency" (p. 32) and discusses their implications for procedures in governance. Adey criticises much of mobility literature's view of seeing mobility as an outcome of emergency or governance rather than a product of how emergency is governed. Additionally, Adey also published an article on pandemic (im)mobilities (Adey *et al.*, 2021) in which they discussed the ranging levels of severity in disruption, economic consequence and health risks experienced by the public and the complex mobilities behind these inequalities. These considerations resonated with my line of research around food insecurity. I considered the possibility of evaluating food insecurity through the lens of emergency mobilities; however, I decided that it was important to consider the everyday as well as elements of disruption. Focussing on analysis of the mundane in conversation with some disruptions holds the greatest potential for me to understand young people's experiences of food insecurity. Although I decided not to focus my analysis through emergency mobilities, I do carry forward elements of Adey's emergency mobilities by analysing the practicalities and realities of policies that resulted from emergency governance in the everyday (like the continued

distribution of the Household Support Fund) and explore the impacts of disruption on young people's experiences of food insecurity (Chapters 4 and 6).

During the conceptualisation of this thesis, I also explored Sheller's (2018) work on mobility justice. The concept of mobility justice provides a new and mobile outlook on previously sedentary considerations of justice. It "employs a mobile ontology, which is essential to examining the constitutive processes of (im)mobilities, together with a sensitivity to the fairness of movements in terms of rights, freedom, capabilities, distribution and domination" (Everuss, 2019, 132). It was decided that mobility justice would not be the key concept for engaging with food insecurity within my thesis, as it focussed on capabilities for and rights to mobility. I wanted to focus on experiences of and the systems behind food insecurity and participation rather than capabilities. However, the thesis engages with elements of mobility justice, including being sensitive to how people's capacity to move is influenced by different individual circumstances and factors (Everuss, 2019) such as race, class and age.

This thesis focuses on young people's experiences of food insecurity and their participation within food systems. As such, it was essential that I investigate existing literature relating to family and child mobilities.

Within the mobilities field, there has also been research on family and child mobilities (Milne, 2009; Murray and Overall, 2017). Milne (2009) evaluated young people's experiences of travelling on public transport, to analyse the ways in which young people interacted with and were treated by adults, to analyse "their social presence in the public world" (p. 103). This article had relevance for this thesis' thinking about young people's opportunities for participation and agency within food systems. Milne (2009) reflected on how some young people were not allowed into shopping centres in groups and highlighted this as a reflection on children's (im)mobilities. Children's mobilities have also been explored by Murray and Overall (2017) by considering how children can be portrayed as agentic in fictional mobilities of literature. They use observations of fictional literature to reflect on how the fictional world offers more agency and freedom to children than the real world sometimes does (Murray and Overall, 2017). This concept

of using imagined mobilities to analyse agency has been developed and applied in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Urry stated that “thinking through a mobilities lens provides a distinctive science that is productive of different theories, methods, questions and solutions” (2007, p.18).

By considering the issue of food insecurity and young people’s participation within food systems (key issues highlighted within the pillars to this thesis’ development), thinking through a mobilities lens encouraged me to ask:

- How do young people travel to access food?
- What policies and systems do young people engage with in order to access food?
How effective are these systems?
- What are the rhythms of food security and insecurity? Does access to food change throughout the year and/or life course?
- How do food supply chains work (or not for those experiencing food insecurity)?

Engaging with mobilities literature allowed me to build on my initial considerations about how young people access food and experience and participate within policies and consider the mobilities associated with these experiences of food insecurity. In my exploration of mobilities scholarship, I identified Sodero’s (2019) concept of vital mobilities as key to the development of this thesis. By viewing food as essential to sustaining life, I explored how an application of vital mobilities could benefit my analysis of young people’s experiences and participation within food systems.

Vital Mobilities and Food Insecurity

In her work on vital mobilities, Sodero (2019, 2022) views blood as a vital material and the movements of blood as vital mobilities. Sodero’s (2019) concept of vital mobilities has been key to the development of this thesis. In her work, Sodero asks “how do we move things when it really matters?” (2019, p. 109) and identifies vital mobilities as the “external circulations that enable internal bodily circulations necessary to life” (2020, p. 169). The vital materials and systems within vital mobilities refer to “goods that are

critical or essential in everyday life” (Sodero, 2019, p. 112). For Sodero’s example of blood, this includes the movements that allow blood to be transported from point A to point B (from donor to recipient). Within this thesis, I introduce food as a new example of a vital material with associated vital mobilities. Another example of a vital material could be water, and its associated vital mobilities and external circulations could include the processes of decontamination and purification, transportation through the water supply network and how it flows through water pipes. Within her concept of vital mobilities, Sodero also establishes circuits of care as the processes that enable vital mobilities “that can be ramped up in case of wide-spread crisis and are also required in everyday contexts” (Sodero, 2019, p.121).

Sodero’s consideration of the vital mobilities of blood focus on the movement and complexities associated with the organisation and actualities of transporting the material. Using the example of blood distribution within British Columbia, Sodero (2019) analyses the implications of storing, distributing and transporting blood from the donation of blood to the treatment of a patient. This thesis adapts this concept to view food as a vital material and the movement of young people to food (and vice versa) as a vital mobility. Where Sodero focussed on the vital material, I focus on the experiences and movements of the recipients in my analysis of food vital mobilities. Through this adaptation, the thesis highlights the complexities and inequalities in the vital mobility of food and its associated circuits of care. The thesis discusses how the complexities and volatility of young people’s lives can make the vital mobilities of food more complicated and prone to inequality than its blood counterpart. As such, it develops the concept of vital mobilities to consider the circuits of care as more of an essential element than previously explored by Sodero within vital mobilities. The thesis identifies and defines circuits of care in a new and developed conceptualisation (detailed in this chapter’s conceptual framework) that allows the systems and processes in food vital mobilities to be evaluated, emphasising the importance of care for and about the recipients of the vital material.

Through its application and expansion of vital mobilities, the thesis investigates the intricacies of young people’s experiences of food insecurity and the thesis’ contributions sit within the wider field of mobilities scholarship, as well as the food security field.

Throughout the thesis, the analysis of food circuits of care includes the consideration of how food systems, policies and disruptions within them disproportionately affect young people's access to food which demonstrates broader connections and references to Adey's (2016) emergency mobilities and Sheller's (2018) mobility justice.

Food Insecurity Observations: Implications for the Research Aims

The consideration of the key pillars to the research project highlighted the thesis's focus on the intricacies of food insecurity and young people's participation. My engagement with mobilities scholarship and decision to focus on vital mobilities introduced questions of significance around the rhythms of food insecurity and how policies and systems impact the accessibility of food. The research focus and aims were also developed because of my initial participant observations that highlighted key lines of investigation.

The empirical work for this research project took place in a community centre in the north-west of England, whose services provided community members with free and subsidised food provision and other services (detailed in Chapter 3). During my time researching at the community centre, I spent time as a volunteer participant observer and sat at the 'front-desk' each week whilst carrying out my observations (this, and the inclusion of these observations in this thesis was ethically approved – see Appendix 1.1). Through these observations I was able to develop my research commitments, identify key areas of empirical research and advance my theoretical understanding. These built on the questions I had already identified from my engagement with mobilities literature.

In this section of the introduction, I introduce an example of a situation I observed at the community centre that shaped the development of my line of research. It is one example of many observations that identified key areas for further exploration and contributed to the ongoing development of my methodology (Chapter 3), research aims, topics of interest and conclusions. The example provides further contextualisation of the research topic. It acknowledges the severity and seriousness of food insecure situations that UK citizens currently find themselves in and the difficulties, frustrations and convoluted 'solutions' that they encounter in trying to get themselves out.

Observing Food Insecurity: Care and Confusion

A man came into the community centre saying that he had been referred here by the Citizens Advice Bureau for a food parcel. Initially he thought that he might be able to get some money, but staff members had to explain that the community centre is not able to offer money to service users. They also don't normally provide free food parcels; however, they offered him one emergency food package (the equivalent of what their usual subsidised food club provides) for free. They then offered to sign him up to become a paying member of the weekly food club. They also explained that the centre provides breakfast and soup at lunch time for free every day. The man abruptly said that he wouldn't be needing it again as he had fallen short and would be fine once he reached pay day. Becky (a member of staff at the community centre) went into the kitchen to sort out a bag of food for the man whilst the man stayed in the foyer and chatted to me. When Becky brought the bags of food, the man was frustrated and said that he didn't eat meat, so we had to take the meat out of the bags, he also said he didn't need the jar of coffee she had put for him. They then put the bags on the floor and took some of these items out of his parcel. When he left, Becky seemed irritated that the man had been a bit short with her and picked through the bag that she had put together for him and said, "beggars can't be choosers".

However, after the interaction, Becky reflected on the man's situation and said situations like these happen frequently in the community centre and that by the time people reach the community centre when looking for support, they have been through several other organisations and attempts to look for help and have been told 'no'. She said that staff try and acknowledge that by the time people interact with them at the community centre they can feel downtrodden and deflated and this can make them irritable and angry. It also means that the front-facing staff at the community centre frequently experience the brunt of this negativity. Increasing incidents of people coming to the community centre looking for free food has resulted in the community centre asking Citizens Advice to stop referring people to them because they are not financially able to give

away free food and do not have the resources to support everyone. Staff shared the emotional toll of having to turn people away when they are looking for free food parcels or money and the community centre hasn't anything to offer.

(Extract from empirical field notes)

This 'transaction' of food was not an empowering experience for the man in search of emergency food support. His attitude demonstrated an aspect of the stigma attached to being food insecure as he was quick to emphasise that this was a one-off event. The fact that he had no choice in the food that was picked for him, which resulted in him sorting through the food on the floor of the community centre, was not a positive experience. While most experiences had by community members at the community centre were positive ones, and staff worked relentlessly to promote a friendly and supportive environment, on occasion this was not the case.

This example highlighted multiple lines of interest for this research to explore and helped to inform both the research's aims and the more nuanced explorations within the thesis' efforts to achieve the aims. For instance, this example demonstrated the negative impact of community members being misinformed by other organisations, resulting in food support becoming stilted. Importantly, this highlighted the existence of (often convoluted) systems and circuits within food provisions and prompted a further exploration of how these systems can become convoluted and ineffective – something that resonated with my considerations of mobilities.

This example also provided an insight into another key aspect of the thesis, in thinking about care. The member of staff's reflection on her comment that 'beggars can't be choosers' encouraged my own investigation into how those who are experiencing food insecurity felt cared for and about (explored in Chapter 2). It also highlighted the strain that staff in organisations like this community centre are under when trying to provide for people who are coming to them as a last resort (discussed in Chapter 4); this instigated further research into this as an issue in the delivery of food circuits of care. As such, the next section within this chapter highlights the considered and specific research aims for the thesis that resulted from a combination of: my initial research interests

sparked by the research pillars; an engagement with mobilities scholarship; and observations made throughout the research process.

Research Aims

By bringing together a consideration of food insecurity, circuits of care and vital mobilities, the thesis aims to offer a novel insight into how young people experience food insecurity and can participate within food circuits of care.

The key aims of this research project are:

- 1) Consider and value young people's lived experiences of food insecurity, the social constructions they encounter, and evaluate their agency within systems that affect them.
- 2) Conceptualise circulations of food as vital mobilities and examine the circuits of care which simultaneously constitute them and are constituted by them.
- 3) Highlight and explore the existence of gaps within these circuits of care to understand how they are formed, experienced, filled and changed by crisis.
- 4) Use the project to create opportunities for young people's empowerment within these systems.

Conceptual Framework

To achieve these aims, the thesis brings a number of interdisciplinary concepts into conversation. The key concepts within this thesis are: vital mobilities and circuits of care, young people's participation, social constructions of childhood and tactics. The considered combination of these key concepts has formed my conceptual framework that threads the thesis together and works to enable an in-depth investigation into the intricacies of (young people's participation within) food circuits of care. This conceptual framework introduces each of these concepts and begins to outline how the application of each concept allows the thesis to achieve its research aims.

Vital Mobilities

Sodero's (2019) concept of vital mobilities has been key to the development of this thesis. This thesis adapts the concept of vital mobilities to view food as a vital material and the movement of young people to food (and vice versa) as a vital mobility. It moves away from Sodero's consideration of emergencies and investigates the vital mobilities of food in the everyday – to provide an in-depth exploration of young people's experiences of food insecurity, in normal food systems, not just in times of emergency. This enables me to understand and analyse how food circuits of care can be ineffective, with gaps in everyday food provision experienced by young people.

Viewing food as a vital material with vital mobilities, the thesis moves existing explorations of food insecurity from a sedentary approach to a more complex and mobile one. By asking "how do we move things when it really matters" (Sodero, 2019, p. 109) I explore how young people move and interact with food systems and identify several complexities to food provision and young people's access to food. By employing a mobile ontology, the thesis can consider the constantly changing nature of food systems in discussion with the equally volatile nature of young people's lives.

Building on the concept of vital mobilities, the thesis identifies and defines circuits of care in a new and developed conceptualisation that allows the systems and processes in food vital mobilities to be evaluated alongside an analysis of young people's experiences and participation within these systems.

Circuits of Care

In vital mobility literature, circuits of care are the systems, processes and policies that constitute a vital mobility (Sodero, 2019). By focussing on the experience (and the movements) of the recipient in food vital mobilities, I emphasise the importance of the word 'care' in the definition of circuit of care. I identify key elements to a successful circuit of care that go beyond Sodero's initial definition of transporting the vital material from point A to B.

Drawing on literature about care, both in and outside of a food insecurity context (De La Bellacasa, 2012; Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2015; Dorow and Mandizadza, 2018; Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021), the thesis builds on the meaning of circuits of care within vital mobilities to introduce circuits of care as a key concept. For Sodero, an unsuccessful circuit of care would mean that the vital material does not reach the recipient. I extend this to argue that a circuit would also be unsatisfactory if it did not achieve care and empowerment. Focussing on the recipients of vital mobilities rather than the material and emphasising the importance of care within systems, I argue that an effective circuit of care should be empowering, routine and reliable, sustainable, ethical, and make the recipient feel cared for and about. These elements are explained in greater detail in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 also explores how the thesis' novel conceptualisation of circuits of care and engagement in care literature resulting in a caring and creative methodology.

Identifying circuits of care as a key concept within this thesis allows the thesis to explore how young people experience food insecurity on a deeper level. By considering how vital mobilities shouldn't just move materials from point A to B but instead by exploring whether the systems that enable these movements are empowering or caring allows me to gain an in-depth understanding of food insecurity. It also allows me to identify areas for possible participation within these systems and, with its methodological influence, to create opportunities for empowerment within the thesis' empirical project.

Circuits of care is an essential concept of this thesis and connects the empirical chapters (4-6) through their attention to the details and nuances of circuits of care: analysing the rhythms of circuits of care and how they are (in)effective in providing food to young people (Chapter 4), whether they provide opportunities for participation (or not) (Chapter 5), as well as by imagining how circuits of care can be made more robust and resilient to change (Chapter 6).

Young People's Participation

As highlighted throughout this introduction, young people's participation is a key concept within this thesis. In conjunction with the concepts of vital mobilities and circuits of care, the thesis considers how young people currently participate within food systems and investigates opportunities for empowerment both within and beyond the remits of this thesis.

As a result of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), youth participation means including young people in the decision-making processes on things that affect their lives (Checkoway, 2011). Chapter 3 provides more detail and critiques the intricacies of this convention. The thesis focuses on what meaningful participation should look like and employs this in the development of its methodology in order to work towards its aim of providing opportunities for empowerment.

In addition to its methodological contributions, the thesis understands young people's participation to consider how young people need to be "involved in implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages" (Janta *et al.*, 2021, p.v) to have fully engaged and participated in the making of a policy or system. The consideration of young people's participation enables the thesis to explore how existing youth participation has been effective or tokenistic and works to value both intergenerational justice in participating in and having a say in their food systems, but also to intragenerational justice in which young people are not viewed as a homogenous group. In the context of food insecurity, it views young people as a diverse group who experience different life events and levels of being food insecure. The thesis develops these considerations by bringing social constructions of childhood into conversation with existing and imagined youth participation in food systems and beyond.

Social Constructions of Childhood

My initial engagement with the school strikes for climate highlighted the importance of considering the social constructions of childhood in understanding how young people are viewed and treated within the social world. The concept draws from the wider fields

of childhood studies and children's geographies. The notion of childhood being a social construct has become increasingly relevant in relation to the school strikes for climate (Raby and Sheppard, 2021) through which the media constructed the young people participating in the strikes as either disruptive, naïve, or agentic. Studies on the social constructions of childhood report that constructions impact young people's experiences of their social worlds and their capacities to participate (Milne, 2009). There are two key categories that the different constructions of childhood can be defined as: either viewing children as passive, non-participatory citizens or as agentic social participants in society (though young people's participation and non-participation can be constructed by society in both a positive and negative light, as detailed throughout this thesis). In a methodological context, this thesis considers how an understanding of social constructions can develop a meaningfully participatory methodology. The consideration of how childhood can be constructed also led to my decision to use the term 'young people' when referring to my participants (although it is important to note that the research is specifically concerned with young people aged 12-17). The term 'children' often replicates the social construction of children as needing protection (this decision is detailed in Chapter 3).

As well as being applied in the methodology, the thesis employs social constructions to evaluate circuits of care. The application of the concept of social constructions of childhood within this thesis also draws on wider mobilities literature (Milne, 2009; Murray and Overall, 2017). Milne (2009) uses social constructions of childhood to review how young people experience travel and engage with social worlds outside of their homes and school. This thesis extends this consideration of social constructions of childhood through a vital mobilities context. It employs the concept of childhood being a social construct to evaluate how young people are given the opportunity (or not) to participate in food circuits of care and what this participation looks like according to the places, people and systems they interact with. It also considers how social class can influence the social construction of a young person (Chapter 6). By studying different ways in which children can be socially constructed it assesses how and why food circuits of care are ineffective or can be made more participatory. It also uses this analysis to

understand how young people create their opportunities for participation and fill gaps within their own circuits of care.

Tactics

The thesis uses the concept of tactics to further its understanding of how young people interact with and create their own opportunities for agency within food systems. Using an analogy of war, De Certeau (1984) describes tactics as methods that an individual in a weaker position uses to outsmart or dodge potential threats. For De Certeau, strategies are structural entities that “produce, tabulate and impose” operations and spaces, whereas “tactics can only use, manipulate and divert these spaces” (Certeau, 1984, p.30).

Drawing on De Certeau’s (1984) concept of tactics and strategies, the thesis works to understand how young people participate in, reject and create their own agency within food systems that don’t work for them. Chapter 5 identifies young people’s use of ‘tactics’: methods used by young people to access food through alternative avenues when the formal food systems and processes are not working for them. A consideration of tactics allows the thesis to notice and analyse fragilities in circuits of care that result in gaps in young people’s access to food.

The thesis uses tactics as a way of evaluating the (in)effectiveness of food circuits of care and assesses how young people create opportunities for their own participation or empowerment. Through combining vital mobilities literature and the concept of tactics, it introduces the term ‘vital tactics’ which are tactics employed by young people to eat food who otherwise would not have access to any food when going through the intended systems. Through this consideration it brings together the conceptual framework to view vital mobilities, circuits of care, young people’s participation and tactics all within one frame, enabling an in-depth evaluation of the dynamic and relational nature of circuits of care, resulting gaps in food provision and of young people’s agency in circuits care.

Summary

The application of this conceptual framework allows an in-depth exploration of how young people experience food insecurity. By employing the concepts of vital mobilities and the new understanding of circuits of care, the thesis will identify the systems that young people engage with to access food and determine how effective or ineffective the systems and circuits of care are in providing (or not providing) food to young people. By considering food systems through the lens of circuits of care alongside a reflection of social constructions of childhood, the thesis will also consider how young people feel cared for within the food systems they interact with and analyse their opportunities for participation within food systems, processes and policies.

Chapter Overview

The remainder of this thesis is structured into six chapters.

Chapter 2 '*Literature Review*' introduces my original conceptualisation of circuits of care and identifies the core elements of circuits of care: to be empowering, routine and reliable, sustainable, ethical, and to make the recipient feel 'cared for and about'. These core elements make up the thesis' definition of circuits of care and are principles that I aspired to in my own methodology. This definition of circuits of care acts as a thread that connects the empirical chapters within this thesis. The chapter then introduces and reviews mobilities, childhood, food justice and tactics as key areas of literature that are relevant to the development of the thesis, the achievement of its aims and the conceptualisation of food circuits of care.

Chapter 3 '*Research Design and Methodology*' introduces the research beginnings to enable the readers' understanding of how the project developed, in particular the chapter sets out the key considerations of a methodology that can research food circuits of care and vital mobilities, embrace young people's participation, and make steps towards positive change in their lived experience. The chapter explores existing literature on young people's participation, critiquing existing projects and evaluating the effectiveness of participatory approaches including Hart's ladder of participation and

Shier's alternative model. It demonstrates the consideration of these approaches in the design of the methodology and resulting decision to use a multi-method, participatory approach. The chapter then outlines and gives the reasoning behind the selection of the specific research site, and the workshops, activities and interviews that I designed and conducted in collaboration with the young people.

The following empirical chapters explore key themes identified in my efforts to understand how young people as a complex and diverse group experience food insecurity, the gaps in their circuits of care and their agentic possibilities and realities within these circuits.

Chapter 4 '*The Community Centre and Fragile Circuits of Care*' draws attention to the increasing fragility of circuits of care and explores the value and vitality of the community centre as one third sector organisation, to young people's food circuits of care. Through a vital mobilities lens, the chapter explores this increased responsibility of the community centre and the subsequent fragility of young people's food circuits of care due to the centre's vulnerability to 'moments of collapse'. The chapter also brings into view the importance of situating the research in its geographical context as it explores the complexities and experiences of circuits of care according to place.

Chapter 5 '*Young People's Tactics in the Face of Fragile Circuits of Care*' delves deeper into the nuances and intricacies of circuits of care through the exploration of young people's tactics. By identifying 'tactics' (methods and adaptations that young people develop to fill gaps in their circuits of care), the chapter uses tactics as an analytic tool to offer insight into individual participants' experiences. The chapter focuses on empirical work co-created by young people in interview to review how young people access (or do not access) food in their everyday circuits of care. Through these findings, it analyses how young people participate and adapt to structures that are not working for them (both by choice and out of necessity).

Chapter 6 '*Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care: Events and Scenarios*' explores the outcomes of the thesis. It introduces 'Youth Health Matters', an event that was the fourth prong of my methodological approach: the codesign of a visibility event with interested young people and key stakeholders discussing young people's visibility

and participation in food structures, processes, and systems. Through an analysis of this event and using existing empirical data, the chapter generates imagined scenarios of disruption as method to develop a manifesto that outlines what a robust and effective circuit of care should look like for young people. Inspired by research such as The Disruption Project (Marsden *et al.*, 2020) and projects that envisage a Mobile Utopia (López-Galviz, Büscher, and Freudendal-Pedersen, 2020; Sodero and Rackham, 2020), the chapter imagines near-future possible disruptions and considers how my participants might be affected by them. In conversation with different social constructions of childhood, it uses the disruption scenarios to imagine how young people might be given or create their own opportunities to participate whilst identifying vulnerabilities in food circuits of care. The chapter uses these explorations to create a manifesto for young people's food circuits of care that highlights action points for how contemporary and future food circuits of care can be made more robust and empowering for people like my participants.

Chapter 7 '*Conclusion*' concludes the thesis and provides a summary of the thesis' key contributions. The chapter reflects on how conceptualising food as a vital mobility allowed the thesis to develop its own definition of circuits of care. It reviews the empirical and theoretical developments made throughout the thesis in relation to vital mobilities and circuits of care, young people's participation, social constructions of childhood, and tactics. The chapter highlights the contributions made to food insecurity practice by embedding this concept of circuits of care within participatory methods. In addition, the chapter reflects on the thesis' relevance to climate change and its contribution to debates on young people's agency within climate change policies. Finally, the chapter builds on the thesis' findings and contributions to make suggestions for future avenues of research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis works to 'reimagine young people's participation in food circuits of care'. It focuses on understanding young people's lived experience of food insecurity and works to understand how young people participate or not in the systems that affect them, as well as using the project to create opportunities for empowerment.

Therefore, in this chapter of the thesis, I introduce and explain what a food circuit of care is and expand on my original contribution of what it means to be a successful circuit of care. I then explore other literature in mobilities, childhood studies, food justice and tactics and strategies. I explain how these different areas of literature contribute to my overall understanding of young people's participation within food circuits of care. I also introduce some of the broader literature through which the understanding of circuits of care could be developed. Ultimately, I demonstrate why each of these areas of literature are valuable to the overall thesis but establish why vital mobilities and food circuits of care is the perspective that I wanted to develop and embed within this thesis in order to explore young people's lived experiences of food insecurity.

In my understanding of food circuits of care, I draw from vital mobilities literature (Sodero, 2019) which predominantly focuses on the movement of blood, and I identify food as a vital material with complex circuits of care. In the first section of this chapter, I elaborate on Sodero's (2019) work on vital mobilities, outlining what a vital mobility is and discuss vital mobilities' contribution to mobilities literature. I introduce my construction of food as a vital mobility and of my conceptualisation of circuits of care, an expansion of Sodero's original iteration, and outline what makes an effective circuit of care. This understanding is key to the development of this thesis and its consideration of food as a vital mobility and young people's experiences of and participation within circuits of care.

Circuits of Care

Introducing Circuits of Care

In Sodero's work, circuits of care are an essential aspect of understanding vital mobilities. Vital mobilities are "external circulations that enable internal bodily circulations necessary to life" (Sodero, 2022, p.169) and explore how things move when it really matters. Vital mobilities are an extension of mobilities literature (mobilities literature and its relation to this thesis is further discussed within this chapter). When introducing the concept of vital mobilities, Sodero presents circuits of care as processes that enable vital mobilities "that can be ramped up in case of wide-spread crisis and are also required in everyday contexts" (Sodero, 2019, p.121). To understand the concept of blood as a vital mobility, Sodero follows the many steps and processes (circuits of care) from the point of donation to its destination: the point of care with a recipient patient. Sodero considers how the movement of blood is made possible by intersecting circuits of care, and these are subject to change and vulnerability according to geographic location, local conditions including weather and hazards, and availability of infrastructure and facilities.

Whereas Sodero focuses on blood as a vital material and its movement from point of donation to point of medical use; my project begins with individuals (young people between ages 12-17 in need of a vital material (food) and follows their experiences of circuits of care. These circuits of care include examples such as experiences of food shopping, interactions with the benefit system and other food related policies, and how young people access their school meals. From the beginning, I had a different 'starting point' from Sodero in my analysis of vital mobilities and circuits of care, with a focus on the recipients' journeys and intersections with the vital material rather than on the material's movements. I argue that the vital movements of food (and individuals' movements to access food) can be even more fractured than their blood counterparts, due to power imbalances within systems and personal economic situations. Thinking about individual circumstance within the context of access to vital materials led to my expansion and deeper consideration of the meaning and application of the term circuits of care.

Vital mobilities revolutionises thinking about mobilities and specifically of how the social circulation of materials enables bodily circulations, but I expand the conceptualisation of circuits of care outside of this context, thinking about its other dynamics. I develop the concept of circuits of care in two ways: underpinning the importance of the nuance of individuals' social situation in understanding the effectiveness and inherent inequalities of circuits of care; and adding depth to what it means to be a successful circuit of care by emphasising the importance of what it means to care and be cared for within and outside of the context of vital mobilities. Where Sodero develops circuits of care to explain vital mobilities, I explore and extend circuits of care as an *independent* concept. Sodero only develops the concept of circuits of care within the context of blood as a vital mobility, which provides strength in her understanding of blood's mobility but does not go beyond to explore the different realms of what it means to care and the socio-political systems shaping a 'circuit of care'.

My thesis expands upon Sodero's argument that "a vital mobilities approach compliments and informs ongoing discussions about the provision of healthcare in Canada, including COVID-19 response as well as climate action" (Sodero, 2022, p.170). I take this argument out of its original context and focus on the fundamental idea that vital mobilities can inform and contribute to discussion about the provision of vital mobilities in the face of uncertainty. I focus not on healthcare in Canada but on food provision within the UK in the wake of COVID-19 and in the face of the cost-of-living crisis and climate change.

By using my more intensive 'circuits of care' lens I review the movements of food as a vital material, not only within the context of vital mobilities and disruption (as originally introduced by Sodero) but considering if recipients feel cared for and/or empowered within the systems they encounter. All references to care in Sodero's book 'Under the Weather' are limited to the healthcare system; whereas I argue that my approach of focussing on the recipients of the vital material and questioning why vital materials do and do not reach them provides a more in-depth analysis of circuits of care and is essential in understanding vital mobilities. This method of critically engaging with vital mobilities through an in-depth and nuanced investigation into the individual experiences of circuits of care supports an analysis of the effectiveness of systems in

providing young people in the UK with food and promotes a wider relevance of circuits of care outside of a vital mobilities context.

Core Elements of 'Circuits of Care'

To consider what circuits of care might look like in the context of food systems and young people's lives, it is important to understand what the key elements of a successful circuit of care are and how these might be translated.

Within vital mobilities and in its most basic form, a circuit of care is the series of processes and systems that a vital material moves through to get from point A to point B. There are ongoing circuits of care in everyday life during which vital materials are regularly transported according to the daily required need; however, these need to be ramped up in times of emergency. Using the example of blood, Sodero (2019) articulates this through examples of widespread emergency such as a natural disaster, where blood as a vital material is needed to support injured individuals at hospitals and on scene; or in smaller accidents, blood is delivered on site to car crashes or nearby hospitals. The failure to deliver this blood could result in death, and so this example effectively emphasises the 'vitality' of these mobilities.

In my conceptualisation, I move away from a focus on disaster or emergency mobilities to focus on the 'everyday' circuits of care. I argue that circuits of care are much more complex in relation to the personal experience of circuits of care than Sodero originally suggests and therefore it is important to consider the everyday as well as disruptions. I maintain that the influence of individuals' social situations on the effectiveness of circuits of care is essential to understanding the complexity of circuits of care. I argue that this can be best understood in the 'monotonous' everyday mobilities. As the thesis will highlight, by working with young people to explore the personal nuance of their experiences, it becomes clear that many circuits of care within the food system are not only unsuccessful in consistently providing young people with food but often do not provide a sense of being cared for.

To identify a successful circuit of care, it is therefore important to ask whether the people receiving the vital material feel cared for; is the circuit empowering; sustainable; ethical; and routine? In this novel conceptualisation of circuits of care, I also emphasise the importance of understanding the complexities of what it means to 'care' and what 'care' means in different contexts.

These contributions and questions are grounded in and have developed from my project alongside exploration of key points from literature and definitions of care. I add depth to what it means to be a successful circuit of care by emphasising what it means to care and be cared for within and outside of the context of vital mobilities. This has allowed me to expand the meaning of circuits of care to embrace its dynamics outside of its primary vital blood mobilities context. Chapter 3 also highlights how I have embedded some of this understanding of what it means to care and be cared for within the development of the methodology and my awareness of best practice for working with potentially vulnerable young people.

The complexity of care in the food context can be understood through the example of food banks. While "food banks can be sites of caring and generous acts, some acts of compassion are structured by possession and control" (Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021, p. 1103). To illustrate this, Surman *et al.* (2021) provide the example of how food bank volunteers provide compassion and in return can expect users' gratitude as well as access to knowledge about users' personal lives. Equally, compassion can be structured by control in food banks limiting the frequency of use and users' choice of food; as well as being dependent on donations and availability of food at the food bank.

This highlights that circuits and systems aimed at providing people with care and support are not always successful and can be impeded by power imbalances and the context of individual circumstance. Food banks have been argued to generate community spirit and support but at their core are "legitimising the state's paucity of action in relation to growing levels of food insecurity" (Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021, p. 1102). In my application of a more complex circuit of care, I argue that systems and processes should be sustainable and provide opportunities for empowerment. The use of food banks is the antithesis of this. They are symbols of poverty, are not empowering to their users

and are not routine or sustainable forms of accessing food. From my ethnographic case area, food bank users may only use the food bank 3 times during one crisis, which is typically considered to be 6 months long and each parcel contains enough food for 3 days. This system is neither sustainable or routine, nor supports people in feeling 'cared for' and is therefore a failing circuit of care.

I recognise that 'to be cared for' can mean different things to different groups. Similarly, the reliability of food within a young person's circuit of care can be impacted by their family units and when experiencing food insecurity this can be a result of family units' economic situations. The economic situations of specific families can also affect who receives care. As emphasised by O'Connell, Brannen and Knight, (2019) young people can find adolescence a time of increased autonomy in their lives and as such choices of food; however, this cannot be understood in isolation and family circumstance must be taken into consideration. This is explored and considered within this chapter's discussions of childhood literature throughout the thesis' analysis.

Through my analysis and investigation into what it means to care and for a system to be caring; alongside the process of learning throughout the application of my multi-method, participatory methodology, I have developed a revised version of circuits of care that I promote as method. My definition of circuits of care is distinguished from Sodero's in its focus on the recipients of vital mobilities and emphasis on the care within systems; this enables these key concepts to be understood and embedded within the project and its methodological approach. As a result of my exploration and development of circuits of care, I have developed a list of what I determine to be the key elements of my concept of circuits of care:

- **A circuit of care should be empowering.**

The processes and systems providing people with a vital material should work to facilitate empowering opportunities for the people receiving it. In the context of food, this should include people having choice to eat the food they would like in a safe and caring environment.

- **A circuit of care should be routine and reliable.**

People in receipt of the vital material should be able to depend upon the circuits of care they experience. In the case of food, the people experiencing circuits of care should be able to rely on them to have access to ample, quality and choice of food. Young people experiencing food insecurity should not have to wonder where their next meal comes from, and these experiences should be understood in the context of their family units when circuits of care have broken down.

- **A circuit of care should be sustainable.**

Systems should be resilient to change and maintained in case of change. In the context of food, this sustainability should be in reference to changes in personal income, season (for young people and their families, this also includes in and outside of school time), and in the face of climate change, (something I will come to reflect on within Chapter 6).

- **A circuit of care should be ethical.**

In this sense, a circuit of care should be morally acceptable and “align... with the values, needs and expectations of society” (Geoghegan-Quinn, 2014). In the case of food, this can mean a multitude of things; it can refer the basic human right of achieving a “standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food” (UN, Article 25) alongside the ethical systems of food in connection to climate change and sustainability.

- **A circuit of care should make the recipient feel ‘cared for’ or ‘cared about’.**

For a circuit of care to be successful, the systems and processes that deliver the vital material should ensure that the personal experience of these systems is a positive one and the person in receipt of the vital material feels both the “affective caring about and material caring for” (Dorow and Mandizadza, p. 1249). For food circuits of care, this should encompass choice of food, dependence upon quality food and the delivery of food in systems with care and dignity.

This section has discussed the project's unique application of circuits of care as its own independent concept and this thesis' conceptualisation of food as a vital mobility. Following the identification of the key elements within my conceptualisation food as a vital mobility and of circuits of care, the next sections within this chapter outline key areas of literature relevant to the thesis' original conceptualisation as well as its four research aims (outlined in Chapter 1).

Mobilities

Sodero's concept of vital mobilities stems from mobilities theory and mobilities as a wider area of research and literature. The study of mobilities was first introduced by Urry and Sheller (2006); it moves away from the view of social science as 'a-mobile' and emphasises the importance of researching the movement in everyday life. This encompasses "both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life." (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.1). In his book, *Mobilities*, Urry remarked that "it sometimes seems as if all the world is on the move" (2007, p.3). Mobilities theory and literature explores all of these movements that constitute 'the social'.

The new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) offers social scientists a way of moving away from a stagnant view of society to investigate the movements of people, ideas and materials and places an emphasis on the "thin networks of connections" that tie people and places together. The new mobilities paradigm emphasises and explores the relationship between time and space; Sheller and Urry (2006) use the example of the car to illustrate that advances in technology have compressed social distance and "transform[ed] time-space 'scapes'" (p. 209). As such, the new mobilities paradigm "is a broader theoretical project aimed at going beyond the imagery of 'terrains' as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes and calling into question scalar logics

such as local/global as descriptors” (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 209). This imagery of going beyond terrains emphasises how the mobilities turn allows researchers to consider issues outside of geographical borders and disciplinary boundaries (Sheller and Urry, 2006). For Urry and Sheller (2006), the mobilities turn involves examining the flows of the human and more-than-human, evaluating the way in which people are transported, ideas are communicated, and social mobility moves up and down. This examination of these flows is particularly important for this thesis’ analysis of the flows associated with food systems and circuits.

For Cresswell, “mobility plays a central role in discussions of the body and society” (2012, p. 1) and allows a consideration of culture that is hybrid and dynamic. Building on Urry and Shellers work, Cresswell further critiques the view of geographies as fixed and emphasises that “mobility is just as spatial – as geographical – and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place” (2012, p. 4). As such, Cresswell (2012) offers up a basic signifier of mobility as moving from point A to B and offers this visualisation, where the line is the starting point for exploration:

A ----- > B

Cresswell (2012) understands mobility through three relational moments: human mobility (something observable and quantifiable), representational mobility (ideological mobilities like film, medicine, literature), how mobility is practiced and experienced.

When thinking about how mobility is practiced and experienced, a key expansion of mobilities literature is mobilities of care. This also holds relevance for this thesis’ conceptualisation of circuits of care and considerations of how young people ‘feel cared for and about’. A. Balcom Raleigh, Kirveennummi and Puustinen, (2020) highlight that care is a key motivation and influence behind individual mobility and suggest that this should be considered when imagining and designing mobile utopias. They argue that “the lens of care in mobility has served as an explanatory framework” (A. Balcom Raleigh, Kirveennummi and Puustinen, 2020, p. 64) for the ways in which people move

and therefore offers insights into what future mobilities people will need based on these movements associated with care. Similarly, Joelsson, Balkmar and Henriksson, (2025) review how transport is caring or not and highlights informal networks of care that individuals often rely on when using public transport; they offer an example of people with prams or buggy's relying on the help of strangers to help them board a bus. Additionally, Joelsson, Blakmar and Henriksson (2025) highlight that care influences where people choose to live and situate their lives, as individuals determine where they would like to live depending on transport links and accessibility to loved ones. These observations of care in relation to mobilities emphasise the importance of valuing individual relationships and family networks when trying to understand complex mobilities (A. Balcom Raleigh, Kirveennummi and Puustinen, 2020; Sträuli, 2024; Joelsson, Balkmar and Henriksson, 2025).

These considerations of how mobility is practiced and experienced, alongside observations of care in mobilities are particularly interesting for this thesis. Observations of care and mobilities highlight that individual experience is not always the same and that people experience both mobilities and care differently. Skeggs (2004) emphasises that "mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship" (p. 49); this consideration has developed to become at the forefront of much mobility scholarship and spearheaded by Mimi Sheller's concept of 'mobility justice' (Sheller, 2018).

Mobility Justice

Observations of power and inequity in mobilities literature and mobility justice hold particular relevance for the development of this thesis as I explore the differences in young people's opportunities for meaningful participation in food circuits of care. Awareness of inequity in mobilities is also important for this thesis as it develops and builds considerations of social constructions of childhood that young people face to understand how this impacts their capacity to participate.

Mobility justice is a key concept that stems from mobilities theory. The concept critiques existing theories of justice for being too sedentary and considers justice as "unstable

configurations that move across scales and realms” (Sheller, 2018, p. 43). Drawing on spatial justice and transportation justice, Sheller (2018) creates a new way of considering whether mobility is equitable instead of just accessible. Sheller views mobility justice as having multi-layered politics of mobility with “embodied relations of racialisation, gender, age, disability [and] sexuality which inform uneven freedoms of mobility and unequal capabilities” (2018, p. 70). Mobility justice builds on the concepts of the new mobilities paradigm by bringing together mobilities theory’s emphasis on connecting scales and sites of mobility to view justice as a combination of struggles across different factors like environment, transport, accessibility, and global distribution of natural resources (Sheller, 2018). This has been a key development for mobilities studies as it introduced a wider lens for understanding how mobility is experienced and a way to review existing systems. Mobility justice moves beyond a lens of transportation justice to consider movement through a feminist lens, review how colonialism continues to impact mobility as well as considering the ‘right to the city’ with a focus on ensuring participation of disempowered groups. This has become particularly important when considering mobility in the face of a changing climate, with the impacts of climate being felt more harshly by often minority or disempowered groups, Sheller’s view of mobility justice calls for considerations of restorative justice in relation to climate change. Sheller outlines her hopes for mobility justice in being able to draw on “deeper and more far-reaching colonial, corporeal and planetaries histories and interrelations” (2018, p. 46) to support more equitable political and social movements.

Mobility justice has been influential in the development and creation of many other research projects. One example of this is Cook and Butz, (2016) analysis of mobility justice in the context of disaster. Cook and Butz (2016) build on considerations of how mobility is entangled with power, social exclusion and politics in their investigation into the Attabad landslide in Pakistan in 2010. The landslide blocked key roads and created a new lake that significantly restricted mobility; by using a mobility justice lens, Cook and Butz (2016) observed the uneven demobilization of impacted villagers. They highlighted that low-income villagers whose income depended on farming were significantly impacted by immobility as they were unable to ship cash crops, therefore reducing their income and consequently, being unable to purchase increasingly

expensive food due to shortages. Their application of mobility justice to understand disaster contexts demonstrated the influential power that management strategies had on motility (the potential to move) and emphasised existing power dynamics and inequities in infrastructure. Power is an important aspect of this thesis' consideration of how young people participate in food systems (how they get to food and how food gets to them) and a key theme of mobilities and mobility justice. For example, in a special issue of *Mobilities*, Richardson, (2013) introduces the issue which discusses (im)mobilities associated with borders. Within the issue Bærenholdt, (2013) introduces the concept of 'governmobility' which emphasises that mobility is largely dictated by power and government and that individuals with less power or in minority groups are often given less powers or permissions to move.

This understanding of the power dynamics involved in mobilities and how individual mobility is influenced by policies and institutions is key for the development of Chapters 5 and 6 within this thesis and my understanding of how young people experience and participate in food systems. For example, Chapter 5 explores how young people can or cannot travel to school to access free school meals, observes unequal access to healthy and nutritious food depending on families' access to transport to large supermarkets, and considers how young people have to implement tactics to access food outside of normal food systems.

Climate Mobilities

As highlighted in Chapter 1, this thesis was originally inspired by young people's responses to climate change and calls for political change. Mobilities literature is closely linked with considerations of climate change and a rapidly changing environment. As such, mobilities literature has expanded to consider how climate change alters contemporary and future mobilities (Urry, 2008, 2015; Sodero, 2022). Urry, (2016) contemplates how futures might become catastrophic, particularly in relation to climate, food, water and security and how this might impact long term mobilities. Through discussions of catastrophism, Urry (2016) warns that ideas of dystopia can

encourage the planning of viable climate alternatives but can also lead to “problematic fatalism” (p. 61) which may encourage people to continue with troublesome high emission lifestyles instead of seeking change. Mobilities literature continued to develop considerations of a ‘mobile utopia’ in the face of climate threat, including in a special issue of *Mobilities* (López-Galviz *et al.*, 2020).

The concept of mobile utopia builds on Urry’s (2008, 2015) and other mobility scholar’s consideration of climate and future mobilities. Urry (2016) highlights that considering climate futures presents a powerful discourse across the sciences to predict how human life will be transformed. To help consider what mobilities might look and like and how mobilities might contribute to a changing (or better) climate, utopia is used as method (Urry, 2016; Buscher, 2017) building on Levitas (2013)’s work. Bringing together elements of mobility justice and restorative climate justice, Buscher suggests that using mobile utopia as method can offer alternatives to contemporary ways of living and “foster different ideas of moral responsibility towards other species and future generations” (2017, p. 12). Mobile utopia offers a way for mobilities scholarship to use the new mobilities paradigm in an imaginative way to imagine and construct new and just mobility systems. However, it is important to note that utopia can mean different things for different groups; for example, Urry (2016) outlines that for some, the invention of the car was considered a utopia, or ‘autopia’ but more recently, organisations view a utopia as being zero-emission and car-free. Within this thesis, the concept of mobile utopia alongside scholarship on disruption influences the development of Chapter 6 as a way to consider how young people might participate in future food systems and face different disruptions.

Emergency Mobilities

Disruption is a key theme within this thesis (it explores everyday disruptions in mundane food systems as well as large scale disruptions such as the pandemic and imagined disruptions in Chapter 6). One example of how mobilities literature has expanded is through Adey’s (2016) conceptualisation of emergency mobilities. Adey’s (2016)

emergency mobilities considers how “mobilities and immobilities occur in, because of, or through emergency” (p. 32) and offers further reflection on the relationship between mobilities and time-space compression. This consideration of mobilities includes the forced mobility or immobility of people because of disaster but also presents the fluidity of the landscape as a further element of mobility to be considered. Moving and fluid landscapes like landslides, earthquakes and tsunamis are examples of the more-than-human elements of mobility that have a complex relationship with human mobilities and activities. Increasingly fluid landscapes are often the result of human activity and contribution to a changing climate but ultimately result in the movement of people away from such disaster areas or leaves them immobilised (Adey, 2016). Adey also considers governance as highlighted by Sheller (2018) as an influential factor in emergency mobilities, with enforced mobilities and immobilities such as curfews or quarantines being put into place.

The pandemic introduced further analysis and exploration of emergency immobilities at a time when mobility was at an all-time contemporary low. Adey *et al.* (2021) explore how the COVID-19 pandemic produced immobilities and giving homeworking as an example, highlight how the pandemic may have forever impacted human mobilities in relation to commuting, with offices continuing work-from-home policies in order to cut office costs. The pandemic introduced paradoxes such as the downturn in tourism resulting in significant losses in economy, but significant improvements to environment and pollution levels (Adey *et al.*, 2021). These insights into the mobile response to covid-19 are transferrable to the action needed to tackle climate change (Adey *et al.*, 2021); in fact, they view failures to contain COVID-19 as a possible insight into the failures that climate change might set in motion. This consideration demonstrates the connection between many elements of mobilities scholarship and climate change and using mobilities theory to consider what a cooler climate might look like and how it might be shaped. This thesis explores the pandemic’s emergency immobilities in relation to young people’s access to food circuits of care in Chapter 4.

This section of the literature review has highlighted that mobilities literature is key to the development of this thesis, particularly its conceptualisation of food circuits of care and understanding of how different young people access food in the everyday and when

facing different scales of disruption. A review of mobilities literatures has highlighted a key theme that capacity and accessibility of mobilities are not equal or just. Placing importance on individual circumstance in understanding how someone experiences the world is also a key theme in literature surrounding childhood; this is important for thesis' understanding of how young people experience and have access to food circuits of care.

Childhood

The beginning of this chapter introduced my conceptualisation of circuits of care. I highlighted the importance of familial circumstance and adolescence as factors influencing how people feel cared for or about and the impact that this holds creating effective circuits of care. I introduced literature from O'Connell, Brannen and Knight (2019) who highlighted that young people often find adolescence a time of increased autonomy but also a time of challenges and change. This thesis focuses on how young people experience circuits of care, are socially constructed and participate meaningfully in food systems. As such, it is essential for me to explore literature relating to childhood.

Childhood has been explored through several lenses within academia. These include through children's geographies, children's rights, examinations of the life course, children's mobilities, considerations of early childhood development and observations of childhood explored through different social constructions. This thesis explores the history of young people's rights and their rights to participation Chapter 3 and considers how social constructions of childhood are experienced in Chapter 6. Therefore, this element of the literature review considers how literature and scholarship on childhood studies has evolved and explores the relevance of children's geographies and children's mobilities in the development of this thesis.

There has been a consistent debate within childhood studies on whether to focus on developmental or social approaches to childhood (Holloway, 2014), however, these two sides have become more blurred as literature has expanded and developed. Through the developmental lens of childhood studies, childhood is viewed as a stage of the life course during which children grow into adults, often with a focus on biological maturity

(Holloway, 2014). As such, some outlooks on children's studies focus on biological and education-based outcomes rather than valuing children's experiences when thinking about childhood as a period of a person's life. Alternatively, Qvortrup, Corsaro and Honig, (2009) suggest childhood studies should consider childhood as both a period and permanent structural form in which "children spend their personal childhood period" but "childhood as a form does not go away and will stay there to receive new generations of children" (p. 26). Therefore, they argue that considerations of childhood should value childhood in its own right and not as a stage of becoming; instead, it should support agency within childhood rather than as an outcome of it.

This conceptualisation of childhood as a period of agency is central to this thesis' focus on valuing lived experience and viewing young people as meaningful participants. This thesis takes different social constructions of childhood into consideration when understanding participation but works towards creating opportunities for meaningful participation and viewing young people as agentic. Another key element that this thesis considers is that inequalities and differences exist between and within generations (Qvortup, Corsaro and Honig, 2009). Children's Geographies is a sub-discipline of childhood studies that explores these inequalities based on space, place and social background.

Children's Geographies

Whilst literature on childhood studies is incredibly broad, for the purpose of this thesis, it is valuable to engage with the development of children's geographies as a sub-discipline of childhood studies. Children's geographies emerged in the 1970s and has developed throughout its history with three different 'intellectual roots': "early research on children's cognition and mapping abilities"; "a rapid growth of social approaches... with an emphasis on young people's voices"; and "feminist research which stimulated interest in parents, educators and other institutions which shape, and are shaped by, children's lives" (Holloway, 2014, p. 378). This consideration of children's cognition and specifically their ability to map-read (Blaut *et al.*, 2003), Holloway (2014) argues, has all

but disappeared, and this is due to shift in focus. Children's geographies literature has developed to think about children as beings and not becomings and this element is essential for the thesis' consideration of how young people meaningfully participate and are constructed by key stakeholders.

Children's geographies is constantly changing (Horton, Kraftl and Tucker, 2008). 'New' children's geographies (which emerged in the 1990s) emphasises an importance on including the "missing geographies and voices of a quarter of the population" (Horton, Kraftl and Tucker, 2008, p. 338). To help understand and address these missing voices, Horton and Kraftl, (2006) highlight that children's geographies often explores everydayness, in which the details of routine life that one might consider unremarkable and take for granted are of key interest in understanding how childhood is socially experienced. This approach is significant for this thesis' consideration of young people's experiences of food as it investigates what young people might consider mundane interactions with food systems, to understand how young people access food and how care within these systems is experienced or not. Horton and Kraftl emphasise the importance of exploring this mundane to understand the more "neglected, underestimated, or effaced parts of the world" (2006, p. 71). Scholars of children's geographies aim to reduce inequalities in research and the outside world; however, Horton, Kraftl and Tucker (2008) also critique children's geographies for having less impact in the wider world of geography and argue that these voices largely remain missing. This lack of youth voice and participation in the wider world (outside of academia) is explored within this thesis.

One instance of young people having a bigger voice in the wider world of geography has been young people's activism around climate change. Farini and Scollan (2024) suggest that young people's climate activism challenges generational order as children make demands of adults to take responsibility for climate change. This notion can be linked back to Qvortrup, Corsaro and Honig's (2009) discussion of children's geographies as they notice and call for further exploration of a change in intergenerational relations, particularly those that "may be derived from demographic developments, that is, developments which children cannot be accused of having caused, but which will nevertheless impact them fundamentally" (p. 30). Other examples of such demographic

developments include the March for our Lives campaign hosted by young person, Emma González, in 2018; a call for stricter gun regulation in the USA (Bent, 2020); and Malala Yousafzai's call for girl's rights to education (Sharpe, 2015). Sharpe also highlights that Yousafzai received a great deal of international attention after she was shot for demanding rights for education; however, it is more difficult for young people to be met with engagement on more mundane issues. This reiterates the importance of children's geographies in investigating and uncovering the everyday, not just the extreme (Horton and Kraftl, 2006).

Children's Mobilities

Both childhood and mobilities are central to this thesis. But how is the thesis situated within the subfield of 'children's mobilities'? Children's mobilities literature is conceptualised by viewing childhood as "situated and fluid" (Murray and Cortés-Morales, 2019, p. 18). As with applications of both mobilities theory and childhood studies, children's mobilities ranges in the way it is applied and discussed. For example, Pooley, (2016) implements an approach of exploring the ordinary when exploring how young people travel across the city; that, like in children's geographies, observations of the everyday can highlight "significant technological and social changes" to how young people move and experience transport (p. 297).

Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019) highlight the importance of viewing children and childhood as individual rather than universal, because a universal view of childhood does not embrace the fluidity of childhood; instead, they emphasise how "spatial and geopolitical contexts" (Murray and Cortés-Morales, 2019, p. 22) lead to children living widely different lives. Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019) highlight that the application of a mobile ontology to childhood studies enables an understanding of the multidimensional, multi-scalar and unevenness of childhood. This view of young people as living wildly different lives is particularly important for this thesis' understanding of how young people do or don't access food.

Furthermore, the application of children's mobilities also brings into consideration Sheller's (2018) concept of mobility justice, through which Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019) add depth to considerations of childhood and children's mobilities by considering inequities in children's movements such as forced migration, surveillance and everyday (im)mobilities enforced by institutions like schools. Skelton (2009) creates and builds on an understanding of how migrant children experience and navigate 'street' spaces alongside coping with disruptions caused by migration to challenge views of children as victims but demonstrate agency through mobility. This application of children's mobilities offers a new space for considering how children can be provided with safe environments to participate in policies alongside coping with difficult conditions relating to migration; this has relevance for my understanding of coping with and participating in food systems whilst coping with difficult home and school lives and food insecurity.

Within this thesis, policies like Free School Meals and school environments become a key element to understanding young peoples' lived experience of food insecurity. The thesis is therefore situated within children's mobilities literature. It speaks to the way that young people participate in policies and systems, specifically by exploring how individual young people's lives intersect with vital mobilities in a diversity of ways. Working to reimagine young people's participation in food circuits of care is a useful addition to children's mobility literature that has not yet been explored.

More recently, observations of children's (im)mobilities and concerns around the impacts of lack of mobility were brought to the forefront of childhood studies because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined above, in their discussions of children's mobilities Murray and Cortés-Morales' (2019) argue that an understanding of childhood mobilities and experiences should be multidimensional and multi-scalar due to vast differences in spatial and geo-political contexts; this was highlighted and exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This project's approach highlights that such an analysis could be extended to see how changes in vital mobilities and the flows within circuits of care are transformed and impact children's experiences in such circumstances (Chapter 6 expands on this).

A wide array of research has been carried out investigating how children were impacted by the pandemic and Cortés-Morales *et al.*, (2022) highlighted that the pandemic not only increased levels of poverty but also led to new implications in inequality. Furthermore, Holt and Murray (2022) observed that the immobility caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns unequally impacted young people depending on their home situation, class and ethnic background. With homeschooling exacerbating inequalities for children in poorer or less educated families both in terms of education and physical and mental wellbeing, alongside a rise in domestic violence caused by immobility and families being contained in their residencies (Holt and Murray, 2022).

These observations demonstrate and emphasise that research on childhood, children's geographies and children's mobilities should consider a wide range of children to understand how space, place, and politics impact childhood inequalities. As such, Holt and Murray (2022) highlight that by using a children's mobilities lens to consider the impact of immobility, new insights can be made into how policies should be developed and improved to support children. Using a children's mobilities lens allows us to understand inequities in children's motility and provides a mobile lens to analyse policies that affect young people. However, because this thesis focuses on reimagining young people's participation in food circuits of care, I am still left with questions around vital mobilities and flows within circuits of care. Particularly, how do young people access food and how caring or just are those circuits associated with the delivery of food to young people? Food justice provides another lens through which I can begin to explore answers to these questions as it offers a way of thinking about the power dynamics and (in)equity within food systems.

Food Justice

This thesis focuses on how young people experience food insecurity and their capacity to participate meaningfully in food circuits of care. It explores how the community centre in which the empirical data is collected creates and/or fills gaps in food circuits of care (Chapter 4) and determines how constructions of young people enable or disable

their participation in food circuits of care. In this chapter, I introduced my conceptualisation of food circuits of care and highlighted that care can mean different things to different people. In the context of food, food banks have been argued to generate community spirit and support but at their core are “legitimising the state’s paucity of action in relation to growing levels of food insecurity” (Surman *et al.*, 2021, p. 1102). This links to the thesis’ considerations of power and participation in circuits of care. Power and participation are key elements of mobilities and childhood literature; food justice provides a lens to explore the power dynamics and parameters of how food is grown, transported and distributed. It provides a different and valuable lens to explore food as a key element to this thesis, however, due to the thesis’ focus on vital mobilities, circuits of care and young people’s participation, food justice is not embedded in the development of the thesis.

Food justice has over a 20-year history and there are a variety of different avenues that scholars and activists have explored within the parameters of ‘food justice’. For Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) food justice means “ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (p. 6). In the winter issue of *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, Gottlieb and Fisher (2000) started a discussion noting the parallels between environmental justice and the approach of emerging community food groups. They considered the environmental justice slogan that the environment is “where we live, work and play” and highlighted that for food justice, this could be altered to consider that food justice is “where, what and how we eat”. This observation was key for highlighting how “new work on food could be seen as seeking to transform where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, accessed and eaten” (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010, p. 5). Conceptualisations of food justice vary and continue to evolve as research and literature on the subject grows. However, key themes of discussion consider how inequities in the food system create barriers to easily accessible sources of healthy and affordable food; and how groups more likely to experience these barriers include low income individuals and minority groups (Merritt, Clark and Freedman, 2024).

Food Justice and Food Sovereignty

The history of food justice literature has a strong relationship with the development of international food policy. The concept and principles of food justice largely stem from the Food Sovereignty Declaration developed in the 1966 UN Food Summit (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996). At the summit, La Via Campesina offered a definition for the term food sovereignty: “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Via Campesina, 2018). Food sovereignty has six principles (also known as pillars) established in the International Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007. These principles are: 1) focus on food for people; 2) value food providers; 3) localise food systems; 4) put control locally; 5) build knowledge and skills; and 6) work with nature (Via Campesina, 2018). The first pillar: a “focus on food for people”, which emphasises people’s “right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised” (Via Campesina, 2018, p. 14), is particularly important to discussions of and work towards food justice and for this thesis’ understanding of food circuits of care.

The concept of food justice has similarities with that of food sovereignty but diverges through its focus on inequities in the food system that contribute and/or exacerbate “disparities in health, economic, and environmental outcomes along the lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, ability and citizenship” (Merritt, Clark and Freedman, 2024, p.56). Coulson and Milbourne (2021) emphasise that the concept of food justice is embedded in struggles for economic justice.

Literature and debates around food justice have grown following the 1996 UN Food Summit and continued to develop and evolve alongside the development of international policy and in reaction to international affairs (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010; Murray *et al.*, 2023). Coulson and Milbourne (2021) highlight that the financial crisis of 2007-2008 was a catalyst for activism and interest in food system inequalities. Murray *et al.* (2023) highlight the impact of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on food justice literature as demonstrated in Table 1. The SDG 2 “end hunger, achieve food

security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” (UN General Assembly, 2015) holds significance over the development of food justice as a concept, particularly surrounding food justices’ emphasis on providing easy access to nutritious food for all and its awareness of the power dynamics associated with food policies. It is clear from the significant increase in literature, that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 at the UN Sustainable Development Summit was followed by a significant increase in academic engagement with food justice.

Table 1: Growth in food justice literature by year, discipline cluster and category (Murray et al., 2023, p. 730)

Years	Discipline	Social equity	Food security	Food system transformation	Community participation and agency	Environmental sustainability
2004	AS	1	1	1	1	1
2005						
2006	AS	1	1		1	1
2006						
2008	SS	1				
2009	SS	1	1		1	1
2010	AS, SS	2	2	2	4	1
2011	PH	1	1		1	
2012	AS, SS	2	2	1	4	1
2013	SS	2	1	1	2	1
2014	H, SS	6	4	6	5	
2015	AS, SS, PH	12	11	9	10	6
2016	AS, SS	5	4	4	5	4
2017	AS, SS, PH	15	15	10	19	8
2018	AS, SS	14	15	5	11	4
2019	AS, SS	7	7	2	2	1
2020	AS, SS	11	7	8	9	5

AS, Applied Science; SS, Social Science; H, Humanities; PH, Public Health.

In their consideration of food justice, Gottlieb and Joshi highlight that “what constitutes a food justice approach remains a moving target” (2010, p. 6). As highlighted in Table 1, Murray *et al.* (2023) divided literature into five categories or lenses of how food justice can be viewed: through a social equity lens, food security, food system transformation, community participation and agency, and environmental sustainability. For this thesis, one of the most important categories is the consideration of community participation and agency.

The concept of considering community engagement in food systems and promoting healthy communities is central to discussions of food justice. Murray *et al.* (2022) highlighted that much of the literature engages with or “indicates the need for further

community participation and agency” (Murray *et al.*, 2022, p. 732) and noticed an alignment of food security literature with human-rights based approaches.

Alkon and Agyeman (2011) developed the concept of bringing together food justice and healthy communities by emphasising the importance of unpacking and understanding the roles that race, class and geography play in communities’ access to food. They argue that an outlook of food justice that builds community can also act as a tool for “racial and economic liberation”. Within Alkon and Agyeman’s (2011) book McEntee highlights the need to “untangle race and class” (p. 336) as white-working class groups are at odds with their racial privilege versus their marginal economic status. The book argues that both low income and marginalised communities are at risk of food security and food inequities and therefore need autonomy “to feed themselves, but...also create new narratives linking cultural traditions and racial identities to a just and sustainable food way” (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011, p. 336).

Coulson and Milbourne (2021) offer up the concept of the ‘justice multiple’ which “brings together a multiplicity of framings and situated practices of food justice” (p. 43) and suggests that which “plural, spatial-temporal (or intra-/intergenerational) and more-than-human conceptions of justice should be fully integrated into a broader notion of food justice” (p. 54). Coulson and Milbourne consider how food justice is practiced in the United Kingdom context; they acknowledge that scholarship on food justice can “neglect addressing class and racial injustice” (2021, p.43) and instead suggest that by examining existing forms of food activism and advocacy, the justice multiple and diverse voices of food justice can be exposed.

Within this thesis, I explore food insecurity experienced by a largely white and low-income group of participants who live in a deprived coastal area and value their identity as a coastal community (Chapter 4). This demonstrates why it is valuable to situate my work within food justice; however, it is important to note that Alkon and Agyeman’s (2011) analysis of access to food does not include age or lifestyle. This is a clear gap that this thesis identifies and explores when working to understand young people’s lived experiences of food insecurity – particularly as this thesis has situated itself within

children's mobilities emphasis on the importance of viewing children and childhood as individual rather than universal.

More recent scholarship calls for a wider interpretation of food justice that incorporates a recognition and emphasis on capability-based avenues and collective solidarity (Sbicca, 2018). One such example of this is Blake's (2019a; 2019b) food ladders approach that offers a practical approach to food justice. Blake's (2019) food ladders approach provides community-scale interventions to build local resilience to food insecurity. Blake's (2019) work is an example of a food justice approach that builds on community participation and agency as its avenue of focus (Murray *et al.*, 2023) with an emphasis on grassroots operations that fosters local level activism. In Blake's food ladder (Figure 1), being on Rung 1 of the ladder is to be receiving emergency food, rung 2 builds community capacity and Rung 3 activities foster local activities to improve food justice and food security, as well as challenging local systems. Blake explains that individuals can move up or down the ladder according to their personal circumstance, but to be at the top of the ladder is to have achieved food security and built community capacity. Rung 3 is indicative of the 'community participation' identified by Murray *et al.* (2023) and of Coulson and Milbourne's (2021) call for transformative activism as it identifies methods of grassroots transformative food systems like community gardens and community agency.

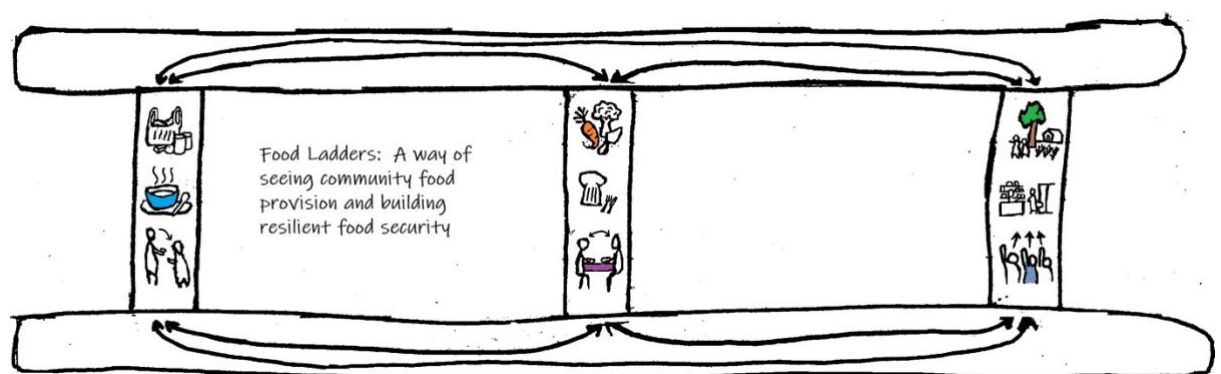


Figure 1: The Food Ladders Approach (Blake, 2019) illustrating Rung 1 to Rung 3 from left to right.

This review reveals a development in scholarship from a focus on environmental justice, to understanding the complexities and multi-faceted elements of food justice, to a call

for building an emphasis on community partnership and agency in achieving food justice.

This thesis explores vital mobilities, circuits of care and young people's participation in food systems, it is not grounded in the food justice paradigm, but it is valuable to situate the approach and the developments of the thesis within this field. In particular, the thesis relates to and builds on food justice literature's concern for health and economic disparities. I also build on its emphasis on building community capacity and agency; I do this through my focus on young people's participation as well as my approach to a caring research methodology that creates opportunities for empowerment (Chapters 3 and 7 go into more detail on this). However, food justice only progresses the project so far in its thinking about young people, their communities and food circuits of care. In particular, the review of literature highlighted the gap in consideration of age and lifestyle when thinking about food justice as well as the flows and movements associated with access to food.

This absence of age and lifestyle considerations leaves me questioning what community capacity building would look like for some of my participants – how would they be involved? Is a community garden (like (Blake, 2019) suggests) something that they would be given access to or even be built within their local area? These questions reflect the thesis' focus on understanding individual lived experience of food insecurity as well as its focus on participation in food circuits of care. This thesis observes that young people's participation relies on power dynamics within their environment and policies that they interact with. As such it is essential for me to engage with literature that considers power within systems.

Tactics and Strategies

This chapter has explored literature relating to mobilities, childhood and food justice. Mobilities provided a valuable lens for exploring vital mobilities and viewing processes and experiences as mobile. Children's mobilities offered a bridge for understanding children's mobility in the context of how childhood is understood and observed, and

children's geographies provided a way of thinking about childhood not as a time of becoming but as a valuable period within its own right. This had specific relevance to this thesis' emphasis on lived experience. Food justice enabled me to consider how access to food is influenced by policy and is not always equal. These observations hold value for thinking about food as a vital mobility and how young people do not have equitable access to food. However, a key element of this thesis is exploring how young people participate (or don't) in food circuits of care. Reviewing literature relating to childhood allowed some insight into the diversity of childhood and participation in society but it is important to think more clearly about what enables or inhibits young people's participation and therefore what makes food systems effective or not.

De Certeau introduces the concept of 'tactics and strategies' in his (1984) book 'The Practice of Everyday Life'. The concept of tactics and strategies provides this thesis with a way to explore the power dynamics within food systems and circuits of care and gain a better insight into young people's capacity for participation and agency. De Certeau positions tactics and strategies as modalities of action; strategies offer more formal practices in structural entities that "produce, tabulate and impose" operations and spaces, whereas the more informal "tactics can only use, manipulate and divert these spaces" (1984, p. 30). The key difference being that strategies operate from a position of already having power, whereas tactics are designed around being comparatively powerless and aimed at eroding power from the hegemonic group and acting as a way of 'making do'. For De Certeau (1984), tactics are used by the powerless to erode power from the powerful. In his introduction of strategies and tactics, De Certeau uses the analogy of war to demonstrate the differences and practical applications of tactics and strategies. Within a war, the 'strategy' is a calculation of power that has its own base and a level of control (such as an army). The tactics come from a place of powerlessness and resistance (such as a smaller insurgency), in which the less powerful group takes advantage of opportunities as they arise to deliver isolated blows (De Certeau, 1984). De Certeau explains that tactics lie in all practices of life and rely on seizing opportunities as they arise without having a long-term plan and that whatever is gained is often not a sustainable profit and a way of "making do". In his war analogy, the rebels using tactics do not have a permanent position of strength so constantly have to keep moving and

adapting to changes and emerging threats. As such, de Certeau expresses that “a tactic is an art of the weak” and often used as a “last resort” (1984, p.37).

Power is an important theme in De Certeau’s consideration of tactics and strategies. He relates everyday practices of tactics to “ageless arts” of living and surviving, by providing the example of a fish using a trick to disguise itself from predators as a ‘tactic’. In this example, the fish uses a tactic as a method of survival, furthering De Certeau’s emphasis on tactics being used by the powerless as the hunted fish has less power than its predator so resorts to disguising himself. In comparison, a more mundane and everyday example of a tactic is suggested as a worker diverting their time whilst being ‘on company time’ to write a personal letter or borrow a workplace item for personal use (De Certeau, 1984). This is a much more mundane example than the hunter and hunted but provides another example of the power disparities between tactics and strategies.

Tactics: An Art of the Weak?

De Certeau’s generalisation of tactics as a sign of weakness has been criticised by other academics. Ahearne, (1995) praises de Certeau for “offering a new set of perspectives on ‘ordinary’ kinds of operation and intelligence” (p. 188) as well as bringing a degree of “conceptual clarity” through his attention to “various divisions of power” (p. 161). However, Ahearne also suggests that the concept of tactics and strategies is too clear cut and that de Certeau is “mistaken” in thinking that tactics are just an art of the weak. Instead, Ahearne suggests that the powerful entities and systems of power would be smart to use tactics and therefore tactics can also be an art of the powerful by proposing that “the more strategic resources which an agency of power has at its disposal, the more it can afford to ‘waste’ on tactics designed to confuse, mislead or seduce its targets” (1995, p. 162).

Eduardo Alonso, (2017) further challenges De Certeau’s conceptualisation of tactics as a sign of weakness and instead suggests that the existence of tactics is an indicator of absences in systems and structural entities. This criticism of viewing tactics as indicative of weakness emphasises that tactics as a way of “making do” is a symbol of less powerful

entities filling gaps in systems rather than acting as an indication of powerlessness. As such, Eduardo Alonso outlines that people using tactics are ways of “making use of what is given to them in ways unanticipated and unintended by the grids of power which structure their everyday lives” (2017, p. 372). These tactics and grids of power exist in a multitude of ways in everyday life; Alonso (2017) suggests that cooking, talking and reading are all examples that could be tactical practices. This could include adapting a recipe to cook with the ingredients that are available to an individual because of the changing market, change in individual financial circumstance or stock availability. In another example, Yilmaz (2013) demonstrates that talking can be a way of making do and a way of articulating power that migrants have by talking to one another in their home language rather than the host.

Sereke and Drzewiecka, (2024) utilise the concepts of De Certeau’s (1984) tactics and strategies but build on Eduardo Alonso’s (2017) argument that tactics should not always be viewed as a sign of weakness. Sereke and Drzewiecka (2024) apply tactics and strategies to understand how migrants navigate everyday life. By understanding tactics used by migrants in their new host countries, Sereke and Drzewiecka (2024) argue that tactics and strategies offer a “useful tool for understanding migrants as agentic” but that viewing them as binary forms of power simplifies the complexities of “how the marginalised navigate everyday life” (p. 2266). They suggest that instead of viewing tactics and strategies as powerless and powerful, considering “how migrants deploy power and develop techniques to overcome or sidestep barriers” (Sereke and Drzewiecka, 2024, p. 2267) is more useful in understanding practices of everyday life.

Tactics and strategies have also been adapted in the context of teaching practices and pedagogies. For example, Rovea, (2022) discusses how De Certeau’s concept of tactics and strategies can be applied to teaching practice and how the teacher needs to adapt to the tactics of the student. Rovea (2022) highlights that teaching can be rigid and not adapt to student’s needs. The application of tactics and strategies in the context of teaching outlines teaching as the strategy but highlights that students have different learning tactics that do not assimilate into the strategies, and that to develop a more flexible teaching style is to enable tactics and give more power to students. This application of tactics and strategies enabled an understanding of the nuances and power

relations between schools and teachers and their students, resulting in teaching practices being adapted to both “safeguard at the same time, the role of the teacher as representative of a tradition to transmit and the equally necessary freedom of the student in receiving the teaching” (Rovea, 2022, p. 67).

This view of tactics not as an “art of the weak” but as a way of “sidestep[ping] barriers” (Sereke and Drzewiecka, 2024, p. 2267) is particularly relevant for this thesis’ consideration of how young people create and employ their own tactics to fill gaps in food circuits of care. The idea that deploying a tactic is an alternative way of articulating power is further developed in Chapters 4 and 5, in which I consider tactics used by young people as efforts to adapt and become more agentic in systems that are constraining and ineffective rather than an act of powerlessness.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced circuits of care as a key and original conceptualisation within this thesis’ understanding of food as a vital mobility and consideration of how young people experience and participate in food circuits of care. The conceptualisation of circuits of care as ethical, sustainable, routine, resilient, caring for and about, and empowering is unique but builds on Sodero’s conceptualisation of vital mobilities. As such, this chapter reviewed key literature relating to the conceptualisation of circuits of care and for the development of the thesis as a whole.

Mobilities literature was highlighted as fundamental to the understanding of food circuits of care; it provides a lens to view everything as “on the move” (Urry, 2007, p. 3) and strengthens my understanding of food as a vital mobility. Childhood studies provided an understanding of the social constructions of childhood, placing an emphasis on the diversity of childhood and situating the thesis within children’s mobilities. Reviewing literature on food justice allowed me to highlight the importance of equity, its focus on health disparities, and community participation and agency in access to food. Finally, tactics and strategies provided an insight into how power is exerted or not in the context of formal systems. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how I am situated

within these areas of literature but highlighted why circuits of care and vital mobilities was chosen as the foundation for the thesis' understanding of young peoples lived experiences of food insecurity.

By positioning young people at the centre of my conceptualisation of food circuits of care, I place an emphasis on young people's motility and capacity for participation in the systems associated with their access to food as the vital material. My unique circuits of care approach allows me to evaluate how young people access food both from a food insecurity perspective but also enables me to understand whether food systems that young people engage with are empowering, caring, sustainable, ethical and caring.

I decided to focus on circuits of care rather than a food justice approach because although a food justice approach would allow me to consider how food systems are just and if young people have equitable access to healthy and nutritious food, the circuits of care approach embeds mobilities and enables me to evaluate the flows of young people's movements to and from food. Although a food justice lens would allow a focus on participation and agency, circuits of care encourages a multi-faceted approach to building capacity through promoting individual empowerment whilst also contemplating how circuits can be sustainable and caring.

As I move forward with circuits of care as the theoretical thread between the empirical chapters of this thesis, it is first important to emphasise how the thesis carries key elements from this literature review into its analysis. For example, children's mobilities' view of childhood as "situated and fluid" (Murray and Cortés-Morales, 2019, p. 18) is fundamental to my observations and reflections on how food circuits of care can be sustainable and effective for young people from diverse social backgrounds. The thesis also builds on children's geographies approach to investigating the everyday in order to understand how childhood is socially experienced, and tactics and strategies are used as an analytic tool for understanding young people's agency (Chapter 5). Mobilities remains a key element to the thesis and its understanding of vital mobilities, and the thesis also builds on concepts of emergency mobilities and mobile utopia, particularly in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3 builds on this chapter's literature relating to childhood, particularly focussing on children's rights to participation. It explores the history of how young people have been positioned in international policy and reviews and critiques literature relating to how young people have participated meaningfully (or not) in past research projects. It then details how this consideration of participation in combination with an understanding of childhood literature was embedded in the development of this thesis' empirical project and methodology to ensure meaningful participation.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will explain the methodological journey of this thesis from the initial inspirations and research beginnings through the understanding and unpacking of existing arguments regarding young people's (aged 12-17) participation to the specific methodological decisions made in dialogue with supporting literature. The chapter aims to provide an in-depth account of the choices made throughout the research design. It details how the methodology was a reflexive research process that was constantly changing to meet the dynamics and needs of its participants. The chapter demonstrates how a consideration of young people's participation in dialogue with a reflexive and creative methodological process allowed me to ensure and embed an element of meaningful participation throughout the design and delivery of the project.

Research Beginnings

Research Participants

As explored in the introduction, the pillars to the instigation of this research project were the prominence of the COVID-19 pandemic and discussions around the school strikes for climate. The school strikes for climate highlighted the inequalities in young people's opportunities for participation, and the pandemic brought to light the severe inequalities in young people's access to food across the UK, particularly in a time of emergency. Thinking about these issues in conversation with one another led the focus of this thesis to be on young people's access to and participation within food systems.

For this research project, I decided to work with young people aged 12-17 to understand their lived experiences of food insecurity, an age group less researched than their younger counterparts. Both social science research and governmental policies on the physical and mental impacts of food insecurity are weighted heavily towards work with primary school aged children. This resulted in older children being overlooked by

researchers and policymakers and becoming more food insecure in the covid-19 crisis (Parnham *et al.*, 2020). This age group is also more likely to have a cognitive awareness of the political and social world as well as an awareness of any food scarcity (Fram *et al.*, 2011). The considerations of these factors led to the decision that this study would work with young people of aged 12-17.

It is important to note here that there are multiple terms that have been used to discuss the group that this thesis engages with. I will be using the term 'young people' (rather than 'children') to refer to people that fit within the age demographic of a child (under 18 years old). In much of the existing literature the term 'children' often replicates and works alongside the notion of vulnerability and supports the social construction of children as needing protection; this research works in agreement with McNeish and Gill's (2006) argument that policy that constructs childhood as a time of vulnerability serves to exclude children from participation. The use of the term 'young people' acts to work against this social construction of vulnerability and resonates with the participatory nature of the project. Therefore, to achieve meaningful participation in all aspects of this research, the term 'young people' aims to empower my participants. When referring to existing literature, particularly when using any direct quotes, I will use the terminology used by the author(s) but when referring to my own research I will refer to my participants as 'young people'.

Geographical Context

The study takes place in a seaside town in the North-west of the UK. Being a coastal town, the research area experiences an annual upturn and downfall in income coinciding with the fluctuations of tourism. Coastal communities exhibit an economic gap between their non-coastal counterparts with the average output per capita being 26% lower in coastal communities than in non-coastal communities (Corfe, 2017). These fluctuations exist alongside the pattern of household bills, which tend to decrease in summer and increase in winter. This is one of the many place-based complications that this thesis explores in discussion with the everchanging circuits of care. As a result, a number of the young people I worked with were from low-income backgrounds and had lived

experience of food insecurity. In the research analysis and discussion (particularly in Chapters 5 and 6), I illustrate how class impacts poverty, vulnerability to food insecurity and young people's opportunities for participation and empowerment. Whilst I explore these aspects in the analysis of the research, it was not a core dimension to the research design but was significant in the context of the research site. The thesis explores these economic intricacies in conversation with place to understand how young people experience food insecurity and participate in the associated structures. In thinking about these complexities and the sensitivities associated with researching with young people who might be experiencing food insecurity, it was essential for me to find a research site that could cater to the needs of both the proposed participants and the research project's ambitions.

Finding a Research Site

When considering where to carry out the research project, I explored many different possible research sites. This also included considering using a local secondary school for the research site, however, recent literature suggests that carrying out research projects outside of the school environment can be beneficial to engagement as some young people had negative relationships with schools (Mort *et al.*, 2018). The importance of qualitative activities taking place in a safe or recognised space for the participants was also emphasised. For ethical compliance and safeguarding reasons¹, (as the project talks about potentially distressing or sensitive topics around food insecurity) I recognised that the location of my research project needed to include members of staff qualified to work alongside and act as gatekeepers for the young people participating.

I began exploring local community centres and youth groups, investigating what sessions and services they provided. I identified a local community centre that held a daily youth group from 4-7pm with the provision of food and a focus on youth wellbeing; they also provided community well-being and food support during the day for adult community members. In these research beginnings I also carried out pilot research, intended to

¹ The ethical considerations behind the research site and their protocols are outlined in Appendix 1.

understand how the local area approached young people's participation and their relationships to food. Through this pilot research, I carried out preliminary interviews with the Head of Catering at the County Council; a local councillor for the Green Party; and the managing director of the local community centre that I had identified. In the next section, I will detail how this pilot research directed the research design, however, the pilot interview I had with the managing director of the community centre allowed me to do some scoping work, to understand how the centre operated, how they engaged with young people, and to both gauge their interest and suitability in being the research site.

After having decided that the community centre would be the research site, I made the ethical decision to conceal the location of the research site within this thesis. This decision was made to ensure the anonymity of both the centre and the participants (more can be read about this decision in Appendix 1.1).

The community centre was initially established by a small group of local residents and professionals and only achieved charitable status many years after its formation. They describe themselves as a charity set up by local people to meet the needs of its community and provide a multitude of services including open access to Wi-Fi and tech support; a community food café; membership to a food club; job search and CV support; youth sessions with free food; group fitness sessions and men's and women's health groups. They deliver sessions with a focus on helping members achieve '5 ways to wellbeing' (Mind, 2024) and work as a not-for-personal-profit organisation.

Following my initial conversations with the community centre staff, I began volunteering at the community centre to better understand their operations, who their members were, and to determine if they would be a good fit for my research intentions. As a volunteer at the centre, I learnt more about the sessions and services they provide. I volunteered at the front desk during the weekly food club, in which approximately 90 members paid £5 to get approximately £30 worth of food. I learnt that the community centre acquires this food through a combination of surplus, donated and wholesale purchase to provide the food to their members at a discounted price. Observing the running of the food club exemplified the complex systems involved in the organisation

of the food club as a service that provides food to low-income families. The successes and difficulties experienced by the community centre in providing this service highlighted the need for my research to explore these systems to understand how food is made accessible to individuals (or not).

I also volunteered twice a week at the youth sessions that occurred in the evening after school. This served three purposes: 1) to learn more about the youth group and decide if it would be a good research site; 2) to learn from the workshops organised by the centre to gather ideas for my own research design; 3) to build relationships with the young people that attended the centre prior to the beginning of my own research project. My observations of the workshops provided by the youth team at the centre inspired my later research design and demonstrated that the centre had created a safe space for young people to share their experiences with their peers. The youth group engaged in workshops around 'difficult conversations', the topic of which was jointly decided by young people and staff and changed weekly; topics included conversations on grief, money, mental health and the cost-of-living crisis. The sensitivity to these topics alongside the creative methods used by staff to encourage conversation confirmed that this would be an excellent site for my research project and these sessions also provided me with inspiration for the development of my own workshops.

Research Development

From an early stage, a key term within my research was 'participation', both theoretically and methodologically. As Hart suggests, "participation is especially important for disadvantaged children ...to fight for their equal rights in solidarity" (1992, p.5). This argument formed an integral aspect of my research and informed my research development as well as the decisions I made regarding the research site and participants. This section of the chapter explores my in-depth consideration of what it means for young people to 'meaningfully participate' which has informed the development of my methods. Participation and inclusivity have both been essential aspects to this research and this determined the location, participants, research design and research process of this thesis.

The following sections investigate what participation involves and thinks critically about variations in participation. It introduces Article 12 from the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a well-known but significantly limited framing of young people's participation. By exploring the different ways in which young people can participate in research projects and reflecting on the methods and attitudes towards participation in previous projects, I reflect on the methods of participation that I carried through the design of my methodology.

Young People's Participation: A Historical and Literary Review

Critiquing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC is a key international document for thinking about young people's rights and potential. Within it, Article 12 provides the most insight as to what young people's participation should look like. In the UNCRC, Article 12 states that "the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely" (UNCRC, 1989, P.5) as well as to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings.

Building upon existing literature (Lundy, 2007; Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020; Mayall, 2006), I argue that this focus on 'views' should be extended, as including young people's 'views' has a narrower remit than acknowledging their lived expertise and the relevance of their knowledge in the development and execution of policies. Gibbons (2014) argues that the language used in the UNCRC isolates the child by speaking about them and not on their behalf, which devalues the participation being defined. As such, Gibbons (2014) argues that the UNCRC remains less about active participation in the context of an issue like climate change or food insecurity, protecting children from the effects rather than actualising them as active participants. This critique contends that when young people are being spoken about in policy and not truly involved this is merely a tokenistic display of participation and not meaningful.

I therefore argue that the UNCRC's outlook on participation in Article 12 does not go far enough and agree with Lundy (2007) that the UNCRC's outlook implies that participation

is merely including young people's views in proceedings. Instead, there is a need for a focus on meaningful participation because "appearing to listen to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003, Para 12). As such, Lundy (2007) argues that even when children's views are heard as suggested by the UNCRC, the views are not always communicated or given effect. This led this thesis to focus on a move away from the notion of "getting children's voices heard" and to developing an understanding of what participation means in different contexts in order to ensure that the research and its methodology can accommodate and promote meaningful participation.

The term 'meaningful participation' has therefore played a key role in the development of the thesis' research design. When researching with young people the term refers to "creating facilitative conditions and enabling environments" (Larkins, 2022) for young people to be included in research and in decision making. There is a general lack of participation and inclusion of young people in decisions that affect them; for example, Larkins refers to the UK's debate on the reopening of schools during the pandemic, in which the perspectives of children were not included at all but rather they were discussed as being at risk or a risk to teachers' health. On this occasion, the value of children's knowledge of school environments was ignored (Larkins, 2022); for me, this highlighted the need for research involving young people to be repositioned with a focus on ensuring that their situated knowledge is valued by decision-makers and the wider community by ensuring that young people participate in policies, processes, and structures meaningfully.

In the setting of the UNCRC's Article 12, it is important to think about participation in a wider context running through a series of policies, processes, and structures. In her analysis of Article 12, Lundy (2007) highlights that for meaningful participation to occur, there is a need for space, voice, audience and influence, meaning that alongside being given the opportunity to express their views, children need this opportunity to be facilitated, to be actively listened to and for their views to be acted upon appropriately. This led me to investigate and critically engage with the unfolding arguments and debates surrounding what young people's participation should look like and resulted in my decision to use participatory methods within my own project.

Engaging with Hart's Ladder of Participation

To develop and design an effective creative and participatory methodology, I gathered a critical understanding of 'participation' and 'meaningful participation'. To do so, I interacted with existing literature to determine the best elements of young people's participation and incorporate these into my own research design and process.

The research around meaningful participation with young people developed around an analysis of the ideas presented by Hart, (1992) in his ladder of children's participation (Figure 1) which was developed as a variation of Arnstein's, (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 2). Hart was commissioned by UNICEF to write this essay "for people who know that young people have something to say but who would like to reflect further on the process. It is also written for those people who have it in their power to assist children in having a voice, but who, unwittingly or not, trivialize their involvement" (n.p., Hart, 1992). Hart's ladder of participation (Figure 1) is segregated into 8 'rungs' of the ladder with increasing levels of child participation; this model is used to evaluate the degree to which projects and policies involving young people are actually participatory.

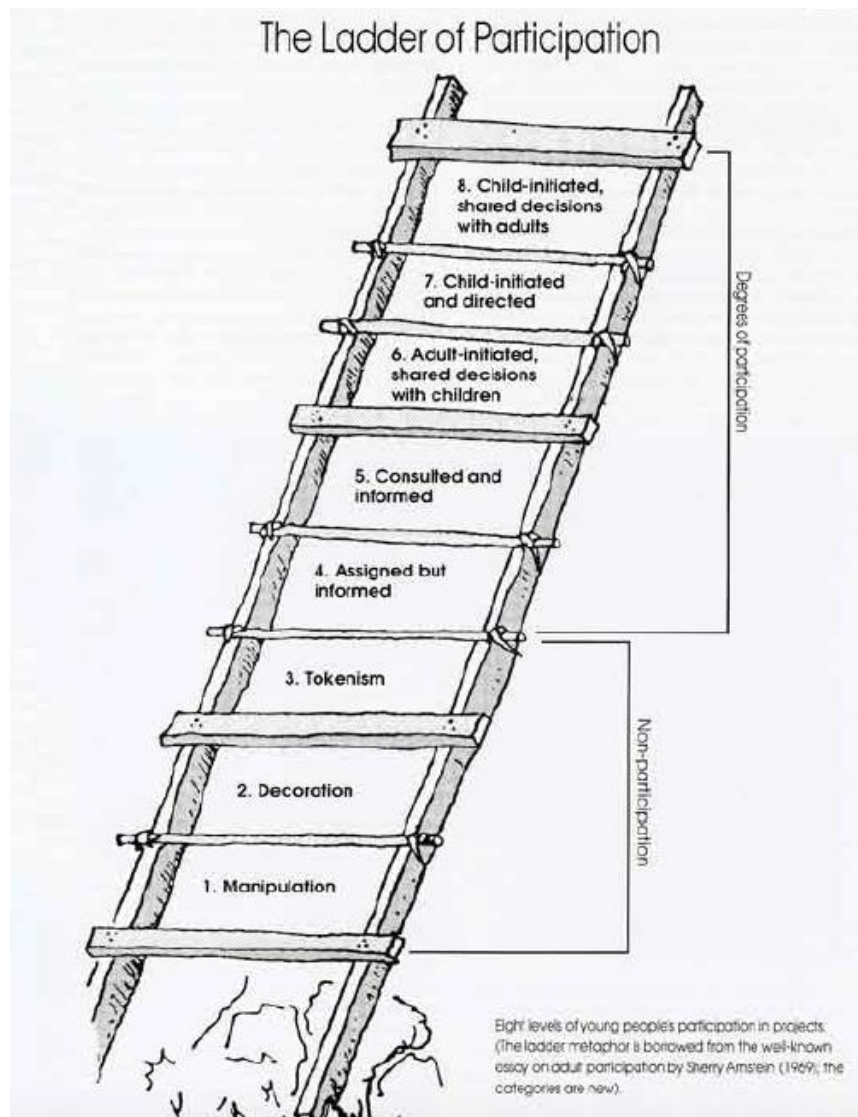


Figure 2: Ladder of Children's Participation (Hart, 1992, p. 8)

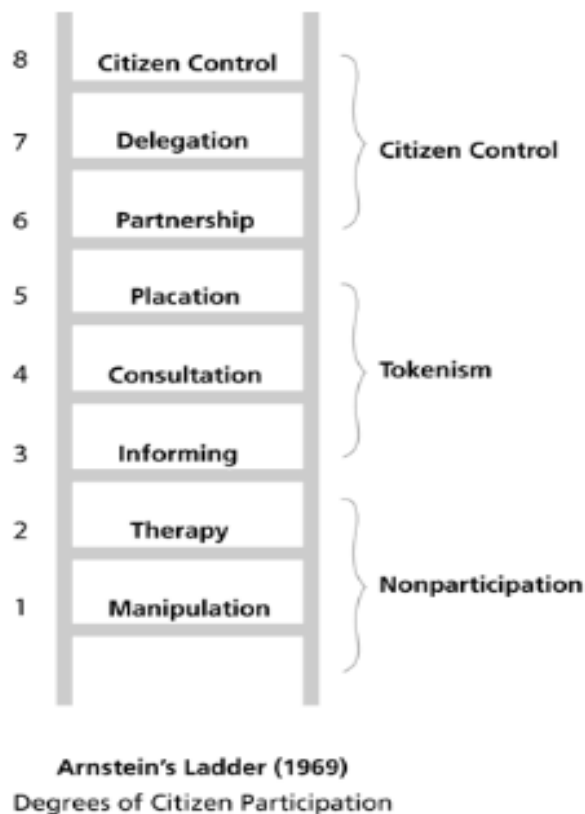


Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969)

The level of participation within Hart's diagram incrementally increases up the ladder with 8 being the highest level of active participation, however, Hart counts all rungs above 3 as 'true' participation with different methods and degrees of engaging with young people.

The third rung, tokenism is common in the western world and Hart describes it as "instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions" (1992, p.9). This is something I was very conscious to avoid in the development and process of my research. As I discuss later in this section, I relied on pilot research to understand young people's experiences and cater to this in my research design, alongside allowing young people to shape conversational priorities in interviews and the overall research design, according to what is important to them. Within this project, aim of facilitating the meaningful participation of young people in

developing suggestions for effective food policies that are informed by lived experiences is intended to move away from the dangerous waters of tokenism. Hart argues that for a project to be labelled as participatory and not tokenistic (and as such, all rungs of the ladder above three should include these) the following requirements should be met:

1. The children understand the intentions of the project
2. They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why
3. They have a meaningful (rather than decorative) role
4. They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them.

(Hart, 1992, p.11)

Therefore, the design of my research methodology (as detailed later in the chapter) included ensuring that all 4 of these principles were met in order to achieve a true meaningful participatory status.

Participation within this Research Project

This section continues the analysis of existing literature on young people's participation and reflects on the elements of participation that I decided to carry through into the design of the thesis' empirical research project. It demonstrates my understanding of Hart's ladder of participation and highlights that the alternative model produced by Shier (2001) (Figure 3) is more relevant to how this project engages with young people. With a focus on meaningful participation, the section analyses existing discussion on participation and brings to light issues that should be considered when attempting to achieve meaningful participation in the policies, processes, and structures that young people experience in relation to food and what this meant for the development of my research.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that arguments surrounding young people's participation have been positioned and developed over time according to varying agendas and social constructions of childhood. This includes the fact that Hart's report was commissioned by the UN following the publication of the UNCRC. Therefore, I recognise the limitations of Hart's model in relation to social constructs, application to contemporary issues and how arguments on participation have evolved.

In the development of my research, I engaged with Shier's (2001) alternative model (Figure 3) to children's participation which describes the process as cyclical instead of linear. Shier (2001) suggests that one of the most useful aspects of Hart's ladder was in allowing practitioners to identify false types of participation, but a more accurate model should focus on openings, opportunities and obligations to differentiate between levels of participation. Shier also recognises that manifestation in real life always differs from what is written on paper. I strongly agree with this, as trying to position my research on Hart's ladder was incredibly difficult – although it did help to identify where more participatory aspects were needed within my research design. Shier's model develops the idea of policy and practice not being linear but a cyclical process which is messy with no clear beginning or end. This different model of young people's participation was useful in understanding what meaningful participation might look like in the context of food systems and policies; particularly in relation to creating openings and opportunities for participation. Reflecting on this model, I aimed for the research design of my project to create openings for young people to "sharing power and responsibility for decisions" within the research process.

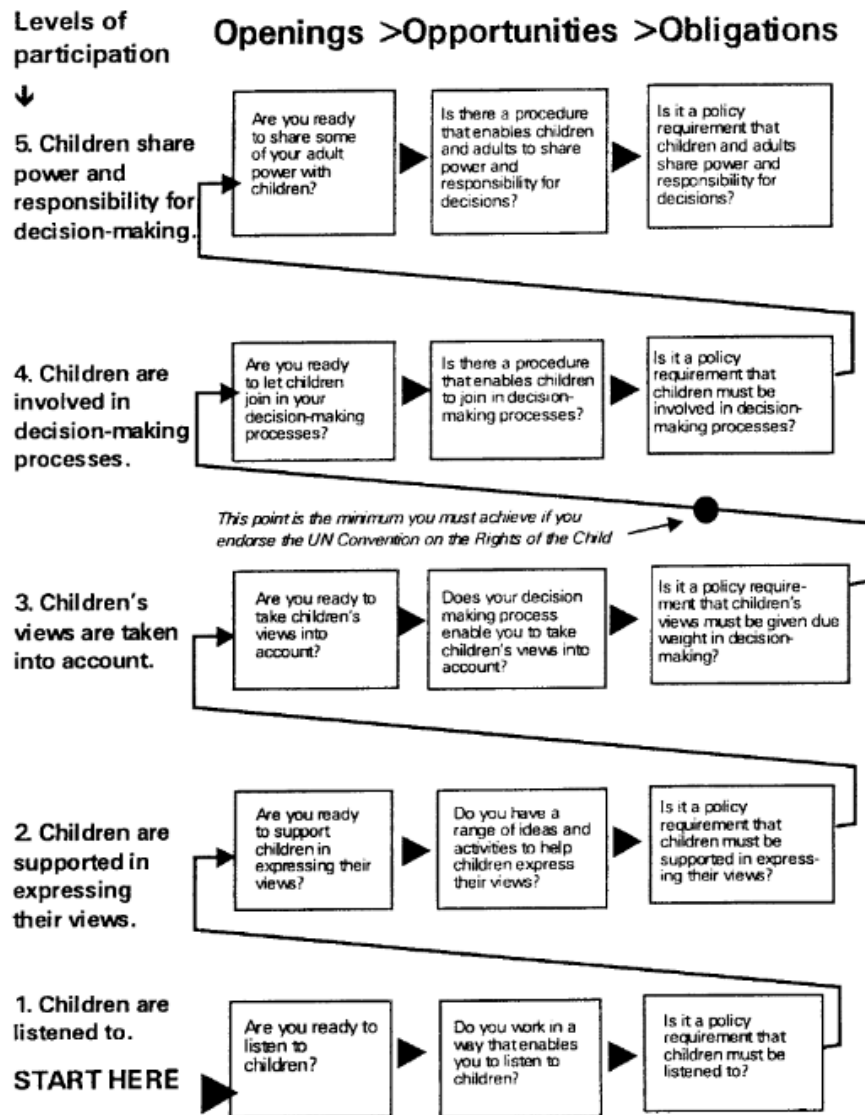


Figure 4: Pathways to Participation – alternative model to children’s participation (Shier, 2001, p. 111)

I have utilised Shier’s model alongside other literature (e.g. Larkins, 2022) to critique Hart’s ladder and help position my own research in the food policy and systems context. Hart’s ladder of participation works with the idea that policy and practice is linear, and that young people should be included at the ‘beginning’ of the creation of a policy. As a result, when trying to place my project on the ladder of participation, I struggled because whilst my methods aim for meaningful participation, I found it difficult to determine a ‘beginning’ for how young people could engage with my research project, particularly in relation to my understanding and application of circuits of care in food systems.

Furthermore, Larkins (2022) emphasises that in focussing on the inclusion of children's views on issues at the beginning of the policy making process, young people's participation becomes limited as they should be consulted and involved at all aspects of the policy evolution.

For Janta *et al.*, children need to be "involved in implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages" (2021, p.v) to have fully engaged and participated in the making of the policy. In their report on 'child participation in EU political and democratic life' they determined that:

"children's participation is still not perceived and implemented as an integral and fundamental part of policy- /decision-making processes. It is still often not embedded in all policy areas, but is rather a topic in itself or an add-on. It is still not a continuous process, but is only targeted at specific activities or stages."

(Janta *et al.*, 2021, p.v).

Therefore, when this research discusses meaningful participation, it refers to the holistic and embedded inclusion of young people in the research process. The research aims to gain an understanding of young people's lived experience of food and food insecurity at a time when the local area is experiencing high figures of food insecurity and also developing projects to reduce food insecurity. My research intends to act as a way of increasing the visibility of young people's experiences alongside creating opportunities for empowerment within the research process and the food systems that my participants engage with.

In my understanding of young people's participation, both in the research project and in food systems, I work with the idea that young people's lives thread through a world of policies, processes and structures, some of which might be explicitly (re)formed but many of which are in the background, unseen. The concept that policy is messy, alongside the acknowledgement of structures that often go unnoticed, has helped me to define my role as a researcher and as a sociologist; I am not a policy maker, and my research is not about 'policymaking', it is to highlight that there are policies, structures and systems that influence young people's experiences of food insecurity. These

policies, structures and systems are what I argue to be circuits of care that are shaping young people's food experiences and are often invisible to young people and to other key stakeholders. My role as a researcher is to make these more visible whilst demonstrating the value of and facilitating the understanding of young people's situated knowledge within this wider context. As such, the participatory focus of my research aims to move away from representations and social constructions of children being non-participatory in policy (particularly in local level food systems). The policy process is distinctive from the research process. Through my research development, I determined that the project would engage with and embed young people throughout the research process and use the project to create opportunities for young people's empowerment within the food systems they experience.

As such, my research is...

- not just about young people's right to express views but about facilitating, listening and acting on views;
- not just about representing young people's 'views' but about highlighting the importance of their situated knowledge;
- not just about including young people at the beginning of the process but creating opportunities for empowerment and acknowledging social constructions of young people as social actors (James and Prout, 2015; Cutter-Mackenzie and Rousell, 2018);
- not just about food policies but about ongoing structures, systems and processes that shape lived experiences and how these might be re-shaped with the participation of young people embedded.

Multi-Method Participatory Research

The above outline of my understanding and critique of youth participation in research methodologies, led to the decision that a multi-method participatory approach was the most effective for the development of my methodology. My research focuses on young people's participation, food as a vital mobility and understanding young people's experiences of food insecurity. Through the development of this research methodology,

I aimed to bring these three aspects together in a participatory project. My review of existing literature led to my understanding that including young people's 'views' in policy making does not equate to meaningful participation and excludes the potential for acknowledging their lived expertise and the relevance of their situated knowledge in the development and execution of policies. For these reasons, I developed my methodology using key concepts from participatory research approaches.

When applying participatory approaches to methods, there is an emphasis on the importance of redistributing power between researcher and participant (Shamrova and Cummings, 2017, p. 401) within the research project as well as the power relations within the topic being researched. For example, (Benjamin-Thomas *et al.*, 2019) highlight that participatory processes (in their case, using participatory filmmaking processes) allow a "complex, yet flexible and adaptable" (p. 1) approach which is key to supporting the inclusion of participants in the research process. In Benjamin-Thomas *et al.*'s research, they value participatory processes in enabling participants who may often be excluded in becoming co-researchers and also emphasise the importance of creativity in participatory research, particularly when working with vulnerable participants (2019, p. 2). As I discuss in the Research Design section of this chapter and explore further throughout the thesis, the participatory nature of my research had a significant impact on the ongoing development and reflections upon research approach. As a result of my understanding of how young peoples' participation should be addressed in research projects, my multi-method participatory methodology enabled opportunities for young people to have decision-making power over the research design. Within this chapter, I explain how the use of creative participatory methods further enabled a reflexive research design in accordance with my interaction with young people and how this allowed a greater understanding of their experiences and research needs.

Complexities of Researching Food insecurity with Young People

Alongside the importance of facilitating meaningful participation and understanding the value of young people's situated knowledge; diversity and the inclusion of

disadvantaged young people's experiences has been a key pillar of my participatory approach. This has had several methodological implications including the consideration I have given to create sensitive research tools; the time my participants will have available to engage with my research; and the most effective methods for facilitating the communication of their knowledge in ways that they can interact with. This has included me anticipating other intersecting inequalities within my research (e.g. literacy, self-expression, horizons of expectation, sense of entitlement).

Knight et al. (2018) discuss the "complexity of the experience of food poverty for teenagers including physiological (quantity of food), nutritional (quality), social (alimentary participation) and emotional/psychological dimensions" (p. 191). This complex nature of research with young people experiencing food insecurity is something that I became aware of from both my literature review and my pilot research; my growing understanding of these complexities has been reflected in the continuous development of the design, detail, and sensitivity of my research methods.

Existing literature in which researchers have engaged in participatory methods on sensitive topics and the complexities of experiencing food insecurity, alongside the information gathered in my pilot research has informed my understanding of the topic and influenced my research design. For this reason, my methods have been developed with an awareness of the sensitive nature of the topic and the research design has been catered to and reflexively adjusted to suit the sensitivity of the topic and participants accordingly.

Pilot Research in the Development Stage

In the initial development of my research methodology, I relied on pilot research to understand young people's experiences and cater to this within my research design. The pilot research was carried out in the form of observations whilst volunteering at the community centre. The observations made in this initial pilot research did not include any formal empirical fieldnotes, the pilot research was carried out prior to ethical approval and therefore, the research only acted as a way to begin to understand the

issues that people in the local area experience, to identify interesting avenues for research and to highlight implications for the design of research activities.

For example, during my time volunteering at the youth sessions, I learnt that many of the young people are quite introverted and feel 'safety in numbers' and so I changed my interview design to include the option of group interviews for those who would prefer to engage in the research with a friend. Observations of the community centre's existing workshops with the youth also highlighted how young people interacted positively with more creative activities. These activities enabled more introverted young people to quietly participate and created a more relaxed environment. This prompted me to develop creative aspects of my research in which young people could communicate their lived experiences of food with the help of drawings or other activities to aid group discussions and following oral interviews. I employed some of the methods that I saw worked well and were already instilled in the group into my own research design, these included the use of creative workshops, and the development of group agreements when talking about sensitive subjects². The details of these methodological decisions will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

The pilot research also had implications for my ethics application. The transition from volunteer to researcher needed careful consideration as my role changed from volunteer to researcher who was observing and making field notes. The adjustments and considerations of this are detailed in the ethics application in Appendix 1 and 1.4 which shows a poster that was shown on screens within the community centre, detailing my change in role and how service users and participants could identify me and register any concerns about the research. Another impact from the pilot research included a gained understanding of how the community centre managed sensitive topics. In my pilot research and participant observations I observed how the centre hosted a workshop each Monday for young people to have 'Difficult Conversations', and the sensitivity and approach to these topics by youth staff was included in my own development of methods for talking about food insecurity. The qualifications of the staff

² See appendix 1.3 for how the consent forms approached group interviews.

and their experiences of handling sensitive topics also strengthened my safeguarding considerations within my ethics application.

Positionality and Epistemology

Alongside the ethical implications detailed above, it is important to consider how the thesis' pilot research and my previous role as a volunteer impacted the development of the research as I transitioned into the role of an embedded researcher. The change in my role from volunteer to researcher was a significant shift in my relationship to the centre and the young people, with implications for the power dynamics of that relationship; I was aware of the potential for tension or wariness from community members and young people knowing I was researching them rather than just participating or volunteering. As such, it was important that this was handled sensitively and openly, in a way that my participants were fully aware and informed that continued to build trust and not undermine the trust that I had established. To achieve this, it was necessary to fully reflect on positionality and the relationship between researcher and research participants. In previous work, Lønning and Uzureau, (2024) discuss the power relations within their project and reflect on how their "positionality affected the research process along often taken-for granted social categories and markers of sameness and difference" (p. 503) and considered how these differences created space between them as researchers and their participants. When thinking about difference, Lønning and Uzureau (2024) also explore how as female researchers working with young men, their gender stood out and immediately created distance on this dimension. This awareness of age difference was one of many differences between myself and my research participants that I took into consideration.

My awareness of potential power imbalances alongside my engagement with participatory literature influenced my epistemology and positionality as a researcher and the development of the project. As a result, in this section, I discuss how my research epistemology and reflections on positionality enabled an empowering and

caring methodology that demonstrated a commitment to co-produced, situated knowledge.

My participatory approach reflects an epistemological commitment to co-produced, situated knowledge. The project's epistemological approach also emphasises that people under the age of 18 (children) and those with lived experience are credible knowers. The project aligns with approaches that emphasise that power should be shared in knowledge production. This approach holds resonances with some Participatory Action Research (PAR) work; in particular, Maynard and Stuart's emphasis that in PAR the role of researchers is to "create time and space [for people] to discover they have control and power, there are other options, and they are capable" (2018, p. 102).

The complexities of adolescence have been neglected in much of food insecurity literature (Fram *et al.*, 2011). Young people experiencing food insecurity are regularly situated as a homogenous group: as vulnerable and non-agentic. As highlighted in Chapter 2, food justice literature recognises the devastating effects of food insecurity to young people's development outcomes, and young people are often shielded from struggles around food insecurity by their households (Fram *et al.*, (2011). For young people (including my research projects' participants) this ability to take control of their own circumstances can feel out of reach, particularly in relation to food insecurity due to family units' experiences, new consumer choices and feeling stuck in systems like reliance on school meals. This thesis recognises that whilst young people may need support, they are also agentic and (as becomes clear throughout this thesis) have a significant awareness of their own food insecurity. As such, it is important for young people to be included in rather than shielded from discussions around their food insecurity. To be empowered is to have the ability to "take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals" (Maynard and Stuart, 2018, p. 98).

Therefore, the thesis' methodological approach aligns with epistemologies that challenge extractive, hierarchical knowledge production. I reflected on the hierarchical relationships that emerge in food banks. While "food banks can be sites of caring and generous acts, some acts of compassion are structured by possession and control"

(Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021, p. 1103). To illustrate this, Surman, Kelemen and Rumens (2021) provide the example of how food bank volunteers provide compassion and in return can expect users' gratitude as well as access to knowledge about users' personal lives. Equally, compassion can be structured by control in food banks limiting the frequency of use and users' choice of food; as well as being dependent on donations and availability of food at the food bank. This highlights that systems or projects aimed at providing people with care and support are not always successful and can be impeded by hierarchical power imbalances and the context of individual circumstance. This understanding contributed to my epistemological approach to be caring, valuing lived experience and removing hierarchical knowledge production.

This understanding of feelings of powerlessness, gained through my situated knowledge from the pilot research as well as through an understanding of existing literature highlighted the need for my methodology to be caring – making young people feel listened to and enabling them to exercise an element of power over the project. When thinking about care, Dorow and Mandizadza (2018) offer a key piece of literature that offers insight into different kinds of 'care' within a system. Dorow and Mandizadza introduce the "back-and-forth of rotational mobile workers" at oil sands work camps in Alberta "between camp and household" (2018, p.1244) and the attached circuits of care. Interestingly, they differentiate two types of care "affective caring about and material caring for" (p. 1249) and this has significance for my interpretation of circuits of care. For Dorow and Mandizadza, "affective caring" referred to the man-working-away-from-home's love and care for his wife, whereas "material caring for" referred to the monetary contribution he sent to his wife by doing the job. This break down of different types of 'care' in a system allowed me to recognise how a methodological approach can be successful and caring in different ways.

In terms of the project's methodology, I aimed for participants to feel an 'affective caring' by being listened to, but a 'material caring for' by providing opportunities for empowerment through research (through the co-production of research). This also aimed to tackle any potential power imbalances between myself and participants and participants and the structures they engaged with did not impede the caring methodology. To achieve this and provide opportunities for empowerment, it is

important to understand what empowerment is or is not and to consider how the concepts of care and empowerment could be developed and embedded throughout the research process. This was achieved by making sure that participants were involved in both the development and creation of the process.

Therefore, throughout the thesis, I use Maynard and Stuart's (2018) definition of empowerment as a complex concept and not "something that can be 'gifted' to or 'bestowed' on people. We cannot 'do it' to other people, yet this is often how the word empowerment is used in policy and practice." (2018, p. 98). Disempowered people cannot be gifted empowerment and suddenly empowered; it is a process created by opportunities for people to become more confident and capable in taking control of their own circumstances. As such, projects and policies should not aim to bestow empowerment upon people (particularly young people) but should "provide catalytic conditions for children, young people and families to become empowered" (Maynard and Stuart, 2018, p.99). Maynard and Stuart (2018) emphasise that the role of researchers is to "create time and space [for people] to discover they have control and power, there are other options, and they are capable" (p. 102). Consequently, I focussed on thinking about how I could collect data and engage with participants through a process created by opportunities for people to become more confident and co-produce knowledge instead of 'doing research to' them. I recognise that it is not always possible to fully achieve such ambitions because ultimately, specific difference still existed, but these strategies aimed to embed caring and empowering practices in every way possible.

Kindon, Pain and Kesby's emphasis on "valuing the voices of ordinary people as expert and authoritative on their own lives" (2010, p.26) was key for my research in working with vulnerable young people and adolescents who feel a sense of powerlessness. By embedding these understandings of care and empowerment into my participatory research methodology, I highlight that the knowledge produced throughout this research project is situated, co-produced and related rather than objective and neutral. This came to the fore towards the end of the methodological prongs where knowledge was co-produced in the development of the visibility event.

In the following ‘Research Design’ section of this chapter, I detail the specificity of my multi-method participatory research design and methodological decisions. I position my work in connection with existing literature alongside learning from pilot research to demonstrate reasoning and support for my design choices.

Research Design

As introduced in Chapter 1, I outlined several aims for the PhD research (see Table 2 for a reminder of these). In order to achieve these aims, I designed a bespoke four-pronged methodological approach to analyse the lived experiences and needs of young people experiencing food insecurity in relation to existing food related policies and systems.

Table 2: Summary of Research Aims

Research Aims
1) Consider and value young people’s lived experiences of food insecurity, the social constructions they encounter, and evaluate their agency within systems that affect them.
2) Conceptualise circulations of food as vital mobilities and examine the circuits of care which simultaneously constitute them and are constituted by them.
3) Highlight and explore the existence of gaps within these circuits of care to understand how they are formed, experienced, filled and changed by crisis.
4) Use the project to create opportunities for young people’s empowerment within these systems.

The research project is set within a community centre in the north-west of the UK and aims to analyse the lived experiences of young people (12-17) in relation to their experiences of food and their access to food. The community centre provides free food and supportive workshops on every evening of the week to a range of approximately 50 young people as well as providing other community services.

The four-pronged methodological approach is as follows:

1. Participant observation of youth workshops, food evenings and the food club at the designated research site (a local community centre in the north-west);
2. Bespoke creative workshops (toolkit) that aided individual and small-group interviews with young people at the community centre who utilise its services;
3. Semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders to gain their views and situated experiences of young people's needs and experiences of food.
4. Codesign of a visibility event with interested young people and key stakeholders discussing young people's visibility and participation in food structures, processes, and systems.

The four-pronged methodological approach provides an effective way to research all of the elements that my research beginnings and development identified as significant: situated and experiential knowledge of the young people and other stakeholders; the social constructions of childhood that are at work; and employing a process that takes steps towards positive change through supporting young people to bring their situated knowledge into dialogue with stakeholders. Given the nature of my multi-method, participatory approach, the research design was constantly changing and developing in accordance with young people's opinions and how they interacted with the project. Figure 4 outlines how the methodological approach was a reflexive process that incorporated the values and feedback from the participants into the development of the research design, including the ongoing development of the bespoke creative activities, interviews and visibility event that allowed the achievement of research aims 1 and 2. The design of the methodological toolkit (made up of the creative workshops) and the final visibility event were the product of a process that was constantly being reflected upon. Appendices 2.1 and 2.2 provide further details on the participants and particulars of each prong in addition to the details provided below.

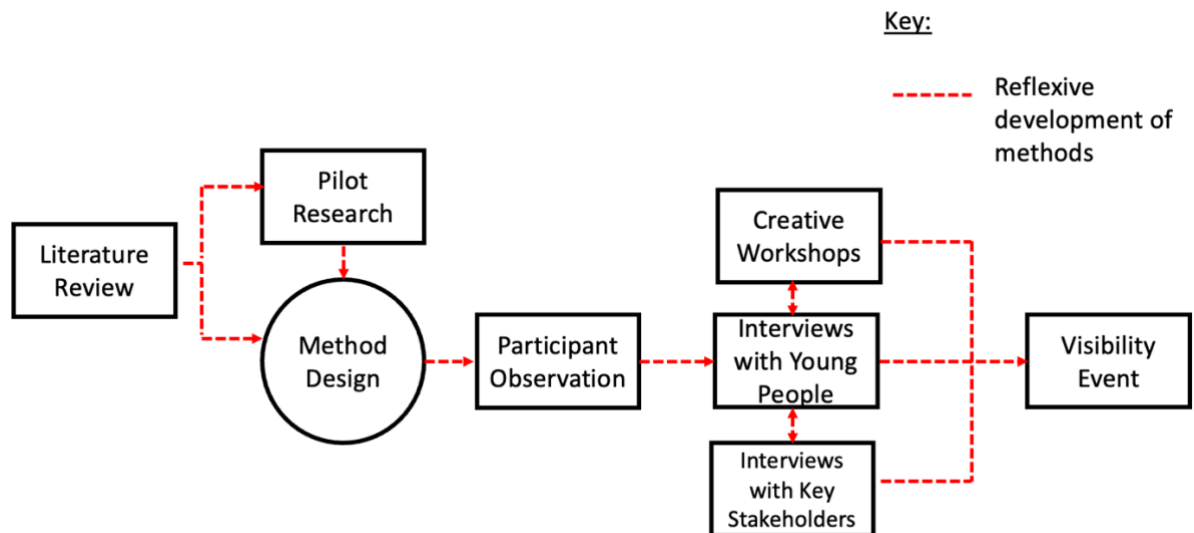


Figure 5: Flow diagram of my research design process

Empirical Timeline

Table 3: Timeline of the Empirical Process

<i>Date</i>	<i>Research Progress</i>
<i>Early 2022</i>	Pilot research and volunteering at the community centre (pre-ethical approval).
<i>June 2022</i>	Ethical approval of the project.
<i>September 2022</i>	Planning my role as a researcher and the rough timeline of the research project with the community centre staff.
<i>October – February 2023</i>	Carried out participant observations of the community food club, family meal, and the ‘Difficult Conversations’ workshops.
<i>January 2023</i>	Distribution of information sheets and consent forms in preparation for my research activities and interviews to begin.
<i>January - May 2023</i>	Activities and interviews carried out in the community centre using my research ‘tool kit’: - Zines workshop - Food Moments workshop + group interviews

	- Innovation Interview workshop - Comic Strip Individual Interviews
	Interviewed key stakeholders.
<i>April – July 2023</i>	Weekly workshops held at the community centre for the co-design and planning of Youth Health Matters. This included decisions and collaborations on: - Case study content - Format of the event - Attendees and invitations - The individual roles in the event - Decorations
<i>July 2023</i>	Youth Health Matters (Visibility Event)

Methodological Prong 1: Participant Observation

The participant observation aspect of my research provided opportunities for me to observe how the young people interacted with one another in the community centre and to understand their lived experiences of food under normal circumstances rather than purely through interview. Gathering an in depth understanding of their social contexts and engaging in face-to-face interaction with the young people in context allowed me to seek their thoughts and beliefs on topics as and when they arose. My ethnographic field notes from these observations (following ethical approval) have added to the wealth of data collected and can place interview responses into the wider social context of young people's lives allowing me to interpret research data through a cultural lens.

The participant observation prong of my research primarily took place at the beginning of my research but ongoing observations continued throughout the process. I engaged with approximately 40 young people throughout the duration of my research, some of whom participated in the later methodological prongs and others were only observed.

Attendance in the youth sessions fluctuated weekly with some young people attending frequently, and others who only came occasionally.

The insights gained through my observations allowed the reflexive development of my 'toolkit' in which my research methods have been designed to engage with participants in a way that works effectively for them, makes them comfortable and approaches issues raised by them as important aspects of the research. This is supported by James and Prout (2015) who emphasise that ethnography and participant observation provide a useful methodology to study childhood because it allows the direct involvement of young people in the construction of knowledge about them.

For example, a key aspect that the young people discussed during my observations was their dislike for school meals, my field notes highlighted that "lunches were obviously a very key sticking point, young people report the food as 'disgusting' and they don't eat there. They eat at the corner shop or don't eat at all" (empirical field notes excerpt). They also shared the value of their free meals at the community centre. In another session, young people were discussing the cost-of-living crisis and "how their families are refusing to put the gas on and not being able to afford to eat hot food as they can't afford to cook it. There was some joking about Christmas dinner and how young people might be just having pot noodle for dinner - this was said jokingly but there was an aspect of seriousness in the background" (empirical field notes excerpt). Observations like these were essential to identifying topics of interest to be explored further through the development of creative workshops and in interview. They led to the inclusion of questions around the cost-of-living crisis in my interviews and to the development of the 'food moments' creative workshop to understand the routines young people had in their access to food. My inclusion of young people's opinions and experiences in the continued development of my research design therefore supports my objective to achieve and facilitate meaningful participation as described by Hart (1992), Shier (2001) and Lundy (2007).

Methodological Prong 2: Creative workshops and Interviews

Creative Methods

Following my observations in both the pilot research and Prong 1 of the methodological approach, creative methods were identified as the most promising approach to working with young people. I had observed young people demonstrate more engagement when offered creative activities in their focus groups so decided to move forward with a creative approach to my own data gathering process. This was inspired by existing work with young people in which sensory and participatory methods were used to gather data and the insights of their participants; in particular, the work of Coupe *et al.* (2020), Mort *et al.* (2017; 2018; 2020) and Walker *et al.* (2012).

Within research literature, creative methods are described as approaches to research that “enable people to express themselves in non-verbal ways” (Brooks, Lainio and Lažetić, 2020, p. 1). Having engaged with literature exploring food insecurity (Knight *et al.*, 2018; Coupe *et al.*, 2020), I determined that using methods that didn’t always require verbal interaction might be more effective when introducing potentially sensitive topics. Another strength of creative methods includes their ability to help research across differences (Brooks, Lainio and Lažetić, 2020), this was particularly relevant for this thesis as there can be a level of stigma when discussing a lack of food and I understood there may be differences in experiences across the group – creative methods could help to reduce this concern. For example, Mort *et al.*’s (2017;2018;2020) use of creative methods provided an inclusive approach for young people to respond to traumatic experiences of floods and create approaches to flood resilience.

According to Brooks, Lainio and Lažetić (2020), there are three different types of creative methods: ‘found materials’ which might include evaluation of website content or found images; ‘researcher-initiated productions’ which are materials produced by the researcher such as photographs or sketches; and finally ‘participatory workshops’ in which the researcher and participant work together to produce materials, for example, the co-production of a documentary with participants. In combination with its participatory approach, this project focussed on enabling participatory workshops to

produce a variety of materials with participants for analysis and to work alongside prongs 1, 3 and 4.

Before explaining the development and the details of the participatory Toolkit used within this thesis' methodology, it is first important to provide some context about my participants. As outlined in the above section, in my participant observation, I observed approximately 40 young people and attendance at sessions fluctuated regularly. As a result of this fluctuation, in each of the sessions and creative methods I outline below, there were a number of different young people in attendance. However, throughout the empirical research, I noticed that a small group of young people would regularly attend the centre and others would drop in and out. This small group of regular attendees became my 'core group' of participants. In the sections below, I detail the sessions that took place as part of my toolkit and record how many participants attended each session. In Appendix 2.1 I provide details on attendees and notes on how session ran, for each activity and prong of the methodology. In addition, Appendix 2.2 offers salient and unidentifiable details and information about the 'core group' of participants; this is intended to build a fuller picture of who the participants were within this study and allow the reader to gain an understanding of participants' backgrounds when reading the data that has been gathered. This table provides non-identifiable information to protect the anonymity of my participants and intends to offer an insight into the nuance and complexities of the young peoples' lives.

Development of a Participatory Toolkit

I developed a 'toolkit' of participatory methods to use throughout my research project, the toolkit included stand-alone creative workshops as well as workshops and activities that aided discussion in individual and group interviews. The toolkit activities were both stimulating and sensitive to the topic. They worked to add depth to conversation in interviews and workshops, through creative activities.

Coupe *et al.*'s (2020) work highlights how a toolkit can generate and encourage free-flowing discussion and encouraged me to think about and develop my own. The contents of Coupe *et al.*'s 'Tools for Food Stories' resource demonstrated that the use

of visual aids and activities in and prior to interviews to enable discussion worked successfully in a food context. This had been a concern due to the complex nature of talking to young people experiencing food insecurity (Knight *et al.*, 2018); however, the methods used by Coupe *et al.* (2020) in their food stories demonstrates a high level of participatory methods in which children can identify the issues most important to them in relation to food and set a precedent for their use in this context. Their participatory methods included the development of 'food snapshots' which are templates for drawing on including shopping basket or plates, as well as 'food places' that include visual images of places where children cook and eat food; these enable discussion of the processes attached to these activities (Coupe *et al.*, 2020). These methods are very much child-led as they enable young people to lead the discussion and influence the conversation and outcome of the research they are involved in (Lundy 2007). This tool kit developed by Coupe *et al.*, also maintained the sensory and tactile methods that are encouraged when working with children as they encourage relaxation whilst stimulating awareness (Bingley and Milligan, 2007).

There is a general acceptance that creative activities have a particular value in semi-structured interviews; they can help to overcome literacy barriers, ease potentially sensitive discussions with more enjoyable sensory activities, and create freedoms in a world where their agency is severely limited (Murray and Overall, 2017). This was evidenced in Walker *et al.*'s (2012) methods of creating storyboards for children to portray their flood experiences; it allowed children to present themselves as they wanted (and not as victims to the flood) as well as bypass any literacy issues. I particularly liked this idea of representation as it breaks the social construction of children as being vulnerable and offers them the opportunity to view themselves in whatever light they would like. After having read Murray and Overall (2017) and Walker *et al.*'s (2012) work, I wondered if it would be possible to transfer these methods to a workshop with young people, and Walker *et al.* demonstrated this as a realised possibility. The understandings gained from Walker *et al.*'s project emphasised the need to incorporate children's needs and vulnerabilities into new flood recovery programmes with young people at the forefront of change.

The Toolkit

Similarly, from my own observations, I knew that my research design and methodology needed to include creative aspects and be able to incorporate the young people's needs and vulnerabilities into making an effective practice. The successes of the methodologies I explored (in breaking social constructions of vulnerability, using creative methods and embedding sensitivity) influenced the design of my research methods to allow me to gain a deeper insight into the young people's lived experiences of food insecurity through the use of a 'toolkit'.

Therefore, the toolkit that I developed aimed to enable a more relaxed and fun atmosphere for workshops and interviews. To enhance this, alongside the group workshops, I allowed group interviews as well as individual interviews depending on the participant's desires. The toolkit was also developed and adapted through the participatory approach to my research, in which young people were provided with opportunities to adapt and help design aspects of the toolkit – this led to the inclusion of peer led 'innovation' interviews as one of the activities within the toolkit. Following my engagement with PAR, participatory literature, and learnings from my pilot research and observations, my toolkit was developed to include:

- Young people drawing their top four food moments of the day (this then aided discussion in group interviews);
- Zine making to represent young people's feelings about and relationships with food;
- Peer led 'innovation' interviews asking each other about some of the key themes of the research project;
- Co-creating comic strips of everyday food stories in interview.

In the following sections, I will describe what each of these elements entailed, the reasoning behind the design of each element, what it allowed me to explore and how many young people interacted with the sessions. The table in Appendix 2.1 details how many young people attended each session and offers some further details on each workshop.

Food Moments Workshop

The food moments workshop was an activity designed to understand the 'Top Four Food Moments' experienced by the young person on the day of the session. Inspired by Walker *et al.*'s (2012) story boards in which young people shared their flood journey by drawing it on a storyboard and Coupe *et al.*'s (2020) 9 boxes method. Walker *et al.* chose to use storyboards because drawing personal experiences instead of talking about them was determined an effective method in children's research and offered freedom for young people to express how they felt about sensitive situations. Coupe *et al.* (2020) designed their 9 boxes as a tool for young people to draw or discuss 9 significant things, these could be 9 days, 9 ingredients or 9 meals.

Drawing upon these methods, I designed a template (Figure 7) for young people to draw their top four food moments from their day. I explained that these food moments could be positive or negative and the little square in the corner of each box was a space for the young person to draw an emoji about how they felt about it. Eight young people took part in this session and there was general discussion within the workshop about how the young people's days had been and the food they had eaten. Young people were asked questions such as "do you have a favourite day of the week for food, why?", "what is your favourite food?" and "do you ever go shopping with your family?".

Following this workshop, three young people volunteered to be interviewed in relation to the discussions from the workshop. We discussed why they had chosen their food moments and then continued our discussion around how wider issues of schools, cost-of-living and how covid-19 impacted their daily food moments and access to food.

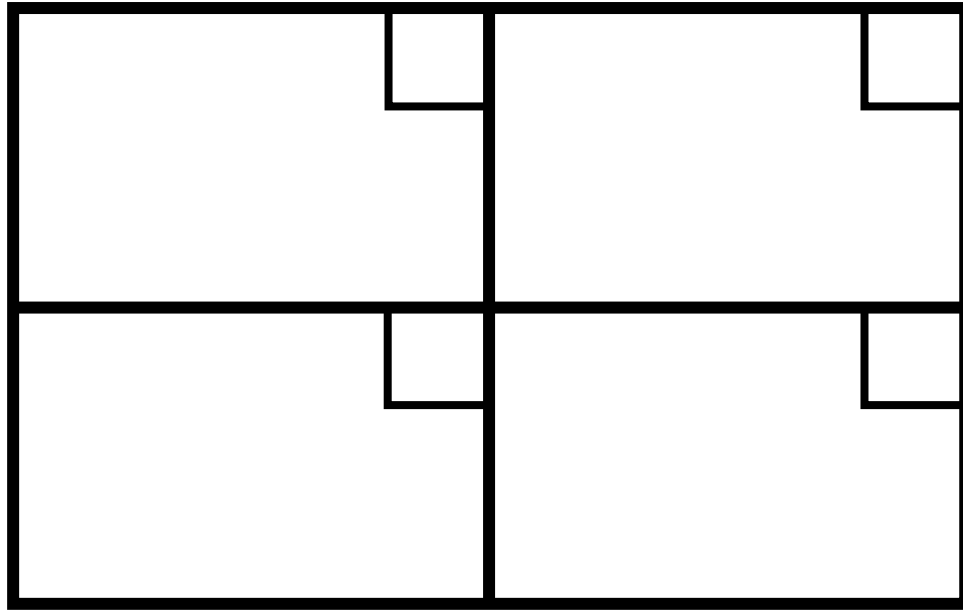


Figure 6: Food Moments Template

When thinking about the value of creative methods, particularly when working with young people about potentially sensitive topics, this workshop provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their day and their experience without any pressure to participate in discussions or compare their experiences to others. However, it is important to note that solely relying on creative methods to gather information and insight can have its limitations. For example, Brooks, Lainio and Lažetić (2020) highlight that relying on creative practice can be a hinderance depending on variations in artistic ability which can mean it becomes difficult to draw meaning from what is produced by participants. To combat this, I asked for volunteers to have a further recorded discussion of their drawings and why they had chosen their moments. As previously outlined, I only interviewed participants who volunteered for interview and gave them the option to interview individually or in small groups. In this instance, 3 participants volunteered to discuss their food moments, and we had a small discussion about their chosen moments, guided by some prompt questions I had previously drafted. This discussion allowed me to draw out the detail and nuance from the participants' sketches that might not have been captured without further discussion.

Zines Workshop

In considering the development of my toolkit and the participatory nature of my research, I returned to Mort *et al.*'s work to determine methods of best practice and how I could ensure my project was at a similar participatory level as Mort's work, which I deem a successful example of creative engagement with young people. Mort *et al.* (2017, 2018, 2020) worked with young people impacted by flooding in the UK to determine better disaster risk management and gather the stories of young people's experiences. The construction of children as victims is critiqued and rejected in Mort *et al.*'s work on flooding (2017; 2019) where they replace it with the social construction of children as agentic and capable of participation, arguing that this construction better promotes the value and ideas of children.

In researching methods that encompassed similar creative and participatory values to those exhibited through Mort *et al.*'s methods, I discovered zines as a research method. I was inspired by Jean McEwan's zine-making around the welfare state; she describes zine-making as "empowering – you make the rules about what you want to say, and how you want to say it" (McEwan, 2022). She also comments on how a group making zines together can "build community, understanding and connection with each other". This was particularly important for my research project in which talking about potentially sensitive topics required building a relationship with my participants and trust within the group.

From my research, observations, and prior work with my participants, I knew that they responded well to creative activities. The zine activity was introduced to the group, 12 young people took part in this session (as previously mentioned, attendance numbers fluctuated each week). They were provided with various materials including recent newspapers, magazines and local food flyers, alongside being encouraged to draw or write anything they wanted on their zines to reflect how they felt about food. The zine activity acted as an opportunity for an informal session in which young people discussed their opinions on their food experiences, occasionally prompted by some questions I had prepared whilst creating their zines that represented their relationships with food. Some of these questions included: How do you feel about food, is it a positive or negative

emotion or both? Do you feel restricted about what you can eat? What do you know about food poverty – what do you think causes it?

This discussion was recorded to be analysed alongside the zines created by the participants. Figures 5 and 6 are examples of some of the zines created by the participants in the session. Figure 5: 'This is Rubbish', was created by one of the participants to portray their relationship with food and their desire to eat healthier. Figure 6: 'Food Poverty', was created by another participant who reflected on how what they were able to eat was dictated by their budget. The issues they highlighted were discussed within the group and explore further in later interviews and analysis.



Figure 7: 'This is Rubbish' Zine



Figure 8: 'Food Poverty' Zine

Introducing the concept of zines and encouraging participants to create their own page was successful in allowing insight into their relationships with food. Bernardi, (2020) recognises the value of arts-based methods by highlighting that the creative space can generate a sense of autonomy and spontaneity, especially when researching with young people. Bernardi's study demonstrated that offering children a creative freedom can enable a space of agency and power balance when doing research. This was

demonstrated within the zine workshop, as young people created powerful zines with strong messages about food poverty and their relationships with food and choice.

Innovation Interviews

The innovation interviews were designed as a direct result of engaging with young people and reflexively changing my methodological designs to cater to their interests. In a previous workshop I had led a group discussion, focussing on my research interests and asking interview-like questions. This was unsuccessful with young people becoming easily distracted and not engaging with the workshop. The design of the innovation interviews was a key example of how the participatory approach to my methodology shaped conversational priorities according to the participants' desires.

As a result of the unsuccessful session, I reconsidered how the workshop should run. I reflected upon how Murray and Overall's (2017) article had considered "how children are presented as agentic beings in children's literature" (p.5) and that fictional literature can offer imagined mobilities and agency that may not be possible in the real world. I considered alongside Kara's (2015) observation that creative methods can benefit from the imagination to think about how the interviews could be enhanced. Kara (2015) suggests that when using creative methods, the imagination can be an excellent way of "enabling a researcher to imagine the world in different ways and from different perspectives" (p. 66). As such, I developed the idea of the 'innovation interview'.

In the 'innovation interviews' session I asked participants to imagine they were going to be interviewed in relation to these key themes and asked them, "what would they wanted to be asked?". To ensure that the session still collected valuable and relevant data to my project's objectives, I identified key themes for the session: food routines, food insecurity, cost-of-living crisis, participation, and anything else of interest to the young people.

Five young people attended this session, and they decided to begin by mind mapping issues that were important to them in relation to the key themes. They were particularly interested in the participation aspect of these themes and identified both social media

and schools as important issues to their relationships with food. Interview questions that they identified as important to them included: “How do you feel about eating in school? How do you think it can be made better? How can young people make it better?” and “What would you change about how young people are viewed/treated?”. The elements they introduced around how young people are perceived in the world encouraged me to further investigate the impacts of social constructions in young people’s access to food and to identify it as a theme for further analysis.

This was a creative method in a different sense than the previous two methods outlined within the toolkit, as instead of producing artwork or images, participants worked together to design and create their own interview questions. Getting participants to imagine they were creating their own interview scripts was very valuable in gathering information on how young people would like to be viewed and treated. This element of the toolkit was incredibly effective in providing a different perspective that allowed an understanding of how young people want to be interviewed and of issues important to them.

Comic Strip Interviews

The methods used in Mort *et al.*’s (2020) flooding work with young people focussed on participatory arts methods, including storyboards, 3D modelling, and memory workshops where children “could explore and share their flood experiences, develop ideas together about their recovery and how to build community resilience; and find ways to engage with and have a voice in local and national emergency flood planning” (Mort *et al.*, 2018, p. 150).

I adapted the idea of story boards to act as an aide to my interviews. Interviews were intended to get a detailed insight into young people’s lives and their interaction with different services when accessing food. It was initially difficult to get conversation flowing in a typical formal interview, so I adapted the concept of storyboards and incorporated making storyboards into the interview process. Six young people participated in the comic-strip interviews. In these interviews, the participant and I co-created a comic strip that displayed what their average day looked like and what food

they ate. Each young person decided whether they would like to discuss the events of a normal weekday or a weekend. This interview design enabled free flowing conversation as I could ask what young people were adding to the comic strip and why. It also meant that young people had the freedom to decide what their character, surroundings and friends/ families' characters looked like in their comic strip – giving them autonomy over their stories they were sharing with me. I found this to give a lot more in-depth information than previous interview attempts, and young people engaged with the activity more enthusiastically. The added element of the computer and creation of the comic made the interview seem less formal and enabled some young people to open up and share information about sensitive topics. The analysis of these comic strips was essential to the development of Chapter 5.



Figure 9: Example of comic strip describing Jordan's average day at school, co-created by Jordan³.

³ In line with the participatory approach, young people were offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms.

Kara (2015) advocates for the application of 'enhanced interviews' as a way of making interviews easier for the participant when discussing sensitive subjects. An enhanced interview is an interview that works alongside other methods of data gathering (Kara, 2015); this could include the use of a visual aid or an artefact. One example of an enhanced interview is Hadfield-Hill and Horton's, (2014) use of guided walks, in which children were taken on a walk and discussed their experiences whilst walking. Hadfield-Hill and Horton report that this resulted in children enjoying the experience and losing the potential tension of a formal interview. The concept of the enhanced interview supported and strengthened my interviews with young people through the creation of comic strips. Whilst it reduced tension and informalized the interview, as Kara (2015) highlights, the comic strip interview also generated an additional piece of data in the form of the visual comic strip to add detail and a visualisation of the data captured in the recording of the interview. These comic strips have been invaluable, adding depth to the data gathered throughout this project, as well as providing a visual element both within the thesis but also when presenting work in conferences. The comic strips offer an illustration of what life is like for my participants.

Methodological Prong 3: Interviews with Key Stakeholders

Interviews with key stakeholders were designed to understand the stakeholders' job roles in relation to young people and food and if/how they interact with young people. The interviews consider the different dimensions and dual temporalities that key stakeholders encounter in their roles: how they manage their everyday responsibilities versus in times of crisis.

Interviews were semi-structured. To prepare for the interviews, a broad list of questions was designed around the key interests of the thesis in relation to the individuals' job role, their encounters of food insecurity within their job role, how they work with young people in their role (if at all), how they were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and their observations of the cost-of-living crisis.

Seven stakeholders were interviewed for this research project. The stakeholders were specifically chosen according to their roles in the food circuits of care and within the local community; they included local charity workers, a member of the city council, a local teacher, and members of national charities. Alongside the broader list of questions developed around the key themes of the thesis, I tailored specific questions according to the roles of individual key stakeholders to best understand their roles and interactions with policies that affect the circuits of care. Interviews with key stakeholders followed interviews and activities with the young people, and questions were informed by my understanding of young people's experiences.

The key stakeholders interviewed for this thesis were also invited to the visibility day that was the culminating event to the thesis' research to bring young people and decision makers together.

Methodological Prong 4: Visibility Event

Participatory methods can enable participants to become and feel like "producers of knowledge" both producing 'outer knowledge' intended for wider audiences and the public as well as 'private knowledge' which might include personal development of skills or relationships ((Blazek and Hraňová, 2012, p. 164). Additionally, the thesis' methodology took strands of inspiration from Participatory Action Research in which research "enables researchers to combine theory and practice, action and reflection by developing practical solutions to address concerns and issues within communities" (Kaluzeviciute *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, through my methodology, the four-pronged approach was intended to reach a natural conclusion through which young people could participate and organise an event that was important to them, and which built participant's own skills to enable a co-designed opportunity for all participants within my study to engage with one another.

Inspired by Mort *et al.*'s flood manifestos (2015), which were presented by children to adults and 'decision-makers', the visibility event was intended to act as an opportunity

for my participants' empowerment. In Mort's flood manifestos, young people shared their needs and wants for future flood policies with those adults who could act on these needs and fulfil their obligations from their positions of power. This correlates with Shier's idea that participation is often dependent on adults acting on their obligations following active listening to support children's participation, in this case with flood policies. The young people's resulting involvement in flood policies links to Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles' (2020) hope that meaningful participation and education in climate change would lead to children engaging with climate across multiple scales. This meaningful participation and resulting engagement and/or visibility of young people in policies and structures that affect them is something that I have aimed to achieve and encourage through my research.

In her research into the participation of children in EU policies, Larkins (2022) highlights that there is a lesson to be learnt from children's participation in policy making and the review of existing structures; that "children's presence and feedback in spaces of policy making can help adults gain relevant attitudes and skills" (p.71) and this will enable and sustain the potential for participatory structures to include young people in the future. This focus on young people as social actors with the competency to be involved in and influence policy and existing structures is a key aspect of my research and shapes the structure of my research design. The methods I used were reflexively developed to accommodate and engage with the young people; but their experiences were also fed through to adult key stakeholders in my interviews and through the visibility event. This provides multiple aspects of participatory involvement for the participants because young people are afforded the space to discuss issues as well as provide feedback and be listened to by adults (Lundy, 2021).

The facilitation of a visibility event within my research project was intended for the young people to share their ideas with key stakeholders and initiate the possibility for future openings in the involvement of young people in food systems.

The visibility event was undefined in the research design, that was because of the project's commitment to participatory methodology principles, with participants taking the lead on the design of the event. Despite my commitment to these principles, I was

surprised by the event that emerged when young people were facilitated to have agency through the participatory process that my research design created. I discuss the development of the visibility event and its complexities in chapter 6.

Summary of Data Analysis

The empirical field notes from observations and workshops, alongside the interview transcripts with young people and with key stakeholders were analysed thematically using Atlas.ti to identify key themes as well as identifying commonalities and disparities between young people's and key stakeholders' experiences and opinions. This inductive analysis involved an iterative process of continuously analysing data and reflexively adapting the analysis and methodology in response to the arising themes. The application of an inductive analysis aligned with my participatory and reflexive methodology because inductive analysis is intended to allow research findings to emerge from the data and process "without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

The research aims were broadly used to help identify themes, in particular themes around how young people perceive themselves and how they interact with adults and systems and themes relating to (in)access to food and how young people manage these. As a result of analysis of observations, the targeted creative methodology that reacted to participants' needs and key stakeholder interviews, several key themes emerged:

- 1) Young people feeling they are viewed as a collective in contrast to the niche and complex individual circumstances.
- 2) The complexity of individual experiences compared to the rigidity of food circuits of care.
- 3) The fragility of circuits of care to individual and larger scale disruption.

My ongoing approach to the analysis of the data collected from all four methodological prongs has allowed me to make different contributions in each empirical chapter according to these themes.

Chapter 4 emerged from the analysis observations of the community centre's food club, family meal and interviews from key stakeholders which allowed me to identify the disconnect between organisations and policies. The examples from these observations were analysed to explore and theorise about the differences in food as a vital mobility versus food. Analysis of the data gathered from these methods highlighted the fragilities in circuits of care and allowed me to identify disruption as a key factor to young people's experiences of food insecurity which then fed into the development of chapter 6.

I identified the existence of tactics in chapter 5 by using data primarily from the in-depth analysis of my participants lives explored in the comic strip interviews alongside my observations and learnings about the participants' sporadic food consumption. The identification of these tactics allowed me to develop the use of tactics as an analytic tool to explore the individual fragilities of circuits of care. This analysis allowed me to explore the complexity and volatility of young people's lives and how these coincide with the vital mobility of food and their experiences of circuits of care.

Finally, chapter 6 provides an analysis of the visibility event as an outcome of the project and highlights the complexities of young people's lives and how this impacts their access to food, particularly in relation to school systems. The participatory nature of the event promoted empowerment and supported participants in feeling cared for and about by giving them decision making power and angling the research process to issues designated as important by them. Chapter 6 also develops imagined scenarios of disruption through the analysis of key stakeholders' interviews alongside the data gathered from the methodological toolkit with young people. The analysis of stakeholder interviews identified that different stakeholders held different social constructions of young people. Chapter 6 provides an opportunity to bring the analysis of these key stakeholder interviews in conversation with the innovation interviews and explore young people's participation in contemporary and future food systems.

Chapter 6 builds on the theme of disruption identified from the inductive analysis. Where Chapter 4 considers how disruption in young people's lives means that rigid circuits of care become ineffective, and Chapter 5 introduces young people's tactics to overcome flaws in circuits. Chapter 6 uses the analysis of the combination of research

methods and themes identified from the analysis of the data to learn from the difficulties and disruptions experienced by young people to imagine how circuits of care could become more robust. This analysis of social constructions in conversation with circuits of care and disruptions also allowed further opportunities for discussions around young people's agency in systems outside food systems and policies.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the considerations of participatory methods and literature into the development and design of my own research process. It has demonstrated the depth and breadth of my engagement with similar research projects engaging with young people and highlighted that meaningful participation was at the heart of the project's development and design. I have explained the reasoning behind every methodological decision and outlined the four-pronged methodological approach.

By explaining the methodological approach, the chapter has emphasised how the methodology used for this research project was a reflexive and constantly evolving process. With youth participation embedded into its foundations, the methodologies adapted to accommodate young people's needs, be sensitive to their vulnerabilities and ensure that the activities were always engaging. Chapter 6 continues this conversation by exploring how the shape of the final visibility event of the methodological process was moulded and shaped by the participants. It highlights the impact of the epistemological approach of viewing young people with lived experience as valued knowers and co-producers of situated knowledge.

In the next chapter, I build on the conceptualisation of circuits of care that was introduced in Chapter 2. I introduce some of the empirical material gathered through the methodological prongs to analyse the circuits of care experienced by my participants and identify areas of fragility within circuits. Chapter 4 elaborates on the role that the community centre at which the empirical research took place, played in young people's access to food and how it works to fill gaps in food circuits of care when other systems failed.

Chapter Four: The Community Centre and Fragile Circuits of Care

Using Vital Mobilities to Conceptualise Fragile Circuits of Care

The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the increasing fragility of circuits of care. Through a vital mobilities lens it demonstrates how the growing individual and statutory reliance on the community centre to provide food services is making circuits of care more fragile. The chapter explores the complex relationships between place, seasonality and power to identify moments of collapse that impact the operation of the community centre and result in damage to the circuits of care. The chapter looks at these “dynamic temporalities, spatialities and rhythms” (Sodero, 2019, p. 120) of food vital mobilities, through focussing in on these examples.

Sodero says that vital mobilities have “dynamic temporalities, spatialities and rhythms” (2019, p.120) and that these are related to the “socio-technical-ecological assemblages” (2019, p. 110) that constitute them. In this chapter I focus on moments in which the rhythms and spatialities of food vital mobilities changed for the participants in my study, creating ‘moments of collapse’ and explore what happened in these situations. The data from my project provides examples of how ‘moments of collapse’ resulted in already fragile circuits of care being impacted or temporarily broken, and how the community centre responded by trying (more or less successfully) to shift how it operated. During my research I observed an increased responsibility being undertaken by the community centre to provide people with food. This increased reliance on the community centre by individuals and statutory bodies makes circuits of care more fragile as they are susceptible to these ‘moments of collapse’.

When conceptualising food as a vital mobility, I acknowledge the differences in food and blood as vital materials. Making blood mobile is a significant achievement (Sodero, 2019) and usually occurs in an emergency (whether this is an individual or more wide-spread event). Food’s mobility is diverse and expansive in its everyday and emergency movements; there is also more to consider in terms of individual health, agency, and resource disparities. These complex temporal influences, power relations, and social

dynamics associated with food vital mobilities are useful in framing the fragility of circuits of care.

When introducing blood as a vital material, Sodero highlights that “vital mobilities cannot be dematerialized; the feat of mobility must be accomplished to safeguard life (e.g. blood must get to the patient)” (2019, p.115). There are two interesting comparisons to be made here to food and the relationship between individuals and food as a vital material. Firstly, mobility of blood is a “feat” whereas the movements associated with food as a vital mobility are often considered mundane. Food is mundane in comparison to blood because the consumption of food is a normal everyday mobility that individuals undertake, whereas even in the everyday transportation of blood, it is likely that the individual who needs it is in some sort of emergency or abnormal situation. This links to Cresswell’s (2012) observation that movements can be overlooked until an instance of disruption, and then what is taken for granted becomes suddenly visible. This was evident for many people in COVID-19 which was a ‘moment of collapse’ for the whole population. In addition to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, I observed varying social and temporal dynamics at the community centre where many service users were experiencing individual crises or disruption, during which the contributions and responsibility absolved by the community centre to fill gaps in circuits of care were made visible.

Secondly, Sodero’s phrasing of “blood must get to the patient”, highlights that individuals are not considered responsible for their access to blood; however, in UK policy and the observations made within the community centre, the consumer is expected to get to the food, or to get the food to themselves. It is interesting to consider the language used to describe a person in the context of food vs. blood. Although food is “critical or essential in everyday life” (Sodero, 2019, p. 112) and therefore, a vital material; a person in need of food is considered a consumer, whereas a person in need of blood is considered a patient. Even in this difference of language, the expectation on the individual to access the vital material is contradictory. This also results in a sense of shame and personal failure if a person has not been able to independently access food and can act as a barrier in their circuits of care.

This concept of blame and responsibility in being able to provide for oneself is reflected in my understanding of how food as a vital material is viewed differently from blood. For example, the way in which the cost-of-living crisis has been addressed in terms of policy support versus the COVID-19 pandemic is similar to the differences in how vital mobilities are considered in terms of food vs blood in a responsibility context. The COVID-19 crisis is an example of food mobilities during a disaster; I recognise that the movement of food during an international crisis is different from the everyday. The empirical examples within this chapter explore the temporal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic versus the cost-of-living crises and the corresponding responsibilities on individuals and the community centre.

The empirical examples within this chapter explore the different 'dynamic temporalities, spatialities and rhythms' (Sodero, 2019) that impact the food circuits of care within the community centre. They also highlight that different circuits of care may be fragile in different ways. Each empirical example offers an insight into the changing of fragility and how 'moments of collapse' shifted how the community centre operates and highlights issues that make the circuits of care that people rely on increasingly more fragile and unsustainable.

In exploring these moments of collapse, the chapter also provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of what one 'third sector' community service/ organisation looks like, and how it is expanding to ensure circuits of care do not fail young people and service users. It explains the gaps that have been created by the particulars of policies and changing social dynamics and explores how these have had a knock-on effect on how the community centre operates and provides care to the young people and wider community it serves. The data suggests that gaps created by government policies have resulted in the community centre as a third sector organisation (TSO) increasing its responsibility to support young people and community members' access to food. Through the analysis of empirical examples, the chapter highlights the increased responsibility that the community centre has taken on and explores how this has been impacted by 'moments of collapse' such as COVID-19, changes in surplus food and increased capacity at different times of the year, resulting in increasingly fragile circuits of care.

Defining the 'Third Sector'

Through a vital mobilities lens, this chapter works to provide an in-depth investigation into the community centre and its changing role in ensuring that circuits of care do not fail young people and other community members. This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the community centre as one of the many organisations within the 'third sector'. Therefore, it is important to understand what the 'third sector' is to comprehend where the community centre sits in the wider circuits of care and political context and why as a TSO, the community centre's contribution to circuits can be 'fragile'.

"Both the definition and existence of a third sector have been subject to debate and disagreement" (Alcock, 2010, p.5). The difficulty in defining the third sector is due to the diverse quantity of organisations that fall within the category as well as its relation to the contemporary political context. Within the context of this thesis, the 'third sector' is understood using the working definition provided by the National Audit Office which defines Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) as: independent of the government; 'value-driven' in that they are motivated by desire to achieve social goals; and they reinvest any surpluses to pursue these goals (National Audit Office, 2019).

However, when considering the language of the third sector, although defined as independent of the government, the word 'sector' implies that it is a subdivision of a whole and suggests that the third sector is an embedded part of a wider system. This chapter's consideration of my ethnographic material highlights that the community centre, as a TSO in this system, has experienced tensions within this system. Language is important, because although the 'third sector' implies that it is embedded in a system, Julie's reflection on the use of the word 'third' emphasises the tensions she and the community centre experience in the wider political nexus:

"I can't stand the third sector. I can't stand the terminology, third sector. I don't mind being called community sector. But when you say third, it's like you're not first. You're not second, you're third."

(Julie, community centre managing director, 2023)

There is some debate on what the third sector should be called, as Julie suggests, one of the options could be the 'community sector', Alcock (2010) suggests that it should be called the 'voluntary sector', the 'charity sector' has also been suggested as an alternative. Each of these definitions have problematic aspects, for example, the term 'voluntary sector' suggests that all the people that work within it do so on a voluntary basis and are unpaid and this is not the case. For easy understanding within this thesis, the decision was made to refer to organisations in this category as the third sector, but it acknowledges and reflects upon the negative connotations that this label can have on its staff.

Staff within the community centre and those I interviewed from other TSOs reported feeling undervalued within the system; these tensions of being undervalued and coming third have an impact on the stability of circuits of care. For example, community centre staff report service users coming to them as a last resort after being refused support or referred by other organisations; this impacts staff morale as well as service users' emotional state when arriving at the community centre. When service users come to the community centre as a last resort, this also means that individual circuits of care become more fragile, depending on a community centre that can experience 'moments of collapse' can result in vital support becoming unavailable. Melissa, who works for Citizens Advice, reflected on the spaces they are given to work from and remarked on how "the third sector always operates from shit spaces. It's one of my big bugbears. You know, we need beautiful spaces, but there's no money for beauty and that doesn't help clients feel valued". These aspects of the fragility of places, spaces and temporalities that the community centre works within is explored in more detail within this chapter but reflects how the community centre experiences being a part of the 'third sector' and the resulting effects on circuits of care.

The Trussell Trust's vision is for a UK without the need for food banks (Trussell Trust, 2024). In an interview with Melissa, from the local Citizens Advice Bureau and trustee of the local food bank, it became clear that this view is shared by those working in third sector organisations within the local area. She shared her opinion that the "food Bank and the work that we do here are literally a testament to what's wrong with the welfare system in this country at the moment" (March 2023). Similarly, a member of the local

food network explained that she believed the problem with such a heavy reliance on the third sector, without any long term solutions “from the top systematically” in the form of government and policy decisions, means that “we’re just basically creating an economy of need that doesn't fix itself, then six months from now we need more money into the system and then more again” (Diane, March 2023).

Gibbon and Dey, (2011) argue that the reduced statutory provisions and resources available in the UK have increased demand and responsibilities of third sector organisations. The data I have collected supports this claim by demonstrating that the community centre has been built from the bottom up with minimal governmental support or infrastructure, yet provides services that community members rely upon in place of effective statutory support. In this chapter, I explore how this increased individual and statutory reliance on the community centre highlights the precarity of food circuits of care. I explore how this increased responsibility has manifested itself in the community centre and its relationship with the circuits of care experienced by the young people and community members at the community centre. This includes reviewing how the community centre interacts with policies and decisions from funders as an organisation independent from the government and with other TSOs.

The empirical examples of ‘moments of collapse’ consider different dynamics alongside a consideration of vital mobilities that help me to answer the following questions:

What does it mean to be independent from the government; is it even possible to be independent of the government when political changes severely impact the role the community centre plays in service users’ circuits of care? And to what extent has an increasing reliance on the community centre to fill gaps left by government and school policies made circuits of care more fragile? How is responsibility considered in food circuits of care, both through an individual’s responsibility to provide for themselves and the responsibility of the community centre to fill the gaps when they can’t?

Place as a Contributing Factor to Fragility and Experiences of Circuits of Care

The community centre was initially established by a small group of people and only achieved charitable status many years after its formation. This emphasises my understanding of how the community centre has been built from the bottom up – starting as an informal community led initiative. They describe themselves as a charity “set up by local people to meet the needs of its community” and provide a multitude of services including open access to Wi-Fi and tech support; a community food café; membership to a food club; job search and CV support; youth sessions with free food; group fitness sessions and men’s and women’s health groups. They deliver sessions with a focus on helping members achieve ‘5 ways to wellbeing’ (Mind, 2024) and work as a not-for-personal-profit organisation. In relation to the NAO’s definition of TSOs, I now consider how the community centre aligns with the description of being ‘value driven’ in conversation with the concept of vital mobilities and my emphasis on the ‘care’ within circuits of care. Their focus on meeting the needs of the community allows care to be interwoven in the delivery of sessions and food and makes for a more caring experience of circuits for service users, but their charity status can make their services more fragile.

To effectively evaluate the impacts and experiences of the community centre, it is necessary to consider its geographical location, its status as a TSO and its relationship with vital mobilities and circuits of care, all in the context of place. Bonner-Thompson and McDowell argue that “examining the geographies where caring practices occur highlights how people cope with austerity. Here, the natural environment of coastal towns becomes important for the young men in feeling that they are cared for.” (2020, p.1). Existing in a coastal town situated in the Northwest of the UK with low income, place impacts the dimensions of circuits of care within the community centre and how they are vulnerable to moments of collapse. Bonner-Thompson and McDowell’s argument is significant because it highlights the importance of place in terms of how people experience hardship, and this is relevant for my consideration of circuits of care. Due to the location of my research area, young people I worked with had different relationships with food and circuits of care than their wealthier counterparts from other areas of the UK.

The UK is an increasingly geographically unequal country (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020). There has been a growing economic and social inequality recorded from the 1980s between the North and South of the UK; young people in the north of the UK are more likely to experience obesity, more eligible for Free School Meals and more likely to experience poor mental health than their southern counterparts (Pickett and Taylor-Robinson, 2021). Levelling up narratives have neglected coastal communities (Asthana and Agarwal, 2023); not only do local authorities in the North have lower earnings than in other regions, but coastal towns have “not made up for the declines in their fortunes seen in the last quarter of the 20th century” (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020, p. 3). The economic gap between coastal and non-coastal communities has widened over time with economic output per capita being 26% lower in coastal communities compared with non-coastal communities in 2015 (Corfe, 2017); similarly, 5 of the 10 local authorities with the lowest average pay are in coastal communities.

Coastal towns have experienced the impacts of austerity due to reduced income across the UK meaning households have less money to spend on activities such as tourism (Beatty, Fothergill and Gore, 2014). Temporality is key in the context of a coastal town that has a reliance on tourism for the area to prosper. This is further evidence that place impacts the living conditions, experiences, and needs of the service users. The consideration of the geographical location adds a layer to thinking about how and where vital mobilities are situated and their associated circuits of care.

Through my research, I observed how place affects the provisions required from the community centre alongside how young people interact with each other. Coastal communities often find themselves experiencing digital exclusion (Asthana and Agarwal, 2023). At the community centre, service users reported not being able to apply for benefits due to the process being online; similarly, young people experienced limitations to their learning, especially during the COVID-19 crisis when learning was moved online (Holt and Murray, 2022). The community centre offers technological support as one of its services to reduce digital exclusion. In my interviews with the centre’s staff, it was highlighted that the digital uptake in service provision and communications during COVID-19 was a key instance of disruption to the community centre’s services, and the digital poverty levels in the area acted as a barrier that the community centre had to

address. The community centre lost touch with some service users and had to adapt to provide youth sessions online, but many didn't have enough mobile data or had too poor Wi-Fi connections to enable them to join. As such, it is essential to take into consideration the location of the study area, as an old coastal town within the North-West of the UK, to fully understand the context in which my participants exist and experience circuits of care and to understand the vulnerability of such circuits.

In the next section, I introduce three moments of collapse from my empirical data. I use these examples to explore how aspects of place intersect with circuits of care and the circumstances of individuals to create fragilities with implications for the community centre.

Moments of Collapse

Community Centre Closure: Pouring From an Empty Cup

In this empirical example, the temporalities associated with its geographical location play a key part in the 'moment of collapse' experienced by the community centre. As a coastal town, the seasonal fluctuation of work centring around tourism and reliance on part-time workers (Asthana and Agarwal, 2023) drastically impacts the support required from the community centre. The nation-wide problem of bills becoming more expensive in the winter as heating needs to be turned on and the expenses of Christmas time add up, is exacerbated for workers that rely on tourism-based work and have reduced income during winter months. This means that the community centre has an increased intake in both community and young people service users in the winter. During my ethnography, Julie reported an increase in young people coming to the youth sessions during the winter as a warm space and parents having less money to provide food for their children in the evenings during this time. However, this led to an increased pressure on the community centre and its staff in providing additional support to service users and resulted in staff becoming overworked and overwhelmed. It is important to recognise that this a temporal and seasonal trend that threatens to repeat itself and contributes to the fragility and unsustainability of seasonal circuits of care.

Empirical Example One: Pouring from an Empty Cup

"On Tuesday I received a message from Julie (the community centre managing director) saying that they had had an emergency meeting on Monday night and as a result they will be closing for a week next Monday from 4th-9th December. Their Facebook page says "our staff have worked tirelessly for the past 2 years supporting our community. We have come to a point when our staff need to take a pause. We can't keep pouring from an empty cup. We have taken the exceptional decision to stop, and take a breath for a week, so staff can re-charge, before we head into a very busy Christmas period."

(Ethnographic fieldnotes, December 2022)

In the following chapter, I explore how people use tactics to adapt to the policies and accessibility of services that impact their ability to access food. Accessing food from the community centre is one such tactic people use to ensure they have enough food. Community members take advantage of the free lunches available in the community café, and young people eat their evening meals for free at the youth sessions, as well as taking food home with them. The temporary closure of the community centre was a 'moment of collapse' and provided an opportunity to consider the centre's role in young people and service users' circuits of care. I observed how people managed and adapted (or didn't) when the services already plugging gaps in circuits were not functioning, it emphasised the vitality of services provided by the community centre. This vitality of services to individuals also highlighted that individuals' reliance on the community centre can make their circuits of care very fragile; if the community centre is already a 'last resort' for some people and the community centre closes.

In my ethnographic research, the three core elements I observed within the community centre's many services were the food club, the family meal, and the youth focus groups. The food club within the community centre had 70 registered members who attended every week to purchase food (this number increased to over 100 during the time I was researching). The food club works on a basis of a weekly £5 membership and members

tend to receive between £20 and £30 worth of food for this membership fee. The community centre's food club operates by collecting surplus food from supermarkets and by purchasing additional food from wholesalers. They are intended to reduce waste food but also to support households on low incomes, offering them a range of cheaper food to purchase and prevent them from needing to access emergency support from the food bank. Members shared with me the value and vitality of their memberships and how it meant they were able to feed themselves and their families as food in the supermarkets had become too expensive. Members all had different relationships with the food club, with some eating solely from the food they purchased from the food club and utilising the free food in the community café; others said that the food club acted as their primary food shop and then they would go to supermarkets to buy additional items they had not been able to get from the food club. One member said she appreciated the food club because it meant her weekly food shop "cost £20 instead of £50".

When the community centre re-opened, I asked members of staff if any services had continued during their closure such as the food club. Staff became reluctant to reveal details on what had occurred, but from my understanding, the food club was supposed to run even during the centre's closure, managed by volunteers. However, staff implied that this had not happened. Staff were hesitant to disclose information to me (understandably because they did not want to upset the volunteers), however, staff also seemed reluctant to admit, that because of their closure, a service had not been provided. This is a significant example, as it brings to light the reliance and responsibility placed on those working in the community centre. The food provided by the community centre at the food club is so vital to some of its members that it can have huge repercussions if not made available. The implications of this responsibility resulted in staff feeling guilty for being unable to provide services when they have become too overworked and overwhelmed to provide their normal services and were forced to close for their own welfare.

The guilt that staff felt is an indication of the number of services that they are providing to plug gaps in circuits of care. Similarly, the efforts that staff made to still organise the food club to run in their absence demonstrates their awareness of the vitality of the

service and the impact it would have on service users if it didn't run. This vitality exhibits the precarity of some service users' circuits of care as the closure of the community centre for one week resulted in a loss of accessible food. Cresswell's (2012) observation that a disruption can make what is taken for granted suddenly visible becomes relevant here. The centre's food club is a vital aspect of circuits of care that an observer might take for granted but the staff display an awareness of that vitality and resulting fragility in support.

What was the impact on young people's circuits of care? When asked what they did whilst the community centre was closed, young people said that they "did nothing" and "sat at home". I asked young people who I knew relied on the food from the community centre to get their lunches for the next day what they had for their lunches that week; they said they either "had nothing" or shared their friends' food. Young people's reliance on a small community centre for their evening meals and lunches makes their circuits of care incredibly fragile and unsustainable – particularly as the community centre has a small body of staff and relies on discretionary funding to provide these services (another issue I address within the discussion of empirical example two of this chapter). The limited capacity of the community centre to provide for an increasingly vulnerable community who are feeling the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and cost of living crisis was visible during my ethnography, with staff having to turn people away and undertaking the emotional toll of this. As Bonner-Thompson and McDowell explore, the emotional labour undertaken by TSOs forces staff to navigate the "cruelty of austerity" and means that "care work may not always be 'caring' but involve moral judgements or enforcement of particular practices" (2020, p.3).

"You know, and I think it's really difficult as well because the third sector is so interconnected. When people get referred to [us] I feel like a lot of the time [we're] their last resort, like it's the last place before they're breaking point and I can't turn people away because, and I think at the moment we're holding up so many statutory services that it's ridiculous."

(interview with Julie, March 2023)

Julie highlights how the community centre receives referrals from other TSOs and what she considers should be statutory responsibility. The data establishes how the community centre acts as a provider of services to plug gaps in circuits of care not only related to food. It offers digital support in an area that experiences digital poverty and provides benefit support for people applying to benefits who are finding the process difficult to navigate. This support is a service that is advertised to be provided by organisations such as the job centre and Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). As a more formal and national charity, CAB provide coordinated support for benefit application, however, report being overwhelmed with service users and not able to provide support to everyone. As a result, the community centre finds themselves being referred people from CAB and the job centre to provide these services – plugging a gap in another circuit of care. This service impacts food circuits, because if an individual can't access all of the benefits they are entitled to, it means that they don't have enough money to purchase food. Julie's comment also reflects upon my examination of the phrasing of the term 'third sector' she highlights that because people are referred to the community centre, it is often their last resort. This can also mean that people are frustrated and upset when they arrive at the community centre and this can have a massive impact on staff morale.

The Responsibility of the Individual: Blood vs Food Mobilities

In relation to vital mobilities, the question of responsibility is a key difference in the provision of blood versus food that the community centre's work seeks to overturn. For blood, Rackham emphasises that the key concern when moving blood is "the end product being with the person that requires it. We only care about what happens before that point if it prevents that point from happening." (Sodero and Rackham, 2019, p. 125).

This is not the way in which food is viewed for most producers, they are concerned with getting food to supermarkets. It is viewed as a commodity rather than a vital material unlike blood, and this means that people are then responsible for their own access to food. This is a key difference between food and blood as vital mobilities and reveals a fragility in food circuits of care. Increasing bills and costs of food have acted as barriers

to people accessing food. The community centre's provision of food for free, or at reduced costs acts as a fix to the broken circuit of care – to fill the gap. Because individuals are viewed as responsible for their own access to food, the community centre reframes food provision as a 'community meal' and works to reduce stigmas associated with food insecurity. However, reliance on the community centre as a last port of call for access to food means that a moment of collapse experienced by the centre is more catastrophic for individuals.

This reliance on the community centre to provide food to households and young people that are struggling to source their own food bears on the staff at the community centre. Julie and her youth team leader Emma shared with me how hard it is to see community members and young people struggling and looking hungry. Clayton *et al.* (2015) discuss the impact this has had on morale of staff working in the third sector. They also discuss how the impact of the "emotional intensities" experienced by staff working in the third sector have become the new normal within the UK as a repercussion of austerity, and the increasing negative situations staff are presented with is acting as a barrier to recruitment within the third sector. Clayton *et al.* (2015) carried out research in a women's education centre where they shared the difficulties of losing staff because, as a charity they couldn't pay high wages and morale was too low. This resonates with the reports from the community centre in my research, as staff reported feeling bad when they had to turn people away and also remarked on their own money troubles – one member of staff worked 30 hours a week at the community centre and worked part-time as a hairdresser to maintain her income.

My data makes explicit the responsibility that the community centre holds over people's access to food and that this increased responsibility and demand on their services has made circuits of care more fragile and susceptible to breakage. Because the community centre is already plugging gaps, the repercussions of failure to provide their services within the circuits of care is more catastrophic because young people and other service users may not have other options.

The spatial-temporal dimension of this example brings into question the stability of circuits of care when the community centre is being relied upon so heavily. This 'moment

of collapse' was the result of seasonal fluctuation in the need for services and overwhelming of staff that is likely to repeat every year. This means the circuit of care is unsustainable. It brings into question how circuits of care can be reliable when this overwhelming need for support is a temporal cycle. This example highlights the potential for rhythms of vital mobilities that cause repeating moments of collapse and fragile circuits.

(Policy) Restrictions on the Community Centre and Being Independent of the Government

Empirical Example Two: Family Meal and fragmented circuits

"The 'family meal' is a service that the community centre used to run prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and is an opportunity for young people that come to youth sessions as well as other people with young families to come on a Friday evening and have a free meal.

It used to be popular but had to be cancelled during the pandemic and is only restarting now (November 2022) following a successful application of funding to Population Health. Julie thinks that initially it will be quiet but will pick up via word of mouth and as the weather starts to get colder.

The family meal was not very busy for the first few weeks of its initiation. I discovered that the community centre had applied for money to support this project from Population Health but were running the initiative regardless of the outcome of the funding bid. However, whilst waiting for a response from their application, the regulations of the funding body required that any projects included in the application could not be advertised before funding was confirmed. This meant that the family meal had been operating on word-of-mouth but once the funding had been confirmed the community centre could openly advertise on social media, in schools and target invitations to families within the area who needed more support.

Julie expressed her frustration at the funding body because they were supposed to hear back about the funding by the end of September and the board missed this deadline by two months, informing successful applicants at the end of November. This meant that the community centre was limited in its capacity to advertise and provide support for the community due to administrative rules. Following this approval, the evening meal will become more popular and have a maximum capacity of 30 people per week, so we can expect this session to get busier.”

Ethnographic field notes from family meal (November 2022)

This example speaks to the social and political dimensions of circuits of care through the relationships between the community centre and bodies of power. It shows that although as a TSO it is independent of the government, it is impossible for the community centre to be completely independent of the government as they rely on government and public discretionary funds to run their services and are also deeply impacted by government policy. Political changes that may seem separate from the centre’s activity can severely impact the circuits of care, particularly as the services rely on discretionary funding (something I expand upon within this section). The power differences between funding bodies and the community centre can work to the detriment of the services and circuits of care that the community centre provides. In interview, Julie discussed how frustrating applying to funding as a charity is. She described the difficulty of having to conform when applying for funding from various funding bodies and expressed annoyance at not being valued for what they already do:

“Constantly, everybody's wanting me to change what we do to develop it, to make it into something different just so it ticks the right boxes on a funding form, whereas I'm going hold on a minute. What we do is really good and very much valued.”

(Interview with Julie, March 2023)

These reflections illustrate the power relations operating in the background of circuits of care and contributing to the fragility of these circuits. In the case of the family meal, compliance to the funding rules meant that less community members were aware of available support. Young people and community members view the free food provided by the community centre as vital to their weekly access to food; a prohibition on advertising resulting in people not being aware of the availability of this food could be the difference in them eating or not. This highlights the fragility of circuits that result in gaps in the individual service users' access to food. The community centre's dependence on unreliable and restricted funding to provide services compounds this fragility. If the community centre weren't successful in applying for funding, some of these services would stop or would not be available for as many people and some young people would have a significantly reduced (and less reliable) access to food.

Bonner-Thomson and McDowell argue that "to understand care, care and conflict need to be held in tension, appreciating the power dynamics that shape care" (2020, p. 2). This was reflected in Julie's frustrations with funders, for example, Julie informed me that funding bodies don't like to pay for food, but instead for equipment or other material items. When applying for funding, the community centre must adapt their ambitions for services they are aiming to provide, to 'tick boxes' and be eligible for funding. For example, in relation to the family meal (example two), funds for food were limited to supporting children and young people. These limitations and adaptations highlight that the community centre is relatively powerless in comparison to the funding bodies and these power dynamics impact the services they provide. The family meal was part of a campaign from Population Health (a funding body) to promote healthy eating amongst young people and address child poverty. This was beneficial to my participants and for the community centre but is an example of policy and funding acting as a limiting agent as to who can access free food. Only families with at least one person under the age of 16 could utilise the service; this meant that staff had to refuse community members looking for free food and in need of support if they didn't have a young person family member.

The family meal also demonstrates how the need for provision changes over the course of the year and highlights the temporal cycles that the centre experiences. Julie was

aware that the service would become busier during the winter months. These temporal dimensions influencing circuits of care and demand on the community centre overlap with the cycles of staff becoming burnt out as demand overwhelms staff – as seen in the first empirical example. These temporal fluctuations are a commonality with the vital mobilities of blood. Sodero and Rackham reflect on how the everyday circuits of care with blood mobilities generally run smoothly, but struggle at Christmas and Easter, “where donations dip but activity does not” (2019, p.126). The difference is that these dips in donation are solved by blood drives and reserve stock, whereas the delivery of food circuits of care rely on a finite number of staff delivering care and support.

School holidays are another example of the temporal influences that the community centre experiences because of external changes. The community centre provides free food to young people every evening of the week to ensure that young people get an evening meal as well as their free school meals (although as already discussed within this thesis, uptake of free school meals has proven to be problematic during my observations and young people rely heavily on the community centre’s provision of evening meals and Greggs to sustain them). However, during the school holidays, the community centre works in conjunction with the government’s Holidays and Activities Food (HAF) programme. Their cooperation with this programme is further evidence that it is impossible for the community centre to work in complete independence of the government as suggested by the NAO definition of TSOs; they rely on funding from the council to provide services and the council relies on the centre to provide staff and space to fulfil their statutory obligations to run the HAF programme.

The community centre works with the local council to provide 60 spaces for young people to participate in the HAF scheme and put on fun days out with food. However, Julie reported that the “county council had cut the funding [they were] able to go for” and simultaneously “put the cost of their packed lunches up”. She said in previous years she would have had to accept this, but this year she disagreed with the council attempting to ‘profit from it’ and had told them that she wouldn’t be supplied by them. The council accepted this, and the community centre continued to run the HAF programme and provided their own food. This is an example of the community as a TSO providing services that are argued should be statutory. In the Child of the North report,

Ayadurai and Todd, (2024) argue that services like these should be provided by schools with government finance to provide “the pastoral support, family workers, breakfast and after school clubs, enrichment activities and holiday play schemes which can make such a difference to breaking down barriers and inequalities” (p.4). These essential services are all currently provided by the community centre through a variety of discretionary funding.

The Power Behind Surplus

The operation of the community centre’s food club demonstrates how different circuits of care can be disrupted and made fragile by external factors. As previously described, the food club relies on a mixture of surplus food and food they purchase as part of a buying co-op. The recent change in the availability of surplus across the UK has resulted in another ‘moment of collapse’ for circuits of care experienced by service users. It demonstrates the effects of ecological, political and commercial changes on the operation of the community centre’s services. The food club has been described by members as vital to their ability to feed their families for the week as prices of food have increased in the supermarkets. However, the centre’s reliance on surplus food within its charity status means that the amount and types of food fluctuate each week. This means that the people who rely on the club as a key source of food are sometimes left with less than what they would need or receive items that they don’t know how to cook (for several weeks, the food club received celeriac which many members couldn’t even identify). These issues are captured in empirical example three:

Empirical Example Three: Surplus Food and Power within Vital Mobilities

“This week there was less collected from the supermarkets that the community centre relies on to top up the food available at food club (they pay for a membership to Fareshare and purchase some food within a buying co-op at discounted rates; they then collect donations/surplus from Greggs, KFC and supermarkets including Sainsburys).

The deputy manager who goes to pick up the food from the various depots was particularly disappointed in the collection from the supermarkets; this week there was a really limited amount of fruit and veg when there is normally a selection of about 2 or 3 because "we just get whatever the supermarkets are going to throw away". There has been a noticeable trend even during my 9-months of research that the amount of surplus food available is reducing significantly.

There was also some confusion about the meat options that should be available for the food club - last week there had been a mistake and people had only received one meat option meaning that some people left "with only one bag of shopping" rather than the normal two. It was decided that normally people should leave with 2 portions of meat but there should always be a choice of at least 3."

Ethnographic field notes from food club (January 2023)

It was a recurring problem that the centre would run out of food before the allotted time for food club. The club was also always asked if there was space for new membership. The staff then had to either say yes, knowing that the amount of food available each week was not always reliable or make the difficult decision to turn people away. The reliance on surplus food highlights that the community centre has little power over a significant aspect of the food they can provide. It demonstrates that because of this reliance on a dwindling supply of surplus food alongside difficulties and restrictions in applying for discretionary funding, circuits of care that enable service users' access to cheap food through the food club are increasingly fragile.

The community centre's food club and community café plug gaps in circuits of care when individuals can't afford or access their own food, but they rely on surplus food which is unreliable and unsustainable. In the UK, the availability of surplus food has been

decreasing due to supermarkets moving towards monetising surplus food through schemes like 'Too Good To Go' and selling items on their best before dates at reduced cost. This empirical example demonstrates that the community centre's food club was severely impacted by this external change to surplus. Papargyropoulou *et al.* highlight that the insecurity of surplus food redistribution makes it a " 'band-aid' solution that addresses neither the fundamental socio-economic causes of poverty, nor the systematic roots of food waste." (2022, p. 1).

The varying quantity and types of food alongside the seasonal produce available at the food club highlights the unsustainable nature of surplus as a solution to failures in circuits of care. The availability and nature of surplus means that people accessing the food club can get obscure food that the public haven't purchased. This can mean that these foods may require skills and knowledge to correctly cook the food. A lack of skills or knowledge can then impact the accessibility of food and act as a barrier to the effectiveness of circuits of care.

Research shows that people who have limited nutrition knowledge and cooking skills are more likely to be food insecure (Armstrong *et al.*, 2021). This inequality in access to food as a vital material is a key difference between food and blood. There is a stigma attached to not having access to food as well as an inequality in being able to access food as a result of limited finances and knowledge/skills. This is not the case for blood, particularly in the UK with the NHS and free healthcare, so there is no impact on people's access to blood dependent on financial circumstance.

Another significant difference to consider when referring to the vital mobility of blood versus food is that Rackham highlights the importance of ensuring that "if you're going to treat people you don't want to ruin other life chances" (Sodero and Rackham, 2019, p. 127). In their article, Rackham (2019) refers to this in relation to giving rhesus blood to girls as it could have implications for future pregnancies. However, the same outlook is not given to the marketing of food. In my research area, unhealthy food is cheaper than healthy food. Takeaways are often the cheapest way for families to access food and are the most accessible, particularly if the family lacks cooking skills. In my empirical research, families reported how difficult it can be to transport heavy shopping on the

buses and so it is easier (and sometimes cheaper) to buy meals from local convenience stores or takeaways. In fast food operations and corner shops, “the ‘offers’ or ‘deals’ [tend to be] on high-fat, high-sugar foods and non-perishable goods” (Kelly, Callaghan and Gabhainn, 2021).

This less healthy food holds the potential for significant detrimental impacts to young people’s future life chances with rising cases of obesity, malnutrition, and type 2 diabetes. “Children from the most deprived areas of England are more than twice as likely to be living with obesity as those from the least deprived areas” (Pickett and Taylor-Robinson, 2021, p.8). This inequality in access to healthy and nutritional food as a vital mobility has a significant negative impact on low-income households and those without the skills to cook food. As a result, the circuit of care in which people rely on takeaways for their access to food directly contradicts Rackham’s focus on making sure that vital mobilities do not harm future chances; a dependence on cheap pre-cooked food like takeaways has a detrimental impact on the individual within that circuit.

The Community Centre and the COVID-19 Crisis

Sodero’s work largely focuses on how blood moves in an emergency context. Much of my research’s consideration focuses on the vital movements of food in an everyday context and how ‘mundane’ moments of collapse are experienced by the individual and the community centre. Sodero and Rackham (2019) consider how blood is transported in emergencies; using the example of the 2017 Manchester bombing, they discuss how those responsible for ordering blood tend to not know what the extent of injuries are and over-order blood supplies. However, in relation to food, the community centre is aware of the extent to which service users are in need but do not have the resources to provide for all on a day-to-day basis. This changed in the event of the COVID-19 crisis when funding and support for TSOs increased drastically in the face of the international crisis. This held a significant difference to the amount of support available for the community centre as a TSO compared to the other empirical examples discussed within this chapter. The final section of this chapter investigates how an increase in

government support during the COVID-19 crisis impacted the community centre's contributions to circuits of care.

During the pandemic, the community centre adapted to a new way of working; including packing food club parcels in isolation bubbles and delivering them to members, moving youth sessions online, and sending pizzas to the youth that attended online sessions. There was "a tranche of government money which was made available to support the general public, which was obviously delegated down to local authority levels." (Interview with Daniel, City Council). This money was a part of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme. The scheme distributed £229.1 million from December 2020 to July 2021 after receiving an extension in April 2021. This included £16 million distributed to fund local charities, specifically to provide food support (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021). Funding was given to county councils to "administer the scheme and provide assistance to vulnerable families with children and other vulnerable households, particularly affected by the pandemic" (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021). Much of this focussed on the provision of food.

Julie remarked on the easy accessibility of funding available during the COVID-19 crisis:

"There was a lot of money available through COVID with very little effort. So, I got in with Community Foundation, got funding from them, got funding from another fund, from all sorts of like COVID-19 funding that got thrown out."

(Interview with Julie, March 2023)

Funding was readily available for little effort for the community centre and other TSOs but was discontinued in July 2021 and some charities had not been prepared for a loss in income and had to apply for competitive and difficult funding bids after having such easy accessibility. The DWP reported that the winter grant scheme was intended "to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well fed this winter period" (2021). However, my understanding of the compounding dimensions that impact circuits of care leads me to ask why this funding was reduced/discontinued in the emergence of the

cost-of-living crisis, where the temporal, locational and financial dimensions that affect vital mobilities were compounded by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of the cost-of-living crisis. This aftermath was witnessed by Jim, a staff member of the local Poverty Truth Commission:

“I definitely think that since I started, poverty in this area was obviously a major issue, but then it just became... it felt like more of an epidemic.”

(Interview with Jim, Poverty Truth Commission, March 2023)

Jim has been in position since October 2021, this was towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then, he has witnessed and worked with people experiencing the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis within the poverty truth commission. The language of ‘an epidemic’ that he used was particularly striking and has been used in other literature talking about poverty and food insecurity in the UK including literature surrounding ‘poverty epidemiology’ (Iacobucci, 2023).

Jim referred to some of the young people and community commissioners he worked with “getting through Christmas unscathed”. His choices of language like this and “surviving” periods of time throughout the year are significant to the consideration of temporal changes in circuits of care. He emphasised the difficulties that low-income families experience in wintertime, including dilemmas of choosing to ‘heat or eat’. The Covid Winter Grant Scheme recognised this difficulty, however, even with the introduction of the Household Support Fund (HSF) to support struggling households following COVID-19, and continued amid the cost-of-living crisis, Jim and other interviewees like Julie and Daniel reported witnessing worsening conditions of food and fuel poverty in 2022 and 2023. According to Julie, the HSF application process has more strings attached than the funding available in the pandemic and this creates limitations to support available. The key stakeholders I interviewed resonated with Meers *et al.*’s argument that HSF funding offers a “sticking plaster” to temporarily solve problems with the budget offered to them. My data concurs with the concept that the HSF scheme is “part of an ongoing shift towards dependence on localised discretionary funds to mitigate increasingly insufficient central social security support”. (Meers *et al.*, 2023, p.26). This correlates with my argument that the community centre’s contributions to

circuits of care are increasingly fragile, as they take on more responsibility and rely on discretionary funding described as 'sticking plaster' to provide vital services and food support to individuals.

Meers *et al.* (2023) describe local authorities as being concerned that households will become dependent on crisis funding such as HSF. This idea of support utilised by government authorities focuses on making people less reliant on discretionary funding and the importance of educating people to better manage their finances. However, this was not considered to be a problem in the COVID-19 crisis when emergency funding was made widely available to support vulnerable households. The data shows that the cost-of-living crisis has been treated differently to the COVID-19 crisis in terms of government support and this has impacted the capacity (and increased demand) of the community centre to provide services to its community members. During my research period, which ran towards the end of the pandemic and into the cost-of-living crisis, need for support from the community centre increased whilst staff reported funding reducing and being more difficult to apply for. The imbalances in support during the cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19 is relevant to the understanding of circuits of care and the reliance on the community centre to fill gaps in community members and young people's food circuits. There was a reliance on the community centre to fill gaps but the services they provide to fill those gaps are dependent on "complex and unpredictable sources of funding, with concerns about organisational sustainability and constrained funding across these organisations bleeding into stretched resources and variable provision across authorities" (Meers *et al.*, 2023, p.41). The community centre as a TSO holds partnerships with local authorities (as demonstrated with the HAF programme) to provide services in the absence of statutory support but is kept at arm's length in terms of being a decision maker. This demonstrates a lack of power. My observations and interactions with the community centre was indicative of how this lack of power made staff feel left behind and 'third' with limited decision making or financial power and that this restricted the effectiveness of their services (as demonstrated in the family meal empirical example).

Conclusion

In Sodero's work on blood as a vital mobility, she explores the vulnerability of movements according to emergencies and climate changes, as well as broader everyday barriers such as ageing transport and communication infrastructure. These are also relevant to the movement of food. However, with the thesis' focus on the individual and the fragility of everyday circuits of care, this chapter's examples have emphasised the importance of delving into specific examples of 'moments of collapse'. They highlight that power imbalances between organisations can be compounded by spatial-temporal influences and make circuits of care increasingly fragile.

The data discussed within this chapter shows that the 'dynamic temporalities, spatialities and rhythms' of food as a vital mobility compound one another to impact how the community centre can provide food to individuals and results in already fragile circuits of care. The chapter explored the strengths of the community centre in working to fill the gaps in existing circuits of care, but also demonstrated that this reliance of individuals on the community centre to access food can in turn add pressure to the centre and make their circuits more vulnerable should the centre experience a 'moment of collapse'.

The examples within this chapter were analysed to explore the differences in blood as a vital mobility versus food. It identified that blood and food differ as vital mobilities in relation to the individual's responsibility for accessing the vital material and the individual responsibility for accessing food deeply impacts how a circuit of care can become fragile. This individual experience is explored in greater detail within the next chapter.

The UK political context of welfare reforms has led to a culture of blaming the individual for experiencing food insecurity and suggesting that these experiences are the result of poor financial management (Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021). Surman et al (ibid) go on to discuss how "stigma is not the mark of a person but an outcome of a relationship that is realised in local practices situated within existing institutional and cultural contexts" (p. 1092). In vital mobilities literature, people in need of blood are

‘patients’ in need of support, whereas those in need of food are consumers considered to have failed in providing for themselves. This means that community members and young people can be embarrassed of their situations, and this becomes a barrier to support. The community centre does not view individuals as consumers, and they are breaking down the barriers and stigma associated with people experiencing food insecurity to make nutritious food more accessible to low-income families and individuals. However, the complex relationships between place, seasonality and power and their impacts on circuits of care have led to an increased reliance on the community centre for food provision and can lead to ‘moments of collapse’ that make circuits of care unstable.

The chapter also aimed to explore the relationship between the community centre as a TSO and the government. The analysis of the empirical examples demonstrated that restrictions to their services, like funding and policy restrictions can hinder the levels of care and support that the centre can provide. These restrictions and simultaneous reliance on the community centre from the government identified the constantly fluctuating relationship between the community centre and policies that impact the stability of the support it provides.

This chapter has provided an in-depth investigation into the community centre that is one very specific third sector organisation. Reflections from key stakeholders that worked in other TSOs resonated with the experiences and opinions of staff within the community centre. For example, The Poverty Truth Commission (another related TSO) reflected on their way of working and how it is very difficult to get the DWP to join in conversations and that in terms of the big calls, they at the Poverty Truth Commission have very little power. A further example comes from an interview with a food bank trustee, they argued that the existence of the food bank was a “testament to what is wrong with UK policy”. The data gathered in this research project demonstrates the fragility of circuits of care as told through the in-depth exploration of the services of one TSO but also demonstrates the possibility that this could be a trend and highlights further opportunity to research how other TSOs are experiencing this increased responsibility to maintain a circuit of care related to vital mobilities, within a context

where their services are, by definition, fluctuating and everchanging, and the resulting fragility in the services that they provide.

Chapter Five: Young People's Tactics in the Face of Fragile Circuits of Care

Introduction

Chapter Aims and Intentions

This chapter argues that using tactics as an analytic strategy strengthens my novel conceptualisation of circuits of care and, through exploring individual experiences, enables a deeper understanding of how circuits of care can be fragile.

The chapter builds upon the previous chapter's exploration of how circuits of care can be fragile. Where the previous chapter explored the wide variety of dynamics that specifically impact one community centre's provision of services that support different dimensions of circuits of care to cause moments of collapse; this chapter expands this view by using the concept of tactics as an entry point to interrogate individual experiences of circuits of care and how they become fragile. The identification and interrogation of young people's tactics make gaps in circuits of care visible, enables the analysis of how these gaps come into existence, and thus provides a further opportunity to understand why circuits of care are fragile/ ineffective. The analysis of how circuits of care are experienced by individuals through the lens of tactics, allows me to demonstrate how the community centre is just one aspect of the social worlds that young people experience.

I use tactics as an analytic tool to help deepen my novel conceptualisation of circuits of care and offer a richness to the understanding of fragilities within these circuits. The chapter uses tactics to demonstrate the complexities of young people's social worlds and how these have a significant impact on the stability and effectiveness of circuits of care for individuals. The previous chapter explored how "dynamic temporalities, spatialities and rhythms" (Sodero, 2019) of food mobilities impact the community centre and its circuits of care. This chapter expands this analysis to consider the complexities of young people's lives.

I start by explaining how 'tactics' are conceptualised within this chapter and why they matter. I then explain how the concept of tactics will be used as an analytic tool and entry point to identify fragilities within individuals' circuits of care. Using empirical data gathered through the comic strip interviews I provide examples of the interactions young people have within their circuits of care and highlight the huge social worlds that they exist in. The empirical examples play specific roles in achieving the chapter's aim to deepen the understanding of fragilities in circuits of care by illustrating the dynamic relationship between young people's lives, their tactics and circuits, and the multifaceted contexts of young people's lives and their environment, and how these interact with the moments of collapse explored within the previous chapter.

What Is a Tactic (and Why Do They Matter)?

Through my empirical research, I learned how circuits of care are failing to provide some young people with easily accessible, nutritious, and enjoyable food. As a result of failings and absences in circuits of care, young people face gaps in circuits of care and my empirical examples highlight young people developing their own tactics to adapt and 'fill the gaps'. Within this thesis, 'tactics' are regarded as actions that young people develop and employ to access food when the existing circuits of care are not working for them. I therefore argue that the identification of tactics makes gaps and fragilities in circuits of care visible and offers a window for deeper analysis of circuits of care and their weaknesses.

When discussing tactics, it is necessary to consider them within the context of de Certeau's concepts of tactics and strategies (1984). He describes strategies as structural entities that "produce, tabulate and impose" operations and spaces, whereas "tactics can only use, manipulate and divert these spaces" (Certeau, 1984, p.30).

Through an analogy of war, De Certeau explains that tactics rely on seizing opportunities as they arise without having a long-term plan and that whatever is gained is often not a sustainable profit. In his war analogy, the rebels using tactics do not have a permanent position of strength so constantly have to keep moving and adapting to changes and

emerging threats. As such, de Certeau expresses that “a tactic is an art of the weak” and often used as a “last resort” (1984, p.37). This view comes across negatively and there have been critiques of this argument including from Eduardo Alonso (2017) who suggests that tactics are not signs of weakness but signs of absence. This has relevance to my research as I argue that tactics are developed as the result of a gap experienced by a young person, this could be because of an absence of support or ineffective structure in the circuit of care that need to be investigated. Although they are signs of a failing structure, tactics provide an opportunity to explore individual agency in relation to the circuits of care they experience and interact with.

In my understanding of tactics, the ‘strategies’ are the structured aspects of food circuits of care such as Free School Meals and associated policies or conventional spaces such as shopping at supermarkets and having family meals at home or the community centre. The tactics are young people’s responses to these strategies when they do not exist or do not work for them. Examples of these I will explore in this thesis or have already identified in the previous chapter include: young people eating for free at the community centre; stockpiling food to eat throughout the week when it becomes available; sharing food with friends; working in food retail to access free food.

De Certeau’s introduction to tactics, both through his analogy of war and reference to everyday activities, resonates with my empirical investigation into young people’s experiences of food circuits of care, their adaptations to failing circuits of care and their feeling of powerlessness within food structures. His consideration of time and power within the context of tactics and strategies resonates with my understanding of the tactics exhibited by my participants, who use tactics to adapt to the more structured circuits of care that are not working for them. The language used to describe tactics by de Certeau, such as being “a clever utilization of time” and “seizing opportunities” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 39), mirrors the feelings of uncertainty expressed by my participants. Some articulated being unsure of where their next meal might come from and as a result use tactics to access food. When introduced throughout this chapter, my empirical examples illuminate de Certeau’s reflection that tactics are a clever utilisation of time and that there is a dynamic relationship between tactics and strategies. This is

particularly significant when using tactics as an analytic tool to develop my concept and identify gaps in circuits of care and understand how they are fragile.

De Certeau's claim that tactics are a way of "making do" when people lack power or are constricted by power structures resonates with and strengthens my observations. However, in this chapter, I use tactics not as a novel conceptualisation but as an analytic tool (identifying gaps in circuits of care to analyse why circuits have become broken or fragile) through which I can strengthen my own conceptualisation of circuits of care and their fragility.

Using Tactics as an Entry Point

The empirical examples provided within this chapter were collated through interviews with my participants during which we co-created comic strips that illustrated an example of a day of their life. Participants decided whether they would like to talk about a day when they went to school, a weekend day, or a specific day they had in mind. The examples within this chapter have allowed me to develop an understanding of how circuits of care are currently failing some young people in providing them with easily accessible, nutritious, and enjoyable food in everyday situations. As a result of failings and absences in circuits of care caused by both policy regulations, and the individual, complex circumstances of young people, my participants find themselves facing gaps in the food structures they interact with and needing to implement tactics. Using these examples, I identify the tactics used by young people as an entry point to analyse the (in)effectiveness of food circuits of care.

The understanding of tactics within this chapter, as actions that young people take when circuits of care are not working for them, enables a categorisation of tactics that are vital or preferential. I define vital tactics as tactics implemented by young people to access food when circuits of care have failed, and they do not have access to food through the normal structures. Preferential tactics are those carried out by young people when the circuits are still working but young people choose to go through other avenues to get different food, this is done by choice rather than through necessity.

Part of the power of the tactic as an analytic tool is that they become visible and can be considered as a category even though separate tactics can look very different. Using tactics as an entry point for analysis of circuits of care and their fragility, the chapter uses ethnographic examples to identify tactics and establish where the gap in policy/provision within the circuit of care is. Through these examples, the chapter explores why these gaps exist, to dig deeper into why circuits become fragile through the lens of the individual experience and the social world.

Empirical Examples of Tactics

Through the analysis of tactics, I have identified three thematic issues: free school meals, circuits of care and age, and healthy eating. These three themes will be used to demonstrate threads between the fragility of circuits of care and the similarities and differences of how they are experienced by individuals. The tactics used within these themes highlight the ineffectiveness of circuits of care and uneven distribution of the need for vital tactics. They provide a unique lens through which to understand how circuits of care can be fragile as a result of individual experience. The tactics within these themes provide an entry point to look at the policies within the circuits of care and to analyse why they do not support some of my participants and their unique but enmeshed lives. I explain why tactics and individual circumstances matter and how they deepen an understanding of circuits of care and their fragility.

Free School Meals

During my empirical work, dissatisfaction with school lunches, particularly with the quality of free school meals (FSMs), was common amongst my participants. However, the existence of vital tactics employed by my participants in relation to these free school meals demonstrate that this is not a preferential dissatisfaction but rather a complaint about their inaccessibility.

Before delving into the circuits of care associated with free school meals, it is important to acknowledge that young people on FSMs are those with families on the lowest incomes (Yang *et al.*, 2022). In January 2022, 1.9 million children in the UK were eligible for FSMs (Long and Danechi, 2023). The policy has been identified as key “in reducing food insecurity and dietary inequalities in children in the UK” (Parnham *et al.*, 2020, p.2). I recognise that the FSM system is intended to support these low-income families by allowing all students access to the same food and this is an example of a circuit of care working towards equal access to nutritious food. However, in their 2023 study, Graham *et al.* revealed that there was a lack of uptake of free school meals, particularly in the age range of 16-17. This demonstrates that there are fundamental issues with the existing policy. Similarly, Yang *et al.*, (2022) emphasise that because of the strict means testing for young people to receive FSMs once over the age of universal provision (in the UK, FSMs are universally provided for children aged 4-7), only very low-income families are eligible and many low-income families go hungry. However, whilst the system has flaws which reduce choice amongst those on FSMs it is also subject to difficulty because of factors external of food (which I explore in the following empirical examples). Therefore, I recognise the complexity and difficulty that systems face in trying to support all needs when influencing factors exist outside of the realms of the circuits of care.

This difficulty further demonstrates how food circuits of care can be more complex than the vital mobilities of blood, as evidenced in the previous chapter. Through my empirical examples, I suggest that analysing young people’s individual experiences provides a window into how individuals’ vast social worlds impact the stability of circuits of care. Circuits of care were defined as fragile in the previous chapter due to being susceptible to ‘moments of collapse’ experienced by the community centre. The empirical examples within this chapter demonstrate how circuits of care continue to be even more fragile because of their interaction with young people’s social worlds and that to be more stable, some of the more rigid structures within circuits of care should encompass and support the diversity and changing nature of young people’s experiences.

Empirical Example One: A Typical School Day for Michelle



Figure 10: 'Michelle's Experience' comic strip co-created in interview

On a Monday morning Michelle wakes up and goes to school on the bus. She tells me she is not normally very hungry in the morning so doesn't have any breakfast before school. But by break time (in the middle of the morning), she is hungry but doesn't have anything to eat. Sometimes her friend will share their snacks with her or she waits until lunch time before she eats anything.

Because of her parents' income, Michelle is eligible for free school meals. She explains that for her school this comes in the form of money that is loaded on her school account so that she can use £2.30 every day to buy her lunch from the canteen. She says that this is supposed to be enough to buy a main meal, a

piece of fruit and a snack but Michelle explains that in reality, if she wants to buy a drink, there is no money left over. She also says sometimes she wants a different item, but it is too expensive, so her choices are limited. Michelle describes that she has to queue for her lunch and different year groups are released at different times. Because of a new school policy where school toilets are locked during lesson time, Michelle must use her lunch break to both queue for her food and for the toilets. These queues mean that sometimes she does not get enough time to eat her lunch and/or when she gets to the front of the canteen line, the things she would like to eat are all sold out. Michelle can feel uncomfortable eating in the canteen in front of lots of people, so this sometimes stops her from eating her lunch.

Once the school day is over, Michelle travels to the community centre where she eats her dinner (provided for free) which is usually some form of pasta, curry or equivalent.

The community centre also receives surplus trays of Greggs' sandwiches, pastries, and cakes twice a week for the young people. Michelle tells me she always takes enough of the sandwiches or snacks home and keeps them so that she can eat one every day for the rest of the week at break time.

(Fieldnotes from a conversation with Michelle, March 2023)

Through the course of my research, Michelle experienced changes in her personal life that coincided with changes in school operations and regulations that interfered with her access to food at school. These changes meant that the tactics Michelle was already using to bridge gaps in the circuits of care (stockpiling Greggs and relying on her friends to share their food) had to be adapted.

In discussion with Michelle in June, she shared that the situation in the canteen has gotten much worse and she doesn't feel comfortable going into the canteen anymore, so no longer accesses her free school meal.

Michelle: Don't go to school lunches anymore.

Researcher: Do you not? Why is that?

Michelle: Because, they added the year 9s in, so now it's like a Britney Spears concert in there.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Michelle: It's like really crowded and no one has anywhere to sit. So some people have to go outside, but they banned eating outside because of the rubbish I think. So everyone has to get their lunch and some people stand up and eat, which is... Like so awkward.

Researcher: So what do you have for your lunch?

Michelle: Just have the stuff that I got from the trades I did at break and snacks for lunch.

Interview excerpt with Michelle (June 2023)

Through the lens of Michelle's individual experience, this 'small change' of adding another year group to a lunch time slot which may seem insignificant to any key stakeholders or onlookers has resulted in Michelle's access to food being upended and the need for her pre-existing tactics to be altered for her to access any food at lunch time. Her stockpiling tactic has gone from being supplementary as a snack at break time to being essential as her main source of food at lunch time. A vital tactic. Such tactics are of particular interest to this research project. I argue that within a circuit of care it is impossible to eliminate tactics as some come from personal preference. However, a vital tactic is an action carried out by a person to fill an absence within a food circuit of care that means they are left without access to food.

Michelle's social eating anxiety results in her feeling unable to access her FSM. Instead, she uses tactics of trading – in which she uses the small amount of money she has to

purchase sweets from the corner shop before school and trade them with friends for more substantial food. She has also developed the tactic of stockpiling the Greggs that the community centre provides twice a week to ensure she has enough food to eat at school for the rest of the week. In this example, the dynamic relationship of tactics with circuits of care is emphasised. The stockpiling of Greggs was highlighted at the beginning of my research relationship with Michelle. However, the nature and necessity of this stockpiling tactic has changed in response to the change in the way in which food is provided at school.

It is worth noting that in interview with Julie, the community centre managing director (CCMD), she shared that the provision of Greggs to the young people is utilised as a tactic differently amongst many of the young people. For Michelle, it has become a vital tactic, for others a way of feeding friends/family or an additional snack:

Julie: But I think just being able to provide them with something (Greggs), knowing that they are eating... Well sometimes as well, it really hurts when I see young people are going ‘Oh I’m going to take that for Dad, for tomorrow, for work” and you realise that it's a lot bigger problem.

This quote highlights the importance of understanding the social relations and responsibilities held by young people. In their observations of the mobilities of care, Joelsson, Blakmar and Kenriksson (2025) emphasised that individual relationships and family networks are key to understanding complex mobilities. Furthermore, children’s geographies literature highlights that childhood should not be viewed merely as a stage of development but should consider the social relations associated with individual childhoods. As demonstrated in this case, Michelle plays a fundamental role in her families’ access to food by developing her own tactics to bring them food. This also challenges the social construction that children need protecting and are passive actors (detailed in Chapter 6) as Michelle proactively finds food to provide for her family instead of solely relying on her parents.

It is particularly interesting to draw a comparison between Michelle stockpiling the excess Greggs pastries and sandwiches provided by the community centre and the stockpiling that occurred across the UK in the global pandemic. It highlights the

uncertainty of the situation that Michelle finds herself in. As Power *et al.* suggest, “Stockpiling is an accumulation of goods predominantly motivated by a desire to minimise the loss of, or the risk of losing access to, certain products, and may arise due to a belief that a product is in short supply, will soon no longer be available, or that its price is likely to increase”(2020, p. 3). I argue that by identifying the similarities between the individual stockpiling of Greggs and the stockpiling tactics during the pandemic we can highlight the sense of crisis and uncertainty that young people like Michelle are feeling on a daily basis. I argue that this stockpiling tactic encompasses a *vital* tactic – when a tactic is used because a person has lost or fears they might imminently lose access to aspects of the circuit of care and acts independently to prevent this loss. Using the tactic to analyse the circuit of care, I consider how Michelle views her circuit of care in relation to FSMs as incredibly unstable as her stockpiling tactic is an attempt to futureproof her access to food throughout the week.

Stockpiling was a side effect of the global pandemic and is an example of a significant proportion of the UK population resorting to tactics in the face of food insecurity due to the disruption of the global pandemic. This is also an interesting example because it resulted in changes and disruptions to the system that meant that increasingly more people needed to resort to using tactics like stockpiling. The pandemic resulted in a “a vulnerable food system, with just-in-time supply chains, [being] challenged by stockpiling” (Power *et al.*, 2020, p.1). The pandemic saw food supply issues in supermarkets in the UK alongside drastic drops in food bank stock and volunteers. Already fragile crisis management systems were plummeted into even greater crisis. In the beginning of the pandemic, people in the UK ‘panic-bought’ and stockpiled food out of fear of not being able to access food at a later date (Power *et al.*, 2020). However, low-income families were financially unable to stockpile and were “confronted with only the most expensive versions of products, [and couldn’t] purchase adequate food” (Power *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). Pre-pandemic, low-income families used tactics like shopping at multiple supermarkets, buying own brand products or reduced items to enable food purchasing (Power *et al.*, 2020). When this became impossible due to disruption and the impacts of other people stockpiling, low-income people were forced to go to food banks or have no food. Analysing the tactics utilised within and outside of the pandemic

demonstrates how systems within circuits of care can be susceptible to collapse, results in the individual's experience of the circuit of care (that already might not be working for them) completely breaking down. The pandemic was a 'moment-of-collapse' for many, but those already employing tactics suffered the most as the structures could not adapt to support their already fractured circuits.

In sharing Michelle's evolving experiences, I emphasise the dynamic relationships between circuits of care and the tactics young people develop to adapt to absences in circuits. This dynamic relationship illustrates that that by nature, circuits of care within vital mobilities are constantly changing and impacted by disruptions and as such, tactics have an equally malleable nature. Observing these tactics has allowed me to identify how young people demonstrate and create space for their own agency when systems and/or disruptions restrict both their agency and their access to food.

The mobilities paradigm considers the role of power and inequity on mobilities (Sheller, 2018); Sodero expands this consideration of power to highlight that in times of disaster "humans shift from actor to object, aware of our mortality and, in many instances, powerlessness" (2022, p. 82). This thesis explores the powerlessness that young people experience not just in disaster but in the everyday of how they receive food. Through the analysis of tactics, it demonstrates that young people can and do transition from a place of powerlessness to power, including providing for their own family members. Power has been a key theme throughout this thesis: challenging the construction of young people as powerless, observing young people's creation of their own agency, and providing opportunities for empowerment (Chapter 6). This emphasis on power and equity when thinking about food as a vital mobility and access to food differs from Sodero's (2019) consideration of blood as a vital mobility who does not place an emphasis on equity in the mobility of blood. Sodero focusses on how blood moves rather than the people who receive the blood. For example, in Sodero and Rackham's (2018) discussion of the movement of blood, the cases they discuss are large scale disruptions based in the UK where healthcare is universal, so they do not expand on individual differences of accessibility.

Therefore, the circuits of care associated with the vital mobilities of food are different (and I argue, more complex) than blood mobilities because food circuits of care can be drastically impacted by individual's unique lived experiences and attributes. For example, Free School Meals in the UK are not universal for children aged 11-18, as such, access to food varies drastically according to individual circumstance. Michelle's mental health alongside her family's financial circumstance drastically impacts her experience of school lunches and FSMs. This results in the use of vital tactics.

I highlight that for an individual, the fragility of experiences of circuits of care stems from the rigid state of some of the policies they rely on in contradiction to the volatile nature of young people's lives. This reflects the key aspect of my novel conceptualisation of circuits of care in that they should be sustainable and resilient to change – both to personal income and temporal changes. This is extended within this chapter to encompass the complex and volatile nature of young people's lives and social worlds. This consideration is echoed through the success of the care provided by the community centre (previous chapter) due to their adaptability and reflexivity dependent on interaction with young people. The following examples echo this argument.

Empirical Example Two: Charlie's Experience of School Lunches

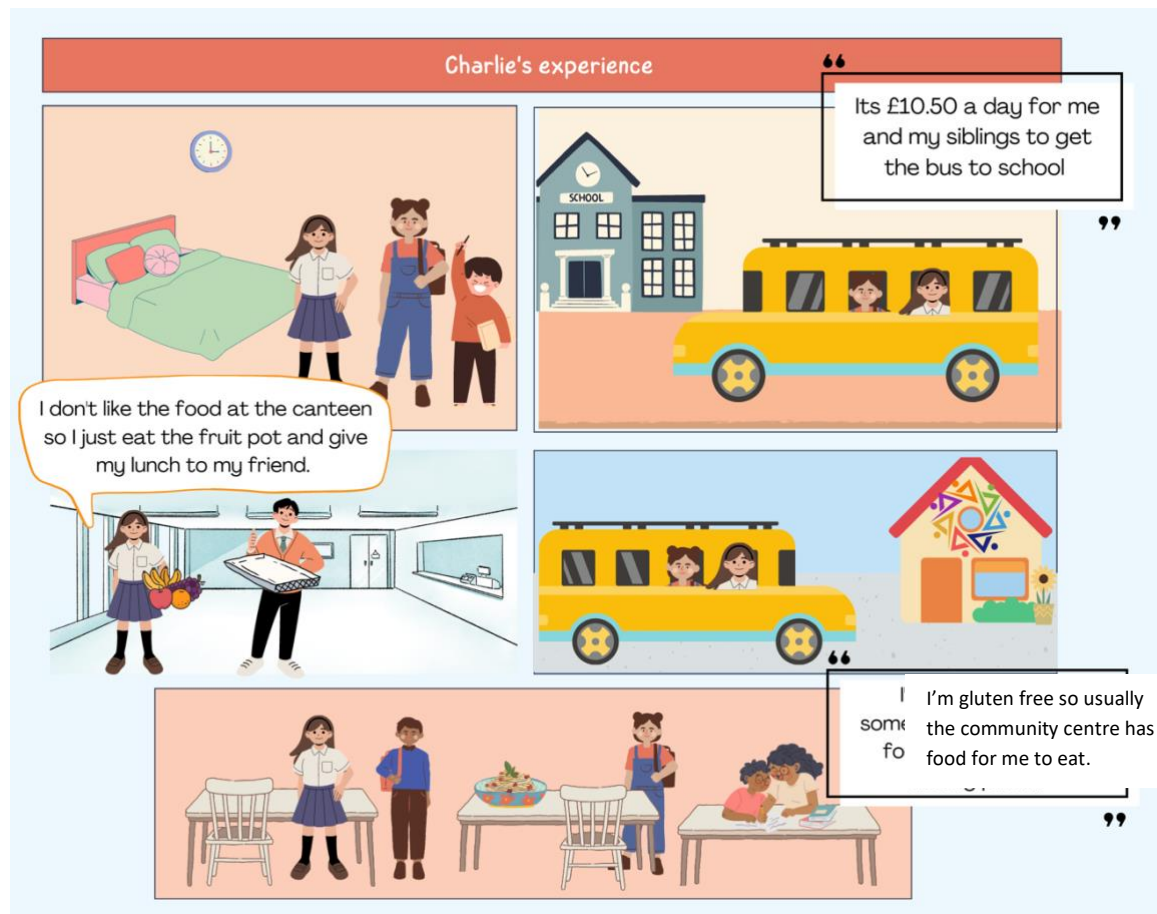


Figure 11: 'Charlie's experience' comic strip co-created in interview

During our interview, Charlie talked about her typical school day and what it's like living with her three siblings. She commented on how expensive it is for her mum to pay for all the children to go on the buses to school, some of them qualify for free bus passes, but two do not (another factor influencing low-income family units and their access to food). For Charlie and her family, the UK's two-child benefit cap has a significant impact on the family's financial circumstance. This is a policy that directly impacts Charlie's experiences of food and, on a larger scale, is pushing 1.1 million children deeper into poverty (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023). Charlie's concern around transportation and lack of access to food is one echoed across the UK because of this policy. The Child Poverty Action Group offers case studies in which parents shared "sometimes food is

lacking because I must choose between [buying] nappies and wipes and food. Sometimes I can't take the kids to school because of lack of money for transportation" (p.2, 2023).

Due to her family's low income, Charlie is entitled to FSMs, however, much of our discussion focussed on her experience of (not) eating FSMs and eating at the community centre as she has a gluten-intolerance. This specific personal need drastically impacts how Charlie accesses her circuits of care and demonstrates that the complexity of food circuits of care are dependent on individual circumstance.

Charlie: I get break time and then lunch time; I have a pot of fruit at break and lunch and apple juice and then go back to my lessons and get the bus home.

Researcher: Is that all you have?

Charlie: Yeah, that's it, that's all I have.

Researcher: How come?

Charlie: I don't like the school dinners. I don't know what it is. I just like can't eat them.

Researcher: Well, because you're gluten free as well. So the gluten free option is not very good?

Charlie: No. So I get a pot of fruit at break and lunch... And then I get the bus to [the community centre] after standing on the bus for like 45 minutes. And then I get food at [the community centre] sometimes. And then I do whatever I do here, and depending on what day it is, if it's a Friday. If it's a Friday, I'll go home, get my stuff and go to my uncle's to babysit. So, if it's any other day then I would go home, do what I do at home and get ready for bed.

Researcher: I'm surprised by your lunch at school, that you just have a pot of fruit. Are you not hungry?

Charlie: No... (big pause) I give my school dinner to my best mate.

Researcher: Do you? Why does she get school dinners or?

Charlie: She does, but she gives hers to one of her mates.

Researcher: Oh gosh, there's a whole chain.

Charlie: Yeah so, I give mine to her. So, they'll all eat, and I'll eat my pot of fruit.

Researcher: What is the gluten free option, are there gluten free options and you just don't like them?

Charlie: There is, I just don't like them... But I'll have to order it though, to get my drink and my fruit. But I just give the main to my best mate.

Interview excerpt with Charlie (June, 2023)

Using tactics as an analytic tool has enabled me to understand how young people experience circuits of care and identify how circuits of care become fragile depending on individual's lives and social worlds. However, in this example, Charlie exhibits no tactics to access food for herself. Like Michelle's story, she details how she gives food to her friends and that there is a chain of friends supporting one another to enable each other access to food. However, in this chain, Charlie is left with no tactics to access any food for herself when the FSM is not to her liking.

This leads to the question: how can my analytic tool of tactics help me to understand the fragility of this circuit of care when there is no tactic? In this example, the lack of tactic is quite telling, that without a tactic, Charlie goes without food. In this instance, this specific circuit of care is not just fragile but broken. In relation to my conceptualisation of circuits of care, the circuit that Charlie experiences does not demonstrate resilience to change in personal income, or a reliable accessibility of ample

choice of food. The analysis of participants' reports of FSMs also evidences a distinct lack of care for or about the young people eating the food.

Empirical Example Three: Pippa's Morning Routine

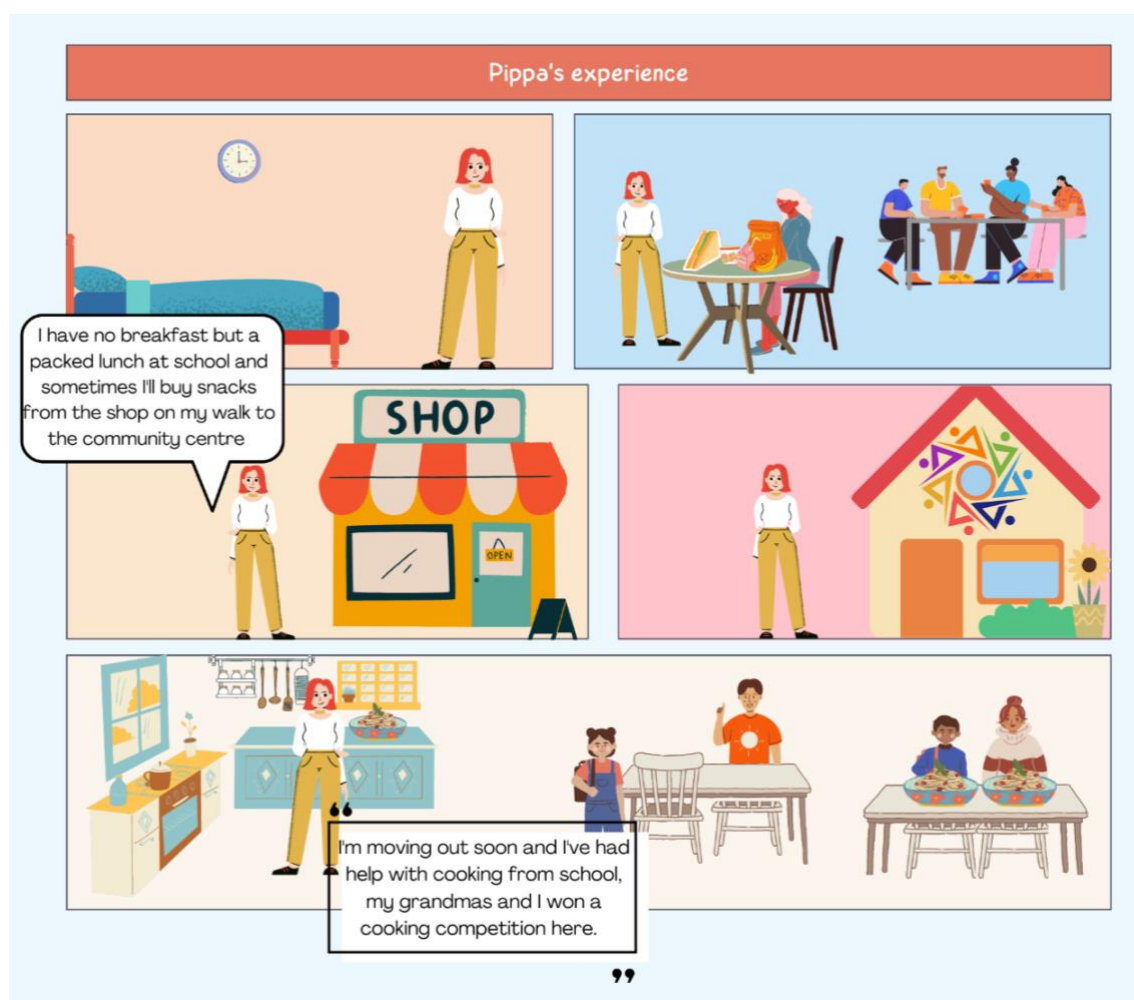


Figure 12: 'Pippa's experience' comic strip co-created in interview

Pippa is a 17-year-old young person who is grateful that her foster mum provides her with packed lunches because she “prefer[s] packed lunches just because the school food isn't very good. It's a bit rubbish to be fair.” Because of this different personal circumstance, Pippa does not need to employ vital tactics like Michelle, who has no choice but to rely on FSMs for food during the school day. In interview, Pippa also commented on how she helps her mum pick foods for her autistic brother to eat at lunch as he has particular requirements for the food he eats because of his neurodivergence.

This is another example of how unique personal lives and requirements can influence the effectiveness of circuits of care for an individual; it demonstrates the vastness of how food vital mobilities can be influenced in comparison to blood mobilities. When thinking about young people's responsibilities, this is a key difference between food and blood mobilities. Pippa has influence and feels responsible for ensuring that her younger sibling has food that he likes, whereas, in blood vital mobilities, individuals have agency in determining whether they would like to donate blood or not, but after that, they have no say in the circuits of care associated to the mobility of blood. Additionally, in the UK, individuals must be 17 or older to give blood (NHS Blood and Transplant, n.d), diminishing young people's responsibilities in blood circuits of care even further.

When discussing what a typical day looks like with Pippa, she shared that she does still implement tactics to get extra money to buy more snacks or energy drinks to 'top-up' her food supply for the day:

Pippa: When I've got the money to, sometimes I do go get, like, some snacks from the Spar. If I've eaten all my lunch because I'm still hungry. Usually, I just eat what I've got in my bag, but I do nip to the Spar sometimes, maybe get an energy drink as well.

Researcher: What school are you going to?

Pippa: [school name], it takes me about 45 minutes to get here because I walk so.

Researcher: Wow, do you? That's a big walk every day.

Pippa: I mean, I do prefer walking cause, you know, getting my exercising in is important. And then if my mum gives me bus money, I can use it in the Spar.

Interview excerpt with Pippa (June, 2023)

This is an example of a more preferential tactic, where Pippa chooses to walk both for exercise and as a way of having some extra money to buy snacks and an energy drink for the school day. Using this tactic as an entry point to consider circuits of care and their

fragility, it highlights the difference in circuits of care for individuals depending on their (and their family unit's) financial circumstance. Pippa has to use fewer tactics than Michelle as Pippa's family can provide her with a packed lunch instead of having to rely on FSMs. However, Pippa's tactic of walking to save money is a different experience to that of an individual whose parent might drive them to school and give them spending money. This example is indicative of how circuits of care are experienced differently according to the social world an individual exists in.

Another point of contention within the circuit of care is that Pippa (and many other participants within this study) reports purchasing energy drinks regularly to 'get her through the school day'. Similarly, Michelle reported purchasing energy drinks in the shop as an item to trade with her friends for more substantial food. Devi, Surender and Rayner, (2010) state that the average young person should receive 25-33% of their total daily energy from school food. Evidenced within this empirical project, many of my participants, including Charlie and Michelle do not meet this quota and do not access their FSMs. As such, they do not receive enough energy. This has huge repercussions for their health and wellbeing, as well as their education. Following the tactics of young people indicates some initial evidence of a relationship between young people not accessing FSMs and drinking high quantities of energy drinks in place of nutritious food. This observation correlates with research throughout the UK (Khouja *et al.*, 2022; Seifert *et al.*, 2011) suggesting that high and unregulated consumption of caffeine can have serious adverse effects on young people including diabetes and behavioural disorders.

Healthy Eating, Tactics and Circuits of Care

In the previous chapter, I touched on the unequal effects of failing circuits of care and food vital mobilities and the resulting inequalities in young people's health. Following young people's experiences of circuits of care and using tactics as an analytic tool has added depth to the understanding of these health inequalities and differences between food and blood as vital mobilities.

In Chapter 2, I introduced food justice as an interesting area of literature relevant to this thesis. Food justice places an emphasis on people's "right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised" (Via Campesina, 2018, p. 14). However, my analysis of Blake's (2019) food ladders approach left me with questions around how young people are engaged in food justice and community capacity building. Blake's (2019) approach to food justice felt top-down and inaccessible to young people, particularly my participants.

Through thinking about food circuits of care and using tactics as an analytic tool to understand circuits of care, I have gained an insight into how young people build their own capacity from the bottom-up. Pippa and Michelle's case studies demonstrate how young people boost themselves (and their families) up the rungs of the food ladder by implementing tactics to reduce their food insecurity. However, young people remain limited by ineffective and inflexible circuits of care, leaving access to healthy and nutritious food unequal.

By using tactics as an analytic tool to understand circuits of care from the individual perspective, it has become evident that the circuits of care young people experience result in them not eating healthily. I have discussed how blood mobilities aim to never negatively impact future life chances (Sodero and Rackham, 2019). However, the consumption of energy drinks as a tactic is one of many examples of how ineffective food circuits of care lead to food mobilities having unequally distributed adverse effects on my participants, with those on low income or with mental health issues needing to exhibit more vital tactics than their counterparts. In interview with Julie, we discussed her concerns over young people's healthy eating:

"we've seen young people being tired and with the rickets, I think it came out with [the] population health director. I was in contact with him quite a bit because I'd seen quite a lot of young people that, in my opinion, had eating disorders because of the fact that food wasn't readily available. We had one family that were literally living off food that was given to them at the end of the day from the spar shop."

Interview with Julie, CCMD (March 2023)

The example of the family living off food from the local corner shop resonates with Charlie and Pippa's discussion of how expensive travel can be. Not only do families on low income have less money to spend on food, they can also find it difficult to get transport to big supermarkets and carry heavy shopping bags; as a result, they can shop at corner shops which tend to be both more expensive and have less choice of food with nutritional value (Widener, 2017; Power *et al.*, 2020). This speaks to the importance of accessibility as well as affordability when considering young people's experiences of circuits of care – something that some of the circuits analysed in this chapter have not demonstrated. This example is an everyday example of 'uneven demobilisation' (Cook and Butz, 2016). In Chapter 2, I introduced Cook and Butz (2016) analysis of how mobility was entangled with power, social exclusion and politics in the Attabad landslide in Pakistan in 2010. Low-income villagers were limited in their access to food due to road closures and reliance on farming; in Julie's example, the low-income family are limited in their access to food due to expensive travel and are forced to eat and choose from a smaller selection of less-healthy, cheaper food than their wealthier counterparts. This, in turn, does not demonstrate a consideration of care for or about individuals within these circuits.

Un-Healthy Tactics in COVID-19: Falling Through the Cracks

In Chapter 4, I considered the temporal impacts of COVID-19 and how it acted as a potential 'moment of collapse' for the community centre in terms of its ability to respond to reduced mobilities and increased demand. However, the increase of resources and the adaptability of the centre allowed it to act as a support for many community members and participants. Here, I expand upon the consideration of the COVID-19 crisis to explore how individuals and their already fragile circuits of care with existing tactics were compounded by the COVID-19 crisis. In many of the tactics already highlighted within this chapter, a vital tactic used by many participants is the regular consumption of free food at the community centre. During the COVID-19 crisis, despite the community centre's best efforts and adaptations to the restrictions of the pandemic,

this service was significantly reduced; in interview, Julie shared the revelations that followed:

CCMD: We had a really big shock the first time we met up with young people after COVID, we went down as I said, to [the park] and [a young person] turned up and he looked like an alcoholic. And he turned up with like a 2-litre bottle of pop and I was like, “why are you drinking that amount of pop?” And he said, “because it fills me up.” So, I was just like this... We need to do something. This is just really, really wrong. And yeah, looked literally like an alcoholic, his face was like mooned.

Interview excerpt with the Community Centre Managing Director (March, 2023)

The above case is another example of a young person using a tactic that they developed to fill the gaps in a circuit of care, in this case the gap was a result of the disruption to circuits of care due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The young person uses this tactic to ‘fill the gap’ and to ‘fill himself up’. This is a shocking and extreme case of food insecurity and demonstrates what I consider to be another vital tactic (albeit ineffective), in which a young person is consuming sugary fizzy pop to survive in the absence of accessible and nutritious food. This highlights the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 including food shortages, school closures and limited resources to young people.

As a result of this interaction, the community centre changed its provision of food from young people aged 7-11 to 11-18 as the UK’s response to COVID-19 offered less support to this age group. Primary school children were largely looked after in the UK during the pandemic and those in secondary school seemed to fall through the cracks in terms of COVID-19 support during lock downs, with many young people eligible for FSMs unable to access support in the first lockdown of 2020 (Pautz and Dempsey, 2022).

This response from the community centre to provide free food to young people every evening was an attempt to fill the gap by creating a new structure within the circuit of care to prevent young people using the tactics they had developed to ‘fill them up’ that lacked any nutritional value. The existence of this free food provision at the community centre is an example of the evolving nature of food circuits of care and tactics in which a new structure within the circuit of care was developed due to the prevalence of young people’s shocking tactics. The positive impact of this change in the circuit of care as a result of interaction with and understanding young people’s lived experiences of failing circuits has been recognised within my research. Michelle reports going to the community centre to “eat some proper food” and “have an actual meal instead of snacks” (Interview with Michelle, June 2023). This reaction from the community centre allows a reflection on how the tactics exhibited by young people in this chapter are indicative of structures within circuits of care that do not work for them, versus the adaptability of the community centre to change their structures and adapt to young people’s needs. This reflects a key aspect of my novel conceptualisation of effective circuits of care: that they should be sustainable and as such, can only be resilient if they are adaptable and responsive to change.

As with vital mobilities, the food circuits of care and infrastructure is prone to both systemic and individual circumstances of disruption. This disruption can then impact the accessibility of vital materials, this has been demonstrated by the ways in which my participants and the community centre experienced and reacted to COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. Disruption also inevitably results in the increase of tactics to access food (which is further explored in the next chapter). However, I argue that although some tactics are inevitable, there is an injustice and therefore a failing circuit of care when the frequency and vitality of tactics (or ability to deploy said tactics) is unevenly distributed. The uneven proportions of vital tactics reflect the observations made by Jasso, Tornblow and Sabbagh, that “overall injustice... can be decomposed into injustice due to inequality and injustice due to poverty” (2016, p. 209); in this case, vital tactics are a result of food insecurity.

Choice and Healthy Eating

The concept of choice is a key aspect to be considered in circuits of care. One of the questions I ask about circuits of care is if they provide opportunities to empower the user (as detailed in Chapter 2). The tactics used by my participants in relation to FSMs do not demonstrate these opportunities for empowerment.

Michelle discusses how young people on FSMs are restricted to spending £2.30 a day; this amount is dictated by the price of a choice of food in accordance with the national nutritional standards (a main, side and a piece of fruit). The limits associated with these standards means that young people in receipt of FSMs have even less decision-making power in terms of what they eat at lunch. More expensive items in the school cafeteria are out of budget for those in receipt of FSMs and their choice is restricted because of their family income. As a result, a policy intended to reduce inequalities and stigma around food insecurity highlights them for young people within schools. Nussbaum argues that there is a moral difference “between a policy that promotes health and one that promotes health capabilities” (2011, p.26). In the case of FSMs this is made clear because young people are not given the choice to eat healthy. Rather, eating healthily is obligatory with less healthy items outside of their price range.

Similarly, a worker at Citizens Advice emphasised the importance of “food being emotive” and that “when we are sad, we want to eat our favourite chocolate bar” (interview, March 2023); being unable to make those choices is a very difficult experience. When thinking about individual agency within circuits of care, this lack of choice is greater for young people with lower income and those in receipt of FSMs because they are less likely to have additional money (such as pocket money) to choose differently. This highlights a participatory and distributive injustice in that young people with more financial support can make the decision (another example of a tactic) to not eat at the canteen and go and buy something else without worrying about money; whereas some of my participants must make the decision to either not eat or to purchase cheap sweets of little nutritional value to trade for more substantial food items.

Outside of the FSM aspect of young people's circuits of care; this distributive injustice can be witnessed throughout the food system, in this case, outside of schools, cheaper food tends to be unhealthy, restricting the choice of low-income families, as they are less able to purchase nutritional food and healthy food than higher income families. This was highlighted in my conversation with a local councillor, responsible for the school meals across the district.

Councillor: So, there's a lot of broken elements that really kind of interrupt children having access to good food on an ongoing basis. And unfortunately, that retail element particularly when you're looking at the own brand and the cheaper end. Food products, which are ready made ready to eat retail, convenience type things. They are the foods that have the lowest nutritional values to them...

So the retail industry generally operates unhindered from regulation in terms of what they do with food and they adulterate food from its natural core being to make it go further to make it cheaper. So it can be gotten to those people that don't have as much money to spend. And so all we're doing in the current model is shortening the life span of the lowest paid lowest earners. So we're then saying so low pay, low earning potentials, low educational attainment, what we'll do to just top that off is we'll actually shorten your lifespan for you as well by making you eat the worst food.

Interview excerpt with county councillor, (March 2023)

This interview excerpt and my analysis of tactics highlights that families on lower income have less food available to them and less nutritional food. The councillor's description of 'broken elements' that interrupt young people's access to food resonates with my concept of failings in circuits of care leading to absences in which young people must form vital tactics to source their own food. Aligning with my insights regarding the differences between food and blood mobilities throughout this thesis, the councillor highlights the severity of the impacts of eating cheaper foods with lower levels of

nutrition including having a shorter life span. The councillor goes on to highlight that young people are becoming malnourished by the retail industry “giving them diets which will actually malnourish them whilst shortening the lives by driving them down an obesity and diabetes route.” (March 2023).

In relation to transport policy, Pereira, Schwanen and Banister, state that policies should be analysed to take into account “minimum standards of accessibility to key destinations and the extent to which these policies respect individuals’ rights and prioritise disadvantaged groups, reduce inequalities of opportunities, and mitigate transport externalities” (2017, p. 170). For food policies and circuits of care, there needs to be a consideration that these inequalities of opportunities and accessibility coincides with the concept that the consumption of healthy food, largely relies on 1) the ability to purchase healthy food and 2) the knowledge and availability of facilities to cook ingredients. These inequalities are highlighted during an interview with Julie in which she shares her knowledge of the community’s lived experiences in affording food.

Julie: Yeah. There's such a high amount of takeaways is because it's cheaper sometimes to do that. So everybody knows that one takeaway is doing an offer each evening 4:30 till five. You get pizzas, chips and drinks for a tenner. And that will feed four people happily. It's really difficult if you haven't got transport and you've got to get to the shops, you've got to purchase the food, you've got to bring it back. You might not have the knowledge. You might not have the funding. And then you might have fuel poverty, which we've seen a lot. I know somebody that's lived in a house that's never had an oven.

Researcher: Yeah. So people in that situation have very limited options.

Julie: And so, it's microwave it or it's pour water over it.

Interview excerpt with Julie, the Community Centre Managing Director (March, 2023)

The fragility and lack of regulation of the retail aspects of food circuits of care emphasise the inequalities in opportunities for families and young people who can't afford to buy nutritional food. The analysis of vital tactics have also indicated that young people like my participants also lack in facilities/skills to cook food and instead buy takeaways or ready meals, further limiting their capacity to eat healthily and resonating with the suggestions made by the councillor in my empirical interview.

Age and Changing Circuits

In thinking about how vital mobilities should support and enhance people's future life chances, I argue that the circuits of care young people are experiencing do not currently enhance some of my participants' life chances. The previous chapter assessed how circuits of care adapt to and become fragile as a result of temporal, physical and political changes, and disruptions. This chapter has used tactics to understand young people's experiences of circuits of care and uses this as a lens to understand the fragility of circuits. This analysis has enabled me to understand that the transition from childhood to adulthood is a significant temporal change to the individual experience of a circuit of care that is not always catered for. Because of the rigid nature of structures (age restricted services) young people engage with, this transition suddenly changes individuals' circumstance and significantly disrupt and change the circuits of care and systems they can access.

When introducing my novel conceptualisation of circuits of care in Chapter 2, I emphasised the importance of an effective circuit of care being sustainable. Not only does this mean being resilient to the changes and 'moments of collapse' illustrated in the previous chapter but it should also include being resilient to change in an individual's personal timeline. This section of the chapter explores the examples gathered from my participants that highlight the fragilities and gaps within circuits of care based on the disruptions to circuits as participants transition from young person to adult.

Tom:

Tom was 17 years old at the beginning of my research and turned 18 whilst the project was taking place. This impacted the support available to him and the food that he was able to access. For instance, the community centre provides food in the form of an evening meal for young people, but once people turn 18, they are no longer able to attend these sessions for safeguarding reasons and the food circuit changes for those young people.

Tom discussed is at college but doesn't enjoy it so regularly doesn't attend. Instead, he works at McDonalds three days a week to get money and because he can eat for free there. In one interview, Tom talked about how he and his co-workers would accidentally cook the wrong items for an order so that they could eat it instead. In previous conversations I had with Tom, he shared concerns over his parents' finances amid the cost-of-living crisis and on a separate occasion reported relying on the community centre to eat food as he has "nothing in the fridge" at home. Tom spends his wages on sweets that get him through the day until he comes to the community centre and on beer – he drinks regularly on the weekend "because it's stressful".

(Reflections from empirical observations and interview notes).

The tactics Tom exhibits of cooking the wrong food and relying on the fast food as his regular food intake, alongside purchasing sweets and beer with his wages reflects his lack of knowledge about nutrition and cooking skills. It also reflects the insecurity of his home situation in relation to his access to food. These tactics also demonstrate a lack of 'care for or about' within his circuits of care. In another interview with Tom, he shared that he doesn't eat at home because he doesn't know how to cook, and he is usually out with friends. In an interview following a focus group talking about participants' best food moments, Tom shared that all he had eaten until he arrived at the community centre was some pick 'n' mix from the shop and some left over pancakes at home:

“Yeah, I had pancakes at... I don't know the exact time, but it's like 11:00 o'clock because they were left on a plate in the kitchen. So, I were cleaning up and thought might as well eat them. They were cold so eh.”

Interview excerpt from group interview with Tom discussing ‘food moments of the day’ (February 2023).

Like Michelle, he stockpiles the Greggs from the community centre; he takes it home and “stick[s] it on the top of the fridge so [he] can eat it all [him]self”. His lack of cooking and nutrition skills result in him eating only ‘microwaveable pizzas and takeaways’ when he is at home. Tom’s experiences and tactics, including eating cold leftovers offer a glaring example of the fragility of circuits of care when young people reach the transitional ages from being a child to becoming an adult and the complexity of access to food dependent on varying food skills and family responsibilities.

In the initial studies of children’s geographies, some scholars viewed childhood as a time of becoming and place an emphasis on exploring everydayness to understand how childhood is socially experienced (Horton and Kraftl, 2006). Tom’s description of his reliance on microwaveable pizza and the nonchalant description of eating leftovers is evidence of ‘everyday’ observations offering an insight into how Tom has limited food skills, and his food circuits of care do not include ‘being cared for’ by his family. This highlights the relevance of ‘new’ children’s geographies that critiques the idea of children as becoming (Horton, Kraftl and Tucker, 2008), as Tom is clearly already responsible for his acquiring his own food and this lack of social support system is resulting in him eating poorly. His specific individual circumstance makes him more vulnerable to food insecurity, particularly as he is about to age out of the community centre’s youth group.

As previously discussed, food mobilities can become increasingly more complex than blood mobilities because of individual circumstance and I have also reflected this in my recognition that young people can often rely on the circumstance and attitude of their family units. Kendig, Mattingly and Bianchi reflect on how financial circumstance can

drastically impact young people's lives in terms of their responsibility and highlight that "poor youth possibly take on adult roles "too early" at the same time that high-income youth may be supported for a long period past their 18th birthday" (2014, p. 271). This concept of how family units can drastically impact the security of circuits of care resonates both with Tom and Pippa's access to food and experiences of the systems that they engage with. Furthermore, Michelle's tactic of stockpiling for her family indicates a reversal in the stereotypical roles of the family unit (as previously discussed). For Pippa, because she is in foster care, when she turns 18, she will be moved to a young person's assisted living facility.

Pippa:

When talking to Pippa about her pending move, she discussed the importance of the community centre to her access to food as well as teaching her food skills (alongside her grandma) for when she moves to live by herself.

Pippa: That's where families can come in again because we've done cooking competitions and stuff before. And so that's quite good because that helps with catering skills and stuff. So that's quite good.

Researcher: So, do you feel like you know how to cook, because you're moving out next year?

Pippa: I'm moving out this August, I think? Yeah, I mean. I haven't had the help from with cooking from school, but I do know how to cook from my grandma's help. You know, I can cook a good meal at my grandma's. I can cook at home, and I've cooked at [the community centre] before. I actually won a food competition with my spaghetti Bolognese. I've never made it before as well. And I just made it from scratch here and we won, and I was like, yeah.

Interview excerpt from comic strip interview with Pippa (June, 2023)

For both Tom and Pippa, when they turn 18, they will not be able to access the free evening meals or some of the cooking classes at the community centre for safeguarding reasons. They will become community members and they will only be able to access the services that the community centre provides for the community – not the youth groups. Support for the general community is only available during the daytime which will drastically impact their circuits of care and access to meals particularly in the evening. When he turned 18, Tom stopped attending the centre and that meant that the one meal he had eaten each day with nutritional value ceased.

The analysis of the tactics used by my participants has demonstrated that the young people lean heavily on the community centre to supplement their circuits of care. This has highlighted the community centre as an essential element to young people's ability to access food when other systems fail them. However, the 'moments of collapse' that Chapter 4 identified that the centre is vulnerable to suggest that this reliance on the community centre creates potential fragilities in young people's circuits of care. Similarly, this reliance on the community centre poses vulnerabilities to young people as they transition into adulthood when the food provisions change. The analysis has demonstrated the volatility of young people's lives and access to food as they transition from childhood to adulthood as well as the impacts of external policies and systems on young people's access to food.

Conclusion

The use of tactics as an analytic tool has made visible the fragilities within circuits of care that would otherwise remain hidden without exploring the complexities of young people's lives. Not only has the identification of tactics made the fragilities and gaps within circuits of care visible, but it has also demonstrated that fragile circuits of care without tactics result in young people not having access to food. The tactics have also demonstrated that fragile circuits of care do not resemble my description of effective circuits of care, outlined in Chapter 2. I argue that an effective circuit of care should be resilient and adaptable to change (including change in young people's lives and social

worlds) as well as reflecting a care for or about the recipients. The evidence of vital tactics demonstrates neither. Chapter 6 explores in greater detail how circuits of care can be made more robust.

The investigation into the fragility of circuits through tactics has also highlighted the inequality in the effects of fragile circuits of care and those who experience fragile circuits. Fragile and ineffective circuits require young people to implement vital tactics to enable their own access to food. Using these vital tactics as a lens for analysing circuits of care reveals that the fragility of circuits and the need for tactics is largely a result of circuits not catering to young people as a diverse group with different complex and changing circumstances. Identifying young people as a diverse and complex group, rather than viewing them as a homogenous one has highlighted the need for circuits of care to be adaptable to their constantly changing and different needs in order to be successful.

Similarly, the empirical examples within this chapter suggest that circuits become fragile because the systems and policies within those circuits are rigid and unresponsive to the volatility of young people's lives and the complexities of their social worlds. The rigidity of FSMs and the changing nature of Michelle's mental health as well as her desire to spend more than the £2.30 limit provided examples of the nuances that impact and reduce the effectiveness of food circuits of care. Relatedly, the analysis of tactics has also demonstrated that age and the personal timeline can be viewed as one of the 'rhythms' of vital mobilities that Sodero refers to in her work, and that effective circuits of care should cater to these changes in a young person's life.

Though the community centre was found to be vulnerable to moments of collapse in the previous chapter, it is important to recognise the vitality of the centre to my participants' circuits of care within this chapter. One of the reasons behind this success is the centre's responsiveness to the complexities of young people's lives that results in greater accessibility of food. For instance, the centre initially began providing free food because of interactions with young people and understanding their experiences of food insecurity; in the COVID-19 pandemic, the centre adapted to this moment of collapse and to the change in need – where the age range of young people in need of support

changed because of how the government catered to younger children's needs. I argue that this reflexivity and adaptation to young people's changing lives can be reflected upon and considered in other circuits of care to provide more resilient circuits and food provision. In the next chapter, I focus on the potential that disruptions like these provide for analysing how circuits of care can be made more robust.

Using tactics as an analytic tool has also provided an insight into the complexity and volatility of young people's lives and how these coincide with the vital mobility of food and their experiences of circuits of care. In thinking about the thesis as a whole, it is important to reflect upon how this complexity of young people's lives impacts the effectiveness and their experiences of circuits of care, how they have engaged with the project, and how they continue to engage with the systems and policies that effect their access to and participation in food structures. The thesis has used multi-method, participatory methods to gather an understanding of young people's experiences of food insecurity within their circuits of care, but through this and the use of tactics as an analytic tool, I also acknowledge that food insecurity is one of the many complexities and stressors within some of my participants lives.

Using tactics as an analytic tool has allowed the chapter to draw out the thesis' larger contribution to mobilities literature through its conceptualisation of food as a vital mobility. The observations made through young people's tactics has highlighted that when evaluating circuits of care, it is necessary to reconfigure the mobilities of things, ideas and people. In Chapter 2, I introduced mobilities literature and outlined that mobility is the movement of an object from A to B (Cresswell, 2012). Furthermore, Cresswell (2012) understands mobility through three relational moments: human mobility (something observable and quantifiable), representational mobility (ideological mobilities like film, medicine, literature), and how mobility is practiced and experienced. This chapter builds on mobilities literature to understand the "thin network of connections" (Sheller and Urry, 2006) associated with food vital mobilities. My use of tactics has demonstrated that to understand the complexities of food circuits of care, it is essential to place how mobility is practiced and experienced at the heart of this understanding before human or representational mobility. It is impossible to understand how circuits of care are effective or not, without focussing on how they are

experienced and analysing the minute, everyday details of young people's experiences and participation within the associated systems.

The thesis aims to reflect upon this and address the aspect of participation within these structures whilst considering the importance of the other aspects of the participants lives. As such, it brings together all aspects of the literature gathered in Chapter 2 to consider how individual lives, family units and social relations, unequally influence young people's access to healthy and nutritious food and simultaneously result in the unequal responsibilities and need for vital tactics.

Whilst tactics have been used as an analytic tool to investigate the fragility of circuits of care within this chapter; the concept of tactics is a way of "making do" (De Certeau) that people utilise when they lack power or are constricted by power structures resonates with this thesis' focus on participation. The use of tactics demonstrated by my participants are examples of young people not assimilating into structures that do not work for them (both by choice and by necessity). This demonstrates an aspect of agency within systems and speaks to young people's desire to participate.

This chapter has demonstrated that young people demonstrate agency through not assimilating within structures and systems that do not work for them. They also demonstrate agency through their development of vital tactics and through their own distribution of food to families and friends – a reversal of familial responsibility and a direct contrast to the social construction of childhood as a time of vulnerability and needing protection. The next chapter builds on this consideration of how young people demonstrate agency to introduce and evaluate the visibility event as an outcome of this research project. It evaluates different social constructions of childhood and discusses how different ways of being constructed enable young people to participate in circuits of care or not. It uses this and builds on the thesis' analysis of all the empirical data to create imagined scenarios of participation and explore how food circuits of care can be made more robust and participatory.

Chapter Six: Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care: Events and Scenarios

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the issues of social constructions of childhood that have risen throughout the thesis to introduce and explore the project's outcomes: the visibility event 'Youth Health Matters' and the creation of a manifesto for young people's participation, that is resilient and robust to change, informed by empirical data and imagined scenarios of disruption.

The thesis has concentrated on how young people participate in food circuits of care and on creating opportunities for participation. The visibility event (the final prong within this thesis' multi-methodological approach) stays true to the participatory nature of the research project to create opportunities for young people's participation and empowerment. The imagined disruption scenarios (the development and importance of which will be explained later in this chapter) theoretically explore participation and social constructions of childhood to imagine how participants might participate in near-future circuits of care. Building on the understandings gathered from the visibility event and other empirical data, alongside the imagined scenarios, the chapter culminates in the development an informed manifesto that outlines what a robust food circuit of care should look like for young people.

When introduced in the methodology chapter, the visibility event was designed to introduce key stakeholders to young people's experiences of how they are constructed and provide an opportunity for young people to discuss how these constructions unequally impact their life experiences. Throughout the thesis, disruption and the fragility of circuits of care has risen as a key theme, with young people's access to food constantly threatened by individual or larger scale disruption. Through an analysis of the Youth Health Matters event and the thesis' empirical material, the chapter progresses to imagine and explore near-future scenarios that impact food structures and circuits of care. The imagined scenarios build on this emphasis alongside my understanding of the complexity of social constructions of childhood to explore alternative social

constructions. The scenarios consider the implications of how young people are constructed for how young people might experience and participate in different situations and disruptions.

The discussion of scenarios draws on the in-depth analysis and theoretical understanding developed through the thesis and insights drawn from the Youth Health Matters event. From this, the chapter makes observations of how the food circuits are vulnerable and how they can be made robust, resilient and reflexive to support and empower young people in the face of a changing and unpredictable world.

Social Constructions of Childhood

One of this thesis' main aims is to consider and value young people's lived experiences of food insecurity, to understand the social constructions that they encounter, and to evaluate their agency within systems that affect them. The empirical research within this project has outlined that my participants experience a variety of social constructions when moving through their social worlds and this impacts their experiences and the effectiveness of circuits of care.

Social constructions of childhood relate to the understanding that childhood (and the experience of childhood) varies depending on different cultures and societies. It refers to the idea that "childhood is not a natural process rather it is society which decides when a child is a child and when a child becomes an adult" (Ali Norozi and Moen, 2016, p.79). The social constructions of children held by society and adults that young people interact with can result in a diversity of situations and circumstances in which childhood is experienced. One of the most common social constructions of childhood is that "children have one significant thing in common, namely their getaway from childhood" (Qvortrup, Corsaro and Honig, 2009, p.22). This construction alongside the concentration on outcome-based education that prepares young people to enter society, suggests that an exit from childhood means their entrance into adulthood and the social world – leading to young people being considered as non-participating citizens. As such, it is essential to consider these social constructions when trying to

understand how young people have agency and participate in food circuits of care as well as determining how food circuits can be more robust, effective and empowering.

Raby and Sheppard, (2021) introduce the different kinds of social constructions of childhood illustrated in a review of editorials discussing the climate strikes of 2019. The list of different ways that young people are viewed within these articles are outlined in Table 4:

Table 4: List of social constructions of childhood generated from Raby and Sheppard (2021) and categorised as participatory or non-participatory.

Participatory Constructions	Non-Participatory Constructions
Young people are social participants and decision makers	Young people are innocent, carefree and passive citizens
Young individuals are elevated as heroes	Young people are embedded in education
Young people are courageous and capable but also need help (lens of precarity)	Young people can be disruptive and viewed as criminals
	Young people are naïve and easily influenced by adults
	Young people are apolitical
	Young people as becoming and are future adults
	Young people as victims and needing protection

Raby and Sheppard (2021) also emphasise the importance of considering how constructions can be different according to a young person's race, gender and class and it is important to "challenge the single axis" (p.5) on which young people are frequently viewed. They offer an example of how social constructions have been racialised and gendered within the school strikes for climate, in which black child activists are more likely to be problematised and white girls more likely to be dismissed as harmless.

This chapter discusses opportunities to challenge social constructions and change the social constructions of children from victims to actors. I highlight and evaluate how the visibility event (introduced in the methodology) provided participants with an opportunity to become social participants and educators of other members of society as an outcome of this research. I then use the observations from the visibility event and all empirical materials to apply the social constructions of childhood in Table 4 to imagine scenarios of disruption. The scenarios build upon the empirical material to consider how young people can continue to have opportunities for participation in future circuits of care.

'Youth Health Matters'

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I introduced my four-pronged methodological approach with the visibility event outlined as the fourth prong and natural conclusion to the methodology in which young people could participate and co-organise an event that was important to them. This event manifested as 'Youth Health Matters'. All aspects of the event (including the contents, running order, location and attendees) were co-designed and decided by my participants, with practical support from myself and community centre staff members.

My research focuses on young people's participation, food as a vital mobility and understanding young people's experiences of food insecurity. I aimed to bring these three aspects together in a participatory project. Engaging with concepts of empowerment and care in the delivery of my creative multi-method participatory

approach allowed my research focuses to be brought together by promoting young people's participation in the research methodology decisions. In terms of developing young people's participation through a process of empowerment, the project was successful by encouraging participation both within the research project as well as within the wider community. When thinking about the theme of food insecurity, due to the participatory nature of the project, this took an unexpected turn. My participants indicated a desire to focus on youth health for the visibility day aspect of my planned methodological approach. This had several implications for my thesis. It promoted empowerment and supported participants in feeling cared for and about by giving them decision making power and angling the research process to issues designated as important by them.

I recognise that this ability to support my participants in a shift away from my original research themes was one of privilege and this is a key issue within participatory methods. As highlighted by Mackenzie *et al.*, (2012), the dynamic nature of using participatory methods can pose challenges in research projects that are funded or have strict requirements/policy driven agendas. Referring to Shier's (2001) model of children's participation, there are different ways of working with young people within a project and the highest levels maintain the importance of creating openings and opportunities for young people to be included in and share responsibility for decision making, but this can be within a more restricted agenda. However, due to the nature of the PhD, I was able to adapt to my participants desires and the Youth Health Matters project unexpectedly provided more insight into the lived experiences of young people that may not have emerged without this deviation from 'food' and provided different insights into food as a vital mobility.

In my early research methods, observations and creative workshops concentrated on understanding young people's experiences of food insecurity and applying this to my consideration of the (in)effectiveness of circuits of care in place to provide young people with food. Inserting a caring approach to using participatory methods led me down a different path than originally planned, with the resulting event led by young people's desires within the project and focussing on their experiences of health.

Taking Shape

This redirection of methods according to my participants' desires coincided with my participants being invited to an external event with local stakeholders and council members. Young people had been involved in planning sessions of this event and determined topics of conversation to host and discuss with stakeholders at the event. This was an exciting opportunity which both I as the researcher and the participating young people viewed as a chance for more youth engagement and participation within local systems. However, the event proved to be disappointing for my participants who described it as "fake" and felt they had been "lied to" in terms of the role they would play in the event. This was an example of an organisation attempting to 'do empowerment to' the group rather than 'with' the group (Maynard and Stuart, 2018) and the young people's participation and input was lost as a result.

"The young people had previously decided on three topics for discussion: mental health, schools and cost of living crisis.

However, upon arriving at the event, we discovered that these topics had been altered and that the questions were not the questions that the young people had originally come up with. The topics had been changed to mental health and schools as one subject that was split up into three discussion tables and one table on the cost of living.

Young people were disappointed that their questions had not been translated across and that it was a waste of time and "f*cking sh*t". This was incredibly disheartening as other young people said that they would still like to do it but for it to be done in a better manner. This was an opportunity for young people to voice their concerns to people of importance and people they felt they would like to communicate with. But the attendees as well as the content were not the people they had aimed at."

Ethnographic fieldnotes excerpt (30th January 2023).

From the participants' experiences and my observations, the event demonstrated a tokenistic approach in which the young people were "given a voice, but in fact [had] little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it" (Hart, 1992, p.9). A key aspect of engaging with participatory methods, is the flexibility of methods to adapt to participants needs, empower and care about participants whilst promoting sustainable change. Young people expressed an interest in attending an event that could provide them with the opportunities promised to them. Recreating this event provided an opportunity for my research to reflect on the disappointments of this experience and support my participants to transform a negative experience to a positive one. It was discussed with my participants and determined that they would like to recreate this event the way it should have been with participants having total control of the topic, attendees and operation of the new event. The participants mutually decided that they would focus on what was most important to them: mental health (and support) in schools and they would form a working group called 'Youth Health Matters'. Campbell and MacPhail (2002) suggest that work on empowerment begins with an assumption that a group is experiencing powerlessness or a sense of lack of control. This was the case for my participants and provided an opportunity for young people to take control of a previously negative event. This experience supports Campbell and MacPhail's ideas that empowerment can be reactive, and empowerment can come from an originally disempowered place.

Once the working group had decided to form, they began a detailed planning process. During this process, my role as the researcher was to facilitate conversation between young people and offer guidance when needed. The original external event took place in January 2023. In February, after having discussed the possibility of creating their own event, young people decided that they would like to form the 'Youth Health Matters' working group. After some initial conversations, on the 18th of March, myself, the young people and the community centre staff created a timeline for planning the event (Table 5) with deadlines of when things should be achieved and what the event should cover.

Table 5: Youth Health Matters Plan

23rd March	Decide who we would like to invite, organise what the event will look like, running times, food, and what jobs people would like.
30th March	Decide what is important to discuss around the first two topics and what the questions should be.
	E A S T E R B R E A K
20th April	Recap and decide questions for next two topics.
27th April	Recap and decide questions for next two topics.
4th May	Finalise the design of invitations to stakeholders and to assess RSVPs.
11th May	Re-evaluate case studies for each topic and finalise questions for each round table.
18th May	Re-evaluate case studies for each topic and finalise questions for each round table. Confirm individuals' roles. Think about venue lay out and review guest numbers.
25th May	Run through of event and making sure everyone is happy with what we have planned.
2nd June	E V E N T
9th June	Evaluation and reflections.

The Event

In the planning process, participants began by deciding on issues they would like to discuss and decided they would like to introduce issues of importance on round tables by talking about their own lived experiences. This was important to them because at the last event they felt like they couldn't get their point across as they were answering questions with answers adults wanted to hear. I listened to participants' needs and supported young people to value their own knowledge and experiences and build their confidence to share their lived experiences. The event provided young people with the opportunity to share their experiences, educate members of the community (including key stakeholders) about these experiences and create bonds between participants. Collecting and telling stories can empower a community by sharing common stories that can direct the narrative (Robinson, 2016).

To do this, young people developed and shared 'case studies' of lived experiences in which systems had failed them and had negative impacts on their lived experiences of schools and their mental health. These case studies were co-developed by the participants, comprised of real individual, or amalgamated experiences but anonymised to make it easier for young people to share. Young people decided that they would introduce these case studies as real incidents or examples of young people's experiences. Once the case studies were introduced by the young person facilitating the round table, the table would then discuss follow up questions about the scenario and a final question for 'moving forward' to get attendees to consider solutions in conversation with young people.

The event had 6 case studies, hosted at 6 tables that attendees would rotate around to hear and discuss all the case studies. The case studies were about imagined or pseudonymous individuals and developed to demonstrate realistic examples of young people's lived experiences and potentially challenge stakeholders' constructions of school life. Appendix 3 provides an in-depth table of all the case studies, follow up questions and points from discussion that were collected and typed up from post-it notes from each table. In the following section, I outline how a case study was introduced and unpack the relevance of the case study both to this thesis and to the young people within the event.

Case Study 1: Timothy

"Timothy is in year 7, he suffers with anger issues and OCD. Due to his OCD Timothy must go to the toilet several times a day. He also suffers with sensory issues. As uniform is mandatory and schools are very strict, he isn't allowed to wear a different uniform, and the texture of his trousers irritates him and he often feels like they stick to him. His time going to the toilet gives him a chance to perform his handwashing routine and time to re-adjust his pants to help ease his sensory issues. The toilets being closed during the school day means he's not allowed to go whenever he wants, causing him to get frustrated and lash out at teachers. Then he gets punished and is sent to 'isolation' in which he is separated from the rest of the students. He's tried several times talking to teachers to see

about getting a toilet pass but can't get a doctor's note as this is not a bladder issue. This is impacting his learning as he always feels on edge with his sensory issues. The time that he spends out of the classroom due to being in 'isolation' is also influencing his grades."

Case study co-developed and presented by participants (June 2023)

The case study about 'Timothy' focusses on an issue that participants raised throughout this research project and are incredibly passionate about. The issue of toilets being locked throughout the school day consistently emerged within focus groups, though not necessarily obviously linked to my research focus of food insecurity. Through this approach in which I aimed to make my participants feel cared for and about, through embedding key elements of circuits of care progresses and allowing participants to co-produce an approach, I worked to empower participants to lead research.

During the event, attendees' reactions to toilets being locked included it being "against their human rights", making them feel like they are "not a valued member of the community" and that it was "unfair", asking "how would staff feel if their toilets were locked". This was indicative of the social constructions of childhood that young people face in the school environment. When thinking about Table 4's breakdown of social constructions of childhood, these responses highlight how having toilets locked in schools demonstrates non-participatory social constructions of young people in schools, as future adults and as potentially disruptive as schools argue that toilets are closed to prevent truancy. The shocked responses to this case study during the event, suggested a shift in these social constructions by highlighting the different treatment of young people in comparison to adults and the marked 'unfairness'.

Another aspect to consider in the fall out from having toilets locked during lesson time is the resulting issues it creates at lunch time (something more obviously relevant to my original research focus).

"When you go to the toilet at the start of lunch, the queue is too big. Then you go to get your lunch. You eat your lunch, you go back. Queue is too big, so you can't go to the toilet at all during the day."

(Young person in interview, 2nd March, 2023).

This has a number of impacts on young people's experiences of food and circuits of care. Through a conversation about the toilets in a practice of caring about the participants' needs, I gained an understanding of the processes influencing young people's school lunch times. Participants explained that they sometimes must choose between going to the toilet at lunch time and eating lunch at lunch time. Or, it has repercussions in the amount of food to choose from at lunch time, if a young person queues for the toilet, there is limited availability of food when they get to the canteen. Equally, young people report not drinking any water throughout the day in response to the toilets being locked so that they do not need the toilet out of fear of needing to go and not being allowed and to avoid queues at lunch time. This is detrimental to their well-being and also to their capacity for learning; the traditional structure and function of schools can be a barrier to health and education capacity (St Leger, 2001).

The event was well attended with 16 young people, 17 local key stakeholders and 7 staff members. Local key stakeholders in attendance included: staff from the local medical group; caseworkers from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); leaders of local community centres; members of the local poverty truth commission; the coordinator of a local college; and members of the public including participants' family members. With young people facilitating discussion with attendees using the case studies they had developed, the event offered an opportunity for young people to become constructed as social participants and decision makers (Table 4) asking how attendees would manage such situations and how systems could change, and how young people could be supported moving forward.

In an evaluation of the event, when asked "What was the most important message?" attendees remarked on the value and impact of hearing young people's experiences first hand:

"many young people experience these sort of things"

“young people are feeling unheard and untrusted”

“hearing young people’s stories, voices and thoughts are powerful”

“the power and influence of young people taking control and addressing the issues – not just for themselves but collectively for more young people locally”

“co-production is key. Listening. Do with, not to, young people”

Feedback from YHM attendees, gathered using evaluation forms (1 June, 2023).

These responses demonstrate how multi-method participatory approach in which participants are empowered and supported to share their own experiences has enabled an increase in awareness of their lived experiences. The responses that support “co-production” and evidence of understanding participants feelings promotes the hope that the project has introduced the beginning of a network and connections between participants and community/ stakeholders in which participants are empowered and cared about. “Young people taking control and addressing the issues – not just for themselves but collectively for more young people locally” demonstrates how the care for and about participants embedded in this approach, is now recognised within participants’ actions towards their peers.

Whilst supporting my research aims of enabling young people’s participation, the event provided me with a variety of materials including ethnographic field notes from discussions (including the excerpt above), recordings of focus groups, and creative works from participants. This data shed light on their lived experiences of school and mental health providing insight into wider circuits of care relating to the vital mobility of food. My project was cyclical in its reflection on methods and development according to participants’ needs and responses to original methods. In addition to this, through what I have learnt from my understanding of successful circuits of care, I emphasise the

importance of the end of a research project instigating the beginning of sustainable change and/or empowerment with care embedded within the research process.

The decision to focus on mental health in schools was unexpected in relation to my research topic of food insecurity and food as a vital mobility but supports the methodological approach of using creative and caring participatory methods. The 'Youth Health Matters' decision to pay attention to health in schools supports a holistic approach to health and is inclusive of young peoples' relationships with food as well as offering insight to the circuits of care associated (and not) with food experienced by my participants. Similarly, health education within the curriculum as well as the school community engaging with the wider community is essential to promoting physical (including food and diet related) and mental health amongst young people (Jessiman *et al.*, 2022).

Similarly, it is important to recognise what care looks like for young people and it is hoped that YHM provided an opportunity for peers to build a sense of peer support. Willow *et al.*, (2023) highlighted that young people report having friends that they are close to and can confide in is essential to feeling like they are cared for. The shared experiences within my participants supported the creating on peer bonds and the community centre is a space that supports this and is an aspect of what care looks like within my research project.

The encouragement I provided my participants to achieve 'Youth Health Matters' supported my aims to promote young people's participation in local systems and create community awareness and relationships that would outlast my research project. This event worked towards a social transformation in relation to the social constructions of childhood experienced by my participants and held by members of the community and local stakeholders. It encouraged young people's involvement in the community and encouraged a personal transformation in building participants' confidence to share their own lived experiences. In doing so, although not about food circuits of care at first glance, the visibility event promoted the participatory aspect of the thesis but also provided insights into the nuances of circuits of care young people encounter.

Reflections

I aimed for my research process to provide reliable interaction and relationship/ trust building between participant and researcher and for the research outcomes to encourage and facilitate further participation without my own intervention. The production of Youth Health Matters within my research project encouraged sustainable social and personal transformation, with participants planning to continue with such events to build community relations and increase awareness of young people's lived experiences. Figure 9 shows the 'wall of hands' created by the attendees at the event that the young people intend to add to with each new event they host beyond the remits of this thesis. Some of these outcomes have also included personal development in which individual participants have gained self-confidence or actively engage with community topics. Engaging with concepts of empowerment and participation strengthened my own methodology and opened avenues I had not previously considered possible – in particular, the Youth Health Matters event itself. It also added a level of depth and understanding to the empirical data I gathered that would not have been possible without considering the key aspects of circuits of care.



Figure 13: Visibility Event with decorations made by the participants and a 'wall of hands' co-created by attendees.

The Youth Health Matters event alongside the empirical data discussed within this thesis offered an in-depth insight into the importance of social constructions of childhood for young people's participation in food circuits of care. For example, the social constructions associated with the lack of access to toilets (as highlighted both in empirical data and in the Youth Health Matters' case study) in which young people are constructed as future adults with less rights than adults and as disruptive, actually negatively impacts their access to food with queues for food and for toilets, as well as accessibility of education as seen by Timothy's additional needs. Similarly, the empirical chapters within this thesis have explored the unique elements of young people's lives that impact their ability to access food, but simultaneously, young people have reported being viewed as "all the same". These constructions work to limit individual capacity for

participation both in food systems and in society by grouping young people together instead of valuing and accommodating individual needs.

As previously highlighted, the aims of this thesis were to create opportunities for participation for young people. Youth Health Matters was the end event of this thesis' empirical work and was fundamentally participatory. However, the thesis aims to reimagine young people's participation in food circuits of care through a conceptualisation of food as a vital mobility. In Chapter 2, I highlighted that mobilities literature focusses on how "the world is on the move" (Urry, 2007, 3) and that mobilities literature is strongly tied to considerations of climate change; as such one avenue of mobilities research considers future mobilities and mobile utopias (Urry, 2016; Buscher, 2017). When thinking about young people's participation in food circuits of care, it is therefore valuable to use my empirical data and its understandings of social constructions of childhood to consider how my participants might participate in future circuits of care that are potentially vulnerable to disruption through climate change and more volatile than the scenarios explored in the empirical data.

Mort *et al.*'s, (2018) work (an early inspiration for this thesis) considers how young people can be constructed as actors rather than victims; in doing so they highlight that disruption, (in their case, floods) can act as an opportunity to change these social constructions of children from victims to actors. Through this work, Mort *et al.* (2018) challenge the idea that young people are passive and promote a more active role in flood response. However, the work views young people as a collective and this thesis emphasises the importance of viewing young people as a diverse and complex group. Consideration of these complexities and diversities are essential to understanding the specifics of food circuits of care. It is important to consider that a robust circuit of care should be accommodating and adaptable in accordance with young people's different and volatile lives.

As such, this section of the chapter builds on the empirical findings of the thesis including that of the visibility event, it introduces imagined disruption scenarios designed with this focus on agency in relation to different social constructions of childhood in mind. The imagined scenarios of disruption apply some of social constructions in Table 4 to

consider how they impact young people's experiences of disruption and their opportunities for participation in the resulting changes to food circuits of care. It also provides discussion on how young people might access food or experience circuits of care differently depending on how they are constructed by the policies and influencing bodies within these scenarios.

When thinking about the thesis' participatory focus, I resonate with the point made by Raby and Sheppard (2021) that a positive social construction of young people values young people as active individuals but also recognises that they may need help. The thesis has concentrated on creating opportunities for young people's participation and findings have been founded on youth voice. However, in relation to these imagined scenarios, it was decided that for ethical reasons, to include young people in the design of scenarios that imagined them in disruption scenarios would be too distressing. I decided that this would be an example of over-research (Alderson and Morrow, 2020) and certain scenarios could have exposed young people to targeted vulnerabilities and triggered negative reactions and emotions from participants (Hadfield-Hill and Horton, 2014). Instead, the scenarios are intended to move beyond the empirical, to embed the thesis' understanding from the empirical data to theorise how young people can be constructed to best participate in future circuits of care. Together with the understandings gained from the empirical data, these scenarios work to inform a manifesto for young people's participation that intends to be robust and resilient to change.

Imagined Scenarios as Method

This section of the chapter uses imagined disruption scenarios as method to outline what robust circuits of care should look like for young people like my participants. From these discussions, the I develop a young people's manifesto for food circuits of care. This manifesto is intended to be robust and relevant in the dynamic contexts of young people's lives. Therefore, to develop an effective manifesto, I needed an approach that enabled me to further explore what some of these contexts might be, outside of the

empirical observations and specific situations explored in the thesis. The approach also needed to enable an understanding of how young people in a range of situations might be impacted by different dynamics.

Before deciding to use imagined disruption scenarios, I considered other avenues that might help me explore the dynamic contexts of young people's lives to develop a manifesto for future food circuits of care. Previous work on mobilities has used mobile utopia to imagine the futures of transport and possibilities for decarbonisation (Büscher, 2017; López-Galviz, Büscher and Freudendal-Pedersen, 2020; Popan, 2019; Urry, 2008). Sodero and Rackham, (2020) have also experimented with utopia to imagine the futures of blood vital mobilities. In Sodero and Rackham's exploration of future vital mobilities they describe utopia as a method of opening their imaginations amid the uncertainty of the Anthropocene. They produce "imaginative time travel to possible futures" and "ethnographic fragments from fictional futures" (Sodero and Rackham, 2020, p. 17). In their imagined vignettes, they weave the anticipated effects of climate change, and as such, set their utopias in 2050 and beyond.

Büscher (2017) discusses utopia as ontology that questions "what it means to be human in present and future societies" (p. 13). In her review of the mobile utopia experiment, Büscher highlights the importance of recognising that the perfect utopia does not exist as "one person's utopia might be another's dystopia" (2017, p. 13). This consideration echoes one of the key factors within this chapter's methodology for creating a manifesto: valuing the diversity of young people's experiences and exploring how disruptions might impact young people differently. In their discussion of mobile utopia, López-Galviz, Büscher and Freudendal-Pedersen, (2020) emphasise the need to "listen attentively to voices over-looked by mobility futures" (p.1). This resonated with this thesis' participatory approach and the manifesto's aim to encourage young people's participation in food circuits of care.

Similarly, Sodero and Rackham's (2020) article held synergies with my own ambitions for this chapter, to imagine possible future disruptions that might impact the vital mobilities of food and their associated circuits of care. I resonated with their ambition to create "ethnographic fragments from fictional futures" and realised that this outlook

could help me in achieving my aims of developing a manifesto that was robust and relevant to a range of dynamic contexts. However, the key difference in my ambitions and Sodero and Rackham's was that in using utopia as method, they explored futures in the distant future. Mobile utopia tends to consider ambitious and distant futures, some of these have included driverless cars (López-Galviz, Büscher and Freudendal-Pedersen, (2020) or in Sodero and Rackham's article, a range of seemingly abstract futures from using drones to deliver blood to AI blood harvested from embryonic stem cells.

The key difference between mobile utopias and my approach is that my manifesto has a focus on the near future rather than the abstract distant future. My approach also focuses on how these near future circuits of care could support my participants and their peers. Young people in this thesis' research area are already experiencing disruptions to their experiences of food vital mobilities (as has been evidenced in chapters 4 and 5), therefore, near-future disruptions are very possible and provide an opportunity to imagine how young people might experience and participate in these disruptions. It is important for this thesis that the imagined disruptions be informed by the thesis' empirical data and therefore in the near-future for my participants to still be considered young people – with their age being a key factor in how they experience fragmented circuits of care.

In thinking about near future disruptions, I explored and was inspired by Marsden *et al.*'s (2020) disruption project. In their project, Marsden *et al.* explore how individuals reacted to disruptions at different scales and temporalities: they explored different forms and scales of disruptions to learn how they impacted participants' attitudes towards and ability to travel in their everyday lives. These disruptive events included: a major snow and ice weather event, a flood, and the closure of a major road (Marsden *et al.*, 2020, p. 91). Participants' adaptations to this range of events included changing their mobility patterns to work from home or using different methods of transport. From their observations, Marsden *et al.* argue that disruption offers an opportunity to evaluate events that force immediate change and reflect upon the range of adaptations that could be implemented into everyday life to achieve change (Marsden and Docherty, 2013; Marsden *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, Lyons and Chatterjee (2017) describe disruptive events and reactions to them as insightful and presenting opportunities to trigger

change. Marsden *et al.* argue that “disruptions represent critical episodes from which it is possible to learn more about what social adaptations occur and how” (2020, p. 90). As such, the examples of disruptive events have been specifically chosen and developed to offer insight into the vulnerabilities of circuits of care relevant to my participants. In addition, the different scales and temporalities of disruption, discussed by these authors, informed my own imagined scenarios as this has proven useful in exploring the vulnerabilities to circuits of care relevant to my participants from a variety of entry points.

For the purpose of this chapter, disruption is defined as an event that interrupts the everyday flows associated with food circuits of care. Examples of these flows could include the food supply chain, capacity to travel to access food, affordability of nutritious food, and cooking/nutrition knowledge. The ‘disruptions’ discussed within this chapter are different from Chapter 4’s definition of ‘moments of collapse’. Disruptions are large- or small-scale events that influence the effectiveness of food circuits of care. Whereas Chapter 4’s moments of collapse referred specifically to pressure points experienced by the community centre that resulted in changes to their scenario. This chapter explores different disruption scenarios that engage with personal, local and national disruptive events as entry points; the scenarios consider how young people might participate in response to these disruptions by considering how they might be socially constructed and therefore what capacity they might have for participation. For example, Scenario 4 provides two alternatives of the same scenario, in which young people are constructed differently, to clearly demonstrate how social constructions of childhood influence their ability to participate. Building on analysis from the empirical data, through these scenarios I analyse how food circuits of care could be made more resilient and robust in the face of volatility and circuit fragilities.

Methodology for Imagining Scenarios of Disruption

The imagined scenarios have been informed by my empirical research alongside my understanding of disruption literature. Therefore, the scenarios are designed with the research area and my participants in mind. For example, Scenario 1 takes into consideration the thesis's consideration of place, being in a coastal town, it makes the scenario relevant by imagining tourism (something coastal towns rely on) drastically increasing in the town. It builds specific empirical data (detailed in the discussion of the scenario) to imagine participants in a future disruption context to determine where opportunities for participation may or may not occur as well as building on the empirical findings of how volatile food circuits of care are, to imagine how food circuits of care may be impacted. As such, the scenarios reflect on empirical findings to create plausible situations that will enable analysis to understand how circuits of care can be made more robust.

A key element in the design of the scenarios was place. The consideration of place has played a significant role in the delivery, results and analysis of my research project. My participants have expressed the importance of living in a seaside town in their identities (highlighted in Chapter 4) as well as their experiences of food insecurity. Therefore, it was important for this aspect of the research to be reflected in the imagined disruptions. Inspired by Marsden *et al.*'s (2022) work, my scenarios are diverse in their disruptions, they include personal, local and more widespread disruptions as well as considering whether disruptions are expected or unexpected.

The scenarios have also been carefully designed to reflect the complexities of young people's lives explored throughout the thesis, including the different temporalities, spaces and social constructions that affect young people's experiences of circuits of care. Each scenario explores at least one social construction of childhood to consider how this impacts my participants' potential responses to the disruption and their capacity to participate in projects or opportunities for change in the aftermath of the disruption. Whilst each scenario explores one or more ways in which young people are socially constructed, the subsequent discussions of the scenarios analyse how different social constructions may enable or detract from young people's participation and/or

effective circuits of care in that situation. The scenarios have not been designed as an exhaustive list of potential disruptions or social constructions, rather, they provide a variety and range of material, which, combined with my empirical data, has enabled analysis and the development of a manifesto grounded in current and possible lived experience.

Table 5 breaks down the considerations made within the making of each scenario and demonstrates what each scenario aims to explore. The social constructions in Table 4 also include those introduced in the analysis of the scenarios. The scenarios developed for this chapter are as follows: Tourism, Flooding, Eviction and National Food Shortages.

Table 6: Contents of Imagined Scenarios of Disruption

	Scale (Personal, Local, National)	Expected? (Yes/No)	Social Constructions explored within the scenario
Scenario 1: Tourism	Local	Yes	Young people as passive/non-citizens. Young people as disruptive.
Scenario 2: Flooding	Local	No	Young people as victims. Young people are courageous and capable but also need help (lens of precarity).
Scenario 3: Eviction	Personal	No	Young people as passive victims. Young people as future adults.

			Young people are social participants.
Scenario 4: National Food Shortages	National	No	Young people are embedded in education. Young people are social participants and decision makers. Young individuals are elevated as heroes.

During the development of my ‘imagined disruption scenarios’ approach, I reflected on what it meant for a disruption to be expected or unexpected. I initially categorised the scenarios as planned or unexpected, but I recognised that in all scenarios there is an aspect of planning, for example, I introduce local flooding as one imagined scenario: this disruption was unexpected, but coastal towns plan and design sea defences and are required to have flood response plans. Similarly, when labelling the scenarios as expected and unexpected, it was necessary to consider who the disruption might be expected by. In the tourism scenario, an increase in tourism is normally expected, but I considered that perhaps the extent of the impacts of this tourism might not be; and that perhaps some people may be less informed than others (through a passive citizen social construction, young people tend to be less informed than adults) and therefore their expectations of potential disruptions differ. This is evaluated further in the discussion of these scenarios.

In their Disruption Project, Marsden *et al.* included an ‘everyday survey’ as a baseline of ‘disruption-free’ travel for comparison to the disruptive events that their participants encountered. I considered writing an everyday ‘disruption-free’ scenario to have as my own baseline. However, in thinking through what this might entail, it became clear, particularly through my understanding of young people’s tactics, that a disruption-free food circuit of care does not exist for my participants. I have learnt that there are always

personal disruptions or external influences that impact young people's experiences of food circuits of care. The scenarios build on this understanding of young people's everyday disruptions and barriers to participation to develop the narratives of the disruption scenarios (Marsden *et al.*, 2020) and consider how more robust circuits of care could include young people's participation.

Equally, when categorising the scenarios in relation to scale, I recognise that the 'personal', 'local' and 'national' scales are not mutually exclusive. It was important to include scales in the considerations of the scenarios, as Marsden *et al.* (2020) used different disruptive events to evaluate the opportunities for change at different scales. Whilst these scales have guided discussion on how food circuits of care operate and can be more resilient, my analysis also acknowledges and values the fact that at local scales, individual experiences can be very distinctive. The scenarios also provide opportunities to explore how national disruptions can shape personal disruptions and subsequent food circuits of care. Not all scales of disruption are always connected and so the scenarios provide different entry points to explore the relationships between disruptions, alongside the impacts on an individual level.

I have intentionally made the scenarios distinctive to enable an in-depth exploration of the diverse young people's lives and their circuits of care. Each scenario is embedded within, and used to explore, what would happen in the narratives of the young people that have participated in this project. The knowledge gathered through the empirical research enables me to imagine and work through some of the potential impacts of each disruption scenario on the specifically situated individuals. These scenarios then provide a new kind of data that has been used to inform the final manifesto.

Imagined Scenarios

As indicated in Table 6, the scenarios occur at different scales. The first scenario, exploring the outcomes of increased tourism, focusses on disruption on a local scale with a prolonged timeline.

Scenario one: Tourism Increases in the Local Area (Local and expected)

The development of a new theme park is announced in the local area. There are council meetings held for the community to discuss the changes to the local area. However, young people are not invited to these sessions so do not get the chance to express their opinions or concerns about the development. Young people are excited about the theme park but are disappointed that it is being built on one of their favourite spaces to hang out with friends on the coast.

Construction causes disruption to normal transport routes. This means that young people's buses frequently arrive to school late, giving my participants no time to go to the shop before school meaning people like Michelle can't employ their tactics of buying items from the corner shop.

As the tourist attraction opens, the local area increases in value, homes and properties become more desirable which results in increased rental prices and residents finding themselves being outpriced. Similarly, existing restaurants and food outlets increase their prices, and new restaurants open with the new influx of tourists. This is good for participants like Emma, whose family own a sandwich shop. The sandwich shop was previously struggling, and her family were having to choose between heating and eating, as well as pulling Emma from school so that she could work in the shop for free instead of hiring staff. However, as food within the local area becomes more expensive, my participants' families, some of whom relied on cheap takeaways, find themselves outpriced due to the new upmarket restaurants and increased prices in existing outlets.

Travel becomes increasingly more congested with public transport focussing on routes to the tourist attraction. With busy and less frequent buses, families find travelling to the supermarket more difficult, meaning their access to lower priced foods in the big supermarkets becomes limited.

Residents also feel that social relations have deteriorated between residents and tourists. This can result in anti-social behaviour. When the new theme park is broken

into and a building is damaged, Tom and some of his friends find themselves being blamed for vandalism. He feels this is an unfair judgement because of his background.

Discussion

This scenario draws on findings from the empirical data from the understanding of tactics (outlined in Chapter 5), in which Michelle, a member of the core group of participants, relied on tactics of stockpiling and trading sweets for food at school. It also builds on data gathered from the innovation interviews (discussed in further detail below) and incorporates elements of participants' home lives, gathered from fieldnotes and observations to imagine them in this near-future scenario.

The tourism scenario highlights the importance of place; this thesis has discussed the impacts of being in a deprived coastal town on my participants including the increased risk of digital poverty. Additionally, the analysis has highlighted that the lack of investment in the area leading to high levels of poverty can create a strong sense of community amongst peers. In 2022, the National Institute for Health and Care Research invested £50 million in 10 local authorities including some coastal towns (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2023). This scenario imagines that this project's research area receives such an influx of income through the development of a new theme park and assesses the potential resulting changes to my participants' food circuits of care.

In this scenario young people are not included or invited to community discussions and information sessions on the development on the new theme park. This builds on young people's feelings from the external event that left young people feeling neglected before the development of Youth Health Matters and to highlight that in this scenario, young people are viewed by the council and theme park engagement team as passive citizens rather than social participants or decision makers within the community.

When considering how this should be reflected in my review of how young people participate in robust food circuits of care, I argue that young people should be viewed as active and capable citizens. In this scenario, if young people had been involved in this initial discussion, they may have been able to query how their travel might be impacted

and offer solutions. The disruptions also highlight that young people are a very mobile group, especially in relation to their access to food – as such, effective and robust circuits of care should incorporate flexible and reliable methods of transport for young people. In thinking about the empirical findings about young people’s transport, it reminds me of the conversations I had with Charlie who discussed her family’s concerns over being able to pay for all her siblings’ bus tickets. Mobility is a defining aspect of the young people’s childhoods (Casadó *et al.*, 2020) and travel has been a common barrier to young people’s food circuits of care within this thesis.

This disruption scenario highlights the importance of young people being viewed as a diverse group; their access to transport and mobility in relation to their food circuits of care varies according to their situation, location and financial circumstance. The increased prices of living in the area in this scenario means that some of my participants may find themselves being unable to afford transport to schools, shops or the community centre. Their travel choices also may be more restricted than their wealthier peers. The scenario echoes Casadó *et al.*’s (2020) argument that young people’s “rich and complex voice” should be included and given agency in the context of travel choice.

The scenario also reflects a social construction that my participants observed and discussed in interview. As part of the innovation interviews within my empirical research, my participants decided to ask each other what they would change about how young people are treated.

My participants replied:

“Look at the people that are doing the incident and like CCTV and stuff like that.”

“We’re not all the same people.”

“Just because you're in that group doesn't mean they're a part of it.”

(Participants in innovation interview, March 2023)

In both the imagined and experienced scenarios, being viewed as a criminal or un-trusted individual reduces the individual’s capacity to participate within the community

and makes them feel excluded. In relation to food circuits of care this could reduce access to food by making individuals feel unwelcome or even being actively excluded. The comments from the empirical data informed my scenario development and highlight the emphasis from Raby and Sheppard that young people should not be viewed on a single axis. My participants' comment that they are not all the same people highlights this as a common struggle they experience. This insight informed the element within this scenario of young people being blamed for vandalism. Similarly, it is important to recognise that while some social constructions view all young people as the same, other social constructions, particularly those that view young people as delinquents or criminal, segregate young people. As Raby and Sheppard (2021) argue, social constructions can be racialised and gendered. Through these empirical and imagined scenarios I demonstrate that for my participants, social constructions are biased depending on their class. The construction of 'the poor other' (Lawson and with Middle Class Poverty Politics Research Group, 2012) leads to young people being categorised as vandals and treated with less respect and/or innocence than their more wealthy counterparts.

This construction also links to previous discussions within this chapter regarding 'care for and about' in circuits of care, in which Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, (2021) discussed the relationship between volunteers and recipients at the food bank. Surman, Kelemen and Rumens (2021) argue that "compassion is not a homogeneous or static experience but is dynamic and contextually contingent on shifting understandings of the self in relation to the other" and I argue that in the case of this scenario and the food circuits experienced by my participants, the care and capacity to participate can be reduced depending on their financial circumstance and how they are subsequently constructed (as criminals or innocent) by bodies of power.

Scenario Two: Flooding (Local and Unexpected)

The area experiences a storm surge and large sea waves breach the flood defences along the coast. The waves within the surge are incredibly powerful and dangerous and warnings are issued to evacuate from public spaces along the promenade. Houses and

estates near the sea front are subject to flooding and the foundations of those closest to the sea edge are damaged.

Some young people's homes are flooded, and they are forced to relocate with their families to emergency housing or to stay with friends/family. Young people discuss how scary it was to see their houses flooded and share that their parents are worried about money. Their families now must pay for new furniture, some have their leases cancelled on tenancies and are left looking for new homes. This creates a lot of stress for the young people within the area. Relocation means that some young people have incredibly long journeys to and from school which leads to exhaustion as well as losing the social aspect of their previous surroundings.

The community centre was also damaged during the floods and is forced to close for 1-month for repairs. The community centre is vital to young people's access to food, and this means that they can no longer access free evening meals every weekday. This also impacts young people's support network as they have no space to meet with their friends from the community centre. The community centre tries to combat this by finding a different venue in which they can host sessions once a week while they wait for the repairs to the building. The community centre also begins hosting online youth sessions – something that they developed the infrastructure for during COVID-19. This provides consistent contact for some of the young people who have displaced from their friends, but the centre ensures it runs at least one-in person session a week for those without access to technology or the internet. Alongside its weekly in-person session, the community centre sends pizza to the young people that attend their online Friday group. The staff at the centre understand that many of the young people relied on their food service each day so want to do as much as they can to continue to provide their young people with food.

Some of the sessions focus on support for those affected by the flood and the young people decide they would like to be involved in flood resilience schemes (the council has begun planning for better flood defences and hosted community conversations, but young people have not been invited to these). The young people decide that they would like to become 'flood friends' and offer peer support to other young people affected by

the floods in their schools, aided by the community centre and their training. The youth workers and mental health practitioner at the community centre develop a training scheme for 'flood friends'.

Discussion

This scenario is largely informed by the empirical data gathered from the community centre's closure detailed in Chapter 4, it also builds on observations from the centre's closure in 2022 and how members were impacted by the closure alongside interview data from the managing director about how the centre was impacted and adapted to COVID-19 disruptions. This scenario uses these empirical understandings to then build upon Mort *et al.*'s (2018) work in which young people were repositioned as actors following local flooding events. As a result of their work with young people, Mort *et al.* determined that "children recognise the risk of future flooding often more readily than adults, which prompts them to think about adaptation and the need for a 'new normal'" (2018, p. 30). They emphasised the need to respect and create opportunities for young people's agency, rather than be considered victims. This scenario channels the construction that young people are capable and agentic but sometimes need help in achieving their aims (Raby and Sheppard, 2021). In this case, whilst the young people had experienced a traumatic event, they needed the community centre to provide a platform from which they could work to support one another and demonstrate their own resilience.

The imagined scenario goes further than Mort's work as it reflects on the importance of moving away from the view of young people as a homogenous group. Mort *et al.* (2018) viewed 'flood-affected children' as one group, whereas this scenario uses my knowledge of the uneven need and application of young people's vital tactics to understand and respond to the fact that the floods would disproportionately impact some of my participants. It recognises that with the community centre closure, some of the young people would not receive their daily free evening meal, and people like Michelle would not be able to employ her tactic of stockpiling food from the community centre. In the imagined scenario, I consider these differences in familial circumstance that have been

highlighted in empirical data throughout the thesis. In empirical observations, young people discussed how their families were worried about money at Christmastime with increased costs, or worried about being able to afford food. Therefore, it is easy to imagine how some families who are already facing financial difficulty would be negatively impacted by an environmental disruption like a flood.

Another crucial aspect for discussion within this scenario is that it demonstrates how the community centre has learnt from the previous disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. A demonstration of Marsden *et al.*'s (2020) argument that disruption offers opportunity for change and development and that this resulting adaptation makes for more resilient and flexible transport. In this case, the community centre demonstrated an effective and more robust circuit of care as it was able to use its learned adaptations to overcome some of the flood-related obstacles and continue to provide young people with food and support despite its closure. It also demonstrates the vitality of the community centre due to this resilience and because of its relationships with young people.

The development of 'flood friends' and viewing young people not as victims but as actors capable of providing peer support is something that could be continued as an adaptation into every-day food circuits of care. The 'flood friends' network also refers to my participant's reflection on the value they place on their location in a coastal town when forming friendships and that the shared experience of this creates stronger bonds. This positive experience created out of a disruption demonstrates young people as agentic and capable of building their own support network. The strength of bonds between young people and the respect shown by workers within the community centre has been highlighted as an aspect that forms more empowering food circuits of care with a demonstration of care for and about its recipients. These aspects should be carried forward as a lesson to develop more robust circuits of care.

Scenario Three: Eviction (A Personal Disruption)

One of the participants and his family is evicted from their rented house. The council provide them with temporary accommodation – an old hotel used by the council for emergency housing. In the hotel there is only a kettle in the rooms that the family are in. This means that the young person has no cooking facilities, the family can only have takeaways or ‘instant’ food that requires boiling water poured on it (like pot noodles). The family are offered food bank parcels by the council. The food bank is aware that they have no cooking facilities, so the parcel is limited to ambient food like tins of fruit, some bread and jam, and instant noodles (or equivalent). None of these have much nutritional value and this means that the young person regularly goes to school hungry.

The temporary accommodation is further away from the community centre than their previous house and so the young person must get a bus back to the hotel from the centre. The community centre offers to pay for this transport so that the young person can continue to attend the sessions – they also send the young person home with additional sandwiches and snacks to share with his siblings.

Eventually, the young person and his family are relocated to a council property that is out of area. The community centre is over 1 hour away from their new flat on the bus and the family decide that it is not safe for the young person to be travelling such a distance every evening. This results in the young person losing out on some of their access to food within his circuit of care as well as his peer support network.

Discussion

This scenario builds on understandings gathered from literature and empirical data. England is experiencing a housing emergency with child homelessness on the rise. The number of children living in temporary accommodation has risen to 151,630 which is a 15% increase from 2023 and 8,860 families are living in emergency accommodation such as hostels (Shelter England, 2024). This imagined scenario was designed to reflect this existing political context and is not an exceptional occurrence. The consideration of

travel within the scenario builds on discussions from the comic-strip interviews in which young people demonstrated an awareness of how expensive and limiting bus travel is. Furthermore, the scenario is informed by empirical data gathered from my observations of food club and subsequent knowledge of food bank parcels and their accessibility.

By building on these observations, this scenario works differently to the others to highlight the individual's situation in a way that the other scenarios (as national or local disruptions) within this chapter do not have the capacity to achieve. The scenario highlights that even though young people have shared experiences, they are not always experienced the same way (this has been a common thread throughout the thesis' analysis of empirical data). It speaks to the vulnerability of personal circuits and reiterates that family units can have significant impacts on how individual circuits of care are experienced and the need for vital tactics.

The scenario uses the understanding of personal circumstance and nuance collected from the extensive empirical data to consider the compounding complexities of an individual situation to their contemporary and future food circuits of care. Young people under threat of or experiencing eviction often have negative physical and mental health outcomes, but the extent of these can depend on gender, age and ethnicity (Vásquez-Vera *et al.*, 2017). This highlights the previous discussion within this thesis regarding the inequalities in food vital mobilities, in which fragility of food circuits of care (in this case caused by the eviction) can have compounding negative effects and unfairly impact future life chances. In this scenario, the young person might miss some school or be unable to concentrate in school, resulting in poorer educational outcomes than their peers. Throughout the research project, the community centre has been reported as a space where participants have learnt essential cooking skills and developed an important peer support network. In this scenario, the young people lose access to this as well, which would drastically impact their food circuits of care.

Families tend to protect their children from the distress of food poverty and parents 'manage' this at household levels by eating less so that their children can be protected from the emotional and physical ramifications (Knight, O'Connell and Brannen, 2018). This indicates a social construction of young people as being vulnerable and needing

protecting. It also relates to the concepts of responsibility in relation to food insecurity. Parents can feel responsible and ashamed of their situation and wish to hide it from their children. However, Fram *et al.*, (2011) argue that young people can often be more aware of their household's situation and take responsibility for family food insecurity. The eviction scenario demonstrates the young person 'losing their innocence' as a young person. In conversation with my participants during my empirical research, one participant remarked on how they "wish[ed] they could go back to being a kid". The participant was only 15 at the time and this demonstrates the feeling of losing innocence of childhood and the dynamics created as a young person experiencing food insecurity. Understanding this in correlation with the complexities of young people's individual experiences, I recognise that some young people will 'feel like a kid' for longer than those who experience negative life events (Fram *et al.*, 2011).

In this scenario, the young person appears a passive victim, to whom things are happening. However, an example of the young person taking an active role within the situation could include the young person taking up a part time job to support his family. Many of my participants have worked part time jobs to support their families or to gain extra funds for themselves. In this scenario, the young person taking on a part time position would demonstrate the young person's reflexivity and adaptability to the situation – skills that have been witnessed in the observations of young people's tactics. One of the social constructions of childhood introduced by Raby and Sheppard (2021) is that a politically or socially active young person can be idolised as a hero. Examples of these individual heroes include Greta Thunberg who is an activist against climate change, Malala Yousafzai who has advocated for access to education, and Emma Gonzalez who has been vocal about the dangers of gun violence (Raby and Sheppard, 2021).

Through this analysis of the eviction scenario, I argue that not only are the experiences and stability of food circuits of care different for individuals according to markers such as class, family stability, financial circumstance, age and gender. Young people are also constructed differently according to the category they fall into. For example, in the tourism scenario, Tom remarked on how he had been treated as a criminal. In this scenario, the young person would not be considered an individual hero or classed as

losing their innocence for getting a job to support their family. This is a commonplace decision many of his peers might have to make (of all of the participants within this study, all of those aged 16 or above had a part-time job, two younger participants also had informal jobs in family businesses).

Whilst it is important to recognise and value the diversity amongst young people as a collective group, it is important to acknowledge that some young people are constructed differently by adults, policies, media and organisations according to their background. As such, it is valuable to reflect on how the circuits of care within this scenario could adapt to the individual's change in circumstance instead of requiring adaptation from the individual. In the scenario, the community centre adapts to provide the young person with support for their transport – this enables them to access key food, services and support. This imagined adaptation was informed by the observations made in Chapter 4, where the community centre demonstrated resilience and flexibility in the face of disruption – something that made its circuits of care more resilient than more rigid circuits. For a more robust circuit, there could be communication and referral schemes between similar community centres to encourage more connected and stable support in cases such as these. Another example of a robust circuit would be additional emotional and food support from the young person's school as a result of communication from the food bank. These are examples of wrap-around services that allow circuits of care to be more malleable and caring in their response to the volatility of young peoples' lives.

Scenario Four: National Food Shortages (National and unexpected)

There is a bad harvest across the UK which has compounded the effects of Brexit on UK farmers (reduced availability of workers, less subsidies, increased oil prices, and more red tape around imports and exports). The government initially tries to reassure the public that there will be no food shortages and that they are making new deals with other countries for increased imports; however, the media contradict these warnings and the public panic-buy food from the supermarkets, exacerbating the severity of the shortage.

Participants with more wealthy backgrounds can purchase food to stockpile. Less wealthy participants are left with reduced amounts of food. The increasing oil prices raise prices of gas and petrol, and families find themselves not being able to afford to heat their homes or fuel their cars to get to supermarkets. Michelle's family, who already were struggling, now heavily rely on the community centre for their children's free meals – Michelle's siblings start attending the youth sessions. The community centre's food club also becomes more popular, with young people's parents asking to become members. The community centre is unable to keep up with this additional need and must increase prices to be able to maintain the service as their food supplies became more expensive. This outprices some families and they are forced to turn some people away. This is incredibly distressing for the staff.

Food bank use increases drastically with more families in crisis. The government issues financial support to food banks to keep up with this additional demand and adds more funds to its (increasingly more vital) Free School Meal scheme. The media suggest that the government should be doing more to support vulnerable young people.

Pippa, a young person who had been in foster care and recently moved into a group assisted living for young people, began work part-time but finds herself struggling to cope with managing her bills and paying for food. She is one of the new members to the community centre food club and the youth team sometimes give her extra food they have from the youth group. They also support her in managing her finances and paperwork.

With a changing climate, young people are worried that things like this will keep happening. What can they do to make it better? What will the government do?

National Food Shortages 2.0

The poor harvest combined with discussions around oil consumption reignites youth strikes for climate across the UK. Young people express concern about how they will be able to afford food in the future and the impacts of pollution from local companies on their food security. Young people across the country organise strikes and local young

people have a WhatsApp group to coordinate a weekly local school strike for climate in protest of national policy and specifically target local fracking companies. The media criticises young protestors for causing disruption to traffic and commuters. The community centre hosts a sign making session.

Discussion

This final scenario provides a large-scale example of disruption. It is labelled as a national disruption and was developed to provide a breadth of disruptions that my participants may encounter. The scenario was informed by national observations of the public response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as empirical observations from the community centre's food club and staff's interview data about their guilt when food club is cancelled (discussed in Chapter 4). The scenario also builds on comic-strip interview data with core participant Pippa, to imagine how she would experience this disruption, based on the information she shared within the research project.

It is important to recognise that although this imagined disruption is experienced nationally, there are international and local dynamics at play. These aspects demonstrate the complexities of food circuits of care and the wide range of factors that can impact how my participants access food. In this scenario, the international political relations directly impact my participants' ability to heat their homes or fuel their cars due to the rising oil prices. Similarly, the national policies including the Free School Meal (FSM) scheme may mean that some of my participants who had not previously qualified for FSMs now are able to eat at school with their friends. However, the national shortage in food might also impact the quality and quantity of food available for FSMs.

The two different versions of young people's reactions to the scenario highlight the differences in actions when young people are constructed differently and feel able to participate and express their views. In the first example of the scenario, young people are viewed as victims; as a result, adults express sympathy to young people being affected by food insecurity and feel the need to introduce further protective policies. However, in the second version of this scenario, in which young people take their

concerns into their own hands and decide to protest, they are viewed as disruptors. This correlates with Raby and Sheppard's observation that when young people are viewed as vulnerable, they are offered sympathy and support but when they present "as complex political subjects, activists and decision makers, they are no longer seen as being children and are often redefined as criminals" (p.2).

In relation to the school strikes for climate, there has been a general critique that young people should not protest and take time away from school, as young people are viewed as being embedded in education. Although Biswas and Mattheis, (2022) argue that the strikes can offer a dynamic alternative to learning with young people learning from each other and educating adults. The view that young people should be in education becomes hypocritical when considering Pippa's situation in this imagined scenario during which she has to take on a part-time job and reduce her hours going to college. This demonstrates another example of how social constructions of childhood differ dependent on the context of young people's lives and backgrounds.

Both the flooding scenario and eviction scenarios within this chapter hold similarities to the second version of this poor harvest scenario. In each, young people use their own initiatives to become agentic participants instead of victims. This is something important to reflect on when considering the futures of food circuits of care. The poor harvest scenario envisages the potential future effects of climate change and highlights the vulnerability of already fragile food circuits of care to further complexities and disruptions. Throughout the empirical research within this thesis, young people shared their concerns about how they were worried that they would be food insecure for the rest of their lives.

At a community conversation between young people and the local council, when thinking about the cost-of-living crisis, the adults reflected on the fact that young people were struggling just as much as adults. Young people were worried about not having enough to eat alongside worrying that this is what their whole lives will be like.

(Ethnographic field notes excerpt, January 2023)

This concern over young people's futures is found across the globe in relation to the effects of climate change, causing a shared state of existential anxiety (Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020). However, in these imagined scenarios that build on contemporary school strikes for climate, young people exhibit their own capacity to become active citizens with political opinions. Another key observation from these scenarios: the strikes for climate, the creation of the 'flood friends' peer support group and in the individual adaptation within the eviction scenario demonstrate the value of socially constructing young people as individuals that can educate instead of being embedded within education.

In interview with a local primary school teacher, Jessica, we discussed how learning can begin with young people, and the things that they learn can be passed on to family members. This highlights that young people's participation can be actualised in different ways, such as subtle acts of agency like sharing information with a family member. Jessica also emphasised the importance of valuing how young people think differently to adults and that this is a strength to the wider community and family network. She talks specifically about her growing project with young people:

"They (young people) are so inspiring and if they can take a little bit of that into their home, they might plant something that is completely new or different and an adult thinks, "Ohh that will never grow." You know, whatever, and it does. And children will try things out because they've not worried about all the practical concerns that an adult might be. And there are all these new realms of possibility then whereas an adult might not even start because they'll have too many practical concerns."

(Interview with Jessica, primary school teacher, March 2023)

In Chapter 1, I discussed how the school strikes for climate had been a fundamental pillar the development of this thesis and critiqued the view of Greta Thunberg as the champion of youth strikes for climate as she comes from a privileged background in a high-income country. Her strikes for climate would not have the same repercussions on

her education versus some of her peers and in comparison, to young people in less developed countries where the right to young girls' education is disputed.

Through these imagined scenarios, I have emphasised that disruption can have severe impacts on the stability of circuits of care. But these impacts can be felt differently by young people as a diverse group and tend to be even more devastating to young people that are already employing vital tactics. This differentiation between young people can be demonstrated using the strikes for climate example. In this imagined scenario, it is possible to imagine that Emma, who used to have to skip school to help in her family's sandwich shop, would be hesitant to participate in the school strikes after having already missed out on her education. This demonstrates the proposition that more privileged young people have more stable food circuits of care (and in this case, education opportunities) meaning they have more opportunities to participate and engage in political actions such as these without fear of consequence. A robust circuit of care should take this into account and accommodate these differences to enable equal opportunity for participation.

Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care

The creation of the manifesto is based on the learnings from the thesis as a whole and using these observations and understandings, translates this into a manifesto that will ensure that young people's participation can be enabled and embedded in different food circuits of care during different times of disruption. Therefore, the key theme of the manifesto is for it to be robust, resilient and reflexive.

The manifesto builds on analysis from the scenarios within the chapter but also on the key themes and observations discussed in each of the thesis' empirical chapters. For example, Chapter 4's discussion of the value of the community centre, particularly in the face of disruption highlighted the importance of reflexivity and adaptation. The data gathered from the interviews with staff and from observations highlighted that the centre's success lies in a caring attitude that helped reduce the stigma of food insecurity.

Chapter 5 highlighted the volatility of young people's individual lives and the diversity of experiences based on individual circumstance. This chapter's analysis of Youth Health Matters as an outcome of the thesis demonstrated the value of young people sharing their lived experiences, both to the depth of the project's empirical research as well as to the opportunities that sharing lived experiences creates for young people's empowerment. The shared lived experiences and shared sense of place also highlighted the importance of how young people bond over shared experiences and feel power together. The case studies created and presented in Youth Health Matters placed an emphasis on the impact of individual circumstance to how young people experience mental health in school and encourage stakeholders to consider these case studies in their own work. Through a series of imagined scenarios, this chapter has built on this understanding of individual circumstance and volatility with a look to the future and bringing forward the research beginnings' inspirations from the youth strikes for climate to consider how participants would be impacted in future climate related and other disruptions outside of their already volatile lives. Through this, I can make observations for how circuits of care can be made robust, resilient and reflexive to support and empower young people in the face of a changing and unpredictable world. The observations made through the analysis of all of the data and imagined scenarios have fed into the development and production of a manifesto that reflects the thesis' focus on participation, resilience and reflexivity. The manifesto considers how the understandings gathered throughout this thesis' data can be used to provide opportunities for further participation and exploration beyond the remits of this thesis.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO

for food circuits of care.

This manifesto states how food circuits of care can be made robust, resilient and reflexive to support and empower young people in the face of a changing and unpredictable world.



Figure 14: Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care (Poster design)

Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care

1. View young people as a diverse group with complex and volatile lives.
2. Reflect and adapt to the complexities and volatilities of young people's lives. Learn from and adapt to the anticipated nuances of disruption to make resilient and effective food circuits of care.
3. Value shared experience: whilst embracing diversity, it is important to value young people's lived and shared experiences.
4. Include young people as participants and treat them as valued social communicators.
5. Value the third sector's increased responsibility and their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.
6. Eliminate vital tactics and the unequal distribution of the need for tactics.
7. Make food accessible: provide young people with easy access to nutritious and affordable choices of food.
8. Inform and be informed by young people. Value young people as educators.
9. Remove the stigma associated with being food insecure by embedding care into food circuits of care.
10. Embed caring practices into food circuits of care. Make young people feel cared for and about.

Conclusion

The visibility event, Youth Health Matters, provided an opportunity for young people participants to reframe themselves as participatory and introduce key stakeholders to issues that were important to them. Introducing imagined disruption scenarios designed with this focus on agency in relation to different social constructions of childhood in mind allowed the chapter to highlight the importance of viewing young people as social participants and active citizens. The manifesto reflects upon Raby and Sheppard's (2021) argument that young people are capable and agentic but sometimes need help in

achieving their aims by being the 'help' to redirect conversations about young people's participation in food circuits of care. By emphasising the value of viewing young people as active participants and valuing their lived experience, the manifesto is intended as a tool to encourage young people's contemporary and future participation in food systems.

Reflecting on the thesis' empirical and theoretical outcomes in Youth Health Matters, Imagined Scenarios and the creation of the Manifesto for Young People's Participation, the chapter has used imagined scenarios of disruption as method to develop a robust and resilient manifesto for young people's participation in food circuits of care. Through the imagination and analysis of near-future disruptions, the scenarios reflect on the fragilities in circuits of care identified throughout the thesis on a number of scales. By building on the depth of empirical data collected throughout this thesis, the identification of an individual disruption emphasises the thesis' deductions that there is no such thing as a disruption-free scenario because of the volatility of young people's lives. Bringing a reflection on the fragilities of circuits of care into conversation with near-future disruptions and social constructions of childhood has allowed the creation of a manifesto that encourages young people's participation and is resilient and robust to future disruptions.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Summary

Through its original participatory research design and analysis of empirical data, this thesis has worked to understand young people's lived experiences of food insecurity. By conceptualising food as a vital mobility, I have introduced circuits of care as its own key element that is integral to understanding food systems and how food insecurity is experienced. The thesis applied a dynamic participatory approach that engaged with the key elements of circuits of care. This approach enabled a reflexive methodology with a specifically designed toolkit that embedded care into its practices. The methodology led to the co-design of the Youth Health Matters event in which participants engaged with key stakeholders in the local food systems. By viewing the research project as its own circuit of care, the event created a space for young people to take control of the research and provided an opportunity for young people's empowerment within and beyond the remits of the thesis.

The study explored the volatility of young people's lives and the complex spatial, temporal and policy dynamics that impact young people's experiences of and participation within circuits of care. By working with young people to explore the personal nuance of their experiences, the thesis determined (in Chapter 5) that many circuits of care within the food system are not only unsuccessful in consistently providing young people with accessible and nutritional food but often do not provide a sense of being cared for.

This thesis has brought together interdisciplinary concepts to enable an in depth and novel analysis of young people's experiences of food insecurity and circuits of care. The detailed consideration of circuits of care combined with the key concepts of youth participation, tactics, social constructions of childhood and vital mobilities has highlighted the fragility of circuits experienced by young people. The analysis identified the tactics used by young people to adapt to the fragilities of circuits of care as well as highlighting the increased reliance on third sector organisations like the community centre to provide food where other services and policies fail. The thesis has shown that

the current 'sticking plaster approach' of policy makers does not accommodate the dynamic and relational aspects of young people's lives; this results in ineffective and fragile circuits of care, with the need for vital tactics, strain on TSOs like the community centre and young people being food insecure.

This chapter reflects on the theoretical and empirical developments made within this thesis. It brings together crucial points from the chapters within the thesis to provide a summary of the findings relating to the key concepts that have been applied. It considers how the application of each key concept (vital mobilities, circuits of care, social constructions of childhood, young people's participation and tactics) have enabled and progressed the understanding of food insecurity, food circuits of care and young people's participation and agency within food systems. The chapter then highlights the key contributions made by the thesis to the fields of mobilities, food security practice, and young people's participation. Finally, the chapter concludes the thesis by outlining future avenues of research and exploration.

Theoretical and Empirical Developments

Vital Mobilities

Sodero's (2019) concept of vital mobilities was key to the development of this thesis. In Chapter 2 I discuss that, in her work, Sodero asks "how do we move things when it really matters?" (2019, p. 109) and that she identifies vital mobilities as the "external circulations that enable internal bodily circulations necessary to life" (2020, p. 169). I explain that by using the example of blood as a vital material, Sodero follows the movements that allow blood to be transported from point A to point B (from donor to recipient). In doing so, Sodero establishes circuits of care as the processes that enable vital mobilities "that can be ramped up in case of wide-spread crisis and are also required in everyday contexts" (Sodero, 2019, p.121).

This thesis has adapted this concept to view food as a vital material to understand how young people access food. In its analysis of the lived experience of food insecurity through a vital mobilities lens, the thesis adapted vital mobilities by beginning its

analysis from a different entry point. As explained in Chapter 2, whereas Sodero focussed on the vital material rather than the experiences and movements of the recipients, I have focussed on the recipients rather than the material. Starting from this different entry point has made it possible for the thesis to highlight the complexities and inequalities in the vital mobility of food and its associated circuits of care.

In another alteration to the original consideration of vital mobilities where Sodero explored the movement of blood in instances of emergency, the thesis focussed on the mundane, everyday circuits of care to highlight the complexities and volatility of young people's lives (as described in Chapter 5). Through the participatory work with young people, it became apparent that 'undisrupted' scenarios did not really exist for them. This problematised ideas of the 'everyday' as distinctive from the 'disrupted' or 'emergency' situation. This insight underpins the development and analysis of 'disruption scenarios' in Chapter 6, which explore different types of intersecting disruption (individual, local, national, global) through the participants' perspectives. In relation to vital mobilities, this analysis highlighted that vital mobilities of food are more complicated and prone to inequality than its blood counterpart. As such, the thesis developed the concept of vital mobilities to consider circuits of care as more of an essential element than previously explored by Sodero within vital mobilities. This built on Chapter 2's identification and definition of circuits of care in a new and developed conceptualisation that allowed the systems and processes in food vital mobilities to be evaluated, emphasising the importance of care for and about the recipients of the vital material.

Circuits of Care

Thinking about individual circumstance within the context of access to vital materials led to the expansion and deeper consideration of the meaning and application of the term circuits of care. Where Sodero (2019) introduced circuits of care to explain vital mobilities, I extended the concept to explore circuits of care as an independent concept (in Chapter 2).

Drawing on literature about care, both in and outside of a food insecurity context (De La Bellacasa, 2012; Clayton, Donovan and Merchant, 2015; Dorow and Mandizadza, 2018; Surman, Kelemen and Rumens, 2021), I emphasised the importance of the word ‘care’ in the definition of circuit of care and identified key elements to a successful circuit of care that go beyond Sodero’s (2019) initial definition of transporting the vital material from point A to B. The thesis argued that an effective circuit of care should be empowering, routine and reliable, sustainable, ethical, and make the recipient feel cared for or cared about. By using my more intensive ‘circuits of care’ lens I reviewed the movements of food as a vital material, not only within the context of vital mobilities and disruption (as originally introduced by Sodero) but considering if recipients feel cared for and/or empowered within the systems they encounter. For Sodero, an unsuccessful circuit of care would mean that the vital material does not reach the recipient. I extended this to argue that a circuit would also be unsatisfactory if it did not achieve care and empowerment.

The thesis expanded on this new and developed conceptualisation of circuits of care by viewing the methodology as its own circuit of care. This meant that the methodology included the key elements of circuits of care (to be empowering to the participants, offer opportunities for sustainable change, and making sure that participants were cared for and about). This engagement with circuits of care in its methodology is considered within this chapter in the thesis’ contributions to food insecurity practice.

Youth Participation

Young people’s participation has been a key theme within this thesis. A critique of the UNCRC’s Article 12 that states that children should be given “the right to express [their] views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UNCRC, 1989, p.5) shaped the development and design of the project.

By critiquing previous policy and scholarship on young people’s participation (in Chapter 3), I identify young people as a diverse group who have experienced different capacities

to participate. Therefore, the thesis has focussed on valuing young peoples situated and experiential knowledge, to develop an understanding of what it means to participate meaningfully. This understanding was applied to the methodology in Chapter 3 (alongside the engagement with circuits of care) to result in the employment of a reflective toolkit and the co-design of the visibility event: Youth Health Matters (which was detailed and analysed in Chapter 6). These reflections on meaningful participation were applied to the design of Chapter 6's Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care.

Situated and experiential knowledge was viewed as a significant emphasis in relation to young people's participation in this project. This was built on my critique of existing research on participation in Chapter 3 that identified much of existing research focussed on including young people's views. The emphasis was put on valuing lived experience and situated knowledge was intended to combat tokenistic participation and echo Lundy's (2007) argument that children are experts at being children. For example, by valuing their situated knowledge, the thesis acquired an in-depth insight into the difficulties and complexities of accessing Free School Meals (Chapter 5) – this would have been impossible without the inclusion of young people's situated knowledge.

The age group and social demography explored within this project contributes to its participatory nature. The decision to work with young people aged 12-17 (detailed in Chapter 3) was founded upon the group's greater exposure to food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their lack of representation in food security research in comparison to younger children. By working with young people within this age range at a community centre in a coastal town, many of the participants came from a low-income background. The age group and social demography of the participants enabled the project to offer opportunities for participation to young people that are often overlooked (Parnham *et al.*, 2020), in both the research project, the resulting visibility event (YHM) and beyond the remits of the study.

By bringing together a participatory methodology with the concept of circuits of care, I embedded participation into the research design and included young people in the methodological decisions. This enabled opportunities for participation within the study

but also impacted the production of knowledge; it meant that the topic of research was altered according to my participants' interests and resulted in the event Youth Health Matters. Although this was a deviation from a singular focus on food, the thesis' methodological approach allowed new insights to be gathered that would have otherwise remained undiscovered and privileged young people's co-production of knowledge (these were detailed further in Chapter 6).

Social Constructions of Childhood and Participation

The consideration of young people's participation as a key concept has been accompanied by an evaluation of the social constructions of childhood experienced by the study's participants. I explained in Chapters 1 and 6 that social constructions of childhood tend to either define young people as non-participatory, future citizens, or as agentic. The notion of childhood being a social construct became increasingly relevant in relation to the school strikes for climate (Raby and Sheppard, 2021) through which the media constructed the young people participating in the strikes as either disruptive, naïve, or agentic. This was particularly relevant for my research as the school strikes were a key pillar in instigating the interest in the research topic.

The application of the concept of social constructions of childhood within this thesis drew upon wider mobilities literature (Milne, 2009; Murray and Overall, 2017) in which Milne (2009) uses social constructions of childhood to review how young people experience travel and the social worlds which they encounter outside of their homes and school. In a methodological context, this thesis considered (in Chapter 3) how an understanding of social constructions was essential for a meaningfully participatory methodology. For example, the 'innovation interviews' in the thesis' methodology toolkit (Chapter 3) highlighted that participants were aware of (and frustrated with) how they were constructed by adults and wider society. They said they would like to be asked "what would you change about how young people are viewed and treated" and in response expressed a need for society to acknowledge that "we're not all the same people" (Chapter 6). The identification of this as an issue had significant implications for the development of the methodology and the visibility event (Chapter 6). This

understanding of social constructions of childhood and analysis gained from the visibility event, allowed Chapter 6 to develop an understanding of how social constructions can influence young people's participation and embed this into the imagined scenarios.

The analysis of and engagement with empirical material was also shaped by this, highlighting that young people experienced and recognised being treated differently according to their ages and wanted to create an awareness of the effects of this. The remark about not all being the same emphasised the need for the thesis to consider the intragenerational differences and injustices within the group I was working with and strengthened my critique of policies and systems which view young people as a homogenous group. The consideration of how young people can be constructed differently according to their different social backgrounds contributed to my analysis of circuits of care. This reinforced my arguments in Chapters 5 and 6 that rigid circuits of care are ineffective as successful ones need to adapt to different young people's needs and that for circuits of care to be empowering and caring, they need to value young people both as diverse and as participants.

Chapter 6 further developed the thesis' considerations of childhood as a social construct. The creation and analysis of imagined scenarios allowed me to reflect upon real-life scenarios, highlighting that the care within circuits and participants' capacity for participation could be reduced depending on individual financial circumstance and how they were constructed by bodies of power. For example, its exploration of social constructions of childhood in relation to recovering from a local flood reflected on how the construction of young people as actors capable of providing peer support in the imagine disruption scenario could be carried forward into actual circuits of care. In its empirical work, the thesis identified young people as effective communicators and capable of sharing knowledge with family members. This, combined with analysis in Chapter 6 highlighted that valuing young people as educators (point 8 in the Food Manifesto) can enable food circuits of care to be more empowering and effective.

Overall, the thesis' evaluation of childhood as a social construct allowed a comprehensive understanding of meaningful participation for young people as a diverse

group; it also added depth to understanding what it means to be cared for, and thus what a circuit of care needs to achieve.

Tactics

In the analysis of young people's participation within food circuits of care, Chapter 5 employed the concept of tactics. The thesis built on De Certeau's (1984) concept of tactics and strategies to understand how young people participate in, reject and create their own agency within food systems that don't work for them. It used tactics as an analytic tool to explore young people's agency in food circuits of care. I argued that 'tactics' are methods used and developed by young people to access food through alternative avenues when formal food systems and processes are not working for them.

Chapter 5 used tactics as a way of evaluating the (in)effectiveness of food circuits of care and assessed how young people create opportunities for their own participation or empowerment. Through combining my application of vital mobilities and the concept of tactics, it defined 'vital tactics' as tactics employed by young people to eat food who otherwise would not have access to any food when going through the intended systems. Through this consideration, the tactics chapter brought together the conceptual framework to view vital mobilities, circuits of care, young people's participation and tactics all within one frame, enabling an in-depth evaluation of the gaps and young people's agency in circuits of care.

The application of tactics as method to analyse young people's experiences of and agency within circuits of care identified two key findings. Firstly, that individual circuits of care are very fragile due to the volatile nature of young people's lives and therefore, the need for tactics is largely a result of circuits not catering to young people as a diverse group with different complex and changing circumstances. Secondly, the analysis of tactics alongside the exploration of vital food mobilities through young people's perspectives highlighted that young people experience circuits of care as full of 'sticking plasters' (the current approach of policy makers to fix ineffective circuits). The identification of vital tactics highlighted that this 'sticking plaster approach' is not

currently working for the young people within this study. One reason this ‘sticking plaster’ approach does not work is that it fails to accommodate the everchanging and dynamic relations of young people’s lives. This resulted in the inclusion of point 2 in the Young People’s Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care (Chapter 6): circuits of care should reflect and adapt the complexities and volatilities of young people’s lives. They should learn from and adapt to the anticipated nuances of disruption to make resilient and effective food circuits of care.

Key Contributions

This thesis contributes to key debates in three fields through its theoretical and empirical developments: mobilities scholarship; food security practice; and young people’s participation. In the following section, I explain these contributions of the thesis, taking each of these fields in turn.

Mobilities Scholarship: Vital Mobilities and Circuits of Care

This thesis contributes to the mobilities field of scholarship through its debate on vital mobilities: firstly, by introducing and offering an in-depth investigation into food as a vital mobility; secondly, by evaluating vital mobilities through the new entry point of young people’s experiences; thirdly, through its novel conceptualisation of circuits of care. By analysing food vital mobilities through the recipients’ experiences rather than previous considerations of ‘following the thing’, the thesis identified new avenues of exploration.

The focus on food as a vital material identified several differences in the conceptualisation of blood as a vital mobility versus food. The key differences in the vital mobilities of food versus blood were: the responsibilities associated with access to the vital material; complexities of individual circumstance in how fragile circuits of care are; and the inequalities within the vital mobilities that also influence future life chances. These nuances in food vital mobilities contributed to the development of circuits of care

as its own independent concept, with a focus on the element of care that had not previously been developed by Sodero (2019).

The role of the individual played a significant role in the thesis' understanding of food vital mobilities and its conceptualisation of circuits of care. Exploring food vital mobilities through the young people's experiences of food insecurity highlighted that the individual is held responsible for their access to food much more than in blood vital mobilities. Similarly, it highlighted that the dynamic and volatile nature of individual circumstance results in drastically more fragile circuits of care in 'everyday' mobilities. Where Sodero explored how vital mobilities of blood had to be "ramped up in case of wide-spread crisis" (2019, p. 121) the exploration of food vital mobilities through young people highlighted that the everyday is full of individual emergencies and fragilities as well as in larger scales of disruption. Focussing on the individual's everyday experiences of food circuits of care (Chapter 5) allowed an in-depth analysis into how individual circumstance and the volatility of young people's lives makes circuits more complex and means that rigid policies and systems are ineffective in providing food to people and need to be more adaptable and resilient to change. This reflexivity was reflected in the effectiveness of the community centre in providing accessible food to the participants.

The thesis identified further evidence of this difference in responsibility in the language associated with the individuals accessing the vital materials; in blood mobilities, the individual is named as a "patient" or "recipient" and in food vital mobilities individuals are viewed as "consumers" or "customers". There is a stigma attached to not having access to food as well as an inequality in being able to access food as a result of limited finances and knowledge/skills. The thesis reflected on how this is not the case for blood, particularly in the UK with the NHS and free healthcare, so there is no impact on people's access to blood dependent on financial circumstance.

In Chapter 4, the thesis reflected on how food vital mobilities can negatively influence future life chances in relation to malnutrition, obesity and a high prevalence of type 2 diabetes in food insecure families across the UK. This was a stark comparison to Sodero and Rackham's (2019) reflections on how blood vital mobilities should never negatively impact future life chances. The consideration of these inequalities and the stigma

associated with being food insecure were key influences on the consideration of care with food vital mobilities and the development of circuits of care as its own key concept.

In this respect, the thesis' is novel in its consideration of what it means to care and in the development of circuits of care as a key element to the evaluation of young people's experiences of food insecurity. In dialogue with the key concepts of young people's participation and the social constructions of childhood, the thesis identified the lack of care and frustrations experienced by food insecure participants. As such, it identified the core elements of circuits of care: to be empowering, routine and reliable, sustainable, ethical, and to make the recipient feel 'cared for and about' (Chapter 2). By using my more intensive 'circuits of care' lens I reviewed the movements of food as a vital material, not only within the context of vital mobilities and disruption (as originally introduced by Sodero) but considering if recipients feel cared for and/or empowered within the systems they encounter. These key elements that I identified as essential to an effective circuit of care acted as a thread through all the empirical chapters as well as creating principles that I aspired to achieving in the study's methodology.

Where Sodero considered the mechanical movements of food, I considered the lived experience and care behind the movements of food and the (convoluted) movements of people to food. I emphasised the importance of understanding the complexities of what it means to 'care' and what 'care' means in different contexts. By delving into the nuances and intricacies of individual circuits of care the thesis highlighted the fragilities of circuits of care that resulted from the disconnect of the volatility of individual's lives and the rigidity of the food policies and systems that they interact with. The novel conceptualisation and application of circuits of care allowed an analysis of everyday and more widespread disruptions to food security. This resulted in the development of the Manifesto for Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care (Chapter 6) that sets out principals to underpin circuits of care that are robust and resilient to both individual and more extensive disruptions.

Food Insecurity Practice

The thesis contributes to food insecurity practice through its approach of engaging participatory methods with my conceptualisation of circuits of care to create opportunities for empowerment in food insecurity research. Approaches to food insecurity practice have typically focussed on analysing health inequality data to address root causes at practice and policy level (Hartline-Grafton and Hassink, 2021). Other approaches include qualitative interviews with food insecure families to understand and recommend policy changes to reduce the impacts of food insecurity on young people's physical and mental wellbeing (Knight *et al.*, 2018). By exploring the meaning of circuits of care and what it is to care, the thesis brought the principles of care into the participatory methodology and subsequent discussions of food insecurity. In Chapter 2, I argued that engaging with circuits of care can work to promote empowerment, sustainable change and embed a feeling of 'care for and about' participants through participatory methods. The research design considered how a multi-method, participatory methodology could embed a caring approach and created a space for the thesis as a whole to consider, practice and promote young people's participation within food circuits of care both within and beyond the remits of the thesis. This provided a new approach to food insecurity practice.

By reflecting on how circuits of care could be empowering, valuing lived experience, and engaging with literature on childhood and participatory research, I emphasised the importance of my methodology being caring and empowering. The direction of research was determined by what was important to the participants, giving them decision making power rather than just being part of the conversation. As a result, the Youth Health Matters (visibility) event was the consequence of a caring process in which young people were disappointed in a tokenistic event they had attended and took the opportunity to change it into a positive experience and as part of the research project. This resonated with Maynard and Stuart's argument that participatory methods should "create time and space [for people] to discover they have control and power, there are other options, and they are capable" (2018, p.102).

The thesis contributes to food insecurity practice by introducing an approach that places an emphasis on 'caring for and about' its participants, aiming for participants to feel an 'affective caring' by being listened to, but a 'material caring for' by providing opportunities for empowerment through the co-production of research. By including fostering sustainable change and power into methodological practices, I argue that this can ensure more sustainable and empowering participation both within the research process and in the practical research outcomes. I set out to develop a set of methods using a creative, multi-method participatory approach with the intention to create a whole process that works with and supports young people. The process of considering care and non-hierarchical co-production in my methods was continued throughout the discussions in empirical chapters as well and culminated in the development of the manifesto. In action, the project has had immediate effects through young people's participation within the research project and externally with their local food systems and communities. The process has created a participatory framework that could continue to shift interactions with food insecurity in the area and be replicated elsewhere.

Chapters 4 and 5 discussed the impacts of external policies and individual circumstances on young people's access to food and considered the agency that young people possess in different dimensions and food systems. The analysis of the circuits of care experienced and adapted by young people experiencing food insecurity further emphasised the need for 'care for' and 'care about' the recipients to be employed both in circuits of care but in food insecurity practice as well. The discussions of the community centre's role in food circuits of care in Chapter 4 and of young people's actions to create their own agency in Chapter 5 informed the development of the Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care in Chapter 6. Throughout these considerations of responsibility and young people's agency, the element of care has been essential to understanding young people's experiences of food insecurity and to the thesis' contributions to food security practice.

As a result, Chapter 6 brought together the key concepts of social constructions of childhood and participation within food systems to highlight how care can be embedded into food circuits of care. These reflections are also relevant for this thesis' contributions

to food security practice. Discussions of possible disruptions (in Chapter 6) brought social constructions into conversation with how young people can participate, feel care and empowered in different situations. The creation of the Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care carried the key elements of circuits of care rooted within it and acted as a continuation of the research project as its own circuit of care and the core elements outlined in Chapter 3.

In its contribution to food security practice, the manifesto brings together the discussions of embedding circuits of care into participatory methodologies with the empirical findings from the thesis. The manifesto works to ensure that care is always embedded in food vital mobilities and food (in)security practice. It is a reflection of the thesis' contributions to food insecurity practice, as its own circuit of care. By reflecting on responsibility and agency in different dimensions and planning for circuits that allow agency, the methodology reflected the key elements of a successful circuit of care highlighted in the manifesto. These included key aspects such as 'valuing young people's lived experiences', 'reflecting and adapting to the complexities of young people's lives' and 'treating young people as valued communicators' (points 1, 2 and 4 in Chapter 6's manifesto).

By committing to employing a caring and empowering participatory methodology, the thesis has worked to promote empowerment, sustainable change and embed a feeling of 'care for and about' within its methodology alongside its empirical and theoretical findings. This provides a new contribution to food insecurity practice by demonstrating that a commitment to the elements of circuits of care within a participatory methodology can create opportunities for empowerment and participation both within and outside of the methodology as well as provide novel opportunities for discussion with participants about food insecurity.

Young People's Participation in Climate Change Policies

Finally, the thesis contributes to debate on young people's participation in policies around climate change. Young people's participation has been a fundamental pillar to

the development of this research. As described in the introduction to this thesis (Chapter 1), the youth strikes for climate instigated my initial interest in young people's participation. I highlighted the inequality in participation in the youth strikes for climate, with a focus on high income children being the most prominent actors of the movement, it was necessary to consider the intragenerational inequity in opportunities for participation and to view young people as a diverse group. The empirical findings within this project identified the differences in individuals' capacity to access food and to employ tactics, this resonated with my earlier consideration of young people's capacity to participate in the youth strikes for climate (Chapter 1) Bringing these two concepts together allows the thesis to reflect on discussions around young people's capacity for participation in climate (and climate related) policy.

A second aspect in the discussion on participation in climate change policy, is the conceptualisation of the latter, often reductively viewing climate change policies as those which explicitly name themselves as such, or that are part of the intergovernmental policy-making that is high profile in relation to this challenge. As I have shown through this thesis, the impacts of climate change, and the implications of policies to mitigate against climate change, have consequences that intersect with all aspects of everyday life, and reshape the mobilities related to them. The consideration of how seemingly non-food related policies impacted the community centre's ability to provide their food services (Chapter 4) was another empirical example of the sometimes-invisible implications of policies on everyday life. In the context of this thesis, the ways that food gets to the young people in the project (or in which they get to food), can be disrupted by a whole range of climate-related shifts. Some of these were explored in Chapter 6, but might include extreme weather events in the local area; escalating food prices due to disasters elsewhere; changes in fuel costs; or the redesign of local transport provision for sustainability. In this sense, policies related to food circuits of care are inseparable from climate change impacts and policies, and bringing the situated and experiential knowledges of diverse young people's lived experiences to the table is central to young people's participation in climate change.

The imagined disruption scenarios in Chapter 6, grounded in the lived experiences explored in this project, provide a novel approach that is capable of bringing climate

change impacts and the implications of strategies to mitigate climate change into other areas of policy. The final scenario refers to a failed crop harvest and demonstrates that food insecurity and food circuits of care are fundamentally tied to climate conversations and policies. The research project has demonstrated that food insecure young people are already experiencing ineffective food circuits of care and are more likely to be negatively influenced by climatic events such as those explored in Chapter 6. This demonstrates that in a sense, all policy is climate change policy, and simultaneously offers an approach for the meaningful participation of diverse young people in its development.

In summary, young people's participation in policy related to climate change is much more complex than having a youth committee at climate policy events like the Conference of the Parties (COPs). The diversity in young people as a group and the evident volatility in their everyday lives needs to be reflected in their opportunities for meaningful participation in climate (and climate related) policies. The example of the Food Circuits of Care Manifesto in this thesis (Chapter 6) provides one example in which young people's participation and knowledge underpins a manifesto that is robust enough to deal with a variety of climate issues that might shake circuits (for example, floods, new sustainable transport systems, fluctuating oil prices) layered onto the already complex and dynamic everyday vital mobilities.

Further Opportunities for Research

The thesis highlights several further opportunities for research that would build on its insights and developments.

Firstly, to expand the investigation of food vital mobilities with the new conceptualisation of circuits of care and from the angle of the recipient rather than the material. This would be particularly interesting in a country with privatised healthcare such as the United States of America. Disparities in health outcomes and access to healthcare according to race and social class have already been identified in the USA (Dickman *et al.*, 2017). This thesis' consideration of young people's experiences of food

circuits of care has enabled the identification of fragilities in circuits of care as well as opportunities for future participation within circuits and systems. Applying this approach to an analysis of blood vital mobilities in America holds the potential to identify fragilities in blood circuits of care and enhance the understanding of inequalities within the healthcare system. Similarly, applying this approach to the analysis of other vital mobilities (like access to clean water or other health services) could provide an understanding of inequalities and care with their associated systems.

Secondly, in Chapter 6, I reflected on this thesis' limitations in the creation of the Young People's Manifesto for Food Circuits of Care. The manifesto was designed as a tool to encourage and (re)direct conversations around young people's participation. Therefore, future avenues of research from this thesis could include the evaluation and trial of this manifesto in empirical situations. An evaluation of this manifesto could consider the effectiveness of redirecting conversations to encourage meaningful participation in food circuits of care. Whilst it was decided that the exploration of the manifesto in the context of imagined scenarios was inappropriate within the remits of this thesis, the manifesto could be developed by gathering feedback and adapting the contents of the manifesto in partnership with young people in a more sensitive context, based on real-world examples. This would both provide opportunities to improve the manifesto and continue the participatory nature of the manifesto's principles. Reflexively adapting the manifesto according to participants' needs also embeds the thesis' practice of engaging with circuits of care in participatory methodologies.

Thirdly, as the scenarios in Chapter 6 highlight, policy changes that seemingly have nothing to do with food can become food policy. Similarly, seemingly non-climate policies can have climate implications. The manifesto created as a result of the imagined scenarios creates a space for thinking about and enabling young people's participation. Thinking further through the dimensions of climate policy in this context could be an interesting line of research. As I reflected upon in the thesis' contribution to discussions of young people's participation within climate policies, the manifesto could be employed to consider young people's participation within responses to climate related issues like flooding or the development and planning of new sustainable transport

systems. The application of the manifesto in these contexts could also support the second avenue of potential research of examining the effectiveness of the manifesto.

Fourthly, exploring young people's experiences of food insecurity outside of the UK through this thesis' methodology and approach could be a stimulating line of future research. During my time as a PhD student, I visited South Korea and presented my research to academics at Konkuk University. The academics were shocked at some of my participants' experiences of food insecurity, especially the thesis' discoveries around the complexities of UK Free School Meals because South Korea provides universal free school lunches to all students in elementary, middle and high schools (Gaddis and Jeon, 2020) – a stark contrast to the UK's universal provision ending at age 7. An exploration of food circuits of care in a country such as South Korea with different food policies and provisions could provide insights to any fragilities in their food circuits of care but also offer opportunities to learn from and contrast circuits observed in this study.

Overall, I hope my thesis will encourage researchers to embed the principles of circuits of care into the development of their research methodologies. I also hope that it will encourage researchers to further research inequalities in other vital mobilities. It is my intention that it will shape food insecurity practice by promoting young people's participation as a diverse group within discussions and decision making around food insecurity. The thesis has highlighted the relationship between climate and non-climate policies, and I hope that it will encourage an acknowledgement of (and action surrounding) how young people can be impacted and involved in seemingly non-climate related policies. For the young people who participated in the project I hope that the legacy that they started with the Youth Health Matters event which emerged through this research project grows to be more successful and empowering and that they continue to be offered and more importantly, create their own opportunities to participate in local food systems.

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Appendices

*All appendices have been redacted to exclude the name and location of the research area. The redactions are marked by square brackets. [example]

** The research methodology developed during the project and was reframed, instead of using Participatory Action Research, the project developed a creative multi-method participatory approach.

Appendix One: Ethics Review

1.1 Application Form

Summarise your research protocol in lay terms (indicative maximum length 150 words).

My research aims to analyse the lived experiences of young people (12-17) in a deprived area of [the North-west of England] in relation to food and their access to food. This research is based on a group of approaches framed as Participatory Action Research (PAR); in this application I am seeking approval for the some of the elements of the process that include human participants. The project will consist of a five-pronged approach to facilitate the articulation of young people's lived experiences of food and their needs in relation to food insecurity and climate change policies. The project intends to work with and learn from young people to understand their food experiences and to develop their skills and confidence in sharing their experiences of food in different contexts.

In this ethics application, I am applying for approval of methods 1) participant observation 2) semi-structured interviews with young people and 3) semi structured interviews with key stakeholders. Using my PAR approach, I will develop the contents of method 5) series of workshops with the young people, supported by the data gathered in methods 1, 2 and 3 and apply for approval of this in a separate addendum at a later date.

Summary of methods. This ethics application relates to numbers 1, 2, and 3.

1. participant observation of workshops, food evenings and the food club at [a local community centre];
2. semi-structured individual and group interviews with young people at the [community centre] that utilise its services;
3. semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders to gain their understandings of young people's needs and experiences of food.

4. a policy review of publicly available, existing food and climate change policies that affect young people in [the local area] As this part of the study uses publicly available written sources it is not relevant to this application.
5. One or more workshops codesigned with interested young people and key stakeholders discussing young people's visibility and participation in food and climate structures, processes, and policies. As these will be developed in stages 1-3 they are not relevant to this application, and I will submit an addendum at a later date.

I am currently a volunteer at [the Community Centre].

State the Aims and Objectives of the project in Lay persons' language.

The key aims of this research project are:

- 1) To understand the situated, everyday food experiences of vulnerable young people in [the local area] whose needs are often overlooked in the development of food and climate policy.
- 2) To facilitate the meaningful participation of young people in developing suggestions for effective food and climate change policies that are informed by their lived experiences.

I am aiming to determine how young people can be supported to have agency in policies that may affect them, both in relation food and to climate change, drawing from their lived experiences of food.

Because of the PAR design of the research, participation and inclusivity are both essential aspects to this research, as such, the community centre I have chosen to be the site of my research provides an opportunity for young people, many of whom are experiencing food insecurity, to engage with the project and provide their knowledge of their lived experiences of food. This makes the communication with and observation of these young people integral to my project.

Please explain the number of participants you intend to include in your study and explain your rationale in detail (e.g. expected availability of participant). If your study contains multiple parts (e.g. interviews, focus groups, online questionnaires) please explain the numbers for each of these.

Please make sure you leave enough safety margin in case you only manage to enrol less or need to enrol more participants, otherwise you may need to apply for an amendment later.

The community centre, its location and its members will be kept anonymised in all outputs of the thesis.

The participatory action research methods I have developed are intended to create a whole process that is working with and supporting young people. The participant observation, interviews and associated creative methods are intended to give young people the power to set the agenda regarding what they think is important and relevant for discussion in interviews and to be introduced to key stakeholders. Methods 1, 2, and 3 are all contributing to usable data in helping to understand young people's food experiences and increase their participation. They are also intended to work towards developing workshops with and for young people to develop their skills and confidence in discussing food structures and talking about their food experiences.

1. Participant observation at [the Community Centre]

I expect to include approximately 40 to 50 participants in this aspect of the study. The community centre provides food and/or supportive workshops on every evening of the week to approximately 35 young people. The actual attendees vary on each occasion, with many regular attendees. Given that I will engage in participant observation two evenings per week for six to nine months, I expect approximately 50 participants during this time with some constants and some that visit less frequently. This section of my research will enable me to learn about the young people's lived experiences of food, through participating at the centre and keeping fieldnotes.

I am currently a volunteer at the Centre. My role as a volunteer is only until I receive ethical approval, upon receiving ethical approval I will become a researcher. My change in role will be made clear to the young people via announcements by staff on multiple occasions as well as through the research poster (below).

2. Semi-structured individual and group interviews at [the Community Centre]

I intend to include approximately 15 to 20 participants in semi-structured interviews. These participants will consist of young people that attend the community centre to utilise its services, and who volunteer and consent to being interviewed. These will allow in depth understanding of the young people's food experiences outside of what can be observed, and the role of the community centre in broader food stories. The semi-structured format will also allow young people to direct the interview to topics of their choice (to some extent) allowing them to highlight things they deem to be important.

Interviews will be individual or in small groups depending on what the young people consenting to be interviewed would find most comfortable but will include similar questions and structure of interview. The option for individual or group interview will be explained to the young people and as per the PAR methodology, young people will be given the decision-making power for how they would like to discuss issues as well as directing the topic of conversation.

The interviews conducted in small groups will have to be consented to with an understanding between participants of anonymity and respect – this is something that regularly occurs at the centre, as I have witnessed in Monday's 'difficult conversations' focus groups (detailed further below) where attendees are asked by staff to create a safe space for discussion.

3. Semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders

I expect between 5 and 10 participants in this section of the study including staff at the community centre as well as local policy makers and other stakeholders. This will give me an insight into the experience from the professional side of the community centre and policy makers without deflecting from the key aspect of the research which is the young people. These interviews I expect to last approximately 30-60 minutes.

As you have indicated that you are working with a vulnerable group please describe the intended participants, and why they are needed for this research.

Methods 1) participant observation and 2) semi-structured interviews at [the Community Centre] will both involve working with a vulnerable group.

I will be working with young people aged 12-17 in [the community centre]. In my role as researcher, I aim to enable young people to explore and articulate the knowledge they have, in particular, their own lived experiences. Through this process and the methods used I aim to support young people to develop agency and create a project in which existing and proposed structures, processes and policies can be creatively explored.

Many of the young people come to the community centre to access food and mental health support. Many of the young people who attend are reported by staff to be experiencing food insecurity, mental health issues, as well as home and schooling issues and are described by staff as 'living in poverty but unaware of it'. They utilise the centre to access free food in the evenings as well as wellbeing sessions – the centre runs workshops including 'difficult conversations', homework clubs and 'youth ambassador' programmes in which the older young people can train to look after the younger ones. The wellbeing sessions are aimed at young people who may be struggling with their mental health. There has been a rise in need for these following the COVID-19

lockdowns and return to 'normal'. These young people are at a high level of vulnerability as they are children in an area of high deprivation (which society already attributes a degree of vulnerability to) and they are experiencing hunger which is both mentally and physically threatening.

These young people are essential to my research as I am aiming to determine how young people who are experiencing food insecurity can be supported to have agency in policies that may affect them both in relation food and to climate change.

Method 1) participant observation is necessary to both inform the design of an interview tool kit and workshop activities (for which I will make an ethical application later in the project), to enhance the PAR aspect of the research whilst ensuring sensitivity around topics.

Information from the observations will be used to inform 2) the design of an interview toolkit, for example, the young people enjoy drawing activities and are comfortable as a group and this has informed the inclusion of a drawing activity in my interview tool-kit and the decision to make group interviews an option. These observations will also inform questions and directions of interview; for example, discussions observed around poverty have led to a focus on exploring young people's key phrases and concepts in interview, providing a chance to contrast this with policy makers' language as well as to gain access to young people's knowledge on the topic and develop their knowledge of and involvement in food and climate structures.

In 1), data will be gathered by writing field notes and participants will be protected by anonymity, the ability to opt-out detailed further in this application, and the reliance on the expertise of existing staff. In 2) I will request to audio record the interview (issues of anonymity, confidentiality, withdrawing from the study and data protection are addressed later in the form). I will request permission to use any other interview outputs as data (also see later in the form).

I need to speak to these young people in order to gain insight into their lived experiences and situated knowledge, and to work with them to creatively develop policies that are more appropriate to the issues they face as a group that is regularly excluded from studies. This will enable me to achieve both of my key aims detailed above.

Method 3) semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders does not involve a vulnerable group. I will be interviewing stakeholders about their job roles and the associated implications with young people, food insecurity and climate change.

As you have indicated that you are working with young people (under 18 years old), please describe the intended participants, and why they are needed for this research.

Methods 1 and 2 above involve working with young people under 18 years old.

The young people I intend to work with will be aged 12-17 years old and attendees of the community centre in which I will be conducting my research. They are residents of [the local area] and all experiencing food insecurity to varying degrees. They utilise the centre's facilities for free food and for wellbeing sessions as detailed previously.

My project aims to understand and gain information on young people's lived experiences of food, with a particular focus upon young people experiencing food insecurity in an area of high deprivation. These young people are essential to my research as it focuses upon the experiences and contributions of young people who I argue to be frequently overlooked in policy and decision making.

Please indicate how this group will be recruited.

I am currently a volunteer at [the Community Centre]. In this role I have already carried out a risk assessment, and the young people at the Centre are familiar with my presence. I have discussed this intended PhD research with both the Community Leader and Youth Leader who have agreed to host my research.

Gaining informed consent:

1. Participant observation

[The Community Centre] has both paid staff and volunteers who support Centre activities, and as a community centre those involved understand that members of the community may change and shift over time. After discussions with the community and youth leaders at the centre, they have agreed to host my research and I was trained as a volunteer at the centre (including obtaining a DBS check).

Before commencing research, I will obtain informed consent from the Centre's staff including the community leader, the youth leader and the health and wellbeing officer. The consent from these three key members of staff will cover ethical and wellbeing considerations of the centre, staff and young people from their experienced perspectives and they are responsible for the implementation of safeguarding policy and procedures at the community centre. A formal informed consent document will be designed in collaboration with these three members of staff at the Centre, once I am able to present them an approved LU ethics application and can discuss that with them, in relation to their existing policies.

In this aspect of the study, consent from the young people is not needed due to the observational and anonymised nature of the study. The observations I will be collating are of activities that are 'normal' to the young people and because they will not be

partaking in any activities that I have designed, and my observations will 'not disrupt normal activity' I will be using the 'opt-out' method as detailed in Lancaster's guidance on research with children.

Should a young person wish to 'opt-out', they can make this known to a member of staff or myself during a session. In practice, since the recording of my observations will be through field notes only, if a young person opts out, I will not write any notes about specific interactions of the individual who has opted out throughout the duration of observations. If they opt-out later in the observation time, I will remove their interactions from existing field notes (to the best of my ability, given these are anonymised), so inclusion of their interactions in my study as data will be minimal.

The centre maintains a regular staff with limited turn around so there is a good continuity and stability in working relationships, however, the centre accommodates a lot of visitors and volunteers so young people are used to external visits and some activities that involve external professionals as well (see appendix 1.4) Initially I was introduced to young people by the staff in the role of a volunteer. Before my research commences, young people will be informed that I am taking on a new role as a researcher conducting observation. I will create and put up a display in the centre, with the approval of staff, that includes a poster with an image of myself, so that I am easily identifiable to young people (particularly as attendees change regularly so the information needs to endure), and details of my research and why I am interested in the opinions and experiences of the young people at the community centre. This poster will be displayed on the digital screens the community centre has on its walls. This way young people are aware of my research and if opposed to being observed can make this known to myself or members of staff and 'opt-out'.

Whilst the young people consider the community centre to be a safe space, by opting out of the research, this will not impact their experience of the centre, merely that they will not be involved in any aspects of my research. To ensure my research doesn't have a negative impact on the environment of the centre, I will rely on the existing staff and processes; staff already monitor volunteers and guests at the centre to avoid problems and maintain safeguarding levels. I will actively engage with staff, building upon the relationships already built to check that they have not noticed in changes in the young people and provide opportunity for them to voice and in turn for me to address any concerns.

The PAR approach to my research design involves engaging with young people to discuss issues of food and policy influence, in doing so I aim to contribute to this safe space by providing them with opportunities for them to grow and develop.

2. Semi-structured individual/group interviews

The young people that attend the community centre will be offered the choice of whether they would like to be interviewed after having received information on my research and the topic of interview which will be on a poster as detailed above. When it is time to start interviews I will (in correspondence with the community and youth leaders) speak to the young people as a group, on multiple visits because attendees change regularly, and invite them to volunteer to be interviewed as part of my research.

Young people can volunteer by expressing interest to me and the staff at the centre and I will ask that they write their names on a list of volunteers for interview also indicating if they would like to be interviewed individually or in a group. To ensure they do not feel pressured take part in interviews, I will ensure they are aware that interviews are optional. I will also utilise the experience and knowledge of the staff and experienced volunteers within the centre to ensure the recruitment is done sensitively e.g. they will have more knowledge about the individuals' capacity to discuss topics.

The interviews and participant observations are completely separate. Those who volunteer for interview will be given participant information sheets and consent forms that clearly detail the interview process and that interviews will be audio recorded (in comparison to field notes for observations) and consent will be obtained for this, including the clear explanation that it is possible to drop out and all data will be excluded as a result, during and up to 4 weeks after the interview.

Individuals taking part in group interviews will be informed of the protocols for group discussion, that information shared within the group is completely confidential and not to be shared with others outside of the group. This will be included on the PIS as well.

Consent for under 16s

If young people under 16 would like to be interviewed individually or in a group, they will be given a 'young person' participant information sheet and consent form, which has been developed by adapting the consent form used by the University and also given separate PIS and consent forms for their parent/ guardian to read and sign should they wish for their child to participate (see appendices 1.2 and 1.3). The community centre has their own system of acquiring consent in which they send young people home with consent forms but also have an emailing consent system. They have agreed that if I provide the centre with my own participant information sheets and consent forms according to the Lancaster University templates (documents attached) they can circulate this via email and/or paper copies to the individuals with parental responsibility e.g. parent/guardian (PR) and receive consent via email and/or paper copy for the young people who would like to participate in interviews.

I have included on the PR participant information sheets and consent forms that should parents/guardians wish to speak to me further about my research I will be available at the community centre on Mondays and Thursdays 3-6pm for further discussion and to answer any concerns.

Once consent forms are completed by PRs, I will talk to the participant about the interview and offer the opportunity for them to ask questions themselves before consenting to the interview. Only following the consent of the young person and their PR will interviews go ahead.

Group interviews will occur once the young people who have stated that they would like to be interviewed together all have provided consent from themselves and parental guardians.

Interviews may include the young people taking part in creative activities such as drawing food storyboards or 'food maps', these will be used as data in my thesis, and this is detailed in PIS and consent forms. Permission from young people will also be confirmed following their participation for me to use their drawings in any publications. If they wish for their creative outputs to not be included in my thesis, they can either take them home or they will be destroyed and not included in any data outputs.

Consent for over 16

Young people over the age of 16 can give consent for themselves in correspondence with Lancaster University's Guidance on Research with Children and Young People and [the community centre's] current standards of practice. They will use the consent forms designed for young people aged 16+ (attached) to consent for themselves.

If the young people over 16 would like to be interviewed in a group with someone under the age of 16, the interview will not take place until consent for the young person under 16 has been obtained.

3. Semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders

The key stakeholders will be recruited through contacts made at the community centre, including the community leader and youth leader. The community centre work closely with the [local groups and associations]; interviewees will be recruited via these contacts. Members of the local council with positions related to food and climate change policies will be recruited – I have previously interviewed some of the local council members at the beginning of my research development so have other existing contacts in place.

Please describe how and why they will be involved in the project.

1. Participant observation

I will attend the community centre on Mondays and Thursdays as a volunteer and researcher. My field notes will contain observations of young people's experiences of food and aims to understand the implications and contexts of how these young people live and their daily experiences. I will observe the 'difficult conversations' sessions on Mondays and whilst not my core focus, these will be used to build a context of the young people's lives and to inform how I design interviews with sensitivity. My field notes from these sessions will be my reflections of how to move forwards with my project and method 2.

Thursdays are normal sessions with the provision of food and will be less sensitive as this is the daily experience of these young people. Normal sessions involve the young people arriving at 4pm, they sit in one room at a large table and some smaller tables and chat in small groups, sometimes as a whole – there is sometimes fruit and snacks on the large table before the main meal is served. The young people have food from 5-6; the kitchen is in a room adjacent to the room they sit in, and a member of staff comes in and asks who wants food and if there is choice they are offered a choice of food. The young people then go into the kitchen one at a time to collect their food. From 6pm onwards they participate in fun activities including karaoke, foosball, colouring, and outdoor games; these activities occur in two different rooms so the young people split into smaller groups according to the activity they want to do. On Thursdays whilst normal session is on, a smaller group of the older young people have opted to attend hour-long sessions from 7-8pm of 'youth ambassador training' with the Youth Leader.

Observations will be of conversations young people have in the workshops carried out and run by the centre as well as practices and opinions observed in the food evenings when young people use the centre to access food. The youth ambassador sessions provide me with access to understanding how the community centre is already supporting and developing the agency of young people (supporting my research's aim) and determine what is useful about this aspect of the community centre's work and what has scope to be developed.

2. Semi-structured individual/ group interviews

These will be focused on gaining more in-depth understanding of the lived food experiences of the young people, including outside of the community centre. Interviews aim to understand the young people's relationships with food and gather their opinions on their food experiences, to support them to develop ideas and confidence in

discussing issues around food and climate structures and how they could be better supported and provided with food.

Young people will be offered the option of being interviewed individually or as part of a group, following their choice to take part. This is intended to provide individuals with emotional/moral support if they would like to be interviewed but are too nervous or shy to interview individually. The group interview provides the opportunity for interviewees to have a more relaxed conversation between friends in response to my questions. However, this option still allows those who are more comfortable to talk to me alone to do so.

As part of the PAR method, young people will largely lead the interviews and decide what topics they think are most important to focus on in relation to their food experiences and issues surrounding food structures, policies, and processes that they encounter. I have provided some example questions for these interviews that might be needed to prompt discussion, these demonstrate the topics of discussion I expect to have with the young people in interviews

Interviews will also include creative activities to aid discussion and add to the data gathered as part of the interviews, these may include food storyboards and 'food maps' to help think through young people's food experience and how they access food.

3. Semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders

These will investigate the roles of key stakeholders in relation to food, climate change and young people. This will include understanding their job roles and how they work with young people. Interviews will aim to understand how key stakeholder view young people according to the social constructs of children alongside understanding how key stakeholders' job roles are involved in food and climate change policies and the considerations of young people (if any) that are include in their roles. Interviews will be semi-structured and allow interviews to highlight aspects of their role they think are important.

You have selected that the research may involve personal sensitive topics that participants may not be willing to otherwise talk about. Please indicate what discomfort, inconvenience or harm could be caused to the participant and what steps you will take to mitigate or manage these situations.

1. Participant observation

The 'Difficult Conversations' session on a Monday is supported by a team of staff including a health and well-being officer, trained staff and regular visits from members of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and existing systems for

supporting the young people should they become distressed. I will rely on these systems and my notes will only focus on the research aims. On Monday sessions I will purely be observing and not engaging in conversations but will highlight any concerns I overhear to trained members of staff, in the unlikely case that other trained staff are not already present to observe concerning comments. On Thursdays I will be interacting with the young people but in a relaxed environment and having natural conversations. I will not be introducing any topics of sensitivity as these sessions are intended for me to build a rapport with the young people and develop a contextual understanding of their everyday lives and experiences of food.

2. Semi-structured individual/group interviews

This research will involve encouraging participants to discuss their experiences of food, including possible negative experiences of food and hunger. This may include some sensitive topics including (lack of) food at home and school and shame surrounding lack of food. However, another aspect I have considered in the process of this research project is that many of the young people are unaware of their position of poverty. In this case I will ensure that conversations are dealt with sensitively and with the correct wording, avoiding negative language and labels.

I will attempt to mitigate situations in which participants become upset by asking staff for advice before my interviews and using them as gatekeepers to those who are interviewed, staff will have stronger relationships and I will rely on them and the health workers to flag young people to me who may be more at risk who I will either not interview or be incredibly sensitive with if they still wish to be interviewed.

The role of the gatekeepers is to 1) oversee all adult staff and volunteers in the centre during its operation, including those who come in to deliver workshops and interact with the young people; 2) safeguard young people using the centre following all listed protocols, I will utilise these to ensure safeguarding and a safe research environment; 3) work to encourage young people's participation in the centre and their development of skills, I will utilise and build upon these to develop my project's participatory methods; 4) provide moral and social support to the young people in relation to their personal and school lives, I will rely on their knowledge to ensure young people have an emotional capacity to discuss sensitive topics.

I will also follow [the community centre's] 'good code of practice' and 'code of behaviour' when communicating with the young people (link to [the community centre's] youth page with policies detailed below). Should participants become emotional I will rely on the expertise of members of staff at the community centre as they employ a health and well-being officer and have staff with varying levels of training to support individuals. The community centre has an established safeguarding policy

with staff guidance and reporting protocol for if young people reveal that they are at risk and I will follow these protocols.

I have developed a tool kit to enable a relaxed and more fun atmosphere for the interviews and will allow group interviews as well as individual interviews depending on the participant's desires. This tool kit will include creative activities in which participants can draw their favourite food or their last meal, there will also be similar activities with whiteboards and/or 3D modelling. I will also be creating an interactive poster in which all participants, not just the ones who agree to be interviewed can engage with; it will include questions such as "how do you feel about food today?" and they will be able to put a sticker on the poster to indicate their emotions. I have created these in the hope that this will create a more relaxed environment and limit discomfort in an ethical and practical way.

I will also provide each participant with a participant information sheet prior to their involvement in interviews in which they will be warned of the potentially sensitive nature of the research.

[link to the community centre's youth page and policies was included here]

3. Semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews will be discussing the content of adults' job roles and their implications and observations relating to food and climate change policy. There will not be any sensitive content in these interviews and participants will be informed of anonymity concerns in advance of the interviews should participants wish to filter their answers (as detailed below).

You stated that the study could induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in a participant's usual, everyday life. Please describe the question(s) and situation(s) that could lead to these outcomes and explain how you will mitigate this.

Other than the discomfort discussed above regarding potential difficult conversations about food and hunger I cannot foresee the generation of other stress. I have created the tool kit to help mitigate any undue stress and will inform participants that they can take comfort breaks and stop the interview process should they decide it is too much for them and more detailed information will be included in the participant information sheet.

I am a volunteer at the community centre, a familiar face to regular attendees. I hope that this will allow participants to feel more relaxed and comfortable in my company and when engaging with me in my role as a researcher in both methods 1 and 2.

My role as a volunteer has also allowed me to gain a greater understanding of my potential participants' experiences and issues and has informed my development of methods and tool kit with a greater level of sensitivity.

You have selected that you do not know if there is a risk that the nature of the research might lead to disclosures from the participant. What kind of information might participants disclose? How will you manage that situation?

Individuals may disclose mental health issues that they are experiencing or problems that are going on in their life and I am not equipped to deal with. In this instance, I would signpost support and care that they can access either within or outside of the Centre (as appropriate). The participant information sheet clearly states that should there be a threat to their health I would have to break anonymity and either share their information with those that work at the centre or with medical professionals. I am confident (especially having sat in some sessions on mental health as a volunteer at the centre) that the centre is well equipped to provide support for the young people, and they are largely aware of the young people's existing mental health issues.

My research aims to understand and obtain the experiences and opinions of young people regarding food. Should participants become upset or disclose information unrelated to the topic and/or become upset, whilst dealing with the situation sensitively, I will defer to the members of staff and established structures within the community centre, trained and equipped to deal with such situations. This is where I would separate my two roles as volunteer and as researcher; as a volunteer I would accommodate the needs of the young person and as a researcher I would exclude information irrelevant to my study.

What are your dissemination plans? E.g. publishing in PhD thesis, publishing in academic journal, presenting in a conference (talk or poster).

I aim to publish the results of this research in my PhD thesis; conferences presentations and academic publications (journal papers, book chapters). I would anonymise all inputs from individuals who are included in the findings of my research in all dissemination (more details below).

I would also like my dissemination to include the individuals who participate in my study to enable the key aims of my research in meaningful and active participation. I aim to

disseminate young people's opinions to local experts following interviews with local experts at a later date within my project. The details of this are still to be developed as ideas may be developed as the research is carried out; as such, according to any changes in dissemination plans I will submit an update to my ethics application.

How long will you retain the research data?

In accordance with Lancaster University guidelines, the research data, such as observation field notes and interview transcriptions will be retained for a minimum of ten years after the end of the study, secure and protected on encrypted devices (and/or locked cabinets) that have been approved by the university and destroyed after this period. Participants will be made aware of this procedure via the consent form.

How long and where will you store any personal and/or sensitive data?

Field notes and interview transcripts will be stored securely. None of my data will include any personal or sensitive data according to the GDPR definitions as there is no reason to obtain any personal data to achieve my aims.

Please explain when and how you will anonymise data and delete any identifiable record?

Data will be anonymised using pseudonyms and/or by describing the participants using numbers. These will be assigned prior to any focus groups or interviews and any other identifiable data will be anonymised before data analysis. I do not plan on naming the community centre in my dissemination and will delete any identifiable data at the end of my PhD.

Anonymity of centre and volunteers:

I am aware that [the community centre] have a social media presence with a Facebook page as well as a website which may hinder the study's capacity to remain fully anonymous. However, my efforts to anonymise data aim to make it more difficult to identify the centre and particularly difficult to identify any of the young people. I will also ask [the community centre] to refrain from posting any content on their social media relating to my study in an attempt to keep the research and centre separate.

Anonymity of young people:

The young people will be anonymised in their responses to method 2 and my field notes relating to method 1 will not include any identifying information. Young people will be informed in the consent form that anything they share will be kept anonymous in all dissemination. Young people use social media extensively and I will ask that they do not

share details of their involvement in my project on their social media – otherwise this will limit their anonymity.

Anonymity of key stakeholders:

Key stakeholders will be informed that all efforts will be made to keep their identities anonymous, however, this will be more difficult than in the case of the centre and the young people due to the exceptional titles of their job roles and from the context relating to their job role they may be more easily identifiable. This will be included in participant information sheets and discussed with key stakeholders prior to their interviews as this may limit the level of information they wish to disclose.

1.2 Participant Information Sheets

Parent/Guardian Participant Information Sheet

Young People and Food Insecurity: Using Vital Mobilities to Reimagine Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care⁴

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University, and I am inviting your child to take part in an interview for a research study about increasing the visibility of young people in climate change and food policy.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you wish for your child to take part. As your child is below the age of 16, they will not be allowed to participate unless both you and they agree and sign consent forms. The first box below details the key things to know about the study and the rest of the sheet provides finer details. If you are happy for your child to take part in an interview after reading this, please sign the consent form.

If you wish to discuss the study with me further or you have any questions you would like answering, I will be available to have a chat at [the] Community Centre on Mondays and Thursdays 3-6pm.

⁴ The thesis title changed after the delivery of the empirical research.

In a Nutshell:

The study aims to work with young people in [town] to understand their everyday experiences of food. Through interviews including creative activities, I will work with and learn from young people to develop suggestions for effective food and climate change policies that are informed by their experiences and opinions. *Through these interviews, the study hopes to bridge the gap between young people's needs and the policies that affect them and ultimately lead to communication between young people and local policy makers.* I have been volunteering at the centre for several months, so your child may have seen me in the centre already.

Your child has been chosen as a potential participant because they attend [community centre name] and its food club. The interview is intended to help support your child to develop their skills and confidence in sharing their food experiences and 'being heard' in local food and climate policies.

If your child decides to take part in this study, they will take part in individual or group interview with other members of the community centre. These will feature discussions with the aid of creative activities about young people's food experiences and thinking about how they can be better supported by existing policies and structures. These interviews will be audio-recorded and written up, data will be anonymised so that your child is not identifiable. The data will be stored securely in accordance with the university's guidelines. Any outputs from the creative activities will also be anonymised and included as usable data e.g. a picture your child draws may be included in my thesis (only if they consent to me keeping them at

The Finer Details:

What will my child be asked to do if they take part?

This study aims to work with young people (12-17) in [name of town] to understand and learn from their lived experiences of food and to develop their skills and confidence in speaking about food and climate change policies that affect them. If you and your child decide they would like to take part, this would involve the following:

Interviews with me to discuss their experiences of food, including how they access food, how often and what they eat and how they feel about food. Your child can decide if they would be more comfortable to take part in the interview individually or if they would like to be interviewed with 1 or 2 friends.

Interviews will last between 30 and 40 minutes. They will include discussions about your child's food experiences and might involve creative activities with myself and/or other group members such as creating food storyboards or drawing 'food maps'. The focus of interviews will largely be led by your child and what they think is important to discuss regarding their food experiences, prompted by some interview questions that I have prepared to help our conversation.

I would like to make an audio recording of the interview with your permission and keep any drawings that your child makes during the interview as potential data.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

The study aims to build your child's confidence in speaking about food and climate change structures that affect them and emphasise the importance of their knowledge and experiences.

Taking part in this study will allow your child to share their experiences of food.

If your child takes part in this study their insights will contribute to our understanding of how food and climate change policies can be better suited to support young people in [the local area] and their access to food.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are minimal risks in taking part in this study.

Conversations about food might be difficult if young people have a difficult relationship with food. If you or members of staff at the centre think it is not a good idea for your child to participate, you can decide not to allow your child to take part, or, if you would like, you and your child can have a discussion about their participation with me and the community centre staff.

Participation is voluntary and if young people decide they do not wish to continue, they can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. They can also choose to pause and take a break. If your child is uncomfortable talking about a topic, they can tell me before or during the interview and we can skip that topic and move onto the next one.

Does my child have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide with your child whether or not they take part. Their participation is voluntary.

What if my child or I change our mind?

If you or your child change your mind, they are free to withdraw at any time before or during the interview, and up to 4 weeks after the interview has taken place. This means that, after receiving notice from either you or your child, I will extract any ideas or information they have contributed to the study, destroying them and not using or

sharing them further. If they have taken part in a group interview, I will still use the contributions from the rest of the group but will exclude any of their contributions. You or your child can withdraw up to 4 weeks after taking part in an interview by writing me an email at h.phipps@lancaster.ac.uk or speaking to me in person at [community centre name].

Will my child's data be identifiable?

After the interview, only I, the researcher conducting this study will have access to the audio recording.

I will keep all personal information about your child (e.g. their name and other information about them that can identify your child) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your child's contribution. I will also not be naming the Community Centre in my research. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project, that is to try and ensure that others reading project outputs will not be able to identify your child.

Participants in group interviews will be asked not to disclose information outside of the group and with anyone not involved in the group without the relevant person's express permission.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information your child shares with me in the following ways:

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas your child shares with me. I will only use anonymised quotes from my interviews, so that although I will use your child's exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect their anonymity in publications. I may also summarise some of the themes from the interview.

I will use the information your child shares for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences and for policymakers.

If anything your child tells me in the interview suggests that your child or somebody else might be at risk of harm, I will be obliged to share this information with the Community leader and/or the Youth Leader at [community centre]. If possible, I will inform your child of this breach of confidentiality.

How will my child's data will be stored?

Your child's data will be stored in encrypted files (no-one other than me will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify your child separately from non-personal information (e.g. views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please talk to me directly or contact myself at h.phipps@lancaster.ac.uk

You can also contact my supervisor: Nicola Spurling via email n.spurling@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Chris Grover, Head of Sociology, Lancaster University sociologyhod@lancaster.ac.uk

Sources of support

If you feel that you need some support regarding any of the content covered in this interview, please speak to [redacted staff members and contact details]

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your child's participation in this project.

1.3 Participant Consent Forms

YOUNG PEOPLE (-16) PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Young people and Food Insecurity: Using Vital Mobilities to Reimagine Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care

Name of Researchers: Harriet Phipps

Email: h.phipps@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time during their participation in this study and within 4 weeks after taking part in the study, without giving any reason. If I or my child decides to withdraw within 4 weeks of taking part in the study their data will be removed. If my child is involved in a group interview and then they withdraw after the interview has taken place, their recorded audio data is part of the larger group conversation and cannot be destroyed. I understand that if my child withdraws, the researcher will disregard their views when analysing the group interview data and only the other participants' data will remain part of the study.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by my child may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but their personal information will not be included, and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	☐
4. I understand that my child's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
7. I agree to my child taking part in the above study.	☐

Name of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature

8. If I am participating in a group interview, I understand that any information disclosed within the group interview remains confidential to the group, and I will not discuss the group interview with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.	☐
9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview study and within 4 weeks after taking part in the study, without giving any reason and my data will be destroyed. If I am involved in a group interview and then withdraw after the interview has taken place, my audio data is part of the larger group conversation and cannot be destroyed. I understand that if I withdraw, the researcher will disregard my views	☐

when analysing the group interview data and only the other participants' data will remain part of the study.	
10. I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.	☐
11. I understand what the study is about and agree to take part in the above study.	☐

Name of Participant Date Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____ Date
_____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

YOUNG PEOPLE (+16) CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Young people and Food Insecurity: Using Vital Mobilities to Reimagine Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care

Name of Researchers: Harriet Phipps

Email: h.phipps@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during their participation in this study and within 4 weeks after taking part in the study, without giving any reason. If I decide to withdraw within 4 weeks of taking part in the study, my data will be removed. If I am involved in a group interview and then withdraw after the interview has taken place, my recorded audio data is part of the larger group conversation and cannot be destroyed. I understand that if I withdraws, the researcher will disregard their views when analysing the group interview data and only the other participants' data will remain part of the study.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included, and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	☐
4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
7. If I am participating in a group interview, I understand that any information disclosed within the group interview remains confidential to the group, and I will not discuss the group interview with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.	☐
8. I agree to my take part in this study.	☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____
_____ Day/month/year

Date

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

KEY STAKEHOLDER CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Young people and Food Insecurity: Using Vital Mobilities to Reimagine Young People's Participation in Food Circuits of Care

Name of Researchers: Harriet Phipps

Email: h.phipps@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 4 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 4 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	☐
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that whilst these efforts will be made to maintain my anonymity, the title of my job role and the contextual background of my job role may limit the extent to which I can remain anonymous.	☐
6. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
7. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
8. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____
_____ Day/month/year

Date

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

1.4 Research Information Poster

Ongoing Research – Learning about food at [the community centre]

My research focuses on **Young People, Food Security and Climate Change**.

This is me!

My name is Harriet, and I'm a student researcher at Lancaster University. I'm interested in how the experiences of young people in [the local area] like you are important for discussions of food and climate change. The first step in my research is to learn about the food experiences here at [the centre].

To learn more, I'll be watching what goes on during my time at [the community centre] and making notes about what is done with and said about food. I won't include any names or personal details in my notes, and I'm only focussing on food experiences. These observations and notes will help me to understand your experiences and develop questions for the second part of my research, where I'll be inviting young people like you to interviews, in order to hear more about you think is important.

If you don't want to be included in these observations, please tell me or one of the members of staff and I will make sure that I don't take notes about any of your activities at the centre, or remove you (where possible) from notes I have already taken.

Feel free to come and talk to me about my research and ask me any questions!



Appendix Two: Methods and Participants

2.1 Methodological Prongs, Participants and Notes

Element of Research	Sub-category	Number of Participants	Ages	Members of Core Group	Notes
Pilot research	Volunteering at the centre's food club, and youth focus groups.	Observations were carried out from early 2022 – September 2022.	Varied		As explained within the thesis, observations from pilot research informed the design and ethical considerations for the project. No formal field notes were obtained.
Prong 1: Participant Observation	Observing centre's food clubs, youth focus groups and family meal sessions.	40 From October 2022 – February 2023	11-17 in youth group and varied in food club/family meal		Approximately 40 young people were observed throughout the research project. The number of young people at the community centre fluctuated a lot. But most of the young people that came to the centre regularly participated in prongs 2 and 4. In the sessions I observed, before running my own sessions as part of the toolkit, numbers of participants would vary from 5-20. There were some regular young people that attended each session, and other young people would attend irregularly.
Prong 2: Creative Workshops (toolkit)	Food Moments	8 (3 volunteers for follow up	11-17	Michelle, Charlie, Amy, Tom, Luke.	8 young people participated in the drawing activity and group discussion.

		group interview)		Michelle, Tom and Luke were interviewed.	3 young people volunteered to participate in a semi-structured group interview, in which we discussed their drawings in more detail and expanded on their experiences of food led by prompt questions I had prepared.
	Zine Making	12	11-17	Michelle, Charlie, Pippa, Tom, Luke	12 young people attended this session. There was general discussion about what participants were creating and why whilst young people chose elements and created their zines.
	Innovation Interviews	5	14-17	Jordan, Tom, Pippa	This was a smaller session which allowed for more in-depth discussions of what young people would like to be interviewed about. Young people worked together to come up with interview questions based on prompt topics introduced by me. They then acted out the interviews which I recorded.
	Comic strip interviews	7	12-17	Jordan, Tom, Michelle, Charlie, Pippa, Amy	7 young people volunteered to be interviewed. These interviews took place towards the end of my empirical work as this had allowed me to build relationships and trust with participants so they would feel comfortable in a one-to-one interview.
Prong 3: Key Stakeholder Interviews		7	30+		- Primary school teacher - CANL worker and food bank trustee - LDFJP development worker - Poverty Truth Commission - Community Centre Managing Director - City council member

					- Head of schools and residential catering for the county council
Prong 4: Visibility Event	Youth Health Matters	40 Young people: 16 Stakeholders: 17 Staff (and me): 7	Varied	Jordan, Michelle, Charlie, Pippa, Amy, Luke	Prior to the event, multiple sessions took place in which young people identified issues they wished to introduce, designed case studies and decided on designated roles for the event. The 16 young people that attended all had key roles in these shaping sessions and other less regular attendees were also involved in discussions and decision making. At the event, 12 of the young people had key roles including 6 table leaders/facilitators, 1 host, 3 welcomers and 4 responsible for catering. All young people contributed to discussions in the table discussions.

2.2 Salient Information about the 'Core Group' of Participants

Core Participant	Age	Background information	Participated in:
1	16	Lives in area near the community centre (as the thesis highlights, this is a more deprived area than other local areas). In his final year of GCSEs and looking forward to going to college and have more freedom.	Innovation interviews, Comic-strip interviews, youth health matters
2	15	Lives in area near the community centre. Has two siblings who also live with her. Struggles with anxiety, particularly around exams. During the research period, her family experienced some financial hardship and lost their family home.	Food moments, zine making, comic-strip interviews, youth health matters
3	13	Lives in area near the community centre. Goes to local school, has several younger siblings and one older and a single parent household. Many children go to different schools. She is often responsible for looking after younger siblings.	Food moments, zine making, comic-strip interviews, youth health matters
4	17	Lives in area near the community centre in a foster home. Has been attending youth sessions at the centre since she was 11 on the advice of a social prescriber. When she turns 18, she will have to move into supported accommodation and can no longer attend youth sessions at the centre.	Zine making, innovation interviews, comic-strip interviews, youth health matters
5	12	Lives in area near the community centre. Has a big extended family and often stays with her grandmother. Recently started at the local high school.	Food moments, comic-strip interviews, youth health matters

6	17	Lives in the area near the community centre with his parents but does not have a strong relationship with them. He works in a fast-food chain on days he is not in college to earn extra money for food and beer.	Food moments, innovation interviews, zine making, comic-strip interviews
7	13	Lives in the city near the community centre. Has one sibling and attends many other clubs including cadets. Joined the community centre during lockdown when they were providing online activities. Received support from the centre in the transition from primary to secondary school.	Food moments, zine making, youth health matters
8	17	Lives in the local area. Started coming to the centre recently, came with friend (Pippa). Doesn't go to college and is looking for work. Struggles with self-confidence and has been working with the centre to boost this.	Zine making, innovation interviews, youth health matters.

Appendix 3: Youth Health Matters Case Studies and Details

Topic	Case Study	Moving Forward	Answers
Mental Health and Bullying	Bob, Age 15, Year 11 Bob is gay and experiencing bullying based on homophobia. He is being physically and verbally abused by a group of people in his year. His feelings are getting very hurt by this and he feels scared, sad and alone. As a result of this bullying, he doesn't want to go to school and has been skipping class to avoid the bullies. He is getting into trouble with his teachers and his grades are suffering. This is adding to his stress even more because it is his GCSE year and is now getting into trouble with teachers as well as the bullies. All of this is making Bob's mental health incredibly low. Bob decides to tell a trusted teacher about the bullying, but nothing seems to be done and the bullying continues. The bullies seem suspicious that he has told on them and the bullying gets worse. Questions: What could Bob do? What could the teacher have done?	What can schools do to support us and create a safe space?	• Teachers need to be more proactive • Provide support and guidance to others • Put in methods to support people or even a little room to go in when not ok • They could make a separate part of school for young people to go with trusted staff members to help make them feel safe and secure • Feel heard, feel safe • Tell stories of experience • Proper training for staff that is refreshed every year • Important that young people feel action will be taken if they speak up • Provide more counsellors in school • Provide more education on bullying and mental health • Offer support and show that you care, flip the tables and imagine that your younger daughter being treated like that • Just show basic human compassion to make a more positive environment for everyone • Know how to signpost • Do exercises like this in classes with students • Create a culture of safety for all in school • Zero tolerance of bullying

			• Nurture groups • Support groups in and out of schools • Listen and include young people in creating that safe space • Educating parents • More time for students problems
Motivation	Jessica, Age 13, Year 9 In year 9, Jessica has just started preparing for her GCSEs, she has chosen her options and is also preparing for her mock exams. Things aren't very good for Jessica at home, her parents have been arguing a lot. Also, because of COVID, she did not get to experience a proper transition from primary to secondary school and now struggles to make friends since her return to school. Because of the struggles she is experiencing at home, she is feeling exhausted and burnt out by the time she gets to school and finds it difficult to concentrate on her school work and is behind on her homework. She has tried to explain (but doesn't want to share the whole story) but has been shut down and told to stop giving excuses. Questions: If Jessica doesn't have a trusted adult, what can she do? How would you feel if you were Jessica? Do you think small rewards during school time would help Jessica's motivation?	What can we do to improve everyone's motivation in schools?	• Incentives like golden time • Return of EMA for 16-18 year olds • Show kindness and compassion • Small rewards to work towards • Have something to look forward to • Nurture groups and support groups • No • I do not think it would work • I don't think rewards would help stigma • Visible confidential support service in school • Listening • Youth workers in school • Access online confidential support such as Kooth or apps that will help with low mood • Peer support in school • Ask them what they want and understand why they aren't motivated • I don't think that rewards would help as they don't address issues • Signposting to social groups outside of school • Youth centre to create new trusted friends • Tell a trusted friend or adult • Mentors that are consistent

Teacher's mental health	Miss Morsley is a science teacher. Teaching years 7 to 11 and sixth form at A level she is a newly divorced mum of two, one 17-year-old and a 2-year old. She's currently teaching through GCSEs so her days are long. As well as this, she has more added stress as her eldest child is currently taking their A levels. Due to so much stress she's not sleeping well and is slowly developing symptoms of depression causing her pupils not to get the best work out of her. She loves her job and wants to stay but she is struggling. Questions: What could the school offer to help relieve stress? Is there any communication she could have with her pupils that could help relieve stress? (Allow them to empathise, we are all human).	How can schools help with teachers' stress levels and mental health?	• Mental health days - less pressure on them to do work and do more enjoyable stuff • Stress management workshop • Regular supervision • Flexible working hours • Offering more support • Staff allowed to show some more vulnerability • Peer support • Wellbeing staff sessions • Incorporating mental health practices with training day for themselves and their students. • Teach students about mental health and talk about how it affects everyone • Open conversations about mental health • Reminding everyone that we are all human • Invest in diverse support/ wellbeing options • Be brave and give time for wellbeing support • Wellbeing days for students and teachers to get to know each other • School pay for therapy • Be understanding • Treat people how you want to be treated. • Pupils and teachers taught to respect each other
Education Stress Support	Jordan is 14 and in year 10. he is currently sitting English GCSE mocks. Jordan has always struggled with reading and finds it hard to concentrate for a long time. He has asked his head of year is there is	How can schools support students in year 10 with mock exam stress?	• More BTEC type courses • Understanding how COVID changed mocks • Revision classes in schools • Teach meditation

	any way he can sit his exams in a smaller room and not the hall or if he can carry a small fidget toy with him to help him concentrate. He was told none of the above would be possible as he has no additional needs diagnosis. This causes more stress for Jordan and these are mocks not his real GCSEs. He's becoming more anxious about the next year. Pressure from school and parents. Questions: How can school help Jordan with his concentration struggles in exams? Should schools offer more BTECs instead of exams (just coursework no end exams)?		• Teachers to support year 10s • Peer support with year 11s • Find the core cause of the stress • Exam stress group • Time out sessions to relax • Work with students at their own pace • Ensure parents are aware of how to support • Understand students' fears and anxieties • Lessons on coping mechanisms • Be more open-minded to mental health issues • Variety of resources to help revisions • Could schools do more cross generational work to tell the stories of coping • More student choice • Use social media more • Flexibility in terms of diagnosis and allowances • Schools need to be brave and work with young people • School shouldn't be one size fits all
Students' Rights	Timothy is in year 7, he suffers with anger issues and OCD. Due to his OCD Timothy must go to the toilet several times a day. He also suffers with sensory issues. As uniform is mandatory and schools are very strict, he isn't allowed to wear a different uniform and the texture of his trousers irritates him and he often feels like they stick to him. His time going to the toilet gives him chance to perform his handwashing routine and gives himself	How can schools empower young people?	• Unlock the toilet doors • Listen, respect, trust • Change the culture • Working with young people to address issues • Learn to listen to students more • Teach students about their rights • Empower by trust and honesty • Celebrate being unique • Ask them what they need

	times to re-adjust his pants to help ease his sensory issues. The toilets being closed during the school day means he's not allowed to go whenever he wants, causing him to get frustrated and lashes out at teachers. Then he gets punished and gets sent to impact. He's tried several times talking to teachers to see about getting a toilet pass but can't get a doctor's note as this is not a bladder issue. This is impacting his learning as he always feels on edge with his sensory issues. The time that he spends out of the classroom due to impact is also influencing his grades. Questions: What support could be in place to help him with his anger issues and OCD? What can school do to help him feel more comfortable (uniform)?		• Offer support but not be controlling, there's a difference • Mutual respect! • Let them have a voice, let them be heard • Give time for young people to input on how things could be made better • Foster a mutually caring environment • Be more flexible • Make sure they feel heard • Human rights
Life skill support	Jeffrey is 17 and in sixth form. He is really interested in finding and applying for a job, but doesn't know where to start. He has ADHD and Autism which means that he struggles to concentrate on the task at hand and he also struggles communicating with others. CV writing isn't mandatory or part of the curriculum at school and schools focus on uni application with sixth formers. He feels pushed aside as uni isn't something he is interested in and he's worried about his future as schools focus on school work and grades instead of life skills. He has tried asking for help and has been pointed to an online resource. He's tried to work out how to use	What can we put in place to add beneficial life skills support for young people in and out of a school setting?	• Teach life skill lessons in school • Treat teachers and students equally • Finding mentors that can advise and bridge education to work • Work placements • CV workshops and interview skills • Volunteering • Life skills training • Schools working with youth groups and community centres • "Community asset maps" to identify opportunities

	the resource but quickly became overwhelmed and distracted. Questions: If you were in his situation what advice would you ask for? And where from? What support could/ should have been given to help with life skills with his ADHD and ASD?		• Seeing neuro diversity as strength not weakness • Career fairs • Equal value to non-higher education options • Support ability and confidence to communicate • People at the job centre that can help with CVS and job apps • Community cooperation and shared knowledge • Invest in young people, they are the future • Resources for a careers service • Funding for resources • If everyone left school with a CV unemployment may go down
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