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EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S

SOCIO-POLITICS

IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis examines how eight young people living in a City in the South East of England, constructed their socio-politics in relation to their everyday lives, practices and relationships. The fieldwork was conducted during a period (beginning end of 2017) when divisive political discourses had been freshly stoked by the EU Referendum, and wider media raised questions about the meaning of politics for young people. Against this backdrop, the study sought to move beyond binarizing questions of political engagement, to build a more nuanced understanding of meaningful spaces for young people to practice socio-political skills and agency in their everyday lives. Examined in relation to the theories of Nancy Fraser and Michel de Certeau, the thesis highlights a need for greater understanding of the complexity of everyday lives, and where socio-politics is experienced in young people's everyday lives.

The study responds to calls for rigorous research design to identify what determines socio-political formation and thinking for young people. Methodologically, the study centres the interview method, using semi-structured interviews alongside visual, participatory approaches to create space

for the participants to foreground their perspectives, voices and experiences. The methods were designed to enable participants to take the lead in presenting what social issues took precedence for them, how they make connections between their micro and macro worlds, and how they may experience marginalisation. The analysis shows that young people make socio-political connections and convictions in response to the power relations and structural divisions they encounter. Specifically, the study illuminates how young people's socio-politics are shaped by their interpersonal relationships, their institutional experiences, and their digital interactions. The analytic approach aimed to recognise the ways in which participants lives are contextually situated, but also dynamic.

The thesis argues the following: Intimate relationships of care were centralised, and informed the participants socio-politics. Participants relied on support within their networks to balance the inter-connections between their micro and macro worlds, particularly when facing isolation and aggression within institutional spaces. Marginalisation within institutional spaces was amplified by intersectional factors, which deepened the participants' sense of socio-political injustice. The participants tactically sublimated their online identities, in reaction to threats of invasion of privacy and surveillance on digital social media. These refractions of identity were socio-politically motivated, in reaction to experiences of digital exclusion and perceived manipulation. Care is a key factor in young people's mediation of their everyday lives, and their socio-political interpretation of their experiences. Presenting these findings in combination demonstrates the multitudinous tactical practices inherent in their daily socio-politics.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: Date

..........................31st January 2022

Once more the legend flourished that the number of years lived constituted some kind of temperamental bond, so that people of the same age are many minds but a single thought, bearing to one another a close resemblance. The young were commented on as if they were some new and just discovered species of animal life, with special qualities and habits which repaid investigation.

(Macaulay, 1923: 305)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The aim of this thesis is to extend knowledge of what shapes socio-political thinking for young people, how social issues take precedence in their everyday lives, and how we can understand this through the connections between their micro and macro worlds. The thesis presents the possibilities for understanding young people's socio-politics through their tactical (De Certeau, 1984) interplays between the domestic, economic and political spheres (Fraser, 2009), but also demonstrates the ways these participants are impacted by power relations and structural divisions. The thesis explicitly centres socio-politics as the phenomenon of study, in order to move beyond hegemonic questions concerning youth political engagement. This thesis aims to centre experiences of socio-political connections and convictions in the participants own words, and with their own emphasis.

First and foremost, the introductory chapter locates the aims of the study, with reference to relevant literature calling for a focus on what shapes socio-political thinking for young people in their everyday lives. I present the contextual experiences that, over the course of the study, shaped its evolution: my conceptualisations of socio-politics, my own motivations, the outside issues taking precedence in political discourses, the difficulties inherent in conflating youth with monolithic experiences of transitions, temporality, and an exploration of what we can mean (and what can be missed) by the binaries of P/politics and micro/ macro worlds. Finally, I present my research questions, which centre the examination of what takes socio-political precedence for young people in their everyday lives.

The thesis sets out to achieve several tentative aims. Firstly, to contribute to literature foregrounding young people's lived experiences, in order to demonstrate how these can be viewed in a socio-political context. Secondly, to draw on participants' stories of their experiences to explore alternative conceptions of youth socio-politics. Thirdly, the thesis aims to build theoretical understanding of young people's socio-politics by integrating key theorists and perspectives, and exploring how theory on everyday lives might be combined with critical theory to support deeper understanding of young people's situated engagement with socio-politics.

This thesis examines these questions with particular regard to the views and experiences of a group of eight young people, five women and three men, aged 18- 25 years. The young people were all from a city in the South of the UK, with wide socio-economic disparity and a high concentration of ethnically white residents. I used semi-structured interview methods supported by the participatory approaches of photo elicitation, walking interviews, and individual social media analysis. Reaching, as I was, for the complexities of everyday life, it felt significant for the research to focus on grounded experiences, allowing space for the significance of any connections to come through. The interviews were all conducted over a three-month period spanning the end of 2017 – the beginning of 2018, with spaces for reflection between each stage of the research process.

The challenges of addressing and eliciting the lived, everyday, socio-political experiences of young people can be issues of ethics, misuse of power, and not respecting individual experience (Alderson and Morrow, 2020), which I discuss further in Chapter Four. My aim with the research design was to address these challenges with consideration to ways the participants might feel ownership during the interviews, for example incorporating methods that foregrounded them leading the direction of the

conversation. The approach I finally took to methodology, I hope, contributes to academic discourses arguing for young people's experiences to be better understood through their words and worlds, in all their complexity (e.g., Lorey, 2011; Lorey, 2019; Columbo and Rebughini, 2019; MacDonald, 2016; Berry and McDaniel, 2020a; 2020b). The overall aim was to make space for experiences rooted in the everyday to be brought forth and examined, co-constructively, in the context of socio-politics.

What defines the period of 'youth' varies depending on the context under investigation. The definitions pertaining to the terms 'youth', 'young people' and / or 'childhood' or 'children' differ according to cultural and policy-oriented definitions of what constitutes the period between 'childhood' and 'maturity', and are debated. For this study, I made the decision to recruit young people aged between 18-25, noting this delineated age group aligned most closely and consistently with the policies relevant to my study focus, which I shall refer to in my literature review.

The wider review of the literature (Chapter Three) draws from youth studies and Sociology and integrates with interdisciplinary perspectives to examine the academic discourses relating to youth politics, socio-politics, and everyday lives, and what might be missed by delineation between these (Susman, Marceau and Dockray, 2019). In order to locate my study for the reader within the specific calls for further research it responds to, I refer to some academic arguments here to contextualise the need for youth research which is both socio-political and everyday-oriented. Further calls are explored in Chapter Three's literature review.

Academics from the field of youth studies have repeatedly explored young people's political engagement. To balance this, within the last decade there have been calls for "more temporally,

spatially and relationally-sensitive vocabulary of citizenship and transitions" (Wood, 2017: 1186), ways to "explore within-culture heterogeneity in emerging adult experiences" (Furlong et al., 2009: 44), and to hold space for stories reflecting "being, and also *becoming*" (Bartos, 2016: 125). It has been emphasised that micro-world, contextual predictors of youth political participation need to be explored against macro-world factors (Kitanova, 2020) in order to fully grasp the impact of the current financial crisis and deepening inequality worldwide, and the potential for understanding the younger generation's socio-political experiences (Grasso, 2016; Sloam, 2020).

Importantly, some scholars have raised the converging effects of historical dynamics, political interests and social imaginaries which 'make up' kinds of young people, placing them as 'inexperienced, morally under-developed and [lacking] good judgement' and thereby incapable of participating in grown-up politics, whilst simultaneously (in modern times) accusing them of being politically apathetic, disengaged or apolitical" (Bessant, 2020: preface). Viewing young people as a group who experience social marginalisation as a result of these misalignments, Bessant has called for clearer understandings of how young people might experience misrecognition (2020). The recognition vs redistribution argument framed by Fraser therefore has real significance in understanding youth socio-politics.

Young people, like everyone else, are bound by the structural, economic and political settings of their time – and as such it is important to discuss how I conceive of children and young people's 'agency' "influenced by this complex of understandings" (Jenks, 2005: 131) within these contexts. I aim to problematise the simplistic use of the term 'agency' and seek to clarify here that I conceptualise young people's agency in this study as being perceptible through everyday resistances to dominant norms, accessed along a spectrum of opportunity, along which young people might grab moments to enact these, but may also be strategically denied

them. As young people develop their personal and social identities, and navigate the societal constructs and institutional settings that follow on from school education, conceptualisations of their agency and / or their being 'social actors' cannot be understood away from various factors that impact on the actualisation of this (e.g. intergenerational / structural / societal factors).

The notion of the ability to act and to mobilise resources in order to be in pursuit of being able to be agentic, does not necessarily make it equally possible for all young people. As I go on to discuss during my literature review, young people can be subject to negative discourses which create or emphasise destabilising conditions, and particularly for the young amongst us "when [those] environments start to fall apart or are emphatically unsupportive, [they] are left to "fall" in some ways, and [their] very capacity to exercise most basic rights is imperiled" (Butler, 2016: 15). Perceiving agency for young people in the same way as it is framed in relation to established adulthood obscures the systems of social organisation which defer to established adulthood, and are not equally accessible to all young people. I approach the investigation into what socio-politics can constitute through everyday lives, in order to explore the structures which act upon young people, and some of the ways agency can be reconceptualised away from the frame of traditional politics.

Reconceptualising young people's socio-politics on their own terms, argue Philo and Smith (2013), and understanding them as part of (not separate from) the 'body-politic' (2013: 137) resists treating their experiences as extraneous from wider societal issues. Significantly, sub-disciplinary discussions prompting reconceptualisations of children and young people "as *actors* and political agency as that which is enacted *by* them" (Kallio and Häkli, 2013: 1) has re-oriented some academic debates to

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examine "what *is* political" (Kallio and Häkli, 2013: 1) for young people, and how we might understand that better by centring research in everyday lives. The methodological difficulties of capturing informal political talk with young people outside of formal settings has also been positioned as a site for further exploration (Theocharis and van Deth, 2018). Research has suggested that politics can be a 'delicate topic' in everyday talk (Ëkstrom, 2016: 16), and political talk can be gendered, norms reproduced and young people self-censor in overtly political talk (Ëkstrom, 2016: 16). These considerations of sensitivity to, and within, research concerning socio-politics underpin my research design.

To combat the focus on "grown-up politics" (Bessant, 2020: preface), I have tried to decentralise my adult-expert reading, responding to Harris, Wyn and Younes (2010) suggestion that an "approach that attends to the complex interplay between marginalization and everyday, individualized political participation could open up new possibilities for a non-adult-centric redefining, reinvigorating and reinscribing of politics for and by ordinary youth." (Harris, Wynn and Younes, 2010: 29). This study addresses elements of these calls through the methodology and theoretical framework for the research. The research focuses on the case studies of eight young people, not to suggest they are representative, but because in-depth analysis of their experiences can illuminate the mismatch between generalised assumptions about the life stage of youth and how some young people reach socio-political understandings. I engage with two key theorists: Nancy Fraser who addresses economic and social marginalisation more broadly, and Michel de Certeau whose everyday life theory aims to understand the unconscious navigation of daily life. My theoretical position is discussed further in Chapter Two.

Reflecting my theoretical framework choices, the investigation does not centre on the participants' overt political perspectives on dominant political discourses, nor a focus on political figures, political parties, or voting patterns. Studies that orient young people's politics in relation to established systems of democracy are already well-researched, as I explore in Chapter Three's literature review. Instead, this study addresses what they feel is most important to them in their daily lives: the interpersonal relationships they frame as holding significance within their socio-political talk, the role of institutions they define, and their perspectives of digital social media engagement. In line with literature which sites (young) people's consciousness and experience alongside their potential for emancipation and tactical revolt (Cingolani, 2014: 8), my research explores the participants' awareness of inequalities, and ways their experiences in their micro and macro-worlds can be renegotiated to produce socio-politics. To contextualise the study further, I move to present my conceptualisations of socio-politics, my motivations, the historico-political context of 2017-2018, and a discussion of the terms macro/ micro-worlds, P/politics, temporality and transitions.

1.2 Terminology: what is meant by young people's 'socio-politics'?

A key point to address as I introduce this thesis is my use of the term 'socio-politics'. Why have I termed these explorations of agency, political understandings, relationships and everyday lives 'socio-politics'? The prefix 'socio' adds a particular form to the type of power it constitutes. It focuses on the political as embedded in the everyday, rather than geographically located as in traditional sites of politics (Agnew and Duncan, 2014). This is not to overvalue the sociological imagination at the expense of the geographical, but responds to an aim of the thesis to allow experiences to be presented on the participants' terms. By broadening the parameters of the

definition, participants' stories were not at risk of being shoehorned into narratives already in existence in political discourses.

As C Wright Mills (1959) argues, individual experiences are inextricably linked to greater social and historical context. The artificial distinction between the private and the political sphere "is as old as the tradition of Western political thought, modern liberal thinkers made the divide central to the pursuit of individual freedom" (Lee, 2007: 164). An important consideration for this thesis is the potential of using the 'term' socio-politics to centralise caregiving and relationships in examinations of socio-political experiences. Lister argues, conflating " the social and the political in the notion of the "socio-political" [makes the] case for care-giving as a form of active citizenship." (Lister, 2007: 56). Kershaw, considering Fraser's Universal Caregiver model (1994) argues that caregiving should also be considered representative of political citizenship, invoking the political nature of care through the term 'socio-political' (Kershaw, 2010: 396). Challenging delineations between politics and the private sphere offers a space to recentre discourses around what challenges to state power are necessary.

As Hanisch famously stated "the personal is political" (2000). Refocusing on the private, domestic sphere, we can see how societal constructs reinforce a very deliberate wider political aim and reinforce power imbalances which affect young people. Oskooii's study used the term socio-politics to challenge misconceptions around discrimination as a political motivator, drawing a distinction "between political (systematic) and societal (interpersonal) discrimination" (Oskooii, 2015: 613) to introduce the complexity of personal experience as a factor. Kornbluh (2019) argues that the increased polarisation in the political sphere obscures the true nature of youth politics, suggesting an apathy which is then reinforced by inaction in the policy arena. Kornbluh's use of the term

socio-political offers a way to encompass the social influences that go beyond the school/higher education/ local environment that young people socialise in. It creates new ways to include the digital social networking sites which can expose young people to a wider range of social differences and inform their understanding of new perspectives/ socio-political thinking. Most recently, Anyiwo et al. (2020) conceptualise socio-political action as "efforts to influence or transform communities and societal systems to be more equitable and just" (Anyiwo et al., 2020: 86). By relating social actions to direct political behaviour, further evidence can be included to demonstrate what is lost from the picture of youth engagement by polarised politics in the political sphere.

The commonality of these studies is the emphasis on using the term 'socio-politics' to both distinguish and interconnect social and political participation, foregrounding the complexity that comes with understanding the multiple spaces in which young people engage. I therefore use the term socio-political as a way to encompass potential variations in the factors that shape engagement and allow me to explore the different elements of the participants' social lives, and how *they* choose to assemble these and engage.

1.3 Professional and personal motivations for the study

My research focus is informed by my previous work as an education and youth participation consultant, as well as by my ongoing theoretical explorations. During my professional career I worked for various institutional organisations in education and governance, and felt there were many opportunities to meaningfully engage with young people's socio-politics that were missed. It was confusing for young people and practitioners alike, as 'youth participation' became a popular phrase in education and social work but lacked interrogation and authenticity in practice.

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The phrase 'youth participation' and the focus on youth civic and political engagement was partly popularised by developments such as the 'Crick Report' (1998) which led to the implementation of citizenship in British schools. A 2005 Electoral Commission Report, entitled 'Social Exclusion and Political Engagement' (2005b) amplified this focus further. The report identified that young voters are particularly keen on the sense of participation, of 'having a say', while the rest of the electorate at large is likely to cite a sense of civic duty or responsibility to vote (The Electoral Commission, 2005a: 12). The paper highlighted that those experiencing social deprivation tended to be amongst the most politically excluded within society. It identified the main factors in social exclusion as being unemployment and low income, poverty, education, skills and training deprivation, health deprivation and disability, access to transport, fear of crime, neighbourhood, and housing.

As 'youth participation' joined 'social exclusion' and 'social capital' to become one of the national political buzzwords, I took on the role of advocating for improved participation opportunities for children and young people for an area of London, in 2008. I witnessed well-intentioned pressure from local authorities exasperating resentful, overwrought and under-funded schools (Headlum and Hepburn, 2016). The many stages through which everyday life experiences and issues in communities filtered, before they reached the political sphere, resulted in a heavy loss of situated understanding about young people's experiences. I had the spectrum of the problem before me, and far-removed from the political end of this machine, were the voices of children and young people.

The motivations for this study respond to many years of experience watching institutions ignoring young people's complex socio-political foci in their everyday lives. Institutions seemed focused on

trying to 'create' participation, but were missing already existent socio-political thinking due to an adult-led orientation toward hegemonic perceptions of what represented political engagement. Redirecting children and young people's definition of the political as if this was somehow extraneous to their experiences missed the 'complex connectivity' (Tomlinson, 2007: 2) and sense-making they were negotiating in their daily lives. I felt that, on many levels, the opportunities to understand and integrate young people's socio-political perspectives of their worlds were being missed through the focus on increasing engagement with traditional political participation. I knew that the complex connectivity also incorporated the considerable increase in global interconnectedness that had been established by adding the digital sphere into the mix. This new interconnectedness was pushing at the previous understandings of how young people interact socially as connections were made and sustained through increasingly accessible technology. This necessitated a change in the way research and practice relating to young people's socio-politics was approached.

Observing these tensions professionally, I sought to understand them better academically with a view to impacting on policy decisions in the future. I felt I had spent years observing a disconnect between how young people described their engagement with families, communities, education and wider society, and rarely seen these lived experiences represented or understood in the institutions they engaged with. I wanted to design a study that was not confined by the restrictions of my previous participatory work, where I could develop methods aimed at power-sharing and listening.

In line with my values as a feminist researcher, I foreground my reflexivity throughout the research. As a mixed ethnicity, Anglo-African woman, who spent some years growing up in the South East of England, I have necessarily been acutely aware of the embodied nature of politics. I draw on

intersectional identity theory (Crenshaw, 1989) for my study as an heuristic and analytic tool, to demonstrate the power of intersectionality to understand aspects of identity and how these can impact on our experiences of social life.

My professional and personal life showed me lives can be classed, gendered and racialised (Goode, J., 2019), busied with the negotiations, hedged bets and careful calculations we make for ourselves and those we are connected to. These negotiations are enacted against the fluctuating economics of a political landscape that impacts upon swathes of its younger population. Foregrounding structural inequalities alongside the common identity facet, youth, the study holds space for the participants to bring their own stories and interpretations.

1.4 A particular point in history: the European Referendum

My research centres on multiple case studies examining young adults' socio-politics in a city in the UK at a particular time. The political background to this meant it was also a case study of a particular historical period, when the UK was dealing with the aftermath of the European Referendum in 2016 (referred to as Brexit), and in the US President Donald Trump was in power in the White House after a divisive election campaign. These two political events dominated much of the media discourses about the political sphere. Brexit in particular, unresolved and unclear as it then felt, was at the forefront of many people's minds. In this section I want to introduce and briefly discuss an example of a (then) contemporary popular discourse connecting young people and political engagement, and how this may have amplified assumptions about young people's political participation at the time of my study.

As the research was conducted in late 2017 and early 2018, it is helpful to focus on the impact of the UK's European Referendum, and how that drew youth political participation into question. The European Referendum held in 2016 offered the British voting public the opportunity to decide whether to 'leave' or 'remain' in the European Union.

The binary of 'Brexit', as the European Referendum is often referred to, masked myriad complex consequences for young people who, by dint of their age, were likely to be affected the most. We are yet to fully realise the impact upon young people's transitions, but it will likely be extensive. The youth demographic is known to be significantly "impeded by contours of economic, spatial, social, educational, and health inequalities" (Ellison, 2017: 678), and face a greater threat of job insecurity. One third of all young people in the UK Labour Market aged between 18-25 years are known to be on zero-hours contracts (Otto and Taylor-Gooby, 2014). The European Referendum of 2016 was still fresh in the minds of the participants I interviewed, who were then aged between 17 and 24 years old. The turnout in this election not only bucked the trend of recent General Elections but it also created an apparent generational divide, represented by Figure 1.1, which was much hyped by the media (Boult, 2016; Helm, 2016; Bristow, 2021). The intersections of these divisions (Harrison, 2021) seem to have become an established media argument to frame youth politics. However, little research exists to understand the intergenerational discussions and negotiations that have taken place behind the scenes (Grasso, 2018).

Age disaggregated - actual EU referendum result*

*In the horizontal bars all areas are proportional to the population size
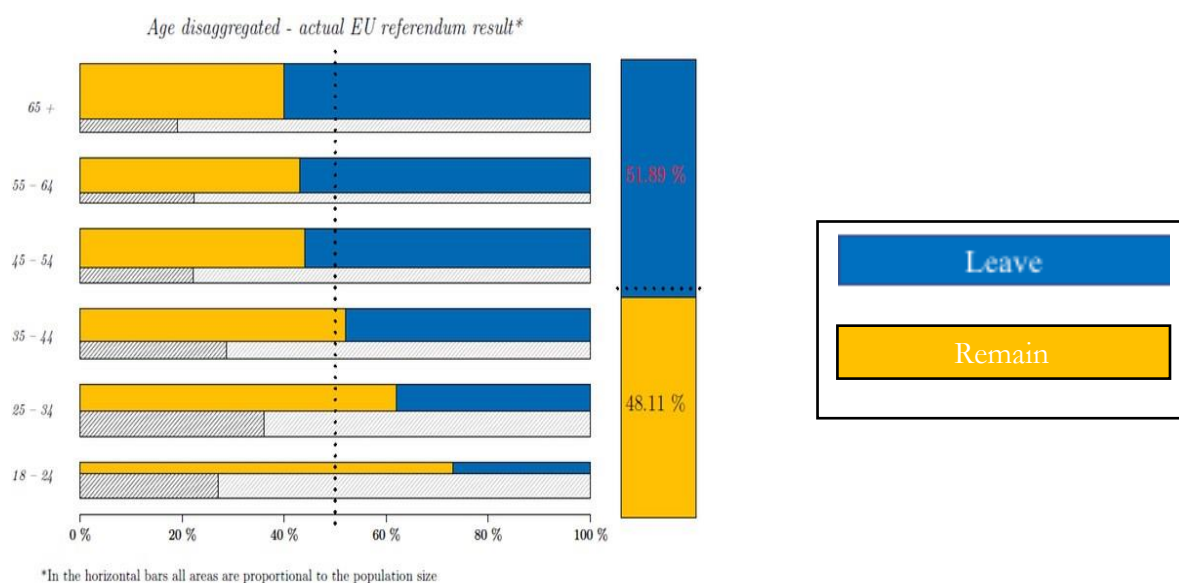
Figure 1.1 (Založnik, 2016)

The result of the referendum was to 'Leave' the European Union membership, and young people's participation in this vote was revealing. Between 64-65% of 18-39-year olds voted in the election, and 73% of them voted to 'Remain' in the European Union. At the time of my study, this referendum and the binary choice of Leave or Remain was uppermost in many people's minds, and several of the participants referenced it. Since the fieldwork, the shock announcement has been made, at the end of 2020, that the UK would be leaving the Erasmus+ Programme which had funded diverse opportunities for young people. However, what came through most in the study during the fieldwork in 2017/ 2018 was the inter-generational discussions about 'Brexit' within families.

Following the dramatic events of the EU Referendum, there was another unexpected result for youth political participation. Scholars who focus on youth political participation reference the 2017 so-called 'youthquake' - meaning a shift in social norms and values predominantly led by young

people (Sloam and Henn, 2019a) - which saw an unprecedented number of young people come out in support for Labour over the Conservative Party, especially given the context of disengagement from previous elections. The anomalous nature of that youthquake, on top of the voting patterns of young people in the EU Referendum, created undeniable empirical reminders of the conflicts within tropes of a politically disenfranchised youth. Whether viewed through discourses on youth political participation or youth socio-political participation, it is clear that the dissonance between these two indicate a need for much deeper understanding of what is going on for young people.

Research has made connections between young people's seeming concern and connection to global inequalities over nation-centred debates, as UK democracy continues to appear to be at a crossroads (Sloam and Henn, 2019a: 123-125). Despite the surprising engagement with traditional politics demonstrated by the youthquake in 2017, the wider context of lower participation in traditional forms of political participation in the UK suggests "the meaning of young people's political passivity and its consequences is still very much in need of further inquiry" (Dahl et al., 2018: 19). This study cannot make broad claims about youth political participation, nor does it aim to. It is worth noting, however, that the research was happening during a particular period of unusual youth political behaviour, and yet analysis shows it was not over-arching political discourses taking precedence in socio-political talk, but everyday experiences.

1.5 P/politics

I want to explore the notion of Big 'P' politics and lower case 'p' politics, and explain why I want to be careful about using this binary in examining young people's political behaviours. The nature of my study challenges the separation of these, arguing instead through the multiple case studies that the participants were engaged in an active, maybe tactical at times, often pragmatic combination of these. The apparent origins of the of Big 'P' politics and lower case 'p' politics binary are Janks' (2012) article on critical literacy, which (in part) explores the possibility and constraint within the constructs of the 'social' (2012: 151). I've cited this more fully here to give a clear sense of the specific P/politics binary I'm engaging with:

> "Politics with a capital *P* is about government and world trade agreements and the United Nations' peace-keeping forces; it is about ethnic or religious genocide and world tribunals; it is about apartheid and global capitalism, money laundering and linguistic imperialism. It is about the inequities between the political North and the political South. It is about oil, the ozone layer, genetic engineering and cloning. It is about the danger of global warming. It is about globalisation, the new work order and sweat shops in Asia.
>
> Little *p* politics, on the other hand, is about the micro-politics of everyday life. It is about the minute-by-minute choices and decisions that make us who we are. It is about desire and fear; how we construct them and how they construct us. It is about the politics of identity and place; it is about small triumphs and defeats; it is about winners and losers, haves and have-nots, school bullies and their victims; it is about how we treat other people day by day; it is about whether or not we learn someone else's language or recycle our own garbage. Little *p* politics is about taking seriously the feminist perspective that the personal *is* the political."
>
> (Janks, 2012: 151)

The contrasts Janks (2012) draws are useful for conceptualising that there is a place for personal politics beyond the arena of formal politics. Initially conceived by Janks as an argument for the importance of critical literacy, Janks argues that "difference is structured in relation to power"

(2012: 150), going on to explain that "This dialectic relationship [between Big 'P' and little 'p' politics] is fluid and dynamic, creating possibilities for social action and change" (2012: 151). In the following argument, I go on to discuss the significance of the fluid and dynamic movements between the Big 'P' and little 'p' politics, and why this fluidity, considered in and of itself, is so important for young people.

In a similar way to other popularised terms such as youth participation, the binary of Big 'P' and little 'p' politics has had multiple meanings and been absorbed into many uses, and can be found cited in anything from opinion pieces on local politics (Atkinson, 2018) to news articles on the demise of political rhetoric (Green, 2014), often with definitions quite far removed from the original contexts. The binary is a stark one – and perhaps some of the more popularised uses have discounted the dynamism between the two P/p's, and the complex space between. The emphasis on the binary also partially obscures the important influence of power in the assemblage of Big 'P' and lower case 'p' politics, particularly at the stage of life when understandings of power may be changing, rather than established, as transitions into adulthoods necessitate independent negotiation of institutional spaces. These spaces, such as the workplace, reveal differing power dynamics to young people that need to be negotiated and understood. It is these negotiations with power that often spark the socio-political behaviour not entirely represented by Janks (2012) definitions, as they may involve tactical connections between the Big 'P' politics, and lower case 'p' politics. This, as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 2, is what de Certeau argues – that far from being predictable and organised, the power of the suppressed is often powerful *because* of its unpredictability, ephemerality and lack of defined parameters between the Big 'P' and little 'p' politics.

An example of young people acting tactically in the moment, and negotiating agency, comes from a study by Börner, Kraftl and Giatti (2021) exploring everyday agency of marginalised youth in the Brazilian urban periphery. The study looked at how current theorisations of youth activism don't serve to understand the multi-faceted moments and understandings of agency that make up the everyday experience of the young people featured in the study. As they negotiate their direct exposure to environmental hazards wrought by climate change, the researchers found that disadvantaged young people in risk-prone areas negotiated their capacity and potential as everyday agents, albeit with limited choices. The study builds on previous work (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) aimed at reconceptualising the boundaries between everyday activism to explore "implicit activisms" (Börner, Kraftl and Giatii, 2021: 278). Adult discourses on climate change, in other words the Big 'P', were being perceived by some young people in the study as 'monotonous', 'boring' and 'top down' (Börner, Kraftl and Giatti, 2021: 279). Researchers identified a mismatch between what mattered to the young people living in their environments, and went beyond definitions of little 'p' politics to something else, comprised of their own sense of what was happening. The examination of a public issue (climate change) and everyday lived experiences of environmental changes, when not focused on as separate and distinct poles, revealed that the belonging and connection the young people felt to their environments and everyday realities were a better way to understand the socio-politics they engaged with. Furthermore, the researchers explained, creating space for young people to be a bigger part of the solution on their own terms was key.

Skelton (2010) argues that young people can do more than act politically "in the interstices of this binary" because the particular life stage they are at and the complex nature of their agency means they have learned to play around with whatever autonomy and meaning they can find in the middle,

creating new socio-political meanings for themselves. Similarly, Hadfield-Hill and Christensen's study with children in a Sustainable Community showed that "young people were involved in a whole series of everyday political moments that contributed to the making of a community" (2019: 829). In fact, engaging their perspectives on their terms had been shown to challenge social problems like social exclusion, reshaping our understanding of their experiences and building on "their capacity to analyse and transform their own lives and to partner in the building of more sound, democratic communities" (Cahill and Hart, 2006: 297). Young people experience the convergence of discourses that could be allocated as 'Political' (e.g. government, global capitalism, and so on) or 'political' (e.g. what they do in the everyday – micro choices, decisions, agreements) markedly, and to ignore the intersections and the meaning of the political *between* the Big 'P' politics and the lower case 'p' politics, when experienced in such a significantly interstitial way, resists experiencing and examining the negotiations young people 'meld and blend' (Skelton, 2013: 145), and potentially create anew.

Everyday politics has been shown to matter in understanding the interstices better, particularly in work on childhoods, as in Nolas et al. (2017b) work on the ways in which children encounter and understand public life through their everyday family lives. Both Bartos (2013) study which explores the politics of friendship amongst children aged 9-11 years by understanding their political engagements, and friendship's place in informing wider social ordering, and Hadfield-Hill and Christensen's study (2019) which used ethnographic methods to understand children's everyday experiences of sustainable communities and how sights, sounds and physicality can tell us much about their inhibited participation demonstrate this. These studies bring to the fore children's awareness of political issues in their homes, communities and personal relationships, but importantly they also point out that this awareness overlaps across several spatialities and

temporalities as they explore their agency. Understanding the in-between spaces, and the peculiar liminality of childhood and youth through the everyday has the power to illuminate the disjunctures where their sense of politics cannot be neatly allocated to one box marked 'Political' and another marked 'political'. It is hoped this study, similarly, contributes to interstitial understanding of young people's socio-politics.

1.6 Transitions and temporality

I will present some of my reflections about temporality, transitions and young people, to aid the reader in understanding my later approaches in analysis when I consider the layered nature of young people's temporal and spatial lived experiences. At times in the thesis I do refer to transitions, in particular during a review of previous conceptions of youth politics but also in relation to youth precarity (Chapter Three, Literature Review). However, both the literature I review later, and the study's findings, challenge the idea of transitions as fixed and linear. The participants cannot be easily read as a homogenous group experiencing the time of youth in similar ways. This is not to suggest that some themes are not read collectively, but young people's everyday lives and identities also intersect in complex ways with other factors such as their family and friend networks, wider communities, and the wider expectations about transitions (Thomson, 2009). Young people's experiences inhabit multiple temporalities, and resist homogenisation. The following paragraphs introduce some of the ways in which transitions and temporality have come to be viewed as interlinked, and why.

In youth research, young adulthood has been constructed as a new life phase (Heinz, 2009), something I problematise as a concept (Chapter Three, section 3.4) but know I have to work with

an understanding of, in order to research young people. Recognising young adulthoods as life stages, it is relevant to discuss conceptualisations of youth transitions. Defining transitions can be problematic as a way to understand the changes between childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood and old age. Understanding youth transitions to adulthoods as emblematic or reductive can fail to capture the interdependence of everyday lives and how cultural and social contexts create both complexity and uncertainty (Boddy, 2020). Furlong's work (1992, 2009) on the changing patterns and social perceptions of youth transitions and his combined work with Cartmel (2006), discussed the continuing impact of social divisions on youth transitions. It also explored ways in which individualisation and protracted transitions from school to work were (then) changing the way young people made sense of their life stage. As Walther (2006) explains, arguing for the significance of structural contexts in comparing European young people's experiences of transition regimes, "young people's biographical perspectives – their subjective appropriation of their own life courses – have to be taken, more seriously, into consideration" (Walther, 2006: 120).

Nilsen and Brannen's (2014) work exploring transitions nearly a decade ago also made the case for the importance of historical context to young people's transitional pathways, challenging the "rhetoric of inevitability" (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014: 7) which had crept into economic and public policy, and arguing for the relevance of social relationships and contexts to dispel reductive ideas about the direction of a whole generation of people. Using biographical narrative methods they demonstrated the importance of both social and historical context, and the dynamism between, rather than the separation of, biography (micro) and history (macro). Nilsen and Brannen challenge broader assumptions around 'intergenerational conflicts' (2014: 1) (a recent example being the supposed generational divide popularised by discourses on Brexit). They argue for the significance of intergenerational transmission, and for sociologists to take an intergenerational lens when

considering impacts upon pathways to adulthood. Similarly, other relationships such as friendships must be taken into account, as these also impact the ways young people temporally arrange their lives. Pressure on time, and the free-market emphasis on the individualised, value-oriented use of time mean "young people find it difficult to synchronise their lives with those of their friends and relatives" (Furlong 2015: 5–6) and maintain connection in arguably fragmented ways, pivoting between past, present and future (Batchelor et al., 2020).

To highlight the complexity of temporality in young people's lives and why it is so important to foreground their experiences of this, I will give an exemplar of the constructed nature of young adulthoods. In doing so, I put to the reader that the contradictions in governance and public policy have an impact on how socio-politics may be experienced by playing with the liminal status of young people. The example is as follows: The point at which young people in the UK gain a raft of new responsibilities and freedoms is also one of politico-legal contradictions. They are not allowed to vote at the age of 16 in England and must wait until they are 18. Despite this, young people aged 16 can enter into a civil partnership or marry, leave home without parental or guardian consent, represent their country in the armed forces, join a trade union, leave school, work full time and pay National Insurance, be prosecuted at High Court, and ironically stand for election to become a member of a community council in some areas. The point of these examples is to highlight the inconsistency and many contradictions inherent in voting restrictions still being in place for young people in the UK aged between 16-18 years old, despite other 'adult' politico-legal freedoms being granted from the age of 16.

Arguably, it is "the geographically divergent liminal positioning of young people within political–legal structures and institutional practices [that] makes them extremely interesting political subjects."

(Skelton, 2010: 145). As Skelton goes on to argue, viewing young people as political actors inhabiting a liminal space helps us to reconceptualise the ways in which they are both Political and political. An essential part of understanding that is to accept their experiences of temporality as they present them, encompassing digital, physical, past and present experiences through which they perform and articulate socio-political experiences.

Why the focus on youth transitions and temporalities? Because this thesis attempts a difficult balance: acknowledging the particular period of history the research was conducted in and the usefulness of naming a 'generation' e.g., for understanding vertical connections within families (Hagestad and Dykstra, 2016), whilst also foregrounding ways in which periods in history "do not determine everything and everyone" (Brannen, Moss and Mooney, 2004: 24) or negate the specificity of structural inequalities on individual experiences. Reductive assumptions about temporality can obscure the real picture, demonstrated by the characterisation of the 'lost generation' of young people (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014: 1) which disallows the connections and inter-reliances between generations (Thomson, 2014a). An aim of the thesis is to challenge problem- focused narratives about young people's political engagement, in part, by demonstrating the individualistic nature of the participants' experiences. In doing so, I recognise the place within a wider sociological history, grappling with "boundaries that are in the process of being redrawn" (Thomson, 2014a: 155) in relation to a kind of spectrum - between historically bound, problem-oriented studies and "[abstracted] individuals from the physical landscape" (Thomson, 2014a: 154). This section makes the point that my research introduces temporalities and spatialities from the perspective of the participants. They will make reference to, and interweave between, hopeful futures. They will describe their experiences online and how these interplay with temporally and

spatially bound realities. The thesis recognises that socio-politics are not static, any more than youth is linear.

1.7 Micro and macro-politics

Throughout the thesis I make references to the terms macro and micro politics in different contexts, and it is important in this introduction to outline some of the thinking underpinning this. To put it simply, the research makes space for the importance and complexity of micro-politics, in order to highlight what is lost by a focus on macro-politics.

I draw on two studies in particular in order to work these conceptions into my own study. 'Environment in the lives of children and families (Phoenix et al., 2017) used a multi-method approach (detailed further in Chapter Four) to capture the interconnected nature of family lives and practices. In this study, the macro represented public and political discourses on sustainability and the environment, and micro represented the daily negotiations which comprised several families' ways of performing environmental practices and conversations in their everyday lives. The study demonstrated that the micro environments of the families' daily lives were "inextricably linked" (Phoenix et al., 2017: 52) with the macro environmental issues. Decision making was negotiated within the temporal contexts and resources available to them, such that "macro environmental practices and local everyday concerns were interlinked and seasonal" (Phoenix et al., 2017: 75). Importantly, children's "constrained agency" (Phoenix et al., 2017: 133) within decision making highlighted both the micro and macro power structures within families and wider societies, and that beyond this they were interlinked, not delineated. This study addresses the importance of

understanding what can be missed by binarising micro and macro-worlds and how these can be challenged by a focus on the everyday.

Longitudinal study 'The Connectors' Study' by Nolas et al. (2014- 2016) explored how children encountered public life through their everyday lives and family environments, by examining their political talk. They make the case for the micro being the performative, idiomatic nature of political talk in childhood, but also argue that it is the practice of *talking* politics collaboratively that is handed down between generations. These findings have significant implications for research which uses interviews and focus groups with children in such a way as to remove them from the context of this familial talk, because it demonstrates how children and young people might also be making sense of what they conceive to be macro politics through intergenerational experiences, conversations and influences. The significance of the micro in its everyday context can be removed by taking 'talk' away from these environments, resulting in a misleading sense of what the relationship between childhood and public life might be (Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss, 2017b: 70). This study contributed to my thinking around the significance of understanding political engagement as being (in part) social praxis, where meaning and connections are made through everyday lived experiences, encounters, relationships, memories and objects (Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss, 2017b: 81).

Both studies engaged with their participants through narrative, multi-method and participatory approaches. The participants were able to 'meld and blend' (Skelton, 2013: 145) elements and meanings in a back and forth between their micro-worlds and macro-worlds. Though I used interview-oriented methods, I integrated narrative, visual and participatory methods to draw as much of the participants' daily experiences into their talk as possible. By not losing sight of the

connections individual participants make, I challenge the existence of the binary between micro and macro-worlds, and instead highlight the ways individual circumstances and identities interplay with meaning-making. Making a methodological choice not to foreground the macro contemporary political discourses of the time through my questioning allowed my study to illuminate spaces where participants step in to, out of, and around micro, meso and macro-politics as they negotiate the socio-economic reality of their daily lives.

1.8 Research questions

My research was conducted in the context of a historically, culturally and geographically shaped political landscape in the UK (Dennison and Carl, 2016) which had culminated in Brexit, over a period when the ongoing effects of austerity and a combination of political events brought young people's socio-political behaviour into public discourses. In this context, I sought to understand how young people's lived experiences interconnected with their socio-political understanding and action over time. My research centred around questions forming in my mind about how contemporary political discourses figured in young people's socio-political narratives, and how lived experiences intersected with this.

The following three Research Questions came to guide and shape my research as it progressed conceptually:

- In a historical period where division and over-simplified binaries shaped over-arching public political discourses, what social issues take precedence in the everyday lives of young people?

With the following sub-questions:

- How can locating the study in the context of everyday lives help to better understand the ways in which young people's micro worlds inform their socio-politics?

- How does the experience of these young adults as a group help us to understand ways youth can be a specific site for social marginalization?

Held collectively, I wanted to understand whether there were factors specific to these young people's lived experiences, albeit locally comprised, that could hold the space open to say something meaningful about collective experience of socio-political formation in youth, whilst not shepherding it to connect to specific themes created in the political sphere.

This research explores experiences of these through research over time with eight young people, all of whom live in the same city in southern England. Their accounts document how they navigate interconnected lives, responsive to global change and diversity (Vertovec, 2007). A goal of the thesis is to demonstrate the value of foregrounding situated understandings of young lives as we navigate moments in politico-social history. I hope this research shows what socio-political threads continue for young people despite, before, during and beyond headline political issues.

1.9 Summation of chapters to come

This chapter has introduced the aims of the research study, and its place in responding to calls for research specifically exploring youth socio-politics in everyday life. I have shared my definitions of

socio-politics, my motivations for undertaking the study, the wider historical context in the UK, and my understandings of P/politics and macro and micro-worlds. I have introduced my research questions and how they focus on the aims: to understand what takes precedence for young people considering their socio-politics, how this is drawn from their micro-worlds, and impacts experiences of social marginalisation.

In order to explain how I came to my theoretical position, Chapter Two offers a critical discussion of everyday life theory, introduces my own position within this and the ways in which I draw on a combination of theoretical influences. Chapter Three reviews existing literature and gives some contextual overview of relevant debates within youth studies. Chapter Four explains how I devised my methodological approach and methods, and the ways my theoretical position influenced this. Chapter Five introduces the ways my participants frame their relationships with others socio-politically. Chapter Six addresses the impact of institutional power dynamics, early experiences of employment, and the socio-political implications of these experiences. Chapter Seven discusses the participants various perspectives on digital social media and networking, and the implications for their self-identity and socio-politics. Finally, Chapter Eight centres on unifying the discussion and referring back to the original aims of the study. This concludes with clarifying my contribution to knowledge, the limitations of my research and ways forward for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

As I explained in Chapter One, my career working with children and young people thus far demonstrated to me that much was being missed from institutional / media-led assumptions about young people (Mejias and Banaji, 2019). I saw that the lack of meaningful engagement with the complexity of their everyday lives, and failure to prioritise policies supporting redistribution, due to a neoliberalist focus on reducing economic interventions, was impacting the perceptions of society and political actors amongst the young people I worked with. The sense that there was a disconnect exacerbated by neoliberalism was then being explored by authors trying to understand what was underpinning young people's changing political behaviour and values (Henn and Foard, 2014; Bastedo, 2015; Busse, Hashem-Wangler and Tholen, 2015). Research suggested the interconnected nature of neoliberalism's moulding of democracy, political practice and growing inequality, together with value judgements about failure and dependency, were impacting on how young people experienced and conceived of citizenship (Hart and Henn, 2017). I felt that the disconnect might be understood by looking at young people's ordinary lives. I sought theory to help me conceptualise socio-politics in young people's lives, and integrate this with the ways that social injustice might constitute socio-political misrecognition.

My aim for the chapter as a whole is to contextualise the ways in which the theorists I introduce have helped to guide my research methodology and elucidate my findings, through their individual foci and combined insights into foregrounding the nuanced voices of my participants. Importantly, they have also informed my understandings of temporality, attention to the everyday, and spheres

of identity. De Certeau and Fraser, in particular, have conceptualised these ideas in ways that have helped me to understand the connections between political / tactical behaviour, both in person and online, and ways these can be seen as emancipatory practices outside the obvious conventions of political behaviour such as voting, party membership, and so on. I will begin by focusing on the two key theorists, de Certeau and Fraser, whose work I engaged with when conceptualising my approach to my research. I then summarise the significance of lifeworlds, and intersectionality theory before moving to my arguments for how these, in combination, can work in addressing my research questions.

2.2 De Certeau

I was drawn to de Certeau's work initially by the theoretical possibilities it had demonstrated in the work of Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss's 'Connectors' Study' (2014- 2016) for understanding the socio-politics of children. I had worked with Nolas on the study toward the end of the project, and children's political talk and its relationship to public life had been conceptualized through its connection to family life and the everyday (Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss, 2017b). Although I had engaged with other theories of everyday life (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1978; Coleman, 1994) in previous work, as I began to conceive my research questions I could see the possibilities for using de Certeau's work both in helping to define my perception of socio-politics and shaping my theoretical framework so that I could design methodological coordinates (Highmore, 2006: viii) to understand their micro- worlds and "search out better ways of making contact with the actual, the real" (Highmore, 2006: 118). It felt important, following calls from scholars citing the importance of looking at the ordinary lives of young people to site their socio-politicisation better. I felt that de

Certeau's work could offer methodological possibilities that create more "substantive accounts of the world that are more inclusive, more attentive, more responsive" (Highmore, 2006: xi).

2.2.1 Key concepts in 'The Practices of Everyday Life'

De Certeau made many contributions to everyday life/ cultural theory. For the purposes of this overview of my theoretical choices I will give a broad introduction to his work but focus on the ways in which it guided my study and what I engaged with most deeply. In Michel de Certeau's book 'The Practices of Everyday Life' (1984), he divides the work into five parts. The first two parts explain his theory, the following three parts demonstrate how it can be used in research. His theory can be considered socio-political in that it conceives modes of everyday resistance. It offers a clear delineation of what resistance can look like, who the proponents of resistance might be, their object and their means. My study aims to further determine the intentions, the motivations and the acts that constitute socio-politics and resistance.

De Certeau uses the terms 'user' and 'producer' to describe two groups of people who make up the modern economy. His objective was to understand how the individual users are able to appropriate and change the dominant mode of productions in society. De Certeau suggest that consumers "ways of operating" create a "network of antidiscipline" (de Certeau, 1984: xiv-xv), and marginal groups and individuals find ways to tactically challenge the strategies of power/ dominant producer groups.

In the opening lines of de Certeau's chapter "On The Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life", he dedicates his essay to "the ordinary man. The common hero. Disseminated character. Untold

wanderer". De Certeau makes the 'ordinary man' his interest, and connects this to the societal domain. His work draws on Freud's (1901) distinction between the ordinary man and the enlightened one. According to de Certeau's further conceptualisation of the binary between the dominant expert/ philosopher and the ordinary man, the so-called expert assumed his authority over the masses because of the proper place "propre" from whence he (believes) he speaks. This concept of the proper place is part of the illusion that separates out the dominant socio-economic order in society and belies its strategy. The producers function by creating and upholding the need for a proper place of reason and order, and the resistance offered by subordinated groups operates on a principle of temporality which works by the ordinary man seizing opportunities for resistance "on the wing" from time to time. In other words, if the producers look to dominate spatially, the consumers will resist temporally – subverting the dominant order's power through temporal tactics (de Certeau, 1984).

Rather than the dominant groups bestowing legitimacy upon the so-called masses, de Certeau draws on Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophus (2013), in part, to oppose this claim and argue that there is no place outside of the everyday language. This dissolves the position of supposed mastery of the expert / philosopher, and suddenly the analysing discourse and the analysed "object" are in the same situation: both are organised by the practical activity with which they are concerned, both are determined by rules they neither establish nor see clearly, equally scattered in differentiated ways of working… philosophical or scientific privilege disappears into the ordinary" (de Certeau, 1984: 11). The dominant order tries to impose power by imposing order on common everyday language. In much the same way as interpretations of young people's politics can be seen to have been broadly funnelled into pre-existing determinations, which then find young people wanting in relation to the structures they are weighted against. If truth, rather than being objective, is in fact a

construction that is claimed and held onto in order to control, it so follows that for any sense to be made of society we must instead look at the ensemble of everyday practices in which we are all implicated. Drawing on this conceptualisation, my research was not focused on young people who were necessarily active in formal political structures, but rather sought to disrupt that narrow conceptualisation of the political by trying to understand 'ordinary' political understandings and experiences. This entails attention to informal and implicit politics, embedded in everyday lives and practices.

De Certeau heralds the opacity of everyday language, which resists any linguistic systematising by the producers, here defined as the 'langue'. Language becomes tools "manipulated by users" (de Certeau, 1984: 21), bound within a social historicity that sees words honed and changed by time, in the same way as he observes an abandoned village's discarded tools marked by hands and movements unknown. De Certeau introduces the idea of "le perruque" (de Certeau, 1984: 29), the worker tricks the employer into thinking that he is submissive and working for the strategies of power / company, when in fact he is using the space and time of the company for a project of his own determination and aimed at satisfying his own needs. These "transverse tactics" (de Certeau, 1984: 29) do not obey any sets of rules, but are adapted as needed, and in this way the employee can gain some control and enjoyment from the place of work on his own terms.

Though de Certeau drew on works by Foucault and Bourdieu, he criticised both for imposing categorisation onto the dominated social agents they describe: "[throwing] over tactics as if to put out their fire by certifying their amenability to socio-economic rationality or as if to mourn their death by declaring them unconscious" (de Certeau, 1984: 59). It has been argued that he commits some level of binarization himself by dividing society into 'producers' and 'consumers', and it can

be difficult to understand the relationship between 'tactics' and 'discourse', due to his reluctance to expound on the actual, dialogical impact of tactics upon the producers but as McNay argues "this unresolved dilemma (…) is representative of a problem central to social and political theory" (McNay, 1996: 79). De Certeau foregrounded narrative in the everyday as a resource for capturing social memory to produce "fuller, thicker tellings of cultural life" (Highmore, 2006: 119), and in doing so, de Certeau's theory allows for understanding young people's socio-politics beyond the binarized discourses surrounding youth politics, exploring instead bubbles of tactical diversion, since 'tactics' have no explicit boundaries. His theory emphasises the ways in which these forms of resistance can merge almost invisibly, potentially producing invisible forms of resistance. It is the purpose of this research to analyse these 'ordinary' young lives to examine ways they interpret and respond to over-arching power discourses, potentially producing resistance that is not anticipated or defined by the producers and strategies of power. As a theory to understand groups which are generally outside of dominant power groups, whether for economic or structural reasons, this everyday life theory is able to elucidate resistance and active agency in a group much defined, but little understood.

De Certeau's theory ultimately affords opportunities to empower and recover the 'ordinary man' so that 'he' is not reduced to a generalized mass of people. The value in his work on everyday life for my study is the focus on understanding the relational construct and examining the ways young people might make use of, but not be contained by, dominant norms. It is for this very reason that the work explores socio-politics emerging from young people's everyday lives, rather than centring importance on their interaction with traditional political participation. The theory applies perfectly for research challenging capitalist- oriented generalisations based upon an aspect of identity, intended to reduce the individual to yet another mass consumer. By examining self-identity,

relationships and social networks through the frames of temporality and space, and alluding to strategies and tactics which have greater or lesser significance at different times. The greater the power, the more tactical diversion at social exchange and the greater the moral resistance. I could relate de Certeau's work exploring the crisis of representation that undermines authority directly to research emerging that demonstrated young people were turning away from traditional political actors / institutions. Words that were once effective "can no longer be believed because they neither open closed doors nor change things" (de Certeau, 1997: 111). This could be argued to apply perfectly to the seeming disconnect between many British young people and traditional political routes.

2.2.2 De Certeau and temporality

The ways in which all of us are affected by temporal and spatial parameters in our social worlds has changed considerably in the last few decades, for many reasons. I will focus on two here in relation to choosing de Certeau's theory, and the particular way this directed my thinking. The first of these is the internet, which has become a bigger feature of modern life and our use of time (Adam, 1995; Bauman, 2013; Nowotny, 1994; Sennett, 1998; Leccardi, 2005). In de Certeau's exploration of temporality, the theory that felt significant in shaping how I perceived the relationship between social media and young people was the perception of how tactics must be 'seized' by more disempowered individuals / groups at an unplanned time. This very much depends on opportunity for resistance, which is also unpredictable. De Certeau perceives much resistant action as being unplanned, but carried out opportunistically. The disruption of the powerful and their 'strategies of power' depends on usually hidden forms of tactics of resistance. The complexities far transcend the literal translation of 'time' and 'space'. Much could be said in a further study, about young people's

modern relationship to temporal and spatial dynamics and how these clash and contrast at times with the more secular, traditional and until recently ongoing view of 'time' and 'space' as 'a priori', absolute, and god-given (Kant, 2006 [1783]), but understanding how the internet brings disruption to the concept of linear time also requires a theory to help understand how this has the potential to both empower and subordinate young people.

I knew that asking young people to talk about their socio-politics, and the ways their micro-worlds intersect with their political thinking was likely to draw on experiences from other temporal spaces across their life course. This necessitated a theory that could grasp and make sense of their potential experiences of, or creation of, tactical behaviour to manage power dynamics, and how they might interpret their positionality within these. I wanted to address temporality in relation to young people's perceptions of ongoing societal progress. This has become a presumptive frame through which to make policies in Western society (Lorey, 2014; 2015), and "Young people have become increasingly aware of the paradox between the expectations which surround them and the tools available to them to achieve these expectations" (Hart and Henn, 2017: 14). At the time I was designing my study the effects of neoliberalism seemed to have reduced welfare-state protection (Hart and Henn, 2017) for British citizens. This meant young people were increasingly at risk of finding themselves disenfranchised, as they were caught between the material reality of their lives and the expectations of their economic transitions (Edwards and Weller 2010). This also connects to how policy, and the capitalist view of work and ownership, views space. These can be led by assumptions about young people's lifestyles and needs, and how they should conform to a received notion that may be very at odds with the dimensions of their everyday reality.

2.2.3 De Certeau- mapping the city

Another significant role for de Certeau in helping me to conceptualise my work in relation to young people were the possibilities in his chapter entitled 'Walking in the City' for doing a study based in one geographical location / city. He argued that a city is composed of the movement of pedestrians through the space, the routes and pathways that do not make sense or figure on maps. De Certeau resists 'panoramicity', instead focusing on those who constitute the city by walking it, viewing the city as "the most immoderate of human texts" (de Certeau, 1984: 92) which can be rewritten many times through many practices. The ordinary lives were lived "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (de Certeau, 1984: 93). Taken against the apparent failure of visible measures of young people's politicisation, i.e., voting, party membership, civic engagement and so on, I was attracted to a theory which supported methods aimed at going beyond what is immediately visible.

De Certeau's concept of the 'doing of space', of 'spatial practices', 'mapping' and of space as a place of performativity, synchronises with the idea of simply following and being led by spatial practices. Shaping my study in relation to these ideas, I foregrounded ways I might engage with young people so that they would share their stories, *their* way, without risk of their experiences being overly organised to fit with a familiar synchronicity. Through de Certeau's ideas, we can understand young adults' politics as tactical, 'user' behaviour that can facilitate agency and power. The hidden struggles and resistances, the moments of opposition and conformation, are rendered as political behaviour that challenges the strategical and prevailing order of those in power. Seeing this behaviour as political allows broader scope to conceive of young people's agency, and the complexity of manoeuvring a route to independence through the use they make of (conformation), and the use on (resistance), the circumstances they find themselves in.

2.3 Nancy Fraser: Recognition vs Redistribution

For my study, I discuss Fraser's problematisations of the recognition vs redistribution debate, and what this might mean for young people's lived experiences. I will also briefly explore Fraser's uses of the term 'dependency' (Fraser and Gordon, 1994) to frame the way I understand my participants' positioning within society.

Nancy Fraser and philosopher Axel Honneth famously debated the relationship between social suffering and recognition struggles, with Fraser criticising Honneth for reducing social oppression to psychic harm alone, moving it into the realms of psychological harm rather than 'status subordination' (Fraser, Honneth and Golb, 2003).The struggle for recognition and ensuing recognition / redistribution debate has become one of the most influential ways of conceiving and depicting social and political movements in the last twenty years. Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser have been, arguably, the foremost proponents of this debate and what emerged through their debates has had a sizeable impact on Sociology and political economy. Both theorists aimed to ground their thinking in contemporary debates, but both characterise social and political conflict in different ways.

The injustice of cultural domination and non-recognition has been theorised and connected to Hegelian notions of oppression and human needs (Taylor, 1992), and Honneth's arguments for recognition (1992). Fraser argues that socio-economic injustice is simultaneously and significantly endemic, and deeply damaging, in Western society. Fraser argues that both recognition and redistribution need solving for social justice. For the purposes of my study, with the added

intersection of 'youth', it is possible to conceptualise the added pressures wrought by both the injustice misrecognition and maldistribution, upon those who have identifiably liminal existences. These injustices intertwine and combine to render those affected by aspects of both more disempowered. The problem has been the potential for them to mutually distract from each other. In the most basic terms, those who theorise about redistribution seek to unify and simplify groups; those who theorise about the need for recognition seek to differentiate and specify.

Honneth's ontology, at the time of engaging with Fraser in debate about the concepts, proposed that all conflicts about these matters were ultimately founded in a struggle for recognition that could illuminate social interaction. Honneth tried to avoid getting stuck on debates about identity being either integral or formed (Appiah and Taylor, 1994; Duttman, 2000) by proposing that recognition rested on mutual recognition, i.e., "the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee" (Honneth, 1995: 92). He wanted to understand how structure and agency were related. If human development can only be recognised subjectively, as per his theorising, this centralises the importance of recognition and respect in the process. Fraser argued that identity politics, as she framed struggles for recognition, are in fact different from (and if prioritised entirely, damaging for) arguments about redistribution. They cannot be reduced nor erased by each other-both concepts, held Fraser, must be examined together but without decentralising the significance of resource redistribution.

Fraser suggested utilising Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (1984), which is conceived as socially ingrained habits, skills, dispositions and individuals' perceptions of the social world around them

and their reactions to it, to help move Honneth's ontology beyond a cluster of emotions associated with social suffering (McNay, 2007). Fraser's key aim in her argument is to contest the idea that the two issues (recognition and redistribution) are in opposition, and to argue that social justice requires the prioritisation and equal prominence of both recognition *and* redistribution. She also argues that progressive politics must incorporate both of these issues.

Fraser's theories about the importance of income distribution draw on (amongst others) Marxist ideas about redistribution / challenge to the injustice of capitalism, works such as 'A Theory of Justice' (Rawls, 1999), 'Distributive Justice' by Rawls (1968), Sen's 'Commodities and Capabilities' (1985). The work takes forward that of other egalitarian theorists, to conceptualise and propose solutions to both socio-economic and socio-cultural injustice. Fraser's (2003) theory offers a new solution to this by proposing the implementation of two potential remedies: affirmative and transformative, as well as possible alternative routes to social justice. Affirmative solutions aim to redistribute amongst marginalised groups, whilst upholding the political and economic structures that already exist, without seeking to redress the balance at the politico-economic source of the problem. Transformative solutions seek to dissolve these groupings in order to draw attention to the socio-economic challenges, and redistribute along socialist lines, changing the conditions of labour / everyday life for everyone.

A criticism of Fraser's work has been her failure to fully establish a phenomenology of social experiences of injustice, as she draws heavily from social movements that have already realised a significant level of political gravitas in the public sphere. She has also been criticised for levying her issues with recognition primarily at progressive and not regressive socio-political movements, which can potentially side-line other struggles (Blum, 1998). Exploring this theory with my study, which is

not focused on a youth political movement, could offer an opportunity to see how Fraser's solutions and ideas may be being experienced in real lives.

2.3.1 Fraser, marginalisation and youth

Fraser uses Gramsci's (2000) developed interpretation of Marx and Engel's (1970) nascent ideas of cultural hegemony to demonstrate the concept's potential use for empowering considerations of political engagement. Fraser argues the concept can inform feminist theory on how dominant groups might 'misguidedly' lead political discourse. Through Fraser's arguments for the balance of recognition and redistribution (2003), and her considerations of Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony' (Fraser, 2013) which, in a similar way to de Certeau's theory of 'strategies' and 'producers', explores the manipulation of culture by the dominant class who seek to instil a worldview as the accepted cultural norm, the examination of youth socio-politics provides an opportunity to examine the ways those cultural norms are resisted, both actively and subliminally as the participants experience their social realities. It can also frame the ways the dominant class might push back on this through lack of resource allocation, or recognition.

Fraser argues for a re-evaluation of the notion of 'dependence' when used specifically in relation to young adults, toward perceiving their economic and social marginalisation and how it is constructed through governance. Young people are not merely a responsibility for society to find ways to support, they provide myriad societal benefits, possibilities and have an impact on social contexts. Thinking with Fraser's theory I am keen to contribute some more integrated understandings of youth-context relationships. Understanding what may produce notions of social meanings for young people, the negotiations and contestations behind the scenes in their worlds, can empower

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'dimensions of discursive struggles' (Fraser, 2013: 143), enabling us to see how even from within economic and / or social subordination, culture and meaning is created and made powerful.

2.3.2 Fraser's concept of 'needs talk'

Fraser introduces the concept of "needs talk" (Fraser, 1989: 291) as a kind of vocabulary by which different groups make and contest political claims over needs. Fraser interrogates the difference between "thick" (Fraser, 1989: 293) and "thin" (Fraser, 1989: 292) needs: the former represents needs which are less pressing such as assumptions and claims for legitimacy, whilst the latter refer to basic needs such as food or shelter. Fraser explains that needs can become masked by other needs, which then become mired in political conflicts based on assumptions. Fraser states that "there is no pre-established point of epistemic superiority", in other words needs cannot be decided by an omni-prescence, they "emanate from specific, interested locations within society". Fraser problematises the way that "needs talk" brings an issue out of a marginalised sphere such as the domestic sphere and is manipulated to create a political narrative.

The dominance of "needs talk" claims, suggests Fraser, imply that there may be newer modes of social control and power which have shifted the boundaries between the 'domestic', 'economic' and 'political' spheres (Fraser, 1989: 292) such that marginalised groups must vie for attention for their needs to be met. This means that rights which arguably should be taken for granted, become needs to be argued for in the economic domain. This also means that certain types of "needs" can deflect attention away from important political questions, such as whether the needs are legitimate, who and how those needs should be interpreted, and the political implications of those decisions to prioritise. Exploring young people's sense of their own socio-politics through Fraser's theory offers

an opportunity to see what needs discourses they recognise and what this suggests about the extent to which politics may reflect new social identities in subordinated social groups.

2.3.3 The 'Transnational Public Sphere'

Fraser problematises Habermas's concept of the public sphere (Calhoun, 1993) and considers whether this can still be relevant in an age of globalisation when information is exchanged transnationally. She also questions whether a transnational public sphere can be effective when participatory parity is not realisable, and challenges careless uses of the term "global public sphere". Her concepts are aimed at the study of transnational mobilisation and political engagement, and whether they need necessarily lead to a shared consensus, but for the purposes of the study I transpose these concepts to the possibilities for digital social media and global networking. Fraser posits that the concepts of legitimacy, inclusion and efficacy are significant for understanding globalisation and ways it can be understood. Importantly, she problematises the relinquishment of local and national publics for (unequal) participation in a transnational public sphere.

2.3.4 Fraser's concepts of 'care'

In Fraser's Contradictions of Capital and Care (2016) Fraser presents a socio-historical breakdown of the different forms of social reproduction that have developed through three phases of capitalist development in Western societies. Her work demonstrates how the separation of production and reproduction is a fundamental contradiction within the capitalist system. The social reproduction conditions are displaced by the economic rationale, which undermines them, and consequently creates a socio-historic burden of 'care' for women. Latterly, this has moved from the concept of

men as the breadwinners, whilst women maintain the household and care for dependants in the household, to women trying to emerge away from these social constructions of male dominance but stuck with the burden of maintaining the burden of unpaid work in the "private" or "domestic" spheres.

Fraser suggests an alternative to current institutional models, the Universal Caregiver model (1994), which would focus on making men's patterns of care and responsibility more like women's, rather than on women fitting within the androcentric 'breadwinner' patterns that capitalise on women's unpaid carework. Fraser also argues for a refocus away from 'how' young people are cared for, toward 'what' they care about. This might have the potential to re-engage debate with the impacts of current social values and cycles of economic production and reproduction, if these can be recognised. This thesis engages with the ways young people's socio-politics suggests a recognition of these tensions, but also explores how these tensions caused by the 'crisis of care' might be being experienced by young people.

2.5 Schutz and Habermas' conceptions of 'life-worlds'

Phenomenology, the science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being, has been an important influence in sociology (Strassheim, 2017a) and moving away from objectivist approaches to research design. I used phenomenology as an interpretive epistemology, with the situatedness of experience in mind, and the phenomenon of focus being socio-politics. Although only in limited ways, I nonetheless wanted to create some opportunities to facilitate the participants to investigate their own structures of consciousness (Husserl, 1970). I was motivated by reformulation of relationships between researcher and researched and the potential to share more power (Weis and

Fine, 2000) This fitted with the aims of my research questions, which were to understand lived experiences. Using interpretive phenomenological methodology (detailed further in Chapter Four) to examine facets of meaning for the participants, moved away from connecting meaning with related concepts, instead allowing the lived, situated experience to take precedence.

Life-worlds, a concept popularised by Husserl, can be conceived of as what is self-evident, worlds that subjects can experience together (Husserl, 1999). This supports de Certeau's theory that neither producer nor consumer are in charge of creating language and culture, rather it is a co-creative process over which neither party has complete dominion. The role of life-worlds as a concept was to ground all knowledge in lived experience, and it helped me to consider how each individual in my research study had their own lifeworlds, with complex connections and no clear-cut rationale to wider political discourses. Schütz developed this concept to combine Husserl's ideas with those of Max Weber's interpretive focus on meaningful action (1978). Schütz' social phenomenology drew from Husserl (1999), to propose that a philosophical investigation should be conducted on the nature of the action. Understanding the action of individuals in the social world meant using as references the relationships among subjects in everyday experiences. Considering the interactions among individuals, for Schütz, meant recognising the complex environment that requires understanding of the social actions of individuals (Schütz, 2008). Habermas (1990) is famed for his concept of communicative action, arguing that this helps to communicate and renew cultural knowledge, and social integration/ social action/ solidarity can be understood through socially and culturally informed linguistic meanings and identities. Both Schütz (2012) and Habermas (1985) emphasise that shared language plays an important role in understanding patterns within a lifeworld, through the sense of a shared and familiar social world, but they differed in that Schutz' social theory is based on types as idealisation with inherent dynamics, and Habermas' social theory is

based on more stable rules. I use the concept of life-worlds to understand the ways social and systemic regulation is created by shared values, beliefs, practices – and how these can be shaped by institutions. I am drawing on lifeworld as individual perspective (Schütz, 1970), combined with the focus on social and material environment factors (Habermas, 1984). Starting from the world my participants were already acquainted with, their own life-worlds, empowered them with a knowledge and everyday familiarity. It enabled them to make connections between shared constructions, making them meaningful (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). As a method for social enquiry, phenomenological approaches offer youth research an opportunity to turn "away from science and scientific knowledge and return[ing] to the things themselves" so that together researcher and researched may "arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience" (Dowling, 2003: 132).

If it is a given that sociology is tasked with forming "its own youth questions, if necessary redefining the policy agenda (…) [sticking] to its own questions rather than absorbing or simply responding to the wider society's forever changing youth problems" (Roberts, 2003:13), then re-examining meaning not as separately exigent in the world, but as being created, by people, from the experiences of their own lives (Cohler, 1993) can highlight the ways in which the knowledge produced by research "constitutes a partial and situated account" (Allen, 2005: 17), and not a definitive answer about what 'youth' means.

2.6 Intersectionality theory

I want to acknowledge overtly that I use intersectionality theory, as conceptualised by Crenshaw (1989) and developed further later (Crenshaw, 2017; Collins and Bilge, 2016), as an *approach* in

conceptualising my research rather than a key aspect of my theoretical framework. Their work on the theory strengthens my argument for holding complexity and identity alongside issues of social injustice and marginalisation. Intersectionality is a concept coined by Crenshaw (1989) a Black feminist activist scholar, in order to interrogate the ways that social identities are interdependent and the ways aspects of identity inter-relate. By evoking aspects of identity such as gender and ethnicity as interlocked, Crenshaw contested the pervading ideas that inequalities were felt relatively equally, and importantly the cumulative effects of intersecting structural inequalities over a life course.

Reading my data with an intersectional frame is important, too, in understanding how issues of social injustice and marginalisation might be experienced both collectively and individually. It emphasises both the danger of reading 'youth' as a homogenous category, and the consequence of what is missed about gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, social class, and so on. In other words, holding on to the complexity of each individual case study supports my argument that lived experiences will tell us more about young people's socio-politics than measuring for traditional political participation. The theory strengthens my approach to my research because it deepens everyday life theories, supporting inter-relationships in micro-worlds, whilst also offering ways to understand how people are affected differently by aspects of social marginalisation. Recognising how privilege and victimhood might impact on different identity groups in different ways felt particularly significant for work with young people of different genders, ethnicities, sexualities, religions, and from different socio-economic backgrounds. Intersectionality theory elucidated "connection around shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege" (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013: 306).

2.7 Conclusion

The theories of de Certeau and Fraser, combined with aspects of theory on life-worlds and intersectionality, all interlace to offer a new perspective on a study of young people. This combined perspective emphasises situatedness, the impermanence and changeability of material and social situations, and the constructed nature of our social identities and political discourses. This framework, held together, provides me with a basis from which to read my data whilst resisting drawing assumptions which would replicate the impact of the ruling classes attempts to create a dominant cultural norm by allowing overarching political discourses to lead my interpretations. Understanding the social issues that take precedence requires an ontological sense of what social realities can comprise, who 'we' are and how many realities are out there (Fleetwood, 2014). Exploring young people's experiences of their micro-worlds necessitates foregrounding ways of talking and listening that are sensitive to the ways a young person might understand their own selves and worlds (Skattebol, 2017), the significance of which strongly influenced the design of my study. Holding the group of participants' experiences collectively also requires holding on to their complexity, and the intersections that make their lived experiences unique. These theories work together, but also inspire questions of each other. Reading my data with these theories encourages me to question the objective ways young people are framed, and the origin of this objectivity.

De Certeau and Fraser both share an aim to explore social justice and cultural dominance through the societal frameworks of politics, culture and economy. Furthermore, both theorists argue that there is power in the unexpected resistances of marginalised groups, and delineate (Western) society broadly as comprising a dominant class, imparting cultural norms and social restrictions, upon a culturally diverse, arguably oppressed, but capable of being resistant, society.

Both Fraser and de Certeau's theories on structures of power have a focus on temporality, spatiality, and the effect of 'time' on individual and societal experience, rendering them ideal frames through which to understand the particular experiences of youth. Both theorists resist reductive assumptions about identities: identities are in flux and experiences are not separate, independent and summative, but interlaced. The emphasis instead is on how an individual may be oppressed by an identity facet in one sphere and space, but empowered by the same social context in another. This works well as a way to read my participants together with the frame of intersectionality, which can highlight the ways young people may experience social injustice in the interstices of their social realities. This offers clear opportunities to examine young people's potential feelings of exclusion and inclusion, whilst also allowing an opportunity to problematise my own position within the research, and contemporary paradigms of power.

My theoretical framework layers in the aspects of the theories explored in this chapter in order to suggest new ways to conceive of young people's socio-political behaviour. By creating a methodology that foregrounds co-construction and narratives, the study is able to examine ways in which young people may conceive of their own tactical behaviour, and what they care about in their everyday lives, whilst also allowing space for them to conceptualise what impinges on their everyday lives socio-economically. This centres the research in their own interpretations of socio-political concerns, which can be understood with respect to their intersectional experiences, and offer a counter-narrative to binarized questions about political allegiance.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The following review of literature synthesises some of my journey, and the process of my engagement with work by other scholars to address the argument of my thesis. This chapter first critically reviews research in youth studies to illustrate how viewing the sociology of youth politics temporally can reveal the impact of scholars on political discourses on youth. The first section addresses relevant youth studies history and how macro work on youth politics can sometimes present a problematic view of young people and politics. The chapter then moves to critically address an example of a recent debate around youth politics, that of apathy vs alienation. This section also introduces some contemporary examples of young people's activism, and how these may bring assumptions about young people's dis/engagement into question. As the literature review moves on I discuss the value of centring young people's experience, rather than approaching young politics and socio-politics as being fundamentally different. I introduce how I orient my thinking around young people's engagement with institutional power such as the workplace or digital social media, and problematise youth precarity.

Drawing upon cross-disciplinary perspectives, the literature reviewed in this chapter illuminates how new ways of understanding young people's everyday experiences, in connection with their worlds, and their virtual and physical spaces, can add to sociological understandings and re-make concepts of socio-political meaning. Awareness of debates that are not within the immediate field of study can support new understandings, and opens research up to possibilities of new approaches, allowing new chinks of insight into established wider discourses defined against normative

structures. By discussing some examples of recent research from other fields and disciplines I show how much can be gained and understood about youth socio-political research from sharing methodologies, practices, and perspectives. The literature review moves, as my own thinking did when I chose to read some of the literature chronologically, toward what can be revealed by considering young people's experiences contextually rather than definitively.

3.2 A discussion of youth studies history

I began my review of literature with the initial intention of understanding the contextualisation of youth politics within the broader historical literature on youth studies. Although I read works dating much earlier to deepen my own sense of historico-social context, I have chosen in this literature review to focus primarily on discussing literature dating from the 1960's forwards. This period saw much study on the concept of youth culture, which helps me to frame the literature alongside work by one of my key theorists, de Certeau, whose works also discussed the meaning and devising of culture more broadly. I introduce some earlier conceptualisations of 'youth' and 'youth culture' by Hall (1904) and Parsons (1942), but I argue my choice to focus in more detail on work dating from the 1960s onwards for two reasons: One, I wanted to address the role of macro work, some of which drew on a functionalist perspective, in forming conceptualisations of youth within sociology. As I delved further into the literature, it seemed apparent to me that this framing changed and developed in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century, and I wanted to chart these for the purposes of my study. Two, I wanted to demonstrate how conceptions of youth culture influenced perspectives on youth politics (Cohen, 2011 [1972]; Hebdige, 1979). This focus should not be taken to be on youth culture itself, so much as how

considerations of youth culture became more assimilated with some key thinking around youth politics and therefore to understand the latter, one must contextualise the former.

Thus far, as I will review, much research surrounding young people's involvement in politics has produced (sometimes conflicting) perspectives on young people's overt political participation, non-traditional participation, and the importance of citizenship education, depending on the aim of the studies. The review initially discusses relevant studies which focused on a macro-level orientation on social structures and young people, and how these shaped later debates concerning youth politics. I hope to illustrate that sociologists are part of the shaping of narratives that focus on macro perspectives, and I also aim to draw attention to the ways these narratives change over time.

In this section, I discuss a brief conceptual history of youth studies in the latter half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century, and some examples from recent history that exemplify the contemporary labelling of youth. This is not exhaustive, but does provide a critical analysis of some academic texts and discourses pertaining to 'youth' during this time period, and begins to highlight the ways that the framing of these correlated with contemporaneous politics. I then summarise some current debates that relate to my research, and address the areas my work is able to speak and contribute to.

The genesis of a tangible thread of specific 'youth' and 'adolescence' oriented studies is often attributed to American psychologist Hall's (1904) convergence of several, arguably already existent (Springhall, 1986), but separate discourses about age, nationhood, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class around the idea of 'adolescence'. There were other socio-historical works concerning youth before this seminal work (Coontz, 2008), but many youth studies scholars stem the shaping of

debate around youth to originate with Hall (1904). It has been argued that the establishing of the concept of adolescence also served to excuse the demands of a capitalist workforce for cheap and malleable labour (Springhall, 1986). This coincided with the First World War which decimated the (Western, in particular) world's young male population, and simultaneously placed young women in unfamiliar positions of professional responsibility to make up the shortfall in workforce, albeit still bounded by various legal repressions (Walvin, 1982). This conception of adolescence also came with an idea of a 'normal' adolescent, with anything deviating from that, e.g., young people who were poor, working class, non-White, non-Christian, especially, being framed as problematic. The conceptions presented by Hall in his original works have been remarkably persistent, framing 'adolescence' as a problematic life stage (Mirel, 1991). The idea that youth is problematic by dint of its stage of life has persisted – this can sometimes obscure the fact that 'Youth' is in fact a social construct, which "describes aspects of people's social position which are an effect of their biological age but not completely determined by it" (Frith, 1984: 2). Assumptions about this social construct have become embedded, to the extent that charting the changes in youth related literature, in particular between the 1960s and today, reminds us of the role researchers play in formulating these constructs.

Many Western societies, and specifically British society for the purposes of this review, underwent significant change in a relatively short period of time from the commencement of World War I to the end of World War II. Arguably, this led to a nostalgia for the supposed stability and integrity that had existed before the post-War metamorphosis. There was a collective interest in upholding this narrative of nostalgia as a way to regroup and refocus (Kenny, 2017). For this reason, the discourse of working-class transformation during the 1950s and ways in which youth culture became folded into that discourse can be traced to a mismatch between what different aspects of

society wanted from the future beyond such a seismic war (Cronin, 2006; Brooke, 2001). As the relatively newly conceptualised 'teenagers' became more visible in society, with social and financial currency, so too did the market which, as in the USA, was responding to the growing consumption of culture by young people (Griffin, 1997). At the same time, the drastic shifts in class culture toward new 'middle class' values (Zweig, 1961) and literal shifts in working class communities' locations, as slums were pulled down and families relocated to entirely new areas (Hebdige, 1979), helped to stimulate much more visible aspects of youth culture. Transcending locality, young working-class people's adaptations of fashions and cultural consumption were frequently linked to music scenes.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (hereafter referred to as CCCS) engaged with youth cultures and subcultures by examining the ways in which young people constitute themselves and their gendered / racialised / classed positions. In part this corresponded with wider societal shifts and the sense that a 'new working class-consciousness' was emerging (Thompson, 2016). The texts produced from CCCS at this time were (and remain) very influential in developing the field of youth studies as we experience it in the main today. Examples of these texts and the ways they incorporated everyday life include Hall and Jefferson's (1975), study examining teds, mods, skinheads and Rastafarians and the significance of ritual to young people. McRobbie's (1978) work on the social and environmental factors impacting on young working-class girls' experiences of education, and Willis' (2017 [1977]) micro study of young working-class boys' approach to their education and transition into labour. Hebdige's (1979) assimilation of youth subcultures which looked at the ways young people were drawing on art, music, fashion, and political positioning to carve out a place with themselves, whilst almost as quickly corporations found ways to mass market youth culture. Corrigan's (1979) compelling work challenged the

historical compulsions for sending children to school, and the nature of the resistance drawing on two small groups of working-class boys in two schools in Sunderland, and McRobbie and Garber's (1978) girls and subcultures study looked at the ways young women participated in youth cultural groups. These texts were seminal, though small studies oriented, partly because they drew from everyday life and in doing so directly challenged stereotypical assumptions. They could not be boiled down into passable concepts that made sense to the status quo. Instead, through drawing on ethnographic methods, and feminist and Marxist thinking to understand young people's lived experiences from within, instead of from without, these studies interrupted uninformed discourses on the nature of 'youth' and the idea of mass (malleable) motivations.

Some scholars at the time dismissed working class complexity and experiences, and in doing so made bold assumptions about young people in the UK. Bowlby's (1944) work on the connection between working class delinquency and previous abandonment by working mothers who placed children into creches or other childcare, and Susser's (1962) pursuit of the idea that working class children and young people's futures were in many ways psychologically determinable (due to the likelihood they would be mentally deficient by dint of their social class), are examples of this. In contrast, much of the work at CCCS engaged with young people's practices and attempted to steer away from homogenising by taking cultural behaviour and practices seriously. It is important to understand that these ideas were not unanimous, nor did they emerge in a unified way. Rather, within the CCCS itself, there was debate and contestation (Clarke, 1975; McRobbie and Garber, 1975). These debates were, at the time, politically informed and theoretically engaged; this overall culture of debate and political engagement contributed to the overall cohesive nature of sometimes divergent interpretations of research. Simultaneously, new forms of economic socialisation,

specifically linkages between education, work, and the ways in which young workers were incorporated into industry, had been explored (Roberts, 1968)

Meanwhile, academically, a divergence between youth cultural and youth transitional studies was becoming distinct and, occasionally, hostile (Brynner, 2000; Cohen and Ainley, 2000). This was in part due to differing methodological approaches; youth cultural studies tended to focus on ethnographic, small-scale, localised research over shorter periods, whereas youth transitional studies tended to work using quantitative, longitudinal, large scale research, over multiple locations. Naturally, these very different techniques give very different insights. The divergences of these approaches, and disciplines, have also arguably nudged focus away from some of the fundamentally important sociological questions about ways individuals are shaped by society, is there such a thing as social structure, and the role of institutions in society, in particular. It has been suggested that this has also led to exaggeration, inconsistency and lack of framing in reference to changing economic conditions, negating concerns with structured processes of reproduction (Furlong et al., 2011).

Griffin (1993) has argued that the youth research of the 1980s was hugely impacted by a dearth of funding opportunities and the presiding political discourses of the time. The lived experiences of youth at that time, were impacted hugely by youth unemployment and worsening social and economic conditions. Griffin (1993) argues, these were not adequately reflected in a breadth of youth studies, as researchers 'scrambled' to conduct more mainstream, and thus fundable, research. These contrasted with the radical approaches of the 1970s (e.g., McRobbie, 1980), as researchers found themselves being directed toward sociobiological thinking that bordered on biological determinism (Rose, 1998). This contrasted heavily with the framing of youth cultures / subcultures through their relationships with power, in the 1960s and 70s (Thompson, 1960). The close

allegiance between Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK and President Ronald Reagan in the US, also encouraged an artificial sense that there was transferability of ideology, values and experiences between the countries. Research tended to obscure this wider framing against power (Parker, 1989), in favour of constructed crises around youth.

The Nature-Nurture dichotomy, distinguishing the social from the biological, was called into question, and dominated much of the youth studies rhetoric (Birke and Vines, 1987). Youth research in the 1990s and 2000s seemed to focus, increasingly, on the transitional phase – which was beginning to be defined in more complex ways. Biological influences continued to be a defining feature, with work on gender differences and their connection to gender behaviour / biological traits contributing to considerations of how the social and the biological are mutually shaped (Graber and Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Maccoby, 1998). The concept of adolescence became more protracted, with transitions to adulthood being re-conceived as extending much further into young adulthood than had previously been thought (Rindfuss et al., 1996; Bernhardt et al., 2007).

Furstenberg's (2000) review of 1990s journals documented the prevalence of articles problematising the nature of youth, with articles about drugs (e.g., Conner et al., 1998; Hagell and Newburn, 1994), dance music and delinquency (e.g., Sellars, 1998; Behne, 1997), sexual behaviour (e.g., Bloor et al., 1998) and school issues (e.g., MacDonald and Sayger, 1998) prevalent. There was a dearth of exploration of young working class, or middle -class, experiences, with a greater focus on childhood experiences – particularly relating to school transitions (Wyness, 1999; Sharp and Smith, 1991; Siraj-Blatchford, 1999). The focus on 'problematic' young people in 'crisis' situations seemed to supersede analysis of the myriad ways young people managed positive identities, and negotiated complex roles and situations as they approached adulthoods.

Latterly, discourses on youth socio-politics have been dominated by discussions of youth participation, youth apathy and alienation. When the buzz words 'youth participation' really took hold, several scholars (Smith, 1999; Wood, 1999; Cooke and Kothari, 2001) discussed the limitations of its actualisation – both in relation to research and practice, and in the transferability of thinking around the limitations of trying to engender adult-led youth participation in relation to wider civic life. Fears around tokenism in youth participative approaches by institutions and charities, highlighted the effects of limited youth participation. Namely, the lack of inclusivity when participative approaches engaged a very small number of young people, and evidence that adult-led youth participation approaches have not gained significant popularity amongst young people, despite being a key goal in governance for several years (Middleton, 2006). Youth participation seemed to be focused on examining the needs of the institutions first, then through these, young lived lives.

Young people are arguably now subject to intense scrutiny in institutional environments (Taylor, 2012) which comes with its own concerns - namely the normalisation of this, and the likelihood this will continue to feel normal in adulthood, raises issues around agency. In some instances highlighted by scholars of youth justice, young people are navigating extraordinarily invasive systems of surveillance and control, whilst also being expected to secure 'successful' transitions into adulthoods (Smith et al., 2007). Colombo and Rebughini (2020) argue that life for young people in modern times is often managed as 'complex uncertainty' (Colombo and Rebughini, 2020: 1) and there is a broader discourse that young lives have become less predictable yet hold greater expectations of individual responsibility and risk management (Beck, 2016). It is not surprising that in such times, with youth historically (and still) ostracised as 'problematic' with dominating and

oppositional discourses pervading their daily lives, young people are relying on trust in their intimate relationships in order to function successfully in everyday life (Giddens, 1991). Young people have been caught between representations in both media and policy as a homogenous group of alternately vulnerable, radical, excluded and 'savvy' people (Mejias and Banaji, 2019). To make sense of these contradictions, the need for youth research that has the potential to both transform, and invite understandings of complexity in young people's lives, has never been greater.

3.3 Apathy, alienation, or something more?

Norris (2004a) summed up what she saw as a 'tidal wave' (2004a: 2) of withdrawal from conventional channels of political participation in post-industrial societies: "Political disengagement is thought to affect all citizens but young people are believed to be particularly disillusioned about the major institutions of representative democracy, leaving them either apathetic (at best) or alienated (at worst)." (Norris, 2004a: 2). The debates around 'apathy or alienation' have become key in youth politics, as scholars and governments alike tried to understand what was happening with youth politics. The particularly low youth voter turnout in the 2005, 2010 General Elections in the UK prompted fears within public media that the Millennial generation was behaving in a politically apathetic way. Research exploring the political behaviour of young people since the 1940's (Davis, 1944; Eisenstadt, [1956] 2017; Percival, 1951) suggests that in the emergent stages this does not change dramatically across the generations but is instead shaped by the social circumstances it meets (Neundorf, 2016). There are some limitations of quantitative studies using voting statistics, political party membership and so on, evident when there was a call for answers to explain the low turnout amongst Millennial youth voters in the General Elections of 2005 and 2010. There was a considerable difference between the turnout rate for young people (of 44%) and the general

population average turnout (of 65%) (Henn and Foard, 2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this prompted fears within governance about disproportionate levels of youth disengagement.

These fears continued to set the tone for later discourses on youth politics, and further pushed these debates into the realms of polarised definitions. In the past, being less likely to vote, less likely to understand the 'meaning' of politics, and engage with political parties was arguably presented as normal 'immature' (Savage, 2007) youth behaviour, in line with a life stage less likely to meet with political identity forming moments such as home ownership, parenthood, and a process of engaging with, encountering and understanding their citizenship (McIntosh and Youniss, 2010). But as institutional concerns grew these discourses on youth engagement eventually evolved into a moral panic (Cohen, 1972) of youth apathy and amplification of a deeply held institutional fear, namely "The thing called 'apathy' is democracy's version of original sin" (Minoque, 1999: 8), and impedes more important questions about the sins of the institution toward its citizens. If young people were actively disengaging, what was this saying about the establishment? I move to explore further how this binary evolved and began to be questioned.

The pattern of seeming political disengagement has become more entrenched over the 16 years since the 2005 General Election, with evidence that youth turnout was declining. This has further deepened assumptions about why this might be happening, and what this says about the generation of young people. Dahl et al., (2017) suggested that one cause of this may be young people's lack of cognitive awareness of political life that was creating a political apathy (evident in data collected from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and the UK). They emphasised that "such a dichotomy" between apathy and alienation "is likely a simplification as a seemingly passive stance can actually mask a latent political involvement". (Dahl et al., 2017: 4), a

view reinforcing earlier work by Amnå and Ekman (2014). What future studies on this topic needed to focus on, they suggested, was the extent to which young people were ignoring politics because they thought things were going well, and whether in fact this might be better understood by more comprehensive understanding of how young people conceptualise politics.

A key aspect to disentangling purported disengagement is to understand *what* young people are being framed as disengaging from, exactly. Delli Carpini's (2000) review points out that their disengagement is often framed against "standard measures of civic engagement" (Delli Carpini, 2000: 340), identified through examples of traditional participation, and as Taft (2011) explains findings in connection with literature on civic engagement have frequently evidenced disengagement through distrust and anger at having been sacrificed (Williamson, 2013), or a "lack of admiration" (Taft, 2011: 1501) of those in power. Young people's changing attitudes toward direct action and protest need to be weighed against social and political capital variations as influencing factors over young Europeans' democratic life, to be understood better (Ross, 2018). So, too, when developing ideas about youth apathy (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Bennett, 2007). Social constructions and socio-politics are contingent on the frames of social experience and contexts, and when exploring the evidence for youth engagement in socio-politics in relation to social contexts there is a measurable activism demonstrated by measures of "non-standard approaches to participation that do not necessarily promote societal cohesion" (United Nations, 2007: 67). In other words, when viewing young people's activism through informal politics such as boycotts or grassroots protests, and away from the "ideal" practices of voting and formal politics" (Taft, 2011: 1502) which maybe governmental measures of 'good' citizenship, the grounds for understanding the complexity of young people's socio-politics as deeply intertwined with their everyday lives suggests engagement does not have to be adult-led, or conceived (Gordon, 2007).

Binaries and simplification have become an established part of our political landscape. We have become used to being presented with divisive choices (Shaikh, 2020). As the wider political picture *seems* to have become over-simplified, there is a danger of correspondingly entrenching reductive ideas about youth socio-political engagement in the UK. Arguments to move away from simplification in our conceptualisations of youth politics point to the 'melding and blending' that young people do when coming up with political conceptions, and how these experiences can lead to new political definitions (Skelton, 2010: 145). Exploring these arguments, and using methodologies that draw from young people's complex, lived experiences can help to reshape the way young people inform discourses about them. Evidence shows there to be a growing distinction between explicitly political activity, e.g., voting, party membership etc., informal and grassroots activism, such as protests, movements and direct activism, and the embedded politics of daily life which don't fit into either of the more explicit activity categories. In recent years explorations of youth apathy, activism and alienation have been reframed and manipulated by media discourses, as examples of wider activism such as the Occupy Movement[1], 'Fridays For Future' international climate strikes[2], Extinction Rebellion[3], and most recently the Black Lives Matter movement[4] have been demonstrably led by some young people.

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[1] The Occupy Movement in the UK was inspired by the International Occupy Movement which began with Occupy Wall Street, and took place between 15 October 2011 – 14 June 2012.

[2] 'Fridays For Future' climate strike movement was started in August 2018 by the [then] 15-year-old Greta Thunberg to demand action be taken to address climate change.

[3] The Extinction Rebellion, or 'XR', was established in May 2018 to compel government action to address climate system issues.

[4] Black Lives Matter is a movement that began in July 2013, after the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter began trending after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African American teenager Trayvon Martin 17 months previously. It has since grown in recognition after the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25th in Minneapolis resulted in worldwide street protests during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In tandem with the foregrounding of these political movements as youth-led, by media discourses reflecting young people's supposed dexterity and skill at growing movements online (Stauffer, 2019; O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward, 2018), there is an assumption that technology has become the backbone to many modern youth movements, theoretically making it easier for young people to use digital social media to participate in activism globally (Schmitz et al., 2020). But media technology research suggests that online activism comes in different forms, should not be read in simple terms, and must be understood against the fact that digital social media platforms are based on market principles, which gives them the power to shut down and mute radical voices (Anderson and Revers, 2018). Added to this, the access to digital resources information about the macro world of politics is not equal, an issue that has been highlighted by events (much later than the study) during the global Covid-19 pandemic begun in 2020. As young people's education and communication centred around online interaction, the disparities of digital access and consequential social isolation issues for young people became clearer (Williamson, Eynon and Potter, 2020). As technology moves forward, media definitions of young people's engagement seem to respond in contrasting ways, reinforcing the lack of clarity about young people's engagement and showing that reductive framing and binarism does not capture the drivers.

Interdisciplinary work in academia can bring clarity to this problem of perception, as different ways of observing and learning from young people have the potential to be integrated. The conceptualisation of young adult politics in academia has seen a significant shift over the last few decades. Previously there was a focus on life-cycle / life-stage research, where young people were framed as inheritors of political responsibility. Now there is a move away from the focus on traditional participation and a fixation on what their political behaviour could be determined to constitute (Henn et al., 2005). Instead, there is a move towards lived experiences. Recent research

challenges the developmental emphasis in sociological discourses related to young people, arguing

for an 'open-endedness' (Østergaard and Thomson, 2020; Thomson et al., 2002) that might allow

for the shifts in experience that limit our ability to understand this generation purely transitionally,

whilst also recognizing the expectation of transition (and differing access to these).

What is the answer to the dichotomy between young people's apathy and alienation then, and does

this exist in real life or has it grown into a binary partly because of the historico-social frame

through which young people are currently being viewed? Farthing (2010) argues that we must move

away from the engagement / disengagement, apathy / alienation / activism debates, and away from

framing young people as the "apolitical harbingers of a 'crisis of democracy'" narrative (Farthing,

2010: 181). Alternative forms of participation, Bessant (2004) argues, could possibly avert a

potential crisis in democracy by connecting with the new ways young people are engaging

politically. The increased focus on climate change activism by some young people, argues Farthing

(2010), needs addressing on two levels: one, how can Western governments heed concerns from

young people about perceived threats to their quality of life (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006), and two,

how can young people live coherent lives in an increasingly "fracturing social world" (Farthing,

2010: 191). Ultimately, the previously dominant and competing paradigms of apathy, alienation and

activism may have actually obscured the ongoing picture, making it harder to see how young

people's lived experiences connect to their political thinking.

3.4 The problem with 'Young People' and 'Young Adults'

Problematising the terminology related to studies of youth necessitates a look back through the

literature to understand how the 'space' between childhood and adulthood came to be conceived

and understood. Historically, the study of 'youth' has been characterised by understanding people's position in relation to the social order, how they negotiate transitions, and develop relationships with peers. However, despite the vast literature pertaining to children's rights, there is a seeming gap that young people fall into once they stop being children and these 'rights' change and fall away (Skelton, 2007), and the spurious boundary between childhood, 'youth', and adulthood can obscure the interconnections between them (Valentine, 2010). This is highlighted by the modern interpretation of 'youth' as the age range 16-25 years (Valentine, 2003), which comprises ages experiencing very different politico-legal statuses.

Normative transitional studies do not capture the complex temporalities of transitions during the biographical phase of youth. What is not always overtly acknowledged is that research on young people is often understood in relation to the dominant theoretical and social perspectives of the time (Harlan, 2016), which can highlight the limitations of normative transitional / analytical models (e.g. Ashton and Field, 1976) as opposed to understanding the temporality (Chisholm and Hurrelman, 1995; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005), and exploring "emergent biographical patterns" (Thomson, 2011: 10).

'Young people' have been examined in relation to social change, initially in relation to established value systems, to understand their 'coalescence' into cultural groups, associated with the particular stresses of adolescence and transitioning into adulthood (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2011). However, there have always been academic voices warning against focusing on 'young people' as a section of society separate and apart, and the literature reviewed points more clearly toward the relationship with changes in society. The fixation on understanding 'young people's' political behaviour has, at times, ignored this correlation.

It could be argued that by generalising about the fact that the previous examples of power intersect with the time denoted as 'youth', I too fall into being reductive. It is true that I continue to use the phrases 'young people' and 'young adults' interchangeably throughout this thesis. However, I want to outline my position, in order that my usage can be best understood and not assumed to attempt sweeping generalisations without consideration of the complexity of material and social situatedness. Material and social possibilities are affected by power discourses, both beyond and within young people's reach; and they then have to engage with these discourses *because* they are encountering changing economic / social / cultural life situations (Skelton, 2010). The life-stage denoted as 'youth' is usually denoted as a defining factor, but I want my research to be understood as contributing phenomenologically to illuminate everyday lives, as a balance to macro-level analyses, and to understand the negotiations and resistances central to these experiences.

The phrases 'young people', 'young adults', and 'youth' are problematic predominantly when they become ciphers for reductive policy making and blanket thinking, instead of social processes and concepts that are historically constructed and situated. The people currently defined as 'young people' or 'youth' are living in increasingly unequal societies (Bessant et al., 2017). Explorations of their experiences – and in relation to this study, socio-politics- cannot be understood away from the power divisions in society, since they are constructed by these very same by dint of the institutional make-up of our economy, the prescribed nature of engagement with these institutions, and so on. The concept of an exigent 'youth', with similar characteristics on a wider, for example European level, has been dismissed (Liebau and Chisholm, 1993; Wallace, 2003) in favour of understanding subjectivity of interpretation.

Framing 'young people' as a separate conceptual demographic also risks silo-ing their experiences from the interlinked and interpersonal nature of everyday life. Young people are not isolated, autonomous individuals and there are specific implications of economic precarity for intergenerational interdependence. Research supports the dynamic formation of socio-politics within family relationships, and the nature of this study which created space for the participants to bring together experiences from several domains of everyday life on their own terms, has significance in identifying how these co-impact and drive socio-political thinking. David Morgan's concepts of family practices have repositioned family as something that you 'do' rather than 'are', foregrounding the significance of the ongoing role of 'doing family' for young people, and how this shapes their perceptions of everyday life (Morgan, 2011). Siphoning young people away from their everyday contexts, cares and concerns fails to take into account the significance of key findings from sociology of family, and the importance of integrating these and warn against unproblematised terminology and delineation of youth. Young people have grown up shaped by the social constructions of 'Child' and 'Adult', and these can be deeply gendered in relation to their experiences of what kind of care a woman or a man brings to the family domain (McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies, 2000: 785), with implications for how they later socio-politically see their own roles in care work.

Nordqvist argues that, as the shift moves toward thinking of family as a set of activities (doing) rather than a structural family (being), we must develop a sociological gaze which is more sensitive to the inter-relationship between "family as a set of practices and the feelings, imaginations, dreams or claims with which they are entwined" (Nordqvist, 2017: 865). Young people at this life stage of societal expectation for decision-making about 'the future' and the social construction of the "trajectories from youth to adulthood" (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 532) are particularly connected

to (and influenced by) family practices around hope, choice and discursive resources which may or may not be readily available to them (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). The varying access to such resources is particularly significant when held against evidence that today's politics of distribution are heavily influenced by the wealth-transmitting mechanism of private inheritance (Cooper and Pugh, 2020), retaining advantage in well-resourced genealogy. Importantly, too, the relationship between family and intimacies are concepts that must be problematised, family does not necessarily conflate with intimacies and the relationship of these concepts in relation to young people risks being lost if we fold youth experiences as separate from wider debates concerning the analytic significance of 'family', 'personal life' and wider 'culture' (Edwards, McCarthy and Gillies, 2012: 2).

Transposing ideas about 'young people' across nation states also poses problems, with the potential to fail to take into account the specifics of economic contexts and corresponding "ideational, institutional and spatial enclosures they create" (Hayes, 2017: 21). The specificities of the new precariousness of employment in the UK (Shildrick, MacDonald and Webster, 2013) need to be understood against the impact of working-class family traditions for work, and thus make little sense if read as disconnected youth experience. Young people negotiate the negative experiences of insecurity of employment against the need for the social relationships work gives, social status, aspiration and recurring patterns of low-status, low-waged jobs, all of which intersect with a pattern of resisting the alternative – unemployment – due to community / family knowledge of the alternative (Shildrick, MacDonald and Webster, 2013: 6).

The arguments presented arguably lead to a key consideration in research pertaining to young people and youth: belonging. Research suggests that young people are sensorily connected to their micro worlds and that these connections help them to imagine futures (Wilson, 2018). The

complexity of the temporality of family (Boddy, 2018), digital connection (Wong, 2020) and spatial connection (Chen and Schweitzer, 2019), for example, in relation to belonging highlight the dangers of disallowing the intricacy of the complex, multi-sensory connections that make up the life stage of youth. Though this research does not centre on belonging, rather presenting connectedness and connections which contribute to socio-politics, this section closes with the argument that young people's experiences 'belong' in contexts, not in silo, in analytical sociological discussions of lived experiences.

It is important to study young people, and in doing so, define terminology with some level of continuity – in part to connect research together and allow for cross-referencing between fields. For this reason, and in recognition of the way that the life stage of 'youth' is institutionally perceived, I use the phrases 'youth', 'young people' and 'young adults' in this study – but by centring the narratives of experience, I hope to foreground individuality in relation to their everyday lives, over institutional perceptions of them.

3.5 Is contemporary youth political participation 'different'?

The prevalence, particularly in media, marketing and commerce constructions, of distinguishing a whole cohort of people by a name defining their 'generation' has led to my participants being labelled as the 'Gen Z' generation[5]. I challenge the constructions of these generations as being

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[5] In 2018, the Pew Research Center defined 'Generation z' (born 1997 onwards, oldest aged 21 in 2018) as the generation succeeding the 'Millennials' (born between 1981 and 1996, aged between 22 and 37 in 2018). There is no definitive cut-off point, per se, but 1996 is widely acknowledged as a useful year to end the birthing years of the Millennials. This allows for a clearer read of the influential factors specific to Generation Z from 1997 onwards. Source: Pew Research Center of Google Trends, accessed December 2019.

different from each other. Are generations really so different from each other? Is Gen Z really so different from its predecessor, the Millennials? This section examines whether young adults who comprise these defined generations really are in a unique position generationally, in terms of political behaviour. It examines why, and for whom, they have been encapsulated in these generational markers. Are they really so different in their political behaviour, or does this obscure wider societal and structural changes that affect us all? Should we perhaps be more suspicious of a general perception that seeks to position contemporary youth as the failing intersectional characteristic of a population otherwise engaged in the political sphere, thereby perhaps kicking the responsibility for / failure to attain emancipatory change further down the generations, and instead examine the wider public disenfranchisement with institutions that has divided a nation?

I will take the idea of generations being supposedly different from each other. New conceptualisations, post-1990s, followed the influential work of Mannheim ([1928] 1952), which asserted that when an age group enters social life "its formative experiences produce a distinct and lasting perspective" (Whittier, 1997: 761), with generations forming units, each generational unit experiencing and interpreting events in the same way. Henn et al.'s (2002) article marked the beginning of the more recent conceptualisation of a generational difference in terms of political behaviour. Posing the Millennial generation as a 'generation apart' (Henn et al., 2002), their research findings suggested that "although uninspired by, or even sceptical of, political parties and professional politicians, young people are sufficiently interested in political affairs to dispel the myth that they are apathetic and politically lazy" (Henn et al., 2002: 186).

Following Henn et al.'s (2002) lead, the focus in academic research increasingly turned to the ways in which the Millennial (and following that, Gen Z) generation was also incorporating technological

advances. This imposed separation began a new shift in the way young people's politics were conceived. Previously, lower engagement had been explained away by the life-stage, and conceptions of less responsibility, prior to transitions such as serious employment, children, home ownership, and so on. This generation's political participation was being framed as non-traditional, and in many ways disconnected from Western democracy's institutional pathways (Marsh et al., 2006; Banaji, 2008), leading to the argument that the Millennial generation was not politically apathetic, but politically alienated. The conception that a young generation were seeking the political elsewhere, alongside research maintaining a generations' political behaviour could be read as unique across the life stages (e.g. Whittier, 1997; Braungurt and Braungurt, 1986), attracted a focus on a generation that seemed to release those in power from scrutiny.

How substantiated is this? A key argument against the reductive nature of examining a 'political generation', is the contestable grounds upon which they are defined as a generation in the first place, when uniting factors might well be found across age demographics. If we take Mannheim's acquiescence that there may come into being differing or opposing forms of response to any particular historical situation ([1928] 1952: 304), then this potentially scatters a generation's political response, who will be influenced by both wider historical, cultural and biological contexts, and their own situated and individualised experiences. The scrutiny created by focusing on the idea of the Millennial generation and their political participation also paved the way for a greater concentration of qualitative studies (e.g. Marsh et al., 2007; Henn et al., 2002), examining ideas presented in earlier quantitative cross-national work (e.g. Barnes, Kaase and Alderbeck, 2016) which sought to explore more fluid conceptions of political organisations and actions, and cause-oriented micro-politics (Norris, 2004b) understanding these against changing concepts of political power in an increasingly globalised world.

Scholars have continued to raise valuable points about the nature of young people's current political behaviour, suggesting perhaps they were inadequately informed (Briggs, 2017), and education could be the cornerstone to righting this. Lodge et al. (2013) pointed to the actions of the Coalition Government as a turn-off for young people, who saw their key interests being pushed further and further down the list of priorities, creating, they argued, a cyclical pur-blindness from government policy makers and recalcitrance from young voters. There is evidence suggesting that young people's engagement with non-traditional politics has increased (e.g. Sloam and Henn, 2019a; Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014), and that the key to refocusing the energy of this may be localised engagement (Sloam, 2007) but paradoxically young people are still less politically active than older generations (Henn and Foard, 2014).

The stereotypes that have been perpetuated in some areas of the press, with blanket headlines such as 'Young People Are Angry' (Pires, 2018) 'Millennials- The Me Me Me Generation' (Stein, 2013), 'The Young Just Don't Care About Politics' (Hatfield, 2015) obscure the reality of everyday lives for young people, and arguably reveal more about the political elite. Scholars have argued that making assumptions about young people's politics in fact points to the failure to convince young people that formal political participation was a given facet of citizenship, as had arguably been assumed in the past (Dalton, 2013; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Sloam, 2020). Instead, examining young people's socio-politics in new ways, as being enacted *by* them rather than to them (Kallio and Häkli, 2013), and examining enactments of agency through young people's own words on their political practices (Skelton, 2013), can re-centre young people's socio-politics so that they can be understood outside the system (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). A rebalance away from adult-centred political debate which orients around generational behaviour, to include young people in the body-

politic, could facilitate "protecting [young people] from the press of much that is so problematic about the politics of adulthood, while still seeking to ascertain their needs and wants, their hopes and fears" (Philo and Smith, 2013: 143-144). What can be surmised from the various debates is that drawing a consensus on how young people politically 'behave' may miss the wider point about how society engages with them, and does not account for all the factors influencing what can be read as political behaviour.

3.6 Workplace for young people – increased freedom or reinforced restrictions?

The time of youth can seem as if it is constructed as a waiting period for the 'real life' of adulthood (Wyn and White, 2020), at which point young people will supposedly achieve economic, and political autonomy and independence. I have problematised some aspects of youth transition theory earlier in this chapter, but I want to focus on some studies into the impact of the workplace on young people's socio-politics. The workplace is recognised as being a 'space' of adult regulation and control, and is given status over and above the domestic (Fraser, 2007) spaces of participation, often resigned as being the spheres of women and children, discussed in the previous chapter (Lister, 2007). This enforced binary plays into young people's perceptions, at the commencement of their professional careers and experiences, that their informal / youth-framed politics are inferior in the new adult world of work (Kallio, 2008; Skelton, 2010).

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1031 prohibits employers' direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of age. Despite this, The Resolution Foundation estimates that 37% of those employed on zero-hours contracts are aged between 16 and 24 (Pennycook, 2013), which strongly suggests that young people are most likely to be given precarious and insecure

employment when they find work (Blackham, 2015). Young people are disproportionately represented in precarious work (MacDonald, 2009: 168-169). In an age of increased economic inequality, the contrast between rich and poor has increased significantly in recent years (Watson, 2020). This seems to have created a cyclical dynamic of labour amongst young people, which goes beyond the expectation for a temporary experience of precarious employment for young people. The economic crisis has affected both less advantaged and relatively privileged young adults' experiences of the workplace, with the former's experiences of precarity potentially coming to define experiences of employment and the latter seeing noticeable stagnation in their incomes (Haddad, 2012; Mayhew and Anand, 2020).

The impact of gender on workplace experiences amongst young people is complex, and the struggle for an equal space and place of recognition for women in employment culture is ongoing. It involves negotiating the new competitive meritocracy designed by strategies of government. These have been presented to entice women into the idea that they have already gained 'freedom' and 'capacity' and they can therefore abandon the aims of feminism, as having already served their purpose. This, argues, McRobbie (2007) serves as another form of entrapment to work endlessly on the 'self' whilst being dissuaded from engaging with the darker mechanisms of market forces, and the continued patriarchies. Regulating the use of temporary contracts for young women, in particular, entering the job market, is crucial in impacting upon the likelihood that they will become income-secure and stay in employment consistently post-education (Bettio, Plantenga and Smith, 2013).

The benefits of education and status in protecting young people from prejudiced treatment at work, are also not straightforward. The psychological well-being of unskilled workers has decreased

(Katikireddi et al., 2012) over recent years, and employment status may have a bigger impact on social well-being than class (Richards and Paskov, 2016). Different dimensions of socio-economic status are known to perpetuate social inequalities in young people, and yet over-simplistic reading of this 'inequality' obscures some of the complex socio-political dynamics experienced in the workplace (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), and how these can be understood intersectionally. The study will explore the intersectional nature of workplace prejudices experienced by the participants, to contribute greater understanding of how these are experienced and tactically mediated.

3.7 Social media: young people's dis/connection online

Though modern life expects its young to be natives of the new globally networked world, the capacity for accessing these connections is not equal (boyd, 2008). Literature has moved to expand the concept of precarity in youth (Beck, 2016; Colombo and Rebughini, 2020; Butler, 2011; Lorey, 2015) to suggest that this spatio-temporal dislocation can have the added effect of seeping a general instability into the everyday, amplified by new lines of exclusion. Feminist theory examines whether the possibilities of the internet as a kind of 'counterpublic' away from the dominant public sphere (Fraser, 2007), with potential for empowerment, are straightforward. It is striking to see how unproblematised framing of young people can inform debates, as Kearney (2006) argues, we conceptualise young women as passive consumers of online content directed by men, rather than paying sufficient attention to the roles they perform as producers, and potential disruptors, of discourses through the unpredictability and agency of their usage.

Research nearly a decade ago exploring the purposes of everyday life online engagement by young people identified 'creative production', here meaning production of material and 'content' to be

uploaded online, as having a tangible relationship with increased online and offline political engagement. (Ëkstrom and Östman, 2015), and a more recent analysis by Kim and Ellison (2021) used modelling to show an increased likelihood that social media will inform political opinions for young people in 'politically homogenous networks' (2021: 1). As digital technologies have changed and developed, the significance of social media 'influencers' has become a bigger feature of youth culture. Ways that young people elaborate identities and negotiate social dynamics has been increasingly centred on digital social media interaction (Osgerby, 2020).

Online technologies' may have potential for uniting political groups, but the reality is that this is often complicated by the 'messiness' of a non-distinct agenda (Keller, 2015; Schuster, 2017). The "new directions in activism, the construction of new participatory communities" (Harris, 2008: 481) are arguably offering new ways for young people to frame and understand agentic practices. However, new online directions in activism are not necessarily engaging young people previously uninvolved in politics, so much as providing new ways for politically engaged young people to explore ideas (Keating and Melis, 2017). New ways to explore socio-politics may come at the cost of helping to manufacture the culture of surveillance (Lyon, 2018; Boyd, 2011). All this must be understood, argues Gangneux (2019) within the context of neoliberal governmentalities, but also as "deeply embedded in and rationalised using neoliberal narratives putting a strong emphasis on one's responsibility to proactively anticipate and manage one's safety and perceived social risks" (Gangneux, 2019: 8).

Technology has also enabled people to transgress between spaces – personal, private, public, temporal and geographical. It is no longer the case that the real and virtual worlds are thought of as entirely distinct (Jurgenson, 2011), and technology affects interpersonal relationships – whether

positively or negatively – and thus must be considered in the context of connection (Moraine, 2012; Turkle, 2011). There is increasing evidence to demonstrate that we must reconsider the idea of young people as being at risk from the internet and being socially 'withdrawn' from 'real life' whilst engaging online (Wong, 2020), and engage more deeply with the ways that digital social media may also make marginalised young people feel interpersonally connected.

Gangneux (2019) and Light (2014) describe processes of subjective engagement and detachment with digital social media as being on a continuum of connection/ disconnection practices, within different power relations. Light and Cassidy (2014) refer to this as 'strategies of disconnection and suspension'. These tactics, regardless of the scale of their success, suggest a conscious socio-political engagement with the nature of digital social media. Perhaps there is a different way to disassemble power in the strategies of producers of digital social media, as users tactically choose what is constructed and separate interpretations of their social life in unpredictable and disparate ways.

3.8 Defining use of the term 'intimacy' in the thesis

I make reference to the term 'intimacy' in the thesis, and I wanted to define the conceptualisations of intimacy I am drawing from. Intimacy within sociology is not easy to pin down, due to its diffuse and sometimes dissonant meanings interwoven through subfields such as sexuality and family, and the problematic combination of intimacy with emotions (Forstie, 2017; Turner and Stets, 2006). Jamieson states, "a singling out of the quality of one personal relationship without attention to the wider constellation is unlikely to provide a maximum value in attempts to understand social change" (Jamieson, 2012: 266), emphasising the interwoven nature of intimacies.

Presenting intimacy as a broad concept is problematic, so for clarity I use the term 'intimacy' in this thesis in relation to four concepts developed into a framework by Forstie (2017) who considers intimacy to be a social relationship, impacted by institutional encounters. Forstie breaks these down into affect (Gould, 2009), the sharing of knowledge (Vogler, 2008; Giordano, 2003), attaining or escaping intimacy through action (Fine, 2012; Nippert-Eng, 2010), and the norms within which relationships can be located (Weeks, Heimberg and Rodebaugh, 2008). I accept the limitations of the term in relation to young people, due to the range of interpretations more broadly, but pulling these definitions together to underpin the conception of intimacy in social relationship acknowledges the disparate meanings whilst also attempting to render the intimacies in the thesis legible. Forstie's considerations of intimacy in relation to institutions is particularly relevant to the thesis, which explores young people's mediations of institutional experience. Throughout the rest of the thesis when referring directly to the intimate social relationships of the participants, I will define which concept of intimacy I am drawing on.

3.9 Problematising precarity of young people

Finally, I want to discuss assumptions around the universal nature of precarity in youth. This represents another call to allow for complexity and steer away from problem-focused narratives about youth as necessarily precarious. Precarity, as explored in Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard's study 'Against All Odds' (2016) is better understood when considered to be dependent upon the systems and relationships interacting in a young person's life (Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard, 2020: 292), rather than an abstract and blanket experience that results from an aspect of one's identity. Moving away from generalising conceptions about a 'lost generation' might inform us better about the intersecting nature of resources, relationships and responsibilities and how these

might combine to allay or amplify precarity (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard, 2020).

Though it makes sense to me to explore the complexity of experiences of precarity rather than decontextualise these and apply them to young people as some sort of homogenous and unproblematised experience, it is important to acknowledge some particular aspects of the labour market that do present young people with potential levels of precarity. The particular circumstances of the labour market in late modernity mean that secure employment is harder to attain and periods of worklessness increasingly commonplace (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2011). As speculated earlier during the section giving the context of the European Referendum (Section 1.7), it is possible that the unfolding consequences of the vote to leave the European Union, and thus Erasmus+, will have direct consequences for more marginalised young people. Almost all of the employment scenarios of the participants I interviewed could be filed under Standing's (2011) definition of the new social class of the 'precariat'. The precariat experience defines those employed through "so-called "flexible" labor contracts' temporary jobs, labor as casuals, part-timers" (Standing, 2011: 10). This reinforces research that suggests neoliberal changes to the youth labour market have increased the likelihood of insecure and contingent employment (Furlong, 2015; Furlong et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, as we shall see, the participants drew upon networks, and constructed stories of hope that partially shored up the precarity of their employment. They drew upon "(formal and informal) scaffolding in navigating precarious times" (Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard, 2020: 299). Sometimes, this necessitated masking aspects of their intersectional identities in different environments, in order to secure the support / survival within that context for later use. This

constituted a management of identities and contexts, which further amplified their dexterity within a multitude of temporalities (e.g. at home, at work, in relationships, social communication, online, and so on).

What the research can suggest about 'youth' as a category is that added to other aspects of intersectional identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality, it can amplify the precarity of already difficult situations. Precarity can be heightened by reduced access to support, or a particular set of interstices and temporal anxieties that place added socio-economic pressure on young people. Whilst I choose not to describe young people as homogenously precarious, the analysis highlights examples of precarity and acknowledges the increased pressure on young people to balance constructed social dependency through their care relationships and networks (Colombo and Rebughini, 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Following an outline of my methodological approach to this study, in this chapter I discuss what inspired my methodological approach, reflections on positionality, my conceptual framework and my narrative analytical framework. I briefly examine the power dynamics and ethical issues of researching deeply the complexity of young people's lives. I go on to consider the context of the 'field', beginning with what drove my decision-making process in choosing sites to recruit and sampling. I then introduce some individual demographics for my participants, before moving on to discuss my interview methods, and how these worked together. Finally, I discuss my analytical approach.

4.2 Overview of methodology

I planned the use of several mixed methods: the semi-structured interview, incorporating photo elicitation, walking and visual prompting methods. The study was planned to reflect my epistemological concern with returning to "the things themselves" (Dowling, 2003: 132) by creating space for participants to reference things and people that felt significant to them to begin our conversations. I designed the study this way to centralise 'meaning' as something that is created as part of our daily lives, thus comprising, in part, material content that they could bring in from their social realities, to draw in connections to the lived, situated experience. This could be considered as one method 'informing' the other (Greene et al., 1989). I carefully chose methods that connected to the same epistemological outcomes, incorporating each element at points that aid the function of

the overall design, 'combining' a mixture of methods from the very beginning of the research relationship with each participant, to avoid "operationalizing at some distance" from other methods (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006: 51).

The methods could be taken as directly influencing each other, in that the photo elicitation informed the direction of the interview, rather than the interview being about analysing the photos in detail. The route chosen by participants for our walking interview informed discussions of localised issues and wider political ideas, and I chose to focus on the talk that came out of us walking together rather than the topography. The discussion of the participants social media feed informed our discussion of the ways in which the participants used social media, yet as I explained in my ethics form (Appendix 7) I did not see their social media feed myself. My research was designed to invite the participants to lead – metaphorically, through discussing their chosen photographs in interview 1, and physically, as they led me through their chosen routes in interview 2. The research focused on the talk emerging as co-constructed stories. The methods in combination helped to enable my methodology to stay true to the analysis of the 'small story' (Phoenix, 2013: 2), which did not desire to be 'neatly storied into beginning, middle or end" (Phoenix, 2013: 2). The methods were designed to create a mosaic of understanding, combining elements of data.

4.2.1 What inspired my methodological design? Ontology and epistemology

As researchers we all bring certain philosophical and epistemological assumptions and beliefs to our research. My ontological approach to the study, being that knowledge is co-created and there are multiple realities, prioritised an active role for participants during the research cycles. The research

acknowledges that structural factors are capable of negatively affecting agential motivation. Understanding the interlocking and mutually dependent nature of young people's material and social settings, and informal groupings – the family, friendship, institutional spaces they experience – must be understood in tandem with the impact of wider structures, such as polity, and economy. The study also explores the idea that generations and identity exist independently of any single individual. For the purposes of my research, the context of 'time' has a particular significance, since 'youth' is conceived of as a particular transitional life stage. How context and mechanism can impact upon outcome (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), is hugely affected by time - the human life cycle is affected by social structures, which are then reproduced (Archer, 1995).

The voice of the participants needed as much as possible to lead the direction of 'political' talk. By being explicit about my theoretical framework in Chapter 2, my intention was to be as clear as possible about the theories I engaged with and how these impacted upon the qualitative study I designed. However, I wanted to briefly reflect on the wider philosophical and epistemological assumptions and how these informed the decision-making about the influence of theories in my study. My epistemological assumption maintained that the research design needed to prioritise interaction, and that knowledge is historically and socially situated. This assumption was based on personal values associated with feminism and socialism. The epistemological assumption I brought to bear on my research was also informed by my previous role and identity as a youth work practitioner, teacher and then consultant. These experiences have undoubtedly had an effect on the ways I am inextricably embedded in the research and its outcomes (Berger, 2015), and the frame I am bringing to the study. I am accountable, both to the participants, and to my previous experience. My professional background means I have learned to pay attention to my own and others' ways of coming to know, knowing and experiencing the world. This proved significant when I set out to

recruit participants. I have experience of engaging young people, including hard-to-reach groups, and I was also familiar with the networks and resource providers who engage with more vulnerable and excluded groups. Being able to relate to, and understand, a range of backgrounds and experiences gave me confidence in my ability to engage young adults for a research project of this nature.

Synthesising these experiences with my theoretical underpinning outlined in Chapter 2, my conceptual framework and approach to methodology was centred in everyday lives (de Certeau, 1984) and informed by the concept of 'life worlds' as a way to study an individuals' lived experience of the world, drawing on Schutz (1970) and Habermas (1984), as referenced in my theoretical framework. Conceiving of life-worlds as a way to understand how the participants might perceive space and time in their own realities and draw ideas about their socio-politics from this helped me focus on experience rather than objective constructions of young people's politics. Similarly, by drawing on ideas from intersectionality theory about the differing ways our realities are affected in relation to aspects of our identity, I could integrate how life worlds were embedded in and operating in a world of meanings and prejudgements that are socially, culturally, structurally and historically constituted. Intersectional theory supported me as a researcher to acknowledge myself, and my own intersectional identity, within the research. Importantly, I could then critically analyse what I might be bringing to my interpretations of what was significant about the everyday lives shared with me. Researcher positionalities are a central consideration in feminist research, and I was very aware that my participants would likely have complex interpretations about my 'identity' as they discussed and formulated ideas about their own. The process of "racial and cultural awareness, consciousness, and positionality" both support an emancipatory research paradigm, and help to mitigate danger "seen, unseen and unforeseen" for both the researcher and participants (Milner IV,

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2007). To stay true to the underpinning epistemology and ontology guiding my research, necessitated engaging critically with the 'self', with engaging in reflection and what kind of representation could be emancipatory, and shifting 'self', and the 'selves' explored by my participants, to their relationship with 'systems'. In other words, I acknowledged that I was also part of meaning-making in the communication with participants.

As explored in Chapter 2, I made socio-politics the phenomenon I aimed to study and used phenomenology as an interpretive epistemology, with the situatedness of experience in mind. This fitted with the aims of my research questions, research design and methodology which were to understand human and lived experiences guides my research questions. Using interpretive phenomenological methodology to examine facets of meaning for the participants, moved away from connecting meaning with related concepts, instead allowing the lived, situated experience to take precedence.

Framing 'youth' as being categorically distinct in some way, as many recent discourses have done, can result in sweeping deficit discourses framing them as 'vulnerable', 'at risk', 'apathetic' or 'disengaged' in relation to adult-centric agendas. Influenced by the epistemological assumptions I was bringing due to my own positionality, rooted in feminist theories (referenced in Chapter 2 and 4), I felt the scope of knowledge could be expanded by understanding young people's perspectives of their social and material environmental conditions and the relevance of these, and their connection to these. Attending to the everyday lives of young people, through ethnomethodological approaches, centres interpretations as far as is possible in the social realities, guarding against "a fictional, non-existent world constructed by the scientific observer" (Schutz, 1970: 8). Schutz's (1970) approach orients toward subjectivity and resists objectification, rooting significance in the

ordinary. Youth policies, following popular discourses about 'youth', struggle to connect with real aspects of young people's lives, and are increasingly failing to connect private experiences with public issues (Skitka and Bauman, 2004). Conversely, everyday life research reflects young people's sense-making necessarily emanates from their surroundings, and personal relationships. My epistemological assumptions emphasise that what can be known is situated, and the phenomena I aimed to observe – socio-politics – was understandable through the relationships and social / material realities and relationships the participants experienced in the day to day.

4.2.2 What studies directly informed the design?

My research methodology and approach were informed by several examples of previous work in youth studies. I drew on a wide range of literature (referenced in Chapter 4) and examples of recent research focusing on young people's everyday experiences. In the following section I highlight some work which had particular influence on how I designed the study. I drew on Wood (2014) and a research study which explored the constitutive nature of the everyday world in young people's subjectivities and practices of citizenship, and the ambiguity she describes in relation to the methods and data collection they undertook. Wood introduced task- based activities to stimulate discussion, and to support more easily comparable data. She also used photo- voice methods as a balance and prompt for the spoken word, and as a way to potentially capture spatial narratives. The potential for "opening up spaces" (Wood, 2014: 133) by allowing the everyday data to be rambling and in-doing-so to capture the ordinary and see its significance gave me confidence to move away from direct questions about political discourses.

Sarre and Moran-Ellis's (2014) work addressed tensions between researching dynamic phenomena and the realities of balancing this with research design, and I found this helpful as I grappled with working out how to balance my choice of research methods with actually recording the dynamism they aimed to capture. Their work helped me to conceive of ways these seeming tensions might create data that could tell me more about structure and agency, and this eased initial quandaries as I considered that these dynamics would reveal themselves as part of this process. I also drew on work by Nilsen and Brannen which highlighted the importance of taking an historical, intergenerational approach to research with young people. Seeing young people's lives as static and ahistorical, as I go on to argue in my literature review in Chapter 4, assumes that "nothing can be done" (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014: 7)) and yet it is clear from research pertaining to intergenerational relationships that the support and sustenance of these mutual relationships is significant in balancing political, economic and cultural contexts (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014). This inspired some of my thinking around introducing photo elicitation at the beginning, and creating opportunities for the participants to introduce intimate relationships, objects or places and who might connect to these.

Importantly, some studies informed my process of designing my study because I was able to ask questions directly of the academics involved in the work. I had discussions before my research process began, with both my supervisors and other Sussex faculty. I found inspiration and commonality of approach within the research on family practices and environmental affordances in India and the UK (Boddy et al., 2016; Phoenix et al., 2017), which highlighted the discrepancies and negotiated complexities of families' narratives of environmental concern. The methods in the study included three visits with families in each country over a two-week period: first, a family group interview, with a cognitive mapping exercise, a second visit with individual walking or driving interviews, and a third visit involved separate photo elicitation and discussions of photographs

taken by members of the family in the ensuing weeks. This everyday life research examined the "everyday practicalities" (Phoenix et al., 2017: 139) but also problematised the binaries of environmental concern. This work allowed me to see how attention to everyday lives and practices can disrupt simplistic understandings of complex socio-politics, whilst illuminating the importance of factors such as poverty, materialism, temporality and relationality.

Another study which greatly influenced my conceptualisations and had formed the reason for my application to do my PhD, was Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss's 'Connectors Study' (2014- 2016), which drew on the relationship between childhood and public life, exploring children's everyday environments through their family, home and school spaces. This study used de Certeau (1984) and Habermas (1989) to explore how political talk was conceived and could be researched. The study took a longitudinal approach, regularly interviewing individual children, parents and groups in home settings, and using sensory and ethnographic methods to explore the phenomenology of childhood politics. I conceptualised my research in terms of young adults' contribution to this conversation, using methods that also looked to embrace spaces of comfort and familiarity to the participants through walking interviews and photo elicitation, and through focus on stories – conceived by de Certeau (1984: 78) as '*récits*', which understand "the self's relationships across time" (Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss, 2017b: 73).

Another key influence on my approach was Thomson, Berriman and Bragg's (2015) longitudinal research exploring young people's digital lives, which used multi-media and mixed methods to explore temporalities for children and young people, exploring the paradoxes in perceptions of social media use and children and young people's experiences of the same. Though the constraints of a PhD meant my own study was more limited in its scope, in terms of the length of time it

covered, there was nonetheless opportunity to consider ways in which I could incorporate the study of young people's digital social media interaction to my study, given this has become a part of most young people's everyday lives.

I recognised the significance of research using sensory informed methods to connect lived experiences and socio-politics and wanted to make this a central part of my research design. The focus of my research design was to create spaces where the participants might share aspects of their personal worlds, make socio-political connections according to their own logic, and the use of language in these contexts would be grounded in a context of shared experiences – both theirs and mine, and theirs and those they chose to reference (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). It has come to be considered by some that interview and focus group methods are adult-oriented methods. Scholars have problematised whether research with children and adults can be considered to be the same, if children are 'inherently different' (Punch, 2002: 321). These concerns grew the development of child and young people-friendly methods, which drew from activities they engaged with in play or at school, such as arts-based methods (Carter and Ford, 2013), video research methodologies (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards and Quinton, 2015) and theatre elicitation (Roerig and Evers, 2019). However, alongside Birch (2018), Wilkinson et al. (2021) I question whether children and young people are *necessarily* more comfortable with creative methods, and vice versa with adults and traditional methods. Intergenerational research referenced in this thesis (Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Wildman et al., 2021) uses the interview method and narrative approaches with young people as a way to resist artificially separating adults and young people, tallying with arguments to relax the adult/ young person binary within research design (Wilkinson et al., 2021). I could see the value of using aspects of the interview method in the work of the academics cited in this section previously. I wanted to incorporate narrative approaches into this, but I did not opt for an entirely narrative

interview, I did give the interviews some structure by referencing topic guides and introducing stimuli related to the theme of socio-politics.

These approaches were designed to create a "sensory sociality" (Pink, 2012: 4), and to move toward "a relational practice situated within the sites and scales of data production, analysis and presentation" (Pink, 2012: 29). I did not plan to enter their homes and personal spaces for this study, so by inviting sensorality and emotivity into the interview I hoped to create a simultaneously self-reflexive space. Though I wasn't entering into the participants private home spaces, partly due to the lack of privacy most of them would have experienced (most of the participants lived at home, some with friends or a partner), I did feel I could create some space for sharing intimate experiences through introducing emotivity with the photo sharing in interview 1 and social media discussion in interview 3, and sensorality through the second interview, the walking interview.

As explored in Chapter 2, I made socio-politics the phenomenon I aimed to study and used phenomenology as an interpretive epistemology, with the situatedness of experience in mind. This fitted with the aims of my research questions, research design and methodology which were to understand human and lived experiences guides my research questions. Using interpretive phenomenological methodology to examine facets of meaning for the participants, moved away from connecting meaning with related concepts, instead allowing the lived, situated experience to take precedence.

4.2.3 The case study approach

I decided upon a multi- case study approach due to its appropriacy for my research questions, the viability as a method for eliciting implicit and explicit data from my participants, and the case study method's links to my theoretical framework (Tellis, 1997). I knew that de Certeau had also conducted case study work in order to explore a range of daily practices with individuals during his career, and found that he could identify forms of resistance by studying lived experiences of individuals in a range of contexts (1984). Seeking in-depth explanations of a social behaviour prioritised case study as a pertinent method (Zainal, 2007), for the following reasons:

- Case studies allow for multiple sources of evidence to be integrated and used, and this resonates with the aim to research experiences of everyday life (Yin, 1992).
- Case studies prioritise the study of real, lived experiences in real situations (Grassel and Schirmer, 2006).
- Case studies support the study of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Tellis, 1997).

I wanted to hold the study open to new ways of capturing experiences of the phenomenon of socio-politics, and to examine the participants' lives in a range of real-life contexts, and I also wanted to recognise the individuality of the participants, and their unique everyday experiences. The case study approach allows me to identify and define cases, study several examples in greater depth, and draw comparisons but also highlight differences (Yin, 2003). Though case studies have drawn criticism as a research tool for their supposed lack of robustness, being difficult to replicate and generalise, this is precisely what made the approach ideal for my research which was not seeking to draw generalised claims to impart upon or describe a wider demographic of young people. The collective case study of young people's socio-politics was centred on eight young people, with the sample size intentionally small to ensure richness of data and depth of study. I was able to illustrate

theory, and demonstrate how different aspects of the participants' lives might relate to each other, in real life contexts "when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984: 23).

4.3 Narrative analytical framework

My interest in narrative approaches lay in the possibilities for "context-rich frameworks" (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013: 60), which were a methodological way to attempt to tie together my theoretical starting points – using de Certeau's (1984) concepts of everyday life practices, Fraser's writing on misrecognition and care, Schütz (1970) and Habermas (1987) conceptualisations of life-worlds, the substance of social worlds (Laing, 2018; Bhaskar, 1978; Goffman, 1983), and understanding identity as intersectional to shed light on social injustice (Crenshaw, 2017; Collins and Bilge, 2016) – and focus on how young people make sense of their lives and find socio-political meaning in the world. 'Narrative' as a term has a broad range of uses in the human sciences (Riessman, 2008: 6). Narratives can be constructed by the individual, but also in groups, communities, nations, all these examples signify constructed stories of experience. I understand narrative methodology to be on a continuum between social linguistics' strict definition of a unit of discourse, topically and temporally arranged (e.g. Labov, 1982), and an entire life story, supported by documents/ interviews/ observations and so on (e.g. Meyerhoff, 2007).

For the purposes of my research, I wanted to consider narrative approaches to my methodology and analysis in order to foreground young people's right to ownership over their experiences, memories and sense of temporality. The theory I had engaged with worked well with narrative approaches in several ways, which I will illustrate here. As I sought studies using narrative

approaches in work related to resistance or identity, I was particularly drawn to Phoenix's (2013) analogy of the 'life on holiday' / 'big story' approach that can preclude the 'small story' and allows "attention to 'under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events" (Phoenix, 2013: 2). Likewise, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) work on the significance of the whole process of telling stories, the pre-amble and the negotiations before the 'telling', that can tell us much about why people may construct notions of 'sameness' in the "face of constant change" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 377). I felt that these spaces for disorder and non-linearity added to the value of narrative methods for use with my key theorists.

De Certeau's conception that consumers might create cultural resistance through sameness in response to imposed power connected to the idea that sameness, in the face of constant change, may be constructed rather than static. Similarly, in his description of walking the city, de Certeau asserts that the city stroller cannot be limited to a defined trail, invariably creating detours and shortcuts that tell their story of the city, which he describes as "the practice of the ellipsis of conjunctive loci" (de Certeau, 1984: 389). In the same way, I wanted to provide space for the participants to lead their own path through their stories, as much as possible. Leading their own paths was obviously actively realisable through the walking interviews, but I aimed to hold this central to our other interviews too. My research study is committed to the exploration of what might go beyond the more obvious definitions of 'political', and instead delve into the personal experience, smaller-scale narratives of the people who took part, in order to trace their 'tactics' (de Certeau, 1984: 29) of resistance. In line with aims to explore 'interrelationships between narrative, subjectivity and power" (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013: 97), narrative approaches can provide an opportunity to understand more complex political processes and struggles.

Similarly, Fraser's work on misrecognition supported me to pay attention to young people's narrative complexities, by respecting the integrity of their accounts of misrecognition rather than carving data into themes I had already defined. Thus, I was attracted to narrative approaches when I designed my research, partially because they allow me to resist neat sanitisation into *the* story, instead foregrounding "elements of sensemaking and sensegiving that are part of the storying process during times of change" (Dawson and McLean, 2013: 200). Narrative approaches felt like they connected with my initial research aim to draw away from wider political discourses whilst still acknowledging they have a background impact. This became part of how I could address the socio-political misrecognition of young people in my research, by 'lifting up their perspectives' (Daiute and Fine, 2003). In turn it was easier to recognise intersectionality through personal experience accounts.

I chose to use elements of thematic narrative analysis (as defined by Riessman, 2008), examining what content a narrative is communicating over specificities of its structural composition and how that has been created for an audience. Working with narrative data for the first time, as I then was, I felt this would be a good way to generate case studies across a group. I also felt that a thematic narrative analysis approach would enable responsiveness to "the need to expose multiple narratives" (Dawson, 2005: 21 rather than "attempting to triangulate away those 'annoyingly' deviant versions of events" (Dawson, 2005: 22). Drawing on the thematic narrative analysis approach also aided me in combining approaches to the method of semi-structured interview, in that I could analyse the data common thematic elements across cases, while still preserving some narrative features. Thematic narrative analysis is also similar to interpretive phenomenological analysis, which connected with my theoretical framework. I adopted elements of narrative analysis for my research, aiming as far as possible to "keep a story "intact" by theorizing from the case"

(Riessman, 2013: 53). I use the term 'elements' as I did what could be considered partial narrative analysis, but did not fully adopt the methods.

Though I do not lay claim to the research methods nor analysis being strictly and solely 'narrative', I did try to analyse the data sequentially, and keep stories as intact as possible, rather than 'fracturing' the data as is more commonly associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006: 50-53)I aimed to stay case-centred in my analysis, which ultimately is what sets this approach apart from other narrative approaches. However, I did introduce reflections on my role as researcher in some exchanges, and do make reference to context, whilst "investigators in the thematic narrative tradition typically pay little attention to how a story unfolds in a conversational exchange or the questioner's role in constituting it" (Riessman, 2013: 58). I was aware, having worked with young people for so many years in participative contexts, of the astuteness of young people in terms of identifying moments of patronisation, and incitement to share, through adults 'sharing' stories intended to elicit adult-led mutual topic sharing, which can impact on the trust built in the narrative interview; "the moment a hearer is made suspicious of the "facts" of a story or the ulterior motives of a narrator, he or she immediately becomes hermeneutically alert" (Bruner, 1991: 10). However, I felt that I needed to balance some of the scaffolding of a traditional semi-structured interview, whilst also working with methods and approaches that gave opportunities for the participants to lead the directionality of what we discussed. This had something to do with my confidence as a doctoral researcher, and is a decision I have learnt from.

I shall reflect in my conclusion (Chapter Eight), on my own insecurity about relinquishing all control over the directionality of the interviews. I framed my interviews through the following thematic narrative analysis approaches: extended accounts in the interview, foregrounding the

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narrator's subjectivities of resistance or misrecognition, and holding these in a societal context. These approaches supported a commitment to multiple 'truths' rather than the idea of a singular, tidy 'truth', and by acknowledging elements of my mode of questioning, and selfhood in the research I also attempted to acknowledge the power dynamics I brought to the relationship as the researcher. I aimed to balance thematic analysis approaches with reflexivity, to move away from objectivity / interpretivism, toward beckoning "voices to "speak for themselves" and not "reduce complicated and conflicting voices and data to thematic "chunks" that can be interpreted free of context, circumstance, other texts, theoretical concepts, and so on" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013: 262).

Andrews' (2014a) discussion of the role of narrative in moments of political change highlights the non-consensual nature of political stories, contested as they can be by communities and individuals. The importance of personal 'stories' for political change is pivotal, though, Andrews argues: "stories play a vital role, not only in constructing the political world as it is, but also as it might be, depicting how it once was" (Andrews, 2014b: no page numbers). Selbin reminds us "stories essentially reflect the cultural values of their time and place as well of those who tell them" (Selbin, 2010: 24). It is important to consider that storytelling also has the power to reinforce dominant relations of power and ways it can be misused, for example by being constructed, censored, and guided for public consumption (Fernandes, 2019). Lives are crafted into stories, and the methodological tools we develop play a crucial part in supporting critical and challenging stories to emerge alongside simplistic and individualistic ones that often have predominance in the media (Starecheski, 2014).

For my methodology, I hold the relevance of narrative methods and 'small stories' in the application of feminist theory seeking to understand the directionality of power, and its relationship

with the 'mundane', is in their ability to expand on the social and individual context and give these significance rather than begin from institutional paradigms and work from these. Fraser, like Andrews, recognises the importance of "a plurality of positions and perspectives from which to speak" (Fraser, 2013: 142), pointing to the need to understand discursive struggles without retreating from political engagement (Fraser, 2013). This links to my conceptualisation of socio-politics as being the connections *between* social and political participation, and moves away from harnessing this to wider political discourses.

A last point I wish to make about my narrative analytical framework is the significance of research that has paid attention to micro-narratives, and the fact they do not need to make a coherent whole. Boddy's (2019) work on care uproots concepts of 'family' and explores the complex temporality of family for looked after children and young people, how policy discourses of family relate to young people's lived experiences of this, as it is negotiated over time. The research showed that a variety of dynamic relationships had constituted family, as the narratives shared reflections on relationships that changed over time. Strawson (2004: 428) challenges Sacks idea that each of us constructs and lives a narrative (Sacks, 1985) by positing that "self-understanding does not have to take a narrative form, even implicitly" (Strawson, 2014: 448) and that holding onto a sort of congealed identity may even hinder our ability to be present in the moment (Strawson, 2017). I agree that focusing on cohesion and order is to disallow the disruption and disorderliness of micro-narratives, and that if self-understanding and narrative sharing should not be taken to go together neither should we seek to re-order narratives as they are presented to us, but learn instead from the incoherence.

To conclude, my narrative analytic framework focuses on the micro-narratives and meaning-making as situated in the stories/ lives of the participants, using narrative scholarship's context-rich

emphasis to understand how lives are "situated, but dynamic. That is to say, lives and stories are in a constant state of being created and recreated" (Andrews, 2014b: 8), and staying close to the stories through an analytic approach that is comfortable in the messiness (Law, 2004) can contribute to deeper understanding of the socio-political practices of young people. I go on to explain the ways that I adopted narrative approaches to inform my semi-structured interviews in the upcoming section, 4.6 Methods.

4.4 Ethical considerations

I sought and received ethical approval for my research from the University of Sussex Social Sciences and Arts Cross-School Research Ethics Committee on 19th September 2017 (Appendix 8). I submitted my ethics application as a High-Risk study, because of the possibility of discussing political behaviour. I also wanted to recognize the possibility that discussing their identification with political affiliates, experiences they may have deemed as political, and perceptions of political experiences of family and friends might elicit emotional stress and make the participants feel vulnerable to judgement.

I knew I was recruiting within a City that was not very diverse in terms of ethnicity, and although I aimed to capture heterogenous experiences within a small qualitative sample, I knew there would be limitations to this. Prior to recruitment I became familiar with areas of the City beyond the central area (although I also recruited centrally), that had a mixture of socio-economic conditions and as such had not been heavily targeted by social inclusion initiatives aimed at reducing deprivation, or heavily segregated for privilege. This helped me to recruit a sample who had experiences that intersected in more ambiguous ways. I had planned for a recruitment style that involved either

direct face-to-face, or telephone, contact before the interview, which gave me a preliminary opportunity to assess each individual and their circumstances before we met for interview. I balanced my participant selection on the criteria (heterogeneity) I had identified before I began my research, with the 'constraints' of who responded to my recruitment drive, aiming to explore everyday experiences that could comprise ethnicity, socio-economic conditions and education, but would also prompt more complexity.

I followed the ESRC's 'Framework for Research Ethics' (2015), and my university's 'Code of Practice for Research' (2017 [last updated, June 2019]) and in line with recommendations developed appropriate information sheets (Appendix 2), and consent forms (Appendix 3). I emphasised, both in the written documents and verbally each time I interviewed my participants, that they retained the 'right of withdrawal', emphasising that they were under no obligation to take part or continue to take part, and were free to withdraw before, during or after the research.

Researcher and participant safety were considered, and I devised pre-emptive safety protocols and guidelines (Appendix 9) designed to protect both the participants and me. The interviews all took place in the same city. The first and third interview were in a safe, hired room that was private for the duration of the interview. The second interview involved participants identifying a small area they felt had some connection to their own exploration of political and personal identity, and we discussed safety considerations for this walk before the interview took place. In consideration of harm to participants, I explained both orally and through the written information sheet (Appendix 2) that some of the topics they may bring into our discussions, for example, poverty, unemployment, relationship breakdown, social exclusion, bereavement, ill-health and so on, may provoke strong feelings. I designed a strategy to implement should this arise, namely, ceasing the

interview and discontinuing the interview, checking in with the participant and passing on details of any relevant organisations who may be able to provide further support.

During the research, I ensured the participants were fully informed about the research design, the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research at point of involvement, what their participation signified, and any potential risks inherent. All the participants were aged 18 years and over, and thus had the right to make the individual choice as citizens as to what degree of involvement and anonymisation they felt comfortable with, and this was clarified at the onset. I indicated clearly both before and each time we met, what I meant by confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw. I encouraged them to ask questions, before they signed consent forms, something that proved to be very useful in helping me to understand further the ways in which we, as researchers, can make our participants feel comfortable. As clarified by my research ethics agreement, I changed all names and identifiable characteristics for pseudonyms, bar a general sense of the area they lived in, which could potentially contribute some contextual understanding of the data.

With regard to the social media interview, I designed the research mindful not to assume the participants are 'digital natives' because they are young; I made sure that the ethical challenges of a research method that could have exploited their privacy, confidentiality, visibility and so on were taken into consideration. I made the decision not to look at their online content, but instead to ask them to describe it to me. This was for two reasons: Firstly, I did not want to be able to identify strangers through personal details relayed so readily in combination with each other, such as images, comments, names, and personal details. Secondly, and importantly, the experience of participants talking me through, rather than showing me, images and articles, made it much easier to discern

meaning when later listening to audio recordings. On reflection, the participants showed me other personal items and so this may have been an artificial distinction to make, but the 'live' nature of social media meant that there could have been messages, images or posts viewed or received in the moment had we looked at the feed together, that the participants may not have wanted me to see.

As a feminist researcher, it was important to me to develop a 'reciprocal exchange' (Lawless, 1991) during my research. I established this by asking my participants at the beginning and end of every interview, if they had any questions for me, and I reassured them that this was a completely open forum for them to explore those questions. Since I was asking participants to reveal so much of themselves, I wanted them to feel they had the space to ask questions of me, and I conducted myself as openly as I could, responding to questions about opinions, and so on.

Finally, the raw data was stored on a secure drive, with password encrypted access. All data has been considerably anonymised such that it does not connect to the participants involved, and I plan to embargo my data for a length of time deemed appropriate, so I can continue to use for my own journal articles and publications.

4.5 Fieldwork context

The field was a city in the South of England, so selected because a city might afford more heterogeneity than smaller towns. Other than this, there were no specific features of this city that made me choose to do my recruitment there. Due to the potential for identifiability, if triangulated with the data which contains narratives and details that could then be recognisable, I will say no more about the city other than to explain how I selected areas to recruit from.

I designed the fieldwork in two phases. Phase 1 involved choosing sites to recruit (see table, Fig. 4.1) Fieldwork Phase One, September- November 2017). Having sought and gained the appropriate research permissions from the University of Sussex in September 2017 (Appendices 7 & 8) abiding by the Code of Practice for Research (2017) and The University Of Sussex Ethical Guidelines (University of Sussex, 2016; BSA, 2002), my aim in this phase was to refine the research focus, by gaining greater knowledge and understanding of potential localities for participant recruitment. After assessing local government information and clarifying statistical information by creating maps that reflected socio-economic conditions, I made area selections.

My criteria for choosing the areas I selected for recruitment was twofold. Firstly, to try and aim for a heterogenous spread of participants. Secondly, to try and protect anonymity in case – being of a similar age and status – they were made more identifiable by being read collectively as a set of case studies (e.g., if several of them had attended the same college / would refer to similar experiences and reference points). I looked to geographical data from the Office for National Statistics website (then, 2017) which provided information about what are called Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) maps from Indices of Deprivation (2010), a way of reading information about a specific location and the local authority district to which it belongs. Using this data kept the recruitment process rooted in a both a physical and human geography understanding of the different areas of the city. I selected most of the LSOAs in the city, though I won't give precise number ratio due to identifiability. The LSOAs were chosen for an initial recruitment focus because of their considerable range in socio-economic and education advantages and opportunities (e.g., cafes, colleges, pubs, libraries, youth centres, local youth groups and services) to target for sample recruitment. Also, on a practical level, I was advanced in pregnancy at this stage and could not have

walked the entire city for cold recruitment, and given I was recruiting for a small sample I felt comfortable that recruiting from most of the city and many of its youth spaces (both virtual and physical) would provide some heterogeneity in the sample.

I will not be presenting details or maps of the LSOAs, nor of the walking interviews I conducted in this thesis, due to a risk of identifiability. Like all cities, this city has a mix of areas of affluence and deprivation. One of the LSOAs was in the lowest proportion comparative to national measures for income deprivation, and also has the highest indicators for education deprivation. Measuring for income deprivation, the deprivation scores indicated that there is a spread of income and deprivation in the city I was focusing my research in, which meant it was likely (though not strictly necessary for the study) that my participants would come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Before I began mapping out my recruitment areas, I also looked at a map which gave an indication of the range of education deprivation in the city. The income deprivation scores show that the LSOA's of this particular city ranked in the mid-range, but the education deprivation map tends more towards the extremes.

I designed and printed posters and flyers advertising the study to young people aged between 18 – 25 years old (see Appendix 6: flyer modified to anonymise identifying information about location). I was informally advised by some people who lived in the areas I had selected or who had knowledge of them, and by staff of two local colleges who offered courses for young people, that recruiting young adults by focusing on programmes and education provision they were engaged with, as well as through 'cold' recruitment, may be most impactful. Based on this work I used a variety of approaches: contacting social media Facebook pages of youth related activities / clubs in the areas and asking admin of relevant youth groups to put out a call on their information pages, handing out

flyers on the street of each of the LSOAs I had identified, advertising in youth services providers, local libraries and local colleges.

The following table (figure 4.1) indicates the fieldwork phases, the time period in which they were carried out, and the research activities that took place. Further detail on the methods continues in Sections 4.7.1, 4.7.2, and 4.7.3.

(Figure 4.1) Table 1: Fieldwork Timeline

Fieldwork Phase	Time Period	Research activities
Phase One: Scoping / Recruiting	September – October / November 2017	Scoping, Mapping and identifying areas for recruitment, to: • Develop research focus • Build relationships with stakeholders who were able to support access Recruiting participants: • Handing out flyers and approaching individuals • Responding to potential participants and explaining research context • Negotiating appropriate spaces for interviews • Sending out information sheets / consent forms
Phase Two: Data Collection	November 2017 – December 2017	First Wave of Face-to-face interviews x 4 First wave of Walking Interviews x 4

	December 2017 – January 2018	Second wave of face-to-face interviews x 4 Second wave of walking interviews x 4
Phase Three: Data Collection	January – March 2017	January: First wave of 'Social Media' / Validation Interviews x 4 February: Second wave of 'Social Media' / Validation Interviews x 4

4.5.1 Sampling

I aimed for as diverse a sample as I could achieve, by using a mix of recruitment strategies outlined above: visiting local areas frequented by young people, handing out flyers, putting up posters, and connecting with online spaces that young people used. Within the selected localities, which I have not specified due to the possibility of triangulation (even if I gave the number proportionately, I have explained that I visited most of the areas in the city and given each city has an identifiable number of LSOAs, and there are only so many cities in the South of England it is an ethical risk I would prefer not to take). While everyone who expressed an interest in the study was invited to take part, my approach meant that I was successful in securing a diverse sample. The participants were aged between 18 and 25 years, and they broadly spanned this age group, with female and male participants. They lived across the areas I had targeted.

4.5.2 Introduction to the case studies

This section serves as an introduction to the eight participants who took part in the study. The following introduces key aspects about each participant. The aim is to help the reader hold each participant in their mind, so that when moving into the analysis in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, this can be understood in the context of their intersectionality.

The participants' pseudonyms are Erjan, Charley, Olivia, Tom, Shona, Charley, Abigail and Paige. Below is a table (figure 4.2) which gives demographic details for my participants, please note in the table I include a column entitled 'Self-definition of political participation'. This details the way they described their active political participation and voting behaviour to me before our recorded interviews. I have included aspects of their self-identified active political participation and voting behaviour intentionally at this stage, though the reader should note that this was not the focus of the topic guide / semi-structured interview questions, as the study is focused on their narratives of socio-political experiences:

(Figure 4.2) Table 2: Demographic details of participants

Name	Age	Living independently / at home	Employed / unemployed	Higher education status	Self-definition of political participation
Erjan	25	Living at home with parents	Part time employed	College level	Overtly engaged in discussions about politics with friends and family, actively promoting activities aimed at dis/ability equality, votes regularly (local and national elections, referendum)
Olivia	23	Living at home with parents	Full time employed	Post graduate level	Actively political, regularly votes

Abigail	18	Living at home with parents	Part- time employed	College level	Occasionally involved in overtly political discussions with friends and family, self-identifies as apolitical, does not vote
Tom	24	Living independently (shared house)	Full time employed	Degree level	Overtly engaged in discussions about politics with friends, actively promoting activities aimed at gender equality, votes in significant elections
Paige	18	Living at home with parents	Unemployed	College level	Occasionally involved in overtly political discussions with friends and family, self-identifies as apolitical, does not vote
Shona	19	Living at home with parent	Unemployed	College level (incomplete)	Regularly votes
Fahad	24	Living at home with parent	Part time employed	Degree level (incomplete)	Overtly engaged in discussions about politics with friends, votes in significant elections (e.g., national, referendum)
Charley	25	Living at home, and occasionally with partner	Full time self-employed	Degree level	Overtly engaged in discussions about politics with friends and family, actively promoting activities aimed at gender equality, votes regularly (local and national elections, referendum)

The following gives some brief details of participants' self-identity, education and professional status, and their living arrangements:

Erjan

Erjan lived at home with his family. He was of dual ethnicity, heterosexual, and described himself as between working and middle class, but he did not foreground these aspects of his intersectionality in his narratives, focusing on the impacts of his disability on his socio-politics and independence. Erjan had completed sixth form and had taken further qualifications to establish himself professionally. Part of the reason he lived at home was the complications around retaining disability benefit support whilst in employment meant he was unable to earn enough money to fully support himself independently. Erjan wanted to work full time but was fearful of his benefits being capped if he worked more hours.

Olivia

Olivia was white, heterosexual and identified as working class and a feminist. She had benefitted from a scholarship for sixth form, and this had impacted on her views of social class. She had returned from university after completing her degree and had recently completed a Masters. She worked full time but did not have the resources from her job to afford living independently at that stage.

Abigail

Abigail was white, heterosexual and identified as working class. She had finished her education after sixth form, and had a precarious employment situation due to an aggressive encounter with an older

male colleague. She was considering travelling the following year. She lived at home with her mother and sibling and was looking for other temporary employment.

Tom

Tom was white, heterosexual and identified as working class. He did not originally live in the area I recruited from and had relocated from an area where he comprised the second generation of economic migrants from other UK countries. He had recently completed his degree and begun a full-time post-graduate professional position. Tom was able to afford living independently in a shared house with other young people.

Paige

Paige was white, heterosexual and identified as working class. She had recently left an apprenticeship where she felt she had not been treated kindly and was being paid below minimum wage. She lived at home with her family, and took on a lot of childcare of her niece for her older sister who worked full time.

Shona

Shona was white, heterosexual and identified as working class. She was unemployed, having left college due to ongoing issues with bullying dynamics which had impacted on her ability to complete her studies. She was trying to find new employment, and over the course of our interviews she was offered a low-paid, zero hours contract position as a carer. Shona lived alone with her parent but hoped to move out into council housing with her partner.

Fahad

Fahad was mixed ethnicity, gay, and identified as working class. He had left university before the completion of his degree and returned home to his family to live with his parent and siblings. He worked part time on a zero hours contract.

Charley

Charley was white, heterosexual and identified as working class. She had completed a university course abroad and returned to her home area to further her professional career. She was self-employed, on a relatively low income, but was able to maintain steady work. She lived at home, and sometimes with her partner.

4.5.3 Methods: Interview 1, face-to-face interview

The first interview was face-to-face, and six of the interviews took place in a private room I hired in the centre of the city, whilst two interviews took place in private rooms hired nearer to those participants' homes. I ensured the meeting spaces were accessible, safe and comfortable. Prior to this first interview, participants were asked if they could plan to show me three photos that they felt represented them, their local area, and/or their everyday life, in some way. I used photo elicitation at the inception of the interviews, which gave the participants a sense that they were able to choose what they shared, and I reassured them that the purpose was only to prompt conversation, not so that the photographs themselves would be subject to scrutiny and intense speculation. Wishing to be sincere to this reassurance I gave the participants, I do not go into detail about what comprised the detail of the photos they brought in at the beginning of their interviews, other than to state each participant had at least one image of a family member or a close friend. The main purpose of the

photos was to create an opportunity for them to lead our initial conversations, explaining to me who or what was in the photos, to lead to further talk. I wanted them to feel from the onset of the interview that they were leading our talk, to lessen some feelings of being on the backfoot. The relevance of the photos is captured in terms of deeper points they made about relationships, shared in the analysis, after they had shown these images with me. This prompted our conversations and gave them the lead in telling their life stories, from their perspectives. After explaining consent terms at the beginning of the interview, I asked the participants if they would be happy to share why they had brought the photographs they had chosen. The photographs worked well as a way to instigate conversation, and although questions about the photographs related to general themes on my topic guide, they were primarily responsive to what the participants had shared so far. The photographs, which due to the specification, featured images of people / things / places that were significant to the participants, also provided a resource from which to examine the ways in which that significance could be understood in relation to their lives, and priorities.

Later in the interview, after the participants had seemed to come to a natural place of pausing in their story-sharing, and I had asked if they had anything else they wanted to add or share at that point, I offered to show them some words I had printed on cards: *Family, Identity, Society, Everyday Life, Nationality, Values, Ethnicity,* and *Gender.* The rationale behind choosing these words was that my key theorists, de Certeau and Fraser, wrote about the ways that political discourses sometimes overlooked the connection between these themes (I problematise aspects of this approach in Chapter 9). I expressed to the participants that they did not have to talk about each of the words, or feel the need to reflect on them at all if they did not want to, but that the option to have a look at the words was there. The purpose of the words was to elicit discussion about broader topics, after we had discussed personal topics – drawing connections between the personal and political. The

participants selected words they felt resonated interest for them in that moment, from several cards which had the words printed on them. All participants chose to look at the words, and each participant discussed these differently: three participants (Tom, Charley, Olivia) chose to speak about a few of the words, three (Fahad, Abigail, Paige) chose to speak about all of the words, and two (Erjan, Shona) chose to order the words loosely as they talked, although neither felt this was a strict ordering – this was more of a kinaesthetic engagement with the cards. All of the participants used these words to prompt other stories, having established from the earlier, photo elicitation stage of the interview that they had the space to lead on topics as they chose to. None of the participants used these words to give bounded descriptions about what the words meant abstractly, and I feel this was down to the narrative approach taken at the beginning – that the participants felt they were able to express experiences they wanted to share, rather than feeling led by the words, however I discuss some drawbacks to this approach in Chapter 9.

Finally, I introduced a map of the local area (which cannot be included in the appendices, for reasons of anonymity and identification), in order to explore ideas about physical terrain, space, locality, and from these – temporality. The participants talked to me about areas on the map they recognised, what they felt they knew about those areas / places, and this prompted discussion about affordances of space and known terrain, in relation to political identity / understandings of resource allocation / societal distribution. The introduction of the map in the first interview also led into the walking interview exercise in the second interview well, integrating the research tasks together and creating continuity between discussions.

4.5.4 Methods: Interview 2, the 'walking' interview

Inspired by de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisations of 'spatial practices' of ordinary people in everyday lives, and how these reframe urban space by encouraging us as researchers to look beyond the significance of the panoptic, I chose to use the 'walking interview' method for my second interview. A walking interview, when the researcher walks alongside the participant during an interview in a given location (Anderson, 2004; Carpiano, 2009; Clark and Emmel, 2010; Kusenbach, 2020), can be a way to move the focus from research driven to participant driven. Significantly, the walking interview supports conversation to occur and talk to flow naturally because the pressure of face-to-face engagement is removed.

The benefits of introducing opportunities in work with young people where the focus is not on face-to-face engagement has been proven to build confidence, support phenomenological approaches, and make the experience less confrontational or intimidating for young people (Kennelly, 2017). I chose to introduce this interview approach in line with my epistemology that the participants should have opportunities to select and steer the direction of much of the interview(s) (Evans and Jones, 2011). The main focus of the walking interview was to give the participants a sense of ownership over what they were sharing with me, by leading me on a route they chose. The routes chosen were identifying, and I have chosen to focus on the experiences they shared prompted by the walk rather than the route and defining features. This foregrounds my key aim with the method: to build confidence in the participants.

I also wanted to explore ways to read the practices of 'contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves" (de Certeau, 1984: 95), and how these might empower the participants. As mentioned previously, the map exercise in the face-to-face interview synthesised the tasks between the two interviews, leading into the walking interview cohesively and

prompting continuity between discussions. I asked each of the participants in the first interview if they would take me on a walk of their choosing for our second interview. I would meet them where they suggested, and they gave a vague sense of the area we would cover so that I could weigh this against ethical considerations such as safety and practicality. All of the routes suggested were safe, public and accessible.

As we progressed through the walk, I asked questions in relation to what was being shared. I found that what the participants paused to observe, remembered, referred to, or were distracted by, comprised a 'pedestrian enunciation' and opportunity to demonstrate 'being' in their worlds (de Certeau, 1984: 97). It was also a space to explore multiple identities, and what constituted the construction or expression of them, framed by context (Goffman, 1975). This more physically cohesive space provided an interesting contrast to the upcoming interview concerning fragmented space, where multiple identities could be explored with relative freedom (Miller, 2013). As they reflected back over past lived experiences, by talking about the personal relevance of their chosen routes, there was an opportunity to take ownership of their locale and spatial experiences. The interviews ranged in length from 50 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes, and the routes selected by the participants were familiar to them.

I found that doing walking interviews with my participants created lots of benefits, for example: pauses in the conversation felt more natural, talking seemed to flow more easily and the participants seemed at ease, it felt more inclusive and seemed to reduce the power imbalance (Kinney, 2017), it prompted memories related to socio-politics and the city (such as reflections on homelessness, on school experiences, and on accessibility). However, walking interviews with participants can risk practical and ethical issues, and I experienced some downsides to the method. One of my

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participants, Erjan, was visually impaired and although it was significant to experience walking as he does and some of the difficulties he encounters, I also felt that in his case his speech was made more difficult when walking because he had to concentrate on the route and potential obstacles. Two of the walking interviews, with Abigail and Shona, were on particularly cold days and both of these routes transgressed through areas that were muddy. In both cases, we finished the interview in a café to warm up, which potentially had implications for confidentiality. I was in the last trimester of pregnancy for the walking interviews, and this meant my pace and ease of walking where at the forefront of the participants' minds – potentially this influenced their routes and may or may not have impacted on what they showed me.

Nonetheless, by engaging in a multisensory event with the participants, physically moving through and inhabiting space, the research was able to foreground participants' experiences and values, through "attending to *their* treatment of the senses" (Pink, 2012: 2). This element of the research design aimed in some way to resolve the isolation between the verbal / speech act, and the system within which it was contained, by moving the process outside of the interview room context and into the system of the social world it described.

There are limitations to the transference of power, and subsequent forms of knowledge. Young people's presence in public spaces is experienced in charged ways that cannot solely be understood by walking with them but needs contextualising against broader ideas of youth as 'othered' (Matthews, Limb and Taylor, 1999; Jupp, 2007). Creating space within the research for my participants to introduce me to how their 'user tactics' created legibility, the networks and spaces that they convened in, or moved through, demonstrated that this kind of active engagement can be productive in countering the discourses imposed upon young people's use of space, so long as there is simultaneous consideration of what might be 'left out' of articulating local knowledges (Crang,

2003). The use of the walking method in my study contributes to research suggesting spatial methods might create useful opportunities to see young people's lives as situated, and political through their situatedness (Jupp, 2007; Kennelly, 2017).

4.5.5 Methods: Interview 3, the social media analysis

Much of social life now exists online (Dalsgaard, 2016), and these social online spaces are run by corporate, globalised organisations. Incorporating my participants' social media use into the study was an essential part of examining their individual experiences against discourses of globalisation. All eight participants already used social media, to some degree, to record and document aspects of their lives, and understood the ways in which others did the same. I did not make the focus of discussing the participants' social media feed the examination of their online activity, nor examine the regularity of their interactions and go through these, partially because I did not want the mental noting of the interactions to become a slightly more laborious process of physically writing down exactly when and how social media engagement was happening. I was mindful of the ease with which a researcher can misinterpret online traces, and since the exact nature of this was not the focus of my study, rather how the participants felt about their relationship with social media, I did not need to foreground this. Instead, the participants talked to me (they did not show me, due to ethical reasons and the possibility of viewing someone else's content) about their interpretations of the content they had shared online, or witnessed others' sharing, on social media feeds.

4.5.6 Methods in combination

The combination and design of the three interviews, allowed for the layering of meaning; each of the tasks set contributed to the subsequent interview, which continued the thread between each interview and also allowed space for consideration and reflection in the weeks I did not see the participant. The space left between each interview, encouraged exploration of ideas and questions about previous discussions, at the beginning of each interview. The connecting nature of the tasks also encouraged a thread that could be followed through, merging many elements of complexity without losing the overall sense of what we had discussed and what stories they had shared.

I also created space to reflect on emergent findings, both for myself *and* for my participants, by the way the study was designed, tasks set, and spaces given between each interview. This was a real strength of the study, and the reflection the participants brought to each cycle of the research as a result of this approach was tangible. Space to reflect on emergent themes allowed room for important questions to be reflected back and reconsidered; how and why were experiences storied, what had the experiences of the co-constructions been, were there any additions, or new interpretations that had formulated between these? As an ongoing process, the participants were invited to question me at any point, but I made this a significant feature of the last interview. The questions asked of me then tended to be wider questions, asked to an imaginary academic audience, rhetorical questions about their 'value', space' and 'place' invoked by the hours we had spent together; in this sense, they had built up a picture of their own experiences and stories, and viewing them through the process of the research, had coalesced them into narratives which they saw as powerful.

4.6 Analytical approach

There are difficulties in co-production of meaning in research, and my analysis was a way of continuing to dialogue with the data, and bringing in the theories and readings that were shaping my standpoint. The themes were constructed, and I want to be explicit about how they were constructed, for the same reason I want to be honest about the co-constructive nature of my interviews: if I am to be sincere about aiming to share power, and to respect young people's words and worlds, I need to be clear about my part in the construction and relaying of that.

During the research I kept a self-critical diary/ account of the research process. This included both my 'internal and external dialogue', in the sense that I made notes about what I was observing in relation to my theory, my research questions, but also about my own private thoughts and feeling (Tobin and Begley, 2004). I recorded my own thoughts and feelings before, during and after the interviews, as well as observations and reflections on my observations in the field. I documented the logistics of the research, methodological decisions, rationales, and my own personal reflections on insights and interests – both about myself and my participants. This audit trail, in the form of the diary, centred my analysis post-fieldwork, as I was able to critically cross-reference details of the transcripts with what had I had been thinking / experiencing at the time.

The first stage of my analysis was to read through my research journal thus far, and then begin to transcribe the interviews. Transcription is hard work, but it reconnects you to the data, and it gave me an opportunity to walk with, sit near, and (in my mind's eye) experience the body language, gestures and nuances of, the participants again. Whilst transcribing I felt I could put myself back into the data, but also look at it from another angle – hearing the participants' stories in full when perhaps before I had lingered over a point in my mind while they spoke on, and also hearing my part in the co-construction. Whilst I transcribed, I added to my research journal and moved from

here to using using post-it notes on large rolls of paper, moving quotes, summations and concepts around systematically to explore and display relationships between the data (King, 2004). I also created a space for 'miscellaneous' (Braun and Clarke, 2006) themes so as not to disregard any elements which did not immediately fit themes. I added, removed, and moved around, post-it notes as I went from a longer list of codes, ideas and themes to a shorter list. These minimally worked ideas informed the third interviews with the participants, although only in the sense that I took the opportunity to ask any questions that felt glaringly missed. I wanted to keep the initial thematic analysis loose in order to continue to keep the interviews as open as possible. I made this decision because I did not want the final interview to lose the explorative feel of the previous two (please see Appendix 5 for topic guides informed by initial analysis).

Once I had finished my data collection and had come toward the end of transcribing the interviews, it had been some time since the initial interviews. This is because not long after the fieldwork, I was off on maternity leave for six months. Coming back to the data with my kinaesthetic roll of paper and my post-it notes, post-maternity, refamiliarized me with the data and the tangible ideas that had begun to form in line with de Certeau's (1984) everyday life theory and themes of care and recognition that resonated with Fraser's (2007, 2009) social theory. The physical nature of post-it notes worked better for me than using NVivo or similar analytic programmes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) argument for thematic analysis as a useful process for acknowledging ways individuals make sense of their experiences, and in turn how these social contexts impact on these meanings, whilst still holding on to the material constraints of 'social reality' felt in line with my theoretical choices. I wanted to examine the participants' experiences in the context of their everyday lives whilst also recognising the material and social constraints. I liked Mazzei and Jackson's (2017) idea that thinking and analysing with theory is 'redoable', in the sense that you could keep going back to the

data and examining new ways it might elucidate the theory you are working with, and vice versa. I experienced the data analysis as 'emergent, unpredictable', a process of reconfiguring concepts and inventing approaches (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017), and I was grateful to have experienced it this way.

Mazzei and Jackson explain that received humanist concepts such as 'data, voice, analysis' (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017: 718) can be put to new uses, and still retain their own ontological weight. Pools of commonality emerged, but equally the stories presented by the participants remained unique and did not address socio-political themes in characteristically obvious ways. The data demonstrated that, in some ways, it was the lack of obvious voice and easily delineable analysis that was the most significant contribution to my findings. I had explored theory which protected marginalised or over-researched groups from being reduced, and my data confirmed that they were in some ways irreducible. With this in mind, alongside the idea that "the reality *is* the process" (Whitehead, 1967: 72), I held myself to account and used both inductive and deductive approaches to the analysis. I knew that Braun and Clarke (2006) specified the need to choose between these two approaches, but I also felt that as I tried to do so I was in danger of losing sight of the data as I felt myself trying to fit it with certain themes. When I found myself doing this, I leaned into my theoretical framework, which had the power to 'offend' and 'unsettle' (Pearce and Maclure, 2009: 277), and challenge assumptions I may have made based on my previous professional experiences. I loved the idea that thinking and analysing with theory could create new 'explosions' (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017: 720) of possibility by applying epistemological and ontological ideas in new spaces, encouraging me as a researcher to remember that the study was not just about methods but about holding myself to account to my own philosophical, epistemological and ontological assumptions and weaving my thinking through.

In the end, it was my judgement and perception that decided which themes would emerge and resonate from a range of disparate and messy codes. I could not capture all of the data's potential in this thesis, and I respect that there is still "radical possibility in the unfinalized because of the constitutive and generative aspects of all texts (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017: 722) but the iterative process ratified by Braun and Clarke (2006), alongside the process of plugging theory and data in with each other in order to avoid arriving at preconceived, abstract themes in an untethered, unproblematised way. Although my post-it note configurations may seem rudimentary, for my learning and thinking style it was an ideal way for me to play with codes by trying out different codes with different data/ theory assemblages, and then regrouping these. These reflexive approaches helped me to identify initial codes and work through toward themes.

During the final stage, writing up the findings, I have tried to show a logical connection between the data, themes, and conclusions drawn following logical processes. In the following chapters I will discuss relevant results, including those that might not have seemed to readily fit into the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: RELATING AND RELAYING SOCIO-POLITICS THROUGH CONNECTION

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five serves as an introduction to the participants, examining how relationships underpin their sense of self and socio-politics and contextualising their lifeworlds through the frames of de Certeau and Fraser's theories. The participants foregrounded relationships in our first interviews, introducing their loved ones as they talked about photos they initially brought in to begin our conversations. They lived at home or in shared households with others, and though they had varying income streams all had relatively low incomes in comparison to their expected outgoings. Their narratives present areas where the imbalance of redistribution, recognition and representation were particularly perilous for young people (Fraser, 1992), and how these shortfalls were addressed through carescapes with others.

The chapter addresses the research questions by examining how social issues are explored in these intimate relationships. It demonstrates that the participants make connections between their micro, domestic worlds – sometimes pulling together experiences from multiple domestic sites as they navigate new spatial identities – and are motivated by care and protection of their loved ones. The significance of intergenerational experiences is examined (Thomson, 2011; Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Hopkins, Botterill and Sanghera, 2018), including how the participants negotiate or resist family narratives of socio-politics. In the process of negotiating a place of 'usefulness' and where they wanted to situate themselves, both socially and morally, in ways that would also be 'useful' to themselves and those around them, the participants negotiated socio-political understandings in

relation to those they know or could relate to. Kershaw argues (2010) care and intimacy are at the root of personal values, and that the significance of socio-politics as a way to frame this connection is the potential to show "citizens bring a political discipline to their private actions, even at home" (Kershaw, 2010: 409). The analysis addresses the private, micro world and shows that through their intimate relationships the participants negotiated different aspects of their intersectional and socio-political identities, drawing on their resources of care in their intimate relationships.

5.2 'Care'ful considerations of intimate socio-politics

The following section explores three participants' articulations of the ways experiences within their relationships with intimate loved ones had impacted their sense of socio-politics. These participants articulated examples which directly connect an experience, an interaction within an intimate relationship that is expressed through affects, shared knowledge, or was mediated through action and norms, and a connection to institutions. I hold them together for analysis here in order to demonstrate how their tactical choices were overtly inspired *because of* intimacy and care, a connection they articulate, which demonstrates the political power of social connection. I move to compare the ways in which Abigail, Paige and Tom's sense-making of the politics embedded in their everyday is woven through conversations, observing modelled behaviour and interpreting these through bonds with their loved ones. In doing so, I also demonstrate how the top-down and homogenous strategies of institutions impacts upon their agency by not recognising the struggles experienced in their everyday life.

Abigail was, at the time of interviewing, precariously employed (having left, and returned to, her job) and relying on her friends and parents for handouts to support her leisure time and day-to-day

needs. Perhaps in part because of this, she introduced family and friends as being something she literally cannot 'live without'. During our interviews she often praised her loved ones for being 'there for her'. Abigail also described drawing upon the resources in her personal relationships to make up for the lack of audibility she feels in institutional settings. This connection that Abigail made, between feeling unheard at school, unheard at work, and to some extent unheard by her mother, and the significance of her friendships as spaces for unconditional acceptance, can be seen as her tactics of resistance to negotiate agency in institutional settings that she finds oppressive and subordinating. As her relationship with her own mother had been redefined and become naturally more distant, Abigail recreated the model of female friendship with her own close girlfriends, who formed her sphere of sanctuary, her influence and confidantes. They helped her to negotiate the combination of oppressive experiences she identified, creating a space for autonomy if only through hypothetical discussions about what she 'would' do if she were more economically stable. She shared some of these 'woulds' with me:

Me: So you're going to Thailand next year?

Abigail: No I'm gonna go straight to Australia in January, for probably about a year? Yeah cause I was gonna go in November, but it was only me and one other, but if we wait 'til January then there's four of us, and it'll be more. more of us, more safe. And I wanna go to Australia, that's where I *want* to go. But I don't even have a job. Well I do, but [laughs] its only part time

Me: So you haven't fully saved yet?

Abigail: Nooo, [laughs] I'm in debt! I mean, I think about things and then they rarely ever go to plan… I don't know how my life's gonna turn out, but. if I could plan it that's what it would be like

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The careful balancing of hopes for a projected future with increased agency were weighted against a present reality which felt much more oppressive. Abigail described a deliberate performance of friendship, comprising both private moments of fealty and support and the demonstration of the '[impressions] of intimacy' (Abidin, 2015: 1) which she shared on social media through photos. Abigail understood at least some of the dual nature of this performativity, how this connects to the self-performance. She masked her true 'self' from the public worlds, which, she felt, risked becoming blurred with the private:

> **Abigail:** "Everyone gets judged on their identity, what I think about myself probably isn't anything like my identity that's out there"

Abigail distinguished her identity 'out there' from the identity she shared with loved ones. Action-oriented intimacy is by its very nature contradictory (Fine, 2012; Nippert-Eng, 2010), and Abigail's distinction suggests she seeks space for protection of self and what feels private to her, as well as shared protection and recognition with others. Despite the contradictions of her self-exposure online, Abigail shared with me a very basic human need for belonging, declaring that she would "die" without her close female friendships, that her friends were "everything":

> **Me:** What makes them best friends in the way that you described?
>
> **Abigail:** Well none of them have ever done me wrong and they'd always have my back. Like if anything was to happen, like they'd always have my back.

This level of close friendship was, for her, a marker of transition into adulthood – as her mother had done before her, she was creating a new realm of what she described as 'aunties' that would in

the future support her own children. Abigail's emphasis on friendships can be seen as another form of identity construction that can be leveraged to seek empowerment in daily conditions of complex forms of oppression. Friendships affirm a sense of self and society (Jamieson, 2008), and possibly young women rely further on these affirmations in the absence of greater institutional recognition. Girls' and young women's friendships are "invested in the production of certain forms of power and subjectivity (Hey, 1997: 23). This is what she had seen modelled from infancy. At the heart of her personal socio-politics was the importance of a sisterhood:

> **Abigail:** Yeah… My Mum's always been like, really, really close to her friends? Like, growing up near – I call them my aunties, like - and um… like, being brought up around that, I've, I've kind of like… my friends are like – my friends are like family, like. They are so, I'm so close to them, and they're really important to me?

Abigail's history and sense of self is interwoven with her sense that she can rely on those she has intimate relationships with and knows they will demonstrate material security if she needs it. This underpins her sense of socio-political placement, but it is implicit and interwoven with the active socialisation, care and communication enacted in her local community:

> **Abigail:** I like the fact that when I have children, they'll go to school with people that I know, do you know what I mean, and everyone knows each other (…) I like the fact that it's like… it is quite a good community, in [*place*], even though some bad things do happen.

Abigail's loyalty to the place she was born and raised in was concrete, and this formed a tangible part of her identity construction work. Family, friendship, proximity and intimacy (comprising affects, knowledge sharing, action and norms) were key elements of this identity work, anchored to the future in idealisations of 'settling down', pivoting her past experiences of her environment

around future notions of shared responsibility with her friends. Abigail's friendships not only bolster the excitement she feels about moments of success in her life, but also impact on her sense of safety as she navigates the spaces in her local neighbourhood:

> **Abigail:** I don't actually know, like, I *honestly* don't know what I'd do [laughs]? Like, I speak to my friends every single day, like the slightest little thing, I get really excited by things and like - everything, but I just - I want to tell my friends? Like, they're the first people that I wanna tell?

> **Abigail:** Like, I don't know. But I can happily walk around town and like, that wouldn't worry me? Like I wouldn't walk round alleyways and stuff, that would really freak me out. And like my friends are always there, my friends are *always* there so I'm not scared

Abigail described an implicit protection her sisterhood afforded her. This reflects a socio-political awareness that this protection is needed for young women. Abigail's experiences speak to the complexity of need for multiple levels of support in the life of a young woman no longer in higher institutional education, experiencing precarious routes into independence, and exploring ways to draw strength from made relationships with friendship kin. This resonates with Fraser's discussion of need interpretations (1989), in which she argues there is a danger of 'interpretive justification' by some objective, ordained sector of society upon the rest, which would potentially obscure the complexity of 'needs' and what ranking these 'needs' might take. In this instance, the young women's need to feel safe is met by an implicit but discernibly socio-political choice to make their local area feel safe by socialising in groups[6]. Abigail's age and economic situation make her aware of

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[6] Since the study, Sarah Everard's kidnap and murder on 3 March 2021, while walking home from a friend's flat, have ignited a national conversation about misogyny and violence against women (Zempi and Smith, 2021)

increased vulnerability to institutional pressures, and so she buffets this with the tactical resource of allyship with her friends, which in turn replicates flavours of intergenerational examples of female allyship and support. By sharing the 'need' to resource herself in this way in our interview, she also renders visible her 'need' to do so in order to 'make do' (de Certeau, 1984: 29) in everyday life.

I hold Abigail and Paige's extracts from their interviews together at this point in the chapter, because I think they tell us something about the way they tactically negotiate their (wider) social and economic precarity by investing in their close friendships and doing what they 'should' do by seeking employment, projecting a performative social image. Simultaneously, they make socio-political observations against which they weight what they 'would' do differently in their projected futures. Not all families discuss politics openly, and through Paige's narratives I explore some of the ways that young adults participate in the politics of everyday life with little, or discreet, reference to the wider socio-political discourses they connect to. In Paige's case, her tact was also necessary – she lived at home with her parents and was part of a network of care to support her full-time employed sister and her little niece, and she was beginning to question the status quo of gender roles and politics within the household. She was also becoming more aware of the financial pressures her living at home placed upon her family, and the comparative ease for some of her wealthier friends who she felt had more privacy and autonomy within their family households:

> **Paige:** Yeah, but my Dad gets so annoyed – because you never used to have to pay for water, but you have to pay for water now. About a couple of years ago they changed it, and now even though there are only three people in the house it costs so much money, and now it's quite expensive. I spend 45 minutes washing my hair, and I don't even have a lot of hair (…)
> But it's like my friend. when she gets home she has her own front room, so when she gets home from work she can go and sit down and watch whatever she wants to watch. So she

can get in and watch whatever she wants to watch. Whereas when I get home, I either get moaned at for whatever it is I put on the tv cos they don't like it, or I have to sit there and watch what they want to watch? Which is usually like, [*local*] news, because I don't want to sit there and watch what they're watching.

Paige's increased awareness of the cost of everyday life and her dependency upon her parents reflects the pressure of wider discourses about youth and gender dependency, and the gender subtexts and assumptions that go with this (Fraser, 1994). Paige saw the gender inequality that she described featuring very prominently in her own everyday life in socio-politicised terms, and rationalised ways she and other women she knew should be better supported to potentially cope with the extra pressure upon working class women to balance lower income, childcare and career. She had recently left an apprenticeship which was paying less than the minimum wage and expecting longer hours than she was contracted for, which she often fulfilled because she felt she wanted to be diligent. Not having a job was a situation which caused her embarrassment and prompted her to think about whether she would give up her financial independence if she were to enter into a relationship with a wealthier man. She described herself as not wanting to be a 'housewife' in her future, as it would be boring. She experienced the processes of social reproduction, which ascribe unpaid/ unacknowledged 'care' roles to women in both households and broader communities through the unpaid care work she did looking after her young niece (Fraser, 2016), and some of what she shares suggests she feels there is a gender skew towards young men in her environment who feel less of these pressures:

> **Paige:** Quite a lot of the boys I know don't actually have a job [we laugh], and they still seem to manage to go out all the time still, and I'm like, I don't want to have to pay for you all the time. Like I hate saying to people I don't have a job, I'll say I don't have a job right now but I will soon. Like, I don't know how anyone can not have a job, it's not nice… like

[*friend*] and I were on the phone the other day and she was saying 'obviously I would like to be successful myself and have my own money and be independent', but… if someone wants to meet me who has a whole load of money and pay for my life, I wouldn't rush to have this be my life again, I'm over it now. Oh my god I'm so tired, I was like, I can't sit here. But there is that thing where you have to have your own stuff, but then sometimes I'm like 'oh my god, I just want to be a housewife'. But like, I would be so bored, just sitting in every day I don't know how people *do* do it

Me: And I think it can sometimes make you more vulnerable

Paige: Yeah. Like my Mum, she was like a full time Mum. My Mum was like that, like she went back to work after [*sister's name*] and then when she had me, and she felt she needed to be at home, but then when I was at primary school she was there to pick me up every day. She would work four hours in the day and be back to collect me and my sister. Like after school today, my Mum and I will go and pick my niece up after school and have her, because both of them work, but when I was younger it was never like that. It was my Mum would pick us up from school every day, take us to school and work in between, whereas now it's very different. I think my sister's very lucky because she's got us to help her out, and she's got her husband's parents, but a lot of people don't have that and have to pay for childcare, or work around their kids being at school. Like the other day I had to cancel with you because I had to collect [*niece's name*] from school because she had clients all day, she's a [*job*] as well, and I was like well *obviously* I'll do that.

Despite Paige's adamance that she was not political, her narratives often gave detailed accounts of the women she valued, her mother, sister, niece and her friends, and the barriers to social equality that they experienced. Nonetheless, she did not consider her own contribution to the care work of her niece to be affective labour, suggesting there was a barrier when it came to translating this sense of injustice into valuing her own contribution. These extra pressures for care work which fall into Paige's lap are an example of the 'crisis of care' Fraser (2013; 2016) highlights. Paige's stepping in to

support her sister demonstrates effectively how this destabilisation can be felt keenly by young women (as well as women more generally).

Though I specified in Chapter Three's literature review that I did not want to make sweeping statements about youth and precarity, Paige's situation of being beholden to a family who have limited financial resources but must support her financially connects with the insecure employment described by Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011).

Situating Paige's lived reality and the intersecting impacts of her age, gender, and class, we see her wrestling with the knowledge that her "parents experience cannot be used as a road map" and her own life is an "ongoing project largely devoid of explicit markers" for her to follow (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2013: 362). Paige seemed to wrestle with the impact of her gender at times in our conversation and at times would share some of what she felt were the more restrictive aspects of being an economically precarious working-class young woman, whilst at others she would not want to connect this to a political issue, which she then saw as committing to an overt political discussion. Paige's experiences connect with Skeggs (1997) research on class and gender, which argues that to truly understand power relations in modern society we must consider the way women live classed and gendered lives that impact on social and cultural relations. Paige's narrative gives a glimpse into how she negotiates her sense of self through the experiences of her mother and sister. She is unwilling to connect the inequalities the three women have experienced (due to the extra load placed upon them as women) to wider politics, though. She wants to hold on to dignity (Skeggs, 1997) – delineating their experiences from people who 'don't have' the care network they share and 'have to pay for childcare':

Me: It's interesting about women, and how women are treated and that's come up a lot. Cos I don't know, how would you describe… how would you describe some of these challenges, to people wanting to understand what young adults experience?

Paige: I don't know I haven't really thought about it. Because I don't like getting into politics, and all that sort of thing, but… and I just don't understand it, like. If it's a ballot, through the post, and I was like 'is this an election' to the guy, and he was like, no, this is for [*City*] and I was like – I thought there was only one [laughs] like I didn't realise there was one that you go to and you have to apply for, and I just thought… I don't want to do that. Like I would rather not vote, than vote for the sake of it if I don't know anything about it? But yeah, if that's your life, but in my mind… it's stupid just to do it for the sake of doing it.

Me: It's funny as well, because you can think about in terms of what's happening in your everyday life, with money, with working rights…

Paige: I feel like there's not so much power for us, I mean men – obviously there's the whole pay difference thing, it's sad because people do think men are the higher ones, type of thing, like in that sense.

These narratives relay a frustration with an electoral system she does not understand, and simultaneously demonstrate her socio-political awareness of issues of inequality in the society she observes and participates in, particularly in terms of an imbalance of access to power for women. Paige sees a link between my question about gender inequality, and the political system she lives under, but does not feel she can identify systemic ways this could be changed and expresses her frustration at this "Like I would rather not vote, than vote for the sake of it if I don't know anything about it?". Undoubtedly, despite not wishing to pledge allegiance in an overt political capacity, Paige is clear about what she perceives to be a root problem causing the injustices for women "there's not so much power for us… people do think men are the higher ones.'

As a last comparative analysis, I introduce some excerpts from interviews with Tom about his family, in part to juxtapose the experiences of the young women with a young man from a financially similar background but with the benefit of higher education. Though from a working-class background, Tom's higher education had given him access to a relatively secure post-graduate job, and he was able to live away from his family in a new City, with financial independence. Although he also grew up in a working-class home with relatively limited means, the emphasis on higher education within his family, together with his gender, and economic independence, gave him a much more stable social status than both Abigail and Paige. In comparison to Paige, Tom's family overtly discussed 'Big' politics, and made distinct and empathetic connections to their own experiences. Tom's comfortable knowledge-sharing intimacy with members of his family from different generations seem to shape his own approach to framing socio-political issues, in an ostensibly considered, even-handed fashion.

'Being' socio-political, for Tom, is part of his family identity, a way to understand and pay homage to some of the historical struggles they have been through as immigrants, and a way to connect and support each other. Both Tom's sets of grandparents had been immigrants from within the UK but from different countries, to an area that was hostile to immigration and where divisions on sectarian lines between the recently migrated groups continued to be played out, even once removed from the immediate locale of the countries of origin.

> **Tom:** Probably quite a lot, yeah. Like, the [*place*] where we're from, it's mostly comprised of people who are Scottish or Irish, and it's changed slightly now, but growing up everyone's family were just either of those two things. And I think there is a slight legacy, but because there was that dynamic anyway, you think back, and I've heard stories – there were Scottish schools, and Irish schools. If you were Scottish in the Irish school, then… like I remember my grandma saying 'oh, you remember when [*name*] used to have that sign saying 'No Dogs,

No Blacks, No Irish', yeah – that was everywhere, that was *real* in our town. It was just really strange, it was completely, it was – there was a massive Protestant/ Catholic divide, considering some of these things had been left behind in the past it was really strange that there was that divide, like my Mum's family – they were like, really poor. They were 'poor Irish', and they were horribly treated when they were younger. And that makes a difference, yeah, when you've seen and heard how people have been treated. But I think the poor Scottish people were treated badly as well, yeah, I don't know specifically what triggered that in people, but there is that legacy. I've never experienced it, but when my Mum was growing up and my Nan was raising them, um, yeah, they were seeing things like that and just thinking that's how it is. And then it changed, I guess. But yeah, it's horrible.

The tactical resistance of producers of culture had been embedded in the family narrative as a survival tale. Education – including political education – was very important across all generations. Tom presented his socio-political views in a very balanced way, which is likely due to his experiences in higher education of weighing and considering his views carefully, but which he also felt connected to growing up in a previously hostile community which had left its mark on his parents and grandparents. Though he described his previous home environment in detail, as well as the places he had travelled to, and the area he was now living, he said he did not feel attached to any particular place:

Tom: Yeah, I think that might happen everywhere, and that's quite an important point to make. I think people feel some connection with where they're from, I guess. Errm, but I think it can be over-amplified as a feeling, I don't think it's that, errm… I dunno. Like, I've never really felt a proper attachment to a place, like, it's something that I, because I'm from there and because I've spent a lot of time there then I own any stake there, it's – a place is a place, you know, you might not like the change – if there's any way that you can influence the change at all, then try that, if not – move on I guess, try and change the dynamics somewhere else.

Me: Yes, I think perhaps… I wonder about the differences or similarities there might be in meanings about place, that change for different generations?

Tom: I don't know because a lot of people who are older that I know have lived in a place for a long time, which would give you more of a deep-rooted connection to a place. Like, if you start a family somewhere, it does mean that you're more… rooted into that area, for different reasons. Because you have to think about… schools, and all sorts of stuff, whereabouts are your family going to be established, do you live near extended family and all that sort of stuff. But when you're not rooted by that connection, you can live somewhere exterior to that place and you're not rooted to any dynamic, you can leave at any point, but then also there's no real… you're not rooted in any way, so there's that element that you can… leave at any point, and you can… change your mind about where you want to live, or where you want to work, or whatever. Shall we go down? Yeah? Yeah, let's go down…

Possibly his emphasis on a lack of attachment and connection relates to his family's immigrant past, and the rejection experienced both within the migrant communities and without, from English people who had previously settled in his hometown.

Tom described his family as often discussing politics around the table, with grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts and siblings contributing to the discussion and supporting new ideas rather than trying to establish a singular narrative. The family held liberal views, but welcomed new perspectives on race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and gender, bringing these discussions to the family dinner table during the younger generations trips home to visit. His family acted as a safe domestic site to explore socio-politics (Botterill, Hopkins and Sanghera, 2020) and this foundation in openness around politics may have contributed to Tom's sense of security, such that he has inherited skills that support his settling into a new reality. Tom takes the sense of security he feels in his family and transposes this into new spaces, making transience a comfortable experience – if he is able to

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change a dynamic for the better in a new environment, he will. If there is too much 'resistance', he says he will move onto 'a new place'. This action in itself denotes tactics of resistance, and resourcefulness, but also speaks to his social status and position as a young man who is well-educated and confident in his social and economic potential in a new environment.

The prevalence of socio-politics in Tom's family identity created an "inseparability of politics from emotional geography" (Pain and Staeheli, 2014: 346), which in his family "works to produce domination as well as resistance across all practices and sites" (Pain and Staeheli, 2014: 346), and contributed to their collective survival of traumatic migration. Rather than "growing up in a coherently organised transnational social field" (Soehl and Waldinger, 2012: 808) the second and third generations of a migrant family gain cross-border connections via a set of distinct ties, often formulated with / by their children. Negotiating socio-politics within his familial kin was a way for Tom to connect with and support elder members of his family. His sense is that his socio-political agency is important, and demonstrable. Through this, evidently, his self-perception of his socio-political agency is that his contribution to wider discourses is important, and should be made with consideration, even if the wider sense is that systemically there are problems.

When I explored this intergenerational transmission, it became clear that the migrant status of Tom's grandparents and parents are a factor in understanding their demonstrative and open communication about political issues. Discussing prevalent political discourses had become a way for Tom and his grandfather to signal 'we care about each other', and that they were invested in each other's shared values, identity and future choices. The community Tom's parents and grandparents had arrived into before he was born sounded precarious, and particularly so for immigrants experiencing "a state of disconnect to both worlds" (Leavey, Sembhi and Livingstone,

2004). Preserving these kinship networks, therefore, would have been essential, as everybody negotiated new roles and new geopolitics (Kuhn, 2002), and "telling stories about the past, our past, [is] a key moment in the making of ourselves" (Kuhn, 2002: 2). This tactical negotiation of socio-political issues, through shared family stories, was demonstrated by Tom's narratives about wider political issues:

Me: Do you think age has a part to play in the Brexit vote?

Tom: Yeah, I think you can. You can probably point to the divide and make an argument for it, but I know people who have the same opinion for the same reasons, or for slightly different reasons, like, for example, me and my brother were chatting to my Grandad about it and my Grandad was saying I don't know enough about it – you know more, it will make more of a difference to you, what do you feel I should vote? I'll vote to Remain then, which is quite an interesting thought process, I guess. And I think maybe that is the way to think about it, because it's not going to have that much of an impact on the older generation, I guess, so… like, the way – the chat we had about it, he was like, it's not really my decision to make

The narrative Tom relayed between his Grandad, brother and himself suggests a socio-political exchange full of intimacy, familiarity and care. His Grandad invited his grandsons' opinions, indicating his respect for the significance of their trajectories and future. His grandsons' experience of this conversation, seemingly, is not only to feel valued and supported, feeling respect for the 'interesting thought process' their Grandad demonstrates, but also to take away from the conversation that 'maybe that is the way to think about it', potentially influencing how they go about decisions in their futures, and the impacts they may have on others. Everyday social relationships extend beyond immediate spatial boundaries, as care and support is demonstrated by

kin who may not live near each other but are drawn closer together through everyday austerity and divisive politics which undermine opportunities for the young (Hall, 2018).

Abigail, Paige and Tom negotiated a sense of agency and support in both their micro and macro-worlds. I hold them together for analysis here in order to demonstrate how their tactical choices were overtly inspired *because of* intimacies and care, connection they articulated, which demonstrate the socio-political power of social connection. The section has explored how Abigail, Paige and Tom value their intimate relationships as spaces for allyship, support and respite from the pressure of everyday life. They centralise their relationships with loved ones and seek sanctuary and support from the pressures of financial stress, social insecurities, the impact of gender inequalities (as in the cases of Abigail and Paige), and engagement with Big 'P' Politics with Tom. The data suggests they formulate ideas about socio-politics based on what they and their intimates discuss, experience and prioritise. The data also suggests they each balance a dependency on their families, but the women – who lack financial stability and independence, and higher education – are more vulnerable to the relations of social reproduction which place them under increased pressure to step in and do unpaid care work for their loved ones. In Abigail's case this could be considered to be the exchange of emotional support "my friends are *always* there so I'm not scared" and financial resources when members of her friendship group are struggling with the demands of everyday life. For Paige the example given demonstrates that she, alongside other women in her family, step in to relieve strains on care which have 'deep systemic roots in the structure of our social order' (Fraser, 2016: 100). Fraser's assertions that the social strand is central to the broader crisis wrought by capitalism as women perform 'affective and material labour' (Fraser, 2016: 1) seems ratified by the young women's socio-political experiences, leading Paige to consider 'housewifization' (Fraser, 2008: 105)

and the further entanglement of 'male domination' (Fraser, 2016: 106) as possible options to make life feel easier.

Tom feels more confident about the possibilities available to him, and that he could "leave at any point, and you can… change your mind about where you want to live, or where you want to work, or whatever", but this is also connected to intergenerational experiences of migration and a received notion about 'making do' and being fully aware of the political strategies of the producers. Therefore, he formulates his socio-politics partly in relation to the received experiences of oppression his family have experienced, and mindful of the impact of decision-making on his whole kin, as modelled by his elders. The participants make observably tactical decisions based on exchanges of resources of support, to help them 'make do' when faced with shortages of emotional or financial support. In doing so, they create pockets of agency that help them negotiate their everyday lives. Their intimacies and care with others see them calibrating decisions across micro and macro worlds, and in between, as they negotiate institutional and societal pressures through the social connections they rely upon to negotiate their adulthoods.

5.3 Agreeing to disagree, disagreeing to distinguish self?

Charley, Fahad and Olivia each relayed stories of moments of resistance in family conversations that they leveraged in our conversations to explain aspects of their self-identity and ways this defined their socio-politics. In this section I discuss how they used their close relationships as a kind of mirror to hold up to themselves, redefining and centralising values they held to be important in the process.

Many of Charley's stories centred on social media use, because her job necessitated regular and sophisticated use of these mediums. Her narratives indicated her pride in her manipulation of digital social media to relay messages about equality, feminism, and entertainment events. They also gave insights into the skilful negotiations and 'resistances' she felt young women needed to perform in order to stay in control of the strategies of social media providers. Charley's socio-politics centred on a need for strategic management of the resources available, and tactical manoeuvring to get around the inevitable need to navigate various platforms to perform social life:

> **Charley:** Another thing I hate is people who try and put best versions of themselves out there. I think we all do that to a certain extent, like we're all guilty of that, none of us want to put bad photos out there. But we end up putting out this false projection of ourselves, I don't know… stuff like that kind of gets to me, you know, like, the whole concept of likes, like I've got my Instagram on private and I don't really use my Facebook, just for business reasons really"

Charley explained to me that she kept her various social media profiles separate from each other, using the messaging facilities in different ways to message different people in her life (family members, work friends, intimate friends, and so on). This was something that all participants alluded to, the separation of social media for different purposes, and Charley used these profiles as part of her professional life so saw the delineation between private and public self as particularly important. Charley seemed to recognise the socio-political force of the 'public spheres' of social media and tried to control the terms with which she interacted with these. She was concerned with the depoliticisation of gender issues, and described not wanting her cousin to be adversely affected by the unreal and unobservable realities (Bhaskar, 1978: 12) she perceived as having the power to impact negatively on self-esteem. A narrative she shared about her concerns about her cousin's social media use demonstrates her perceptions of the power of the multiplicity of terrains for global

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and intimate connection, and the ways that the knowledge-sharing intimacy of family felt disrupted for her. It also demonstrates that Charley wanted to foreground the fact that boundaries between private and public life are a socio-political issue for her, and that she sees exposure of 'real' self-identity, in a public way, as putting oneself at personal risk. Social media, whilst the subject of this account, is in fact a case in point through which Charley oriented her socio-political ideas about values and family. She was aware of the constant pull on young people to make choices, due to the proliferation of options available to them (Beck, 2016). The new moral choices afforded, through time and agency, demand an overwhelming level of multitasking from young people – and have "an increasingly short period of validity" (Colombo and Rebughini, 2020: 9). Digital technologies, social media in particular, are specifically aimed at young people (Theocharis, 2012; Vromen, 2017; Boulianne and Theocharis, 2020) with young people 'knowingly or unknowingly' being 'exposed to politics' and 'politically socialised' (Pickard, 2019: 2):

> **Charley:** Yeah, ok, so, yeah, even, like when I post a story on Instagram and it gets twenty likes, I mean one of mine got fifty likes and I was like, wow – this is amazing, you know. I mean obviously I was like 'ah, this is nice, loads of people like my picture' you know, but I think some people who are 18 or whatever – they're defined by their likes, if that makes sense? And maybe if I were 18 at this given time that would be my life, and I'd be defined by how many followers I had on my page, and how many likes I had on my pages, and how many likes I get on my profile picture and stuff like that.

Beck (2016) explores the role of older family members in introducing younger generations to the existing social and political order, and research into the impact of social media on mental health (Kelly et al., 2016) suggests that the negative consequences of social media interaction have a particularly drastic effect on girls. Thus, this account of frustration with her cousin can be seen to

be about connection and family intimacy, as they "mediate the moral uncertainty in changing times" (Berriman and Thomson, 2015: 595). Charley felt a distinction between her 'generation' as she described their age gap, and her cousin's, and used this perceived difference to explain the difference in values. Charley's portrayal of her perceived reserve about social media use, resisting the draw to seek approval from 'likes' actually tells us more about her perception of the significance of social media and its dispensation of social capital. The following extract also suggests she wants to be perceived as being beyond an age where she would be coerced into posting images for likes (unlike her younger cousin):

> **Charley:** I have umm, some cousins of mine who are much younger than me, I think I told you about, and one of my cousins you know she had 99 likes on her profile picture and she was desperate for one more like, you know, to round it up to 100 and um I was just like, well I'm not going to because at the end of the day 99 people who you haven't asked have liked that picture, and you're asking me to like it, and I'm not going to just like it because you're saying that. Obviously you're a beautiful girl, yeah, you're a nice looking person, but you don't need to ask just one person to like your picture, if 99 people have done that of their own accord.

Charley's concern seemed to be the sense of belonging that social media sells, and how this can be assimilated with unsavvy attitudes to acceptance:

> **Charley:** I don't know, her sort of 'winning at life', I don't wanna say it like that, because she's very interesting, you know, interested in a lot of things. but that whole self-acceptance thing comes from how many people follow her, or how she's perceived, or how many likes she get. And I have seen it with her where if a picture doesn't get enough likes she'll delete it, you know. Like who are you trying to improve, or like impress?

Charley's concern here is about what she sees as her cousin's choices and priorities. Her story seems to suggest she sees her cousin's younger age as a risk factor in focusing on self-acceptance, being 'defined' by responses from social media. Charley used this example to validate her own socio-political discourse of empowerment for women, separating herself out as an 'older' young adult who makes more 'responsible' choices. She seemed to draw a connection between fickle behaviour on social media and the socio-political shifts observed amongst her peers:

> **Charley:** I'm so glad I'm not 18 anymore, I'm so glad I'm past that thing of wanting someone to like something so I get 200 likes
>
> **Me:** So you think younger people focus on that?
>
> **Charley:** In a way, you have to listen to other people to sort of gain a bit of y'know… yeah. knowledge. They've lived their lives as well.
>
> **Me:** So you see yourself as helping your cousin?
>
> **Charley:** Yeah. Sometimes it's not popular. You know? If I say to my cousin, you know, you're wrong. There are other people who are like… it's basically, like Corbyn; I voted Green, I didn't know who to vote for and I didn't want to vote for him. You know there was this time where he was hated, y'know, and now everybody loves him…

The link Charley makes between her cousin's image on the internet and her voting choices in going against the 'popular' idea of voting for Jeremy Corbyn suggest that her socio-politics places significance in formulating her own ideas and not being flippant or trend following. In describing her cousin's behaviour as different from her own, Charley also demonstrated that she expected her cousin, her kin, to come under a more collective family viewpoint about sharing personal details online, but her cousin has other ideas and motivations. Charley perceived that her 'generation' had

been productively communicative on social media, rather than self-congratulatory with their interaction. In fact, by generational definition they are not in different generations, but Charley's distinction supports an argument against the idea of homogenised generation – Charley feels there are significant shifts, perhaps in connection with changes in technology and shifting discourses, which distinguish her age group from that of her cousin, who is seven years younger. Her cousin's behaviour, she felt, was performative and insecure – whereas Charley carefully disguised aspects of her identity, being mindful not to reveal much about her preferences, image or allegiances, on any social medium. Charley felt that the public and binarized nature of political discussion that had played out on social media, had drawn younger members of her family into debates they were not equipped to navigate.

These extracts highlight a tension for Charley. Although Charley felt her socio-politics were based on her values about gender, equality and freedom to express identity, there was jarring between the sincerity of held beliefs and desire to further social issues, and the actuality of accepting the freedom of a young woman close to her to portray aspects of her self-identity online. Arguably, Charley felt the beginnings of 'Structural Nostalgia' (Herzfeld, 2016) for a time when social media was reciprocal and measured, viewing her younger cousin's behaviour online as symptomatic of a loss of "reciprocities of respect and affect" (Herzfeld, 2016: 150). She felt her cousin's attitude to politics connected to the ephemeral 'like' culture on social media, with her cousin seeking as much approval for her political opinions as she did her self-image in a photo. She did not see the point in this and felt alarmed that her cousin's self- perception was so closely tied to the number of people who followed her, agreed with her posts, or liked her photos. What this tells us about Charley's socio-politics is that she views social media and politics to be inextricably linked to popularity amongst many young people. Though she promotes freedom, her wider awareness of gender

inequality makes her critical of what she views as attention seeking behaviour from a family member. This demonstrates the complexity of individual young people's socio-politics, and the non-linearity of some of their decision-making.

In Fahad's stories he discussed his sense of self-identity and compared it with what he perceived to be the identity of his parents, and the messages about identity he felt he was receiving from the discourses about Brexit. As a young gay man of mixed heritage, Fahad was feeling vulnerable to the xenophobic, ultra conservative elements of political discourses about Brexit.

> **Fahad:** Yes, so going back to the vulnerability again, like, feeling vulnerable in a sense where I'm focusing, like sometimes I'll find myself focusing on someone else's ideology and opinion rather than mine and I do think, again like the butterfly effect, it just changes the way you think slightly but you don't realise. Like small things like Brexit.

Fahad's description of himself as 'feeling vulnerable' and having to focus on and adapt to 'someone else's ideology' tell us how his socio-politics and sense of self was being affected by the othering discourses of Brexit. His stories suggested that he was seeking his place in both a literal and figurative sense, by trying to understand where he fitted within his family as well as where his family fitted into the changing shape of the UK. These feelings of displacement where exacerbated by the fact that he had returned home from university and was living in his family home, and he felt less able to talk about the over-arching political discourse of Brexit, not necessarily at home but in his local area, where he felt many people held right wing views and had largely voted for Brexit:

> **Fahad:** Anything to do with Brexit. I think, for me at the moment personally because of my space and because of my situation, it's not, I haven't talked about stuff like that a lot but I know like eventually when I move out from my family's home and I move, because at the moment yes, again going back to me and my perception of it being more liberal the further

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you go into [*City*]. So, like me wanting to move there soon. And then after that I'll obviously—

Me: --So, kind of at the moment in [*place*] and living at home, do you feel less able to talk about those bigger opinions?

Fahad: I think not less able it's just the space, the surrounding, the people. You don't-- it doesn't come up.

This feeling of holding back about the topic of Brexit in his surroundings, which came up a lot on our walk together, impacted both his work life (discussed in Chapter Six) and his home life, in different ways. Fahad described a sense of unease and displacement which was directly affecting his feeling of security in his hometown:

Me: No, just that really. How do you feel in the context of that particular situation you describe, of Brexit?

Fahad: I think it did change, it has changed my way of seeing kind of, it does make me kind of want, like I do not see myself living here my whole life because it makes me kind of, yes like it makes me feel like, this sounds really silly that what if I don't get an opportunity or something or like being sort of like, for me being surrounded by. because it was such a big thing for me at the time because I was taking a [*subject*] course, there's all races there, there's all genders there. Do you know what I mean and it's a such a liberal and I remember that I [*left university*] and then the Brexit stuff happened. So, it like, it took like a 180 on kind of… perception of space I guess and being like okay, so this isn't enough like kind of thing… like. Like I think this is the first time I've said I don't see myself living here my whole life kind of thing.

Fahad considered his socio-politics and alignment to be 'liberal' and saw the world around him shifting towards a more conservative, xenophobic space. I want to highlight a connection here, as Fahad did, with his feelings about Brexit and the racist rhetoric in his local area, and wider

questioning he had been doing about his identity, fitting in to his area, and his family. These questions had been prompted by a return home from university. Fahad talked a lot about his younger years and his earlier separation from, and return back to, his primary caregivers at a young age. Growing up between England and South Asia, he experienced the complexities of two very different notions of kinship and sense of place. The English family, led by his mother, shared experiences of being othered due to her relationship with his father, the siblings levying experiences of this to foreground liberal views. His South Asian family, his father's side, focused on strengthening kinship bonds through performative heteronormativity and dominance, marginalising those (including Fahad) who did not meet these gendered expectations.

These gendered expectations were demonstrated by his father removing him from England and returning with him to South Asia, so that Fahad could go to a strict boarding school which would negate his desire to explore gender fluidity. Although he had gone to the boarding school in South Asia with his father, who lived nearby, Fahad had still boarded and had little contact with his father and none with his mother. This, he felt, had impacted greatly on his confidence and sense of self, and he "had a lot of bad experiences when I wasn't living with my parents". His experiences seemed to have made his need to understand his parents' decision-making and identity composition all the more important in helping him to understand himself. Fahad's father had been a migrant to the UK from South Asia, and Fahad described his father struggling with aspects of this transition.

> **Fahad:** "He had travelled to [*another Western country*], he'd been here like, but then my Mum was like… and I see it now, so much in her. She wasn't able to ground herself in lifelong friends, kind of thing, because she moved around so much. It's like, I've had so many arguments with my parents where it's like; tell me who you are… I wanna know who you are. Like, I wanna know who you were, before I was born, what type of person were you, do you know what I mean?"

Fahad was seeking markers to help him come to terms with some of the consequences of the neglect he experienced in his childhood, such as his struggles with mental health, by extending a level of understanding and empathy toward his parents 'I wanna know who you were, before I was born, what type of person were you, do you know what I mean?'. Fahad's sensitivity to his Mum and Dad's experiences helped him to understand his own experiences of racism and structural inequalities, and his socio-political position about sexuality, ethnicity, and gender. Having relatively recently come out as gay, he was trying to make sense of the impact of the earlier experiences of being othered by his father, and understand how they had affected his sense of self identity:

> **Fahad:** Those experiences are what decide who we become. Umm, because I've had a lot of bad experiences when I wasn't living with my parents, but the more you read about… how the brain works, the more you think, oh my god that's why I think like this – that's why I do these things"

This speaks to his desire to understand himself and make sense of his experiences by explicitly demonstrating his reach toward his parents' narratives and how these could tether some of this complexity for him. As he discussed his experiences of exclusion within family spaces, his local area and the political discourse of Brexit, he led the conversation to articles and discussions he had seen on social media about homophobic attacks in public spaces:

> **Me:** Yes, yes, yes. And that can feel difficult, how you want to kind of express your sexuality and how you want to talk to people about that and then you're seeing things on social media that sort of suggest, you know, that somebody's being targeted for that reason.

> **Fahad:** Well yes, for a specific reason.

Me: Yes. Actually I think, well I knew that story that was maybe a year or so ago? Is that the same?

Fahad: That was two separate ones, yes, yes.

Me: Tell me what the second one was because I don't know?

Fahad: Yes, so there was one story where a gay couple went to-- and this again it goes back to space. They went into a straight club, they went into a different space that they usually go into and obviously they felt safe but like, they left the club and like this group of men kind of followed them and they got beat up. And like again thinking of their sense of space like how their perception of [*place*] has changed forever. And they're never going to be able to kind change it back kind of thing.

It felt clear from Fahad's stories that the influence of othering narratives in the media, on social media and in his local area were stirring up feelings of displacement and vulnerability. He did not feel 'safe', and describes feeling 'vulnerability', and a 'butterfly effect' which has impacted on his 'perception of space'. The area he grew up in can be mapped as a conservative holding space, comprising primarily 'Leave' voters. De Certeau describes the binary position between maps and what he describes as 'spatial stories', in which the social relations of power can be both played out in the former instance and avoided in the latter. As Fahad makes sense of his own spatial story, we learn about the historical and structural inequalities he sees in the area and the ways these have intersected the map of his life.

The complex feelings Fahad shares about his sense of 'place' (a static, tangible, physicality) and 'space' (more abstract) are also framed through the experiences of his Mum and Dad, who he describes as having felt othered at different points in their lives. He observes a pattern of othering which culminates in the feelings he had at the point of our interview, of political discourses being

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demonstrably concretised around him "by the operations that orient it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (de Certeau, 1984: 117). His sense is that the 'place' has become more difficult to live in as a young gay, mixed ethnicity man. However, the 'space', a word he repeatedly mentioned in one of our interviews, is a "practiced place" (de Certeau, 1984: 117) and Fahad practices his negotiated understandings of his identity internally, tactically using the space as a home and for work but planning a future beyond. Fahad's experiences of feeling othered have made him aware of a structural divide in which he must mediate his behaviour in order to fit in with the emerging spatial dynamics of Brexit which suggest to him there is a discrepancy between "the freedom of space on the one hand and the 'right to one's own place' on the other" (Massey, 1999: 39). The impact of the combination of factors on forming his socio-politics, is evidenced by his delineation between liberal 'places' and conservative 'places', and where he has previously felt safe and accepted (university, and in the City) compared to being othered and excluded. As he says, the disorienting impact of his experiences in different areas has been exacerbated by both his upbringing and the recent political discourses on Brexit and 'that's why I think like this'.

Olivia drew on intergenerational connections in her understanding of her feminism, but she also saw contradictions in her family and extended kin that she found upsetting. The story she shared, of internalised outrage at her Mum's racist boyfriend, reveals the wrestle between values that have moved beyond the sphere of 'family values' with the corresponding impacts upon intimate relationships. Olivia perceived a sense of duty to both protect and practice care in bringing some of her family member's perspectives closer to her own. Her narrative shows her socio-politics have to take on different guises in different spaces. This re-orienting space means that Olivia has to position herself politically, in a different space from those she loves, whilst still maintaining a closeness to a

family whose perspectives on issues of equality feel antithetical to her own. From her narrative, it seemed that perhaps her family, in turn, felt unsettled and unsure about how she viewed them and what place they held in her life, regularly finding excuses to challenge her anti-racist and feminist beliefs:

> **Olivia:** Yeah, my Mum will sometimes say things that I don't think are ok to say, and I remember one time at the Christmas dinner table my Mum's boyfriend said… I don't even want to say the word… he said 'paki', he said he'd been to the 'paki shop', and I've heard him say 'chinky' before, and he doesn't mean… a lot by it, but for me just saying that word means a lot… it just calls to mind a stereotype doesn't it, and that person probably wasn't even from Pakistan, they're just a person with dark skin, who maybe speaks English with a noticeable accent, and that makes him feel entitled to brand people as all the same thing (…) it just boxes people in and I think its oppressive (…) and it was really awkward because I hadn't known him very long so I couldn't say 'you can't say that! You can't say that in my house!

Morgan (2020) describes family practices as being readable as 'gender practices, class practices', too (Morgan, 2020: 734). The gendered and classed nature of Olivia's reading of her family dynamics is influenced by the strength she has observed in the women:

> **Me:** I just wanted to pick up on some words you used when you were describing that: 'below' and 'put that on me', although I don't think you see yourself in that way, those are the words you used to describe the way you felt, and you shared that you felt there was this really balanced situation with parents trying to make [*her full scholarship at private school*] it a viable situation, umm, I just wondered if I'm drawing out the right threads there?
>
> **Olivia:** Yeah, you are… I never really thought about those things they said about my Mum being… feminist? But yeah. I think there is this thing about you know a woman, who's struggling, and can't have it all, and all that stuff in what they were suggesting… that's what really pissed me off. My Mum is a really good Mum. Like, she has done *everything* she's just a

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really good Mum, and I think it's so unfair of them to assume that just because she's not with my Dad anymore she's somehow not as good? At doing that job? And I guess that speaks to this idea that there is in our society that there is a set idea of what a Mum is, and does. Umm…

What Fraser describes as a previously "normative picture of a proper family" (Fraser, 2012: 591) and the significance Olivia perceives, of that ideal, to the parents of her peers at the private school she went to, does not resonate with her. Olivia describes what Fraser calls "a new world of economic production and social reproduction [is] emerging" (Fraser, 1994: 592), in which more diverse family structures are now common. Her socio-politics recognised that women like her mother balance full time employment, parenthood, and the weight of injustice created by the social reproduction of values that continue to reinforce the model of a two-parent home (Fraser, 2013; 2016). The lack of recognition for unpaid care roles, the 'set idea of what a Mum is' in our society as Olivia describes it, and the lack of societal flexibility in acknowledging the need for a model which prevents "exploitable dependency" (Fraser, 1994: 603), disproportionately place women like her mother in positions where they are viewed as 'not as good'. Perhaps this sense of injustice relating to her mother's experiences also contributes to her protective feeling that her Mum's boyfriend can't say racist things 'in my house', because it is actually her mother's house.

Within-family variability to egalitarian attitudes points to the complex socialisation influences that contribute to gender attitude development in young people (Marks, Lam and McHale, 2009). Aspects of Olivia's family dynamics feel challenged by the education she has received (and pursued). Olivia's description of a family ritual which she felt momentarily disconnected from due to her Mum's boyfriend's presence (which she described as fracturing the ease), and her Mum's boyfriend's statements which she viewed as unacceptable tells us something about her sense of her

socio-politics as being measured both within, and against, the family structures she has grown up within.

There is a generational and relational aspect to her socio-politics, as Olivia describes her understanding of the complexities of her grandmothers' identities, and the insidious nature of their racism, but rationalises the reasons for their xenophobia. Her sense-making for them could be considered as gendered, in that it cannot be disconnected from her perceptions of their own vulnerability which she connects to trauma experienced as young women during the Second World War. Here we see the third generation making sense of the racism of their forebears:

> **Olivia:** My grandma's pretty bad, for… you've got the German immigrant who complains about immigrants, and then you've got the one who's very proud to be British and I think carries over that defensive pride from being in the War. And she's very… she can be, frankly, xenophobic, and kind of racist sometimes. But she would never say anything to someone, she just complains' "oh so-and-so over the road doesn't speak English properly", or if she calls the phone company and gets transferred to India it really pisses her off, she's like "Those jobs should be here! And they can't even speak English properly!" so… yeah, I find it difficult to communicate with her about those things sometimes

Unlike Tom's grandfather, who he views as reaching to his grandsons for understanding of modernity and encouraging discussion, Olivia does not feel that her grandmothers are easy to communicate with about social justice issues. They feel unreachable on certain topics, and Olivia finds it 'difficult to communicate' with them.

This section gave some examples of Charley, Fahad and Olivia distinguishing themselves from their loved ones and leveraging difference in socio-political opinion to establish a sense of self-identity. These conversations demonstrated ways they defined their values by looking within their intimate

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ties and adapting - 'bricoler' (de Certeau, 1984) – their values. Charley, who talked a lot about the role of social media in everyday life, saw it as being an important part of socio-political influence amongst young people. However, she wanted to assert that she was not readily influenced by popularity and 'likes' online. Giving the example of her cousin as a juxtaposition against herself, Charley revealed that she feels there is an element of popularity in young people's political decision-making when social media raises the profile of a particular political discourse. Charley feels strongly that although she supports freedom of identity and choice, her cousin's choices were influenced by the wrong values. This demonstrates on the one hand the power of kin as a counter-influence on the media, and providing other perspectives on socio-politics. On the other hand, it shows how different perspectives within a family can sharpen a young person's sense of their own socio-politics.

Olivia and Fahad seek to do reparative work in making the people they love into acceptable figures when talking to a stranger (me) about their family dynamics. We can see that Fahad negotiates a sense of identity through his ideas about 'space' and belonging. He explores his parents own sense of belonging and considers how the renewed emphasis on space created by the Brexit discourse has muted his desire to have conversations about belonging within his home, and his local area. He nonetheless observes the 'place' he lives in and describes feeling his convictions about his socio-politics unnerved by the sense of xenophobia. Olivia describes moments of overt racism and questionable views within her family but is more sympathetic to the older women in her family who she views as being strong. This may be due to observed social injustice, as the three women she describes – her mother and two grandmothers – have all experienced androcentric measures of social value. In centring their complexity, Olivia's views connect to Fraser's who suggests we must "reconceptualise gender equity as a complex, not a simple, idea", (Fraser, 1994: 595), in order to

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bring everyone on board. For Olivia, who is anti-racist, this means feminism should be held alongside anti-racism. However, her intersectional view of feminism becomes problematic when she is faced with racist views from the women she loves. Both Olivia and Fahad develop empathetic narratives for family members they find problematic, reaching back into their histories to understand what has defined their views. In doing so, they maintain their connection to their loved ones whilst simultaneously negotiating their own socio-politics.

5.4 Safety net: Networks for support and socio-political experimentation

Both Erjan and Shona had early experiences with state intervention, for different reasons. Erjan had a number of complex disabilities. As a child, Shona's family had child protection social work involvement. Their experiences related the pressures of a state system delivering an increasingly one-size-fits-all response, through policy and funding, to a plethora of social problems that were being marginalised (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2014). Erjan and Shona's encounters with social services provided a fascinating insight into the pervading sense that, arguably, with public services aimed at young people under greater pressure, the one-size-fits-all approach is in danger of significantly limiting those reaches to autonomy and may hinge on the support and understanding of invested and interested care-oriented relationships for successful navigation.

Erjan's desire to make direct challenges to perceived barriers to equal rights had to constantly be balanced against his job in local governance. Erjan was reticent when talking about his activism, due to his heightened concerns that his actions and abilities were being monitored in order to determine

his entitlement to disability benefits[7] prompted discussions and planning with his parents – particularly his mother – to help him make decisions about mediated risks he might take to defend his rights. This defined a complex relationship between his own sense of what should comprise socio-political action, and the more muted tactics he was forced to undertake so as not to jeopardise financial support he was entitled to by compromising his job. Erjan presented his family as very supportive, and that their endeavours to find opportunities for Erjan were something they were all involved with together.

> **Erjan:** I think we read an interview in the [*local*] magazine? And then Mum gave it to me, and then Mum decided to apply to be [*a volunteer for a disability youth group*] … to volunteer as one. and then Dad read it, and then went part time on the table [*I think this refers to the number of hours you can sign up to do voluntary support*]"

The confident engagement by the family in services designed to enable, fostered in turn a model for Erjan that he could negotiate what he needed in terms of resources and access, and although there was an onus on being mindful about his activism, he welcomed guidance from his parents and brother, expecting them to participate in his decision-making processes:

> **Me:** "Have you ever had anyone actually say to you, we've seen what you've posted, and we don't like it...?"
>
> **Erjan:** "I think when we did the… I think when we did the [*protest*] I think my Mum was thinking 'ah, be careful what you say', because the DWP need to do a background check [laughs] and they actually, you can find more safer ways of expressing yourself rather than…

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[7] The rules for Incapacity Benefit at the time of this study stated that you could only do 'Permitted Work' as a claimant, and could not work for more than 16 hours per week. Erjan was concerned about how to balance these hours with his ambitions to progress toward independence, and concerned that his activism might be seen to act against him.

and I was like yeah that makes sense but they don't have time to go through that do they, they don't have time. to go through… their job is like, to go through the phone. They don't have time to do that anyway, it's not like a job interview, nah probably not…"

What Erjan described in this mutual negotiation with his mother about what would be best to reveal to the DWP, is an example of a calculated, isolated action of resistance. Erjan's actual lifeworld differed from the construction of 'disability' he felt the DWP based their decisions on. The resistance mechanisms available to Erjan are not only perceivable in his activism, but in the actions he takes in his everyday life to negotiate autonomy:

Me: Am I right in relaying from what you've said that you want to work, but you've been told you can only work 15 hours in order to receive the supportive benefits you need. You'd like to work more, but you've been told by the government that this is restricted?

Erjan: "Why would I have to wait for something … wait for a new system which is better [long pause] it's just annoying how they can like restrict you, that badly. And obviously my whole family work as well, so then… that's annoying. That's fine, but I kind of like think, oh yeah… they know how hard I work, but it's just a shame that we're not supported. Actually encouraged, we *need* to do that"

Erjan's daily life, at work and also in relation to the lack of support for him to live an independent home life, exemplify this (Barnes, 1995). Discussions with his parents – particularly his mother – helped him make decisions about mediated risks he took to defend those rights. This created a complex relationship between his own sense of what should comprise action, and the tactics he had to undertake in order to negotiate financial support he was entitled to, limited hours he could work in order to be eligible to receive that support, and his own visibility through activism for a Disability Rights organisation he was a prominent member of. Erjan's mother helped him to engage with

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opportunities, navigate the DWP phone calls and administration, and find a space for himself. Despite this, his frustration was palpable:

> **Erjan:** You may have that feeling of 'I kind of just want to be the same', and it's not easy to… feel. It kind of feels like, like Erjan is tied down, like tied down from the… and knows what he wants to do, but has to wait for a specific year or time

Arguably, the strategy, the 'calculus of force relationships' (de Certeau, 1984: xix) enacted by the DWP isolates Erjan from his environment, but in doing so it crystallises his socio-politics as he is able to articulate very clearly the converging forces, their irreconcilabilities, and the social injustice this demonstrates. It affects his freedom to work, to participate fully in society, and to achieve independence, because it restricts his working hours in order for him to receive benefits which support him to live with his disabilities. Erjan's tactics in negotiating what he will and will not reveal to the DWP is a great example of a tactic "[insinuating] itself into the other's place fragmentarily, without taking over its entirety" (de Certeau, 1984: xix). Nonetheless, the balancing act was ongoing and wore him down. Erjan perceived that it was hard to achieve meaningful equal rights for people with disabilities, and that this had to be carefully weighed against his job in local governance.

Shona's socio-politics were relational in the sense that she developed her values from experiences with the people she was closest to. Her narrative suggested that her extended experiences of state social care intervention had fused some sense of her self-perception, as both 'Shona the individual', and 'Shona viewed by Child Protection'. One version understood her rights, the availability (or lack of) resources, and the other viscerally felt the positions of vulnerability she had experienced – with the state acting on behalf of her family, for her welfare.

Me: Did you talk about confidentiality at that point because you were talking about something, you know, you were talking about your [*relative's*] disability. Why does that bring up the idea of something confidential? Is it because you feel protective?

Shona: Well, to tell the truth like because I've been bullied about my mum and my nan throughout practically my life. I just, it just swirls in my mind the fact that if I'm telling someone this it's, I'm just scared that it's going to be out in the open you know what I mean? And I'm just scared that it's going to relapse the bullying again and I don't want that.

Me: Yes understandable.

Shona: You might think I'm stupid but [laughs].

[redacted due to identifiability]

Me: You were taken off the register, child protection?

Shona: Yes. And yes, I mean since I've been taken off of them, I've been living at home with my mum we've had the most wonderful, memorable relationship ever. It's just been amazing. And I can do what I want, I can go anywhere that I like and yes mum might get a bit protective, "Oh take your phone, blah de blah." I'm like, "Yes, I'll go. I've got my key; I've got my phone. If anything happens, I've got your number. I can call you it's fine. I'm at my boyfriend's, he doesn't live far from here. So if I'm stuck, I can call him and if I can't get hold of you, I'll call him and I'll go to his place." Simple as that [laughs]. But yes, no, but yes.

Shona's relief at the comparable safety of her new life, albeit fearful of being found by a family member who was a danger to her (her concerns for privacy are discussed further in Chapter Seven's exploration of social media), is also connected to the ways in which the reciprocal care of her kin relationships have been able to stabilise her life. Shona seemed to negotiate a private sphere of identity for herself, and this was deeply connected to her closest friendship which she saw as being

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spiritual and transcendent. This private side of her could not be accessed by institutional care, and she was able to relinquish aspects of her past trauma by believing in the idea of a spiritual protection. In her descriptions of herself she uses her knowledge of her situation to empower herself. Her socio-politics are informed by the care she has received in moments of vulnerability, or her ability to show care to her loved ones. Her sense of being entitled to live in safety, without discrimination, and to experience happy family life is weighted against the previous absence of this. As we shall see in the following chapters, this also shaped the way she guarded her life and her expectations of care for her loved ones and other vulnerable people. Action taken by the state, she felt, had created a space of safety in her life. Though she described feeling a sense of care had been fulfilled towards her by the state, she nonetheless felt a freedom in being released from this.

Her close friendship was a key element in the realisation of a future free from the negative experiences she had suffered in her past. The action of escaping into intimacy with a secure positive peer relationship impacted upon her resilience and ability to reframe her past experiences (Jamieson, 2008). Shona described her 'like a sister to me. She's like the best friend I've had in my whole entire life, so.' This was a friend who she described as not seeing very often but classified as a close friend. In fact, the friendship sounded fairly inconstant, but held deep meaning for her.

> **Shona:** Yeah. It's like me and my friend_____now,_____she's a spiritual guide, and she's got all these spirits that she loves and like, protects and that, and when I'm around her, she produces some of that spirit on to me. Because she's a gate key, when you're a gatekeeper, she produces me a gate key so when I need to blow off any steam I call her up, and she can give me the key to open up to let everything out? So it's just like, yeah… [laughs]
> (…)
> She's about a year younger than me. But we're like, fused. We're like sisters from another mother? And we've produced this bond that none of my other friends can take place? And

she's just. She's the one that um. she's the one that always helps me, or protects me and that, and whenever I'm frustrated I call her up, and she produces a spear on to me which is a spiritual gate key, which I can then let off everything that's on my mind, and I pass it on her, and she can diffuse it? Basically she's a gatekeeper, so all the breath that I want to let out inside me, she can let out on to her, and then she diffuses it. Do you see what I mean? And after that we talk, and then it's all over and done with. Sort of thing.

Shona's story centralised the significance of her friend in witnessing her emotional needs and helping to 'diffuse' them. As a witness to aggression throughout her childhood, Shona's deep fear was that she might have the same inability to control her emotions. The friendship she describes gave emotional support to keep her emotions in check in her day-to-day life, 'protecting' her so that she can 'let everything out'. Though she described feeling a sense of care had been fulfilled towards her by the state, she had been given very little in the way of resources for ongoing day-to-day support. In lieu of this, she recreated a replacement 'kin' of supportive people around her, who mediated the absence of state support which had withdrawn, with regular support:

> **Shona:** It has been, my life has been a rollercoaster. I can't lie and say oh yes, it's been perfect. I mean, as my mum says no family life is absolutely perfect. You're going to have ups and downs, you're going to have fights, you're going to have arguments. But at the same time, as long as you've got that bond, that bond can never be broken so you've got a perfect, you've got quite a perfect relationship.

In lieu of a large network, Shona internalised a sense of the provision she was entitled to and used her knowledge of the judicial processes involved in her previous situation to empower herself. She balanced this with valuing and leveraging the support she had from her boyfriend and her friend, whom she kept close, to support her with the emotional outfall of the abuse she had experienced.

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Erjan and Shona explicitly incorporate the need for care in their intimate relationships, in order to support their access to both resources and mental health and wellbeing. Viewing this needs-talk through the lens of Fraser's "complex and intersectional analysis of claims-making strategies" (Fraser and Naples, 2004: 1104) allows us to understand young people's potentially heightened economic and social marginalisation, as they fight for recognition of their identity facets and a fair redistribution of economic resources. Both the family and the space they grew up in becomes a domestic site for defining their socio-politics. They explain how this deepened sense of self impacted upon their socio-political relationships with family, and ways that they brought aspects of their new thinking back into the family sphere in order to challenge, understand and be understood.

5.5 Conclusion

Chapter Five draws together narratives of intimate relationships which are unique, but which can be collectively understood to show these participants centralise their intimate relationships. This chapter contextualised the participants and introduced them, and in doing so also presents the ways complexity in their micro worlds and relationships play a pivotal part in securing socio-political ideas (Kallio and Häkli, 2013; Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010; Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard, 2020), and helping them negotiate spatialities. The following chapters explore the shape of experiences beyond the domestic sites, introducing institutional and digital spatialities and how these inform the participants' socio-political experiences.

The analysis in this chapter suggests that the participants were each invested in interdependent forms of intimacy in their everyday lives. These intimacies oscillated through the tactical use of privacy and public performances of self, as the participants revealed aspects of their needs

(emotional, economic, and so on) to different people in different contexts. They also describe negotiating a sense of agency and support between their micro and macro-worlds. These examples demonstrate how oppression can impact on young people's socio-politics both in new experiences of institutional neglect, and the legacy of intergenerational examples of social marginalisation (e.g., Pain, 2005; Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Wildman et al., 2021).

In order to create agency and contribute societally, the participants re-formulated traditional social expectations and norms associated with early adulthood (Nilsen, 2021) creating care exchanges that helped them manage precarity (Tronto, 1993; Hoppania, 2015; 2019). The participants found new ways to assert independence in their everyday lives by reshaping roles in their close relationships, taking on issues affecting those closest to them in solidarity and as a form of contribution (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2011; Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Thomson, 2014). Their tactical choices were individual, though influenced by the social behaviour of those around them. They shared with others close to them and saw themselves clearly as part of a wider, immediate community, bringing awareness to the situations they encountered daily and weaving these into their socio-political sense-making. These narratives also connect with research which suggests that young people are more motivated by personal, localised issues than a narrow focus presented in political debates (Sloam, 2007).

The significance of Fraser's (2007) arguments for avoiding delineation of recognition and redistribution, instead developing both into a potential broader paradigm, are supported by the way some of the participants describe stepping in to support, or be supported by, people they are close to in their everyday lives. These carescapes are at the heart of each participants sense of socio-politics, and yet they are not state supported, nor recognised as resources that come at a personal

cost to them or their loved ones (Fraser, 2013; 2016). Viewing youth as a marginalising intersection of their identities, we can see how added to other intersectional aspects of their identity, the complex needs of young people (Fraser, 1989) risk being obscured.

CHAPTER SIX: NEGOTIATING SOCIO-POLITICS THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six addresses the precarities participants described experiencing in relation to wider networks in their lives such as their institutional relationships, and interactions with bureaucracy and the workplace. These emblematic vignettes capture their unique perspectives on social issues such as racism, bullying, machoism, sexism, and misogyny, and explore the ways their responses may have been informed by their socio-politics. This chapter also examines the ways in which these participants may experience marginalization within these more formal networks, and how they used socio-political and tactical practices (de Certeau, 1984) to manage these experiences.

The chapter addresses the research questions by examining how young people's socio-political agency is impacted by precarious employment situations where the power dynamic is unbalanced. The chapter also suggests that participants tactically managed marginalisation through 'subaltern counter-publics' (Fraser, 1997: 70) which provided support and "stand in a contestatory relationship to dominant publics" (Fraser, 1997: 70). This chapter explores how their intersectional identities impact upon the ways they experience the workplace and institutional relationships, and ways they draw on support to help them negotiate socio-political difficulties. The participants also demonstrate that whilst they "remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances" they operate "transverse *tactics* [which] do not obey the law of the place" (de Certeau, 1984: 29). In

this way, the participants are able to transgress the delimitations of those in power and enact agency.

6.2 Making it work?

Fraser posits that participatory parity is only possible if underlying economic and status inequalities are first addressed. Fraser also considers social justice to be contingent on the balance of redistribution and recognition, and the following narratives from Erjan highlight the problematic nature of reductionism in disability discourse, and how unequal opportunities can come about through ignoring situated experiences of reality. Erjan worked for local government but was restricted from working beyond 16 hours due to the conditions of his benefits. He felt trapped between the unilateral effects of generic administration pertaining to his disability benefits, the impact the related regulations necessarily had on his working hours and conditions, and the complexity of his individual circumstances and needs and desire for independence. His compromised work hours rendered his position as relational to his family and their resources, and he felt dependent and tentative in his workplace, which in turn made him feel restricted:

> **Me:** It feels kind of… ironic, from what you say, working for [*a community organisation*], that their actions are contradictory…?
> **Erjan:** You're 26 years old, you know what you think, you know what you believe in, you've got your job for the local council and you're trying to balance your political commitments and on top of that you're having to balance 'oh I have to be careful what I say because the DWP it seems quite shocking that when you look at what you're sole aim is, which is to make the world a better place, it seems quite shocking that [*a community organisation*]… It doesn't make me feel right inside. It's like, yes I'm getting the outcome I wanted. But the outcome should be that I can express myself anyway not necessarily a government

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department who we disagree with anyway, having to say… umm… this is how we can say or can't say. It's like well… why have freedom of speech?

Erjan's narratives emphasises the need for him to 'balance' his need for recognition with his right to redistribution. They were dominated by the very real articulations of resource need (and lack), due to his complex disabilities, that significantly impacted on his feelings of security in the workplace. Added to this, he felt anger at his inability to work in the way his 'whole family work', he felt under-valued in the workplace "they know how hard I work, but it's just a shame that we're not supported', and as he emphasised, he *'needs'* to work.

> **Erjan:** Why would I have to wait for something … wait for a new system which is better… it's just annoying how they can like restrict you, that badly. And obviously my whole family work as well, so then. that's annoying. That's fine, but I kind of like think, oh yeah… they know how hard I work, but it's just a shame that we're not supported. Actually encouraged, we *need* to do that!

The marginalisation of minorities is partly the outcome of oppressive social policy decisions made by UK government (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004). Erjan, recognising that, has actively campaigned for social justice for people living with disabilities, and his socio-politics is directly informed from the oppressive social structures which perpetuate inequalities for him. The stigmatisation of being a young person, affected by the intersection of age but also by the intersection of impairment, affects his sense of self and forces him to frame himself relationally, in the context of his family who 'obviously (…) work as well, so then… that's annoying'. Disability is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and as such there is a particular need to bridge both paradigms, of recognition and redistribution, so as to allow an "*intersubjective* precondition of just cultural patterns of interpretation and valuation" (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004: 342). Erjan, though discouraged

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from drawing attention to his recognition needs in ways that might make him identifiable to the DWP, is nonetheless encouraged and supported by his family to challenge the redistribution binds that attempt to deconstruct him into generic parts. They encourage him to retain his tactical self, pursuing political protest, working and sourcing strength from his social interaction. In this way, his family become part of the social change his actions aim for, and his bodily enactment of, and performance of, advocacy empowers him in his activist context to recombine the 'rules' that he feels unable to challenge in his professional life.

Erjan's socio-politics encompassed concerns about how people viewed his disabilities, wanting the right to be viewed as an individual and not heterogeneously (Leonardi et al., 2006). However, the stress of maintaining different levels of expression of his personal socio-politics in different spaces was stressful, knowing that what empowered him in one space, precluded him from independence in the other. Erjan was caught between the influences of narratives of activism and need for change in his disability rights organisation, and the realities of his restricted opportunities to impact upon these. He felt vulnerable to employers' actions not because of his visibility in the spaces on the streets, so much as his visibility in a permanent way were he to be captured in images online that would work as 'evidence' against his claims to the DWP for support. In his narrative describing a conversation he had with his mother about what he should say to the DWP about the nature of his working hours and his socio-political views on his working status, he demonstrates a caution and concern for what he reveals of his socio-politics:

> **Erjan:** I think my Mum was thinking 'ah, be careful what you say' because the DWP need to do a background check [laughs] and they actually, you can find more safer ways of expressing yourself rather than… and I was like yeah that makes sense but they don't have time to go through that do they, they don't have time. To go through… their job is like, to

go through the phone. They don't have time to do that anyway, it's not like a job interview, nah probably not…

Erjan is guided by his family to 'be careful what you say', though this was not a disempowering relationship, but an arrangement of care and support which he experienced as being egalitarian and empowering. Yet, he is dubious about the power, in real terms, of the civic system. He sees an opportunity to step away from pre-determined routes and restrictions, reassuring himself that were he to protest online 'they don't have time to go through that, do they'. This construction involves some deception (de Certeau, 1984), and his tactics of resistance and socio-politics are rendered particularly visible because this deception he is forced to undertake clarifies his intent to defy the professional restrictions he feels unfairly marginalise him.

Fahad felt the need to downplay aspects of his socio-political beliefs at work, but simultaneously experienced events which reinforced them. Fahad felt that since the EU Referendum, social divisions had established themselves more clearly in his community, and he saw that physically in his local environment through racist graffiti:

> **Me:** Do you notice that inequality visibly where you live in any way?
>
> **Fahad:** I think I notice this [gesturing to graffiti] because of my background not because of the space but yes, I do agree with what you're saying.
>
> **Me:** What do you mean by your background?
>
> **Fahad:** Like being mixed race and being lived in two countries I mean like, coming here like.

This contributed to the sense he had that the local 'space' as he described it had changed and was no longer a place he could be open about his socio-political views. He shared a narrative that he perceived to demonstrate the racism of his colleague, and he contextualised this against the greater cleft he saw in his local community as we walked together in his local area:

Me: Do you see people noticing that they're being treated differently?

Fahad: There was this one, an Indian man came in and one of my colleagues was serving him. She's [*in her 60's*], she's-- I don't think she's from [*City*] I think she's from [*City*] but she's moved down here and yes. So, she served this customer, sorry after you… She served this customer, and he asked her if she had any, if she had any tissue paper and to which she kind of looked at him and she was like, she was trying to kind of do sign language in a way and it was kind of, I don't know if you know what I mean because English isn't someone's kind of-- because there's that barriers of an accent it's kind of automatically like not seeing them as the same level as you. Like thinking that you're more intelligent if you know what I mean like. So, he asked for tissue paper and she thought he was asking for pepper so she started shouting at him like, "We don't have peppers, like, go." Like kind of stuff and then so I quickly went and I was like because I think also because I've grown up in [*South Asia*] so I'm used to people speaking English with a strong accent. So, I was you know, I went up to him and I was like we don't have any tissue paper but let me get you some, kind of thing, and yes.

But yes, then that got me thinking did I, because of the space that I was in growing up like I said like, being used to because a lot of people speak English in [*South Asia*] and yes, being used to kind of someone's accent and kind of just thinking if I've been in this space as in I've grown up here with just a British identity like, would I have acted kind of differently and stuff.

Me: Yes, yes. I mean how does it make you feel in a way seeing that?

> **Fahad:** It made me want to look at both sides but I do kind of yes, because the more you kind of see subtle things like that happening but on the internet there's so, do you know what I mean, on the internet it's literally like, "You're a racist, you're this, you're that." And but it, like oh we're just walking towards the hospital.

Fahad draws in his experiences of wider discourses being played out in digital social media, as reinforcing his perspective of his space, which suggests there that he felt that political discourses had made him more vulnerable to physical and virtual aggression. The historicity of racism and racial inequality in the workplace in the UK are proven, and it is likely that Fahad felt a sensitivity to this – he had referenced his father's struggles to find employment when he first arrived in the UK in previous interviews. The Race At Work report (Ashe and Nazroo, 2016) flagged up that witnessing racist events impacts on ethnic minorities in a number of negative ways, including impacting on mental health and feeling pushed to seek work elsewhere. Fahad's perception of the racist behaviour of his colleague, coupled with his subversive tactics to appease the situation and offer support to the customer affected, show his way of demonstrating socio-politics emerges as resistant behaviour in the moment.

Framing Fahad's story as a struggle for cultural status within a socio-political knowledge of institutionalised injustice (Fraser, 2007), we can explore this memory in terms of claims of citizenship. We can observe the increasingly restrictive claims for citizenship and the ways in which they might cause workplace tensions, as Fahad's co-worker makes a claim for her status as a white, British woman, Fahad makes a claim for his status as a mixed ethnicity man, and the customer asserts a claim for service and respect in the midst of all this. His narrative demonstrates the complexity for young adults experimenting when and how to perform their personal socio-politics.

At the time of the research, both Shona and Paige were unemployed. Their experiences mirror the growing number of young people across Europe who are finding the transition from school to full-time employment, as well as the transition from employed to unemployed 'uncertain' (Schröder et al., 2019). The experiences of being unemployed caused both of them to frame their socio-politics more firmly in terms of projected futures:

> **Shona:** Well, if I had kids, I'd like a boy I want them to have their own hopes, their own personalities, their own dreams, their own beliefs, and be who they want to be. Choose things themselves. Umm… I want them to stand in what they believe in… And I just want them to have an everyday life. If they want to be bisexual, transgender, gay. Then I would want them to be themself. Whoever they want to be, they can themself. It's their life, I can't really tell them what they can and cannot be.
>
> **Me:** Uh-uh. You sound like you want freedom for your children?
>
> **Shona:** Obviously when they're - obviously I'd be a protective mother, but I wouldn't be protective as- I wouldn't mother them all the time, I'd let them roam free when they want to… Well growing up I wasn't allowed out, I never had choices of my own, I never had freedom. And… I just don't want the kids to have the same thing growing up that I did. I want them to have their own sense of personality, I want them to grow up being who they want to be, not who I want them to be!
> (…)
> We're both hoping to have our first baby when I'm 25, 26? And then to have our last child when I'm about 35, 36? And that's it then, I wouldn't have anymore.

Shona's hopes for her children, and other brief narratives (not included due to identifiability) about housing possibilities, also indicate how she views herself socio-politically. In her hopes for her future, she talks about balancing 'choices' and 'freedom' in a way she feels she has not experienced in her past. she talks of wanting 'them to have their own hopes, their own personalities, their own

dreams, their own beliefs, and be who they want to be', which juxtaposes with her experiences growing up. This suggests her past has informed her socio-politics orientation around acceptance, and the significance of demonstrating aspects of intersectionality with support from loved ones.

Paige had a more practical way of thinking about her projected future, and having experienced financial exploitation in her previous employment, her main concern was to be paid a liveable amount of money. She described her previous job's wage as being 'not liveable', which suggests that she holds a socio-political perspective on what can be classed as a liveable wage. Paige expresses measured hopes for employment in the following narrative:

> **Me:** I mean, that's totally taking advantage of you. You were working really hard, for not much money at all
>
> **Paige:** And then when I was applying for jobs, a lot of them you had to put down what you were earning before, and I was like, but that shouldn't affect my job. And I don't want to put that down, because I don't want to put down that I had such a small amount because they might think 'oh, right'. So the job I went to yesterday I was like, I know, because I've lived on £400 that it's not a liveable wage. And I have said I won't earn any less than £15,000 because I know that's like a lot different – but when you're working on that money you do realise, like that's a liveable wage that. What I was earning was not liveable. My bus fare was £13 a week, which was £52 a month. Like, today, my bus fare cost £3.20. tomorrow it will cost £3.20. The day before it cost £3.20. that's not going to change.

Paige's explanation of the cost of outgoings versus incomings highlights the social injustice wrought upon young people earning an 'antisocial' wage, and it is shocking to realise these conditions of economic marginalisation and the social marginalisation they co-create have remained since Fraser first commented on neoliberalism and the ensuing lines of social antagonism that can be drawn in

1993 (Fraser, 1993: 9/10). Shona, who has previously accepted a lower than liveable wage, is able to recognise the economic and status inequalities caused by living where the cost of living does not equate, or only marginally equates, to the wage she is offered. Though she recognises the social injustice, she manages her expectations by asking a job agency for no less than the lowest income she believes will make it possible for her to catch the bus to and from work and also afford other basic necessities. This tells us something about the tempered nature of Paige's expectations for women and young people. Whilst she recognises social injustices, her narratives suggest she holds little hope for social change.

The significance of loved ones in shoring up Shona's identity was also demonstrated during our walking interview, at which point she was expecting an interview for work the following day. She was explaining that she had finished higher education for the time being, but there was a process involved in signing up with an agency to apply for work. During this narrative she expressly talks about how she 'can't really get my hopes up' and at the same time holds an idea that her Grandad is watching over her, as we discuss a weather change during our walk:

> **Shona:** No I've finished college all together,_____ and_____are all colleges. You can't just go when you want, so… you have to apply and stuff, but. I've applied for jobs, I've got a job interview tomorrow, they want me to hand in all my forms – DBS forms, passport, two types of statement to prove my name and address, and then I start work two weeks after that
>
> **Me:** So you've got the job??
>
> **Shona:** Yeah, practically. But I can't really get my hopes up, so, they might look at my forms and that and say they're not correct and I won't get in. So… Yeah, they'll help me, but I won't just get the job there and then. I mean it's a new environment, I won't know

anyone, but, at that point I've just got to keep my head up and – that road, errm, by um, err…_____? Not____,____? Sorry, I've just slipped!

Me: No, I don't think I know those roads… It's actually brightened up, thanks to your hope it would

Shona: Well, I'd say Grandad to be honest.

Me: That's a lovely thing to say

This idea of 'hope' and being in some way overseen by loved ones comprised another facet of how she viewed her hopes for her own family in the future and suggests the relationship with her loved ones has contributed to her socio-political sense of hope, and what she deserved. However, it also highlights the difficulties inherent in entering employment - 'it's a new environment, I won't know anyone, but, at that point I've just got to keep my head up'. Shona was offered employment during one of our interviews. My field notes describe her as constantly checking her phone during this interview and seeming more nervous than before. She constantly received alerts and phone calls during the last interview, one of the calls was from an agency offering her work:

Shona: [*To Agency Worker on phone*] At the moment I've practically got a job, but I could hand it in [*C.V.*] and do weekends or something? [*Agency Worker can be heard to be encouraging about her submitting further information*] I'm currently in an interview now, so I can't… [*ends call*] I've got a job now!"

The conditions of working over weekdays and weekends doesn't seem to concern the Agency Worker, who encourages her to submit a C.V. for the proposed work. At the end of the phone call, Shona told me that she had 'a job now' but did not express excitement – more relief. This contrasted with her enthusiastic descriptions of her future ideal life, in other moments in our

interview. She wanted to have a 'fulfilling career' and valued her 'right to vote' and saw this as 'giving her opportunities'. However, the actuality of this at her current life stage, in precarious socio-economic circumstances, presented her with limitations. Not only did she seek temporary work, but she also cared for a relative with disabilities:

> **Me:** I can see you'd be really good at that, definitely. Sensitive and yes, I think that would be exactly what you-
>
> **Shona:** I mean at my interview they asked me why I wanted a job, like why I applied for the position and I just turned round and said, "Well, all I want to do." I mean through experience because my [*relative*]'s in a care home. My [*relative*]'s in a care home and I said, "Through like, people that have got dementia, all I want to do is just to make them feel comfortable, make them feel loved. Help them remember what they don't, and just give them the same love and affection that they wanted or might have had in their previous life. All they want is just to be looked after, loved, cared for and I just want to do that. I just want to care for, I want to care for elderly people because I don't know, I just… I haven't got a thing for elderly people, I've just got a thing for giving them love, affection, kindness, compassion, commitment and stuff like that. I just want to look after them like I look after my [*other relative*] and look after my [*other relative*]. I just want to help out, I just want to give them the best opportunity in life that they've got left. Make them feel comfortable for when their actual time comes, if you know what I mean.

Shona here describes her role in carrying out work considered to be beyond the boundaries of economic redistribution (Fraser, 2005). She did not see it as unpaid and difficult work that she was unrecognised for, but as 'love', and 'care' and looking 'after them'. This tallies with Fraser's assertion that increased pressures for 'flexibility' compound inequalities of distribution then overlaid with inequalities of recognition. Shona does not feel recognised for her care work, and she does not feel deserving of the time off allotted for workers of 'higher' status, so when she accepts agency care work, she accepts the extra pressures of working every weekday and weekend, willingly.

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Paige did seem to recognise the care work she does for her sister, whose working hours preclude her being able to collect her daughter from school (this is then distributed amongst the women of the family, Paige's mother, the child's paternal grandmother, and Paige herself). Nonetheless, she saw it as a responsibility that she should share in, as a female, especially living under her parents' roof. Though Paige said that the family did not discuss politics at home, it was recognised that her sister bore the brunt of care for her niece, in comparison to her partner, and this connects to the issues of 'politics of care', and the gender inequality she saw featuring very prominently in her own everyday life. The negotiation of the lack of childcare resources available to her sister, who was a full-time employed mother of a young child, was not something that she described the family discussing overtly:

> **Paige:** I think my sister's very lucky because she's got us to help her out, and she's got her husband's parents, but a lot of people don't have that and have to pay for childcare, or work around their kids being at school. Like the other day I had to cancel with you because I had to collect_____from school because she had clients all day, she's a_____as well, and I was like well *obviously* I'll do that.

The informal care Paige describes wraps around an insufficient formal entitlement to support, and Paige acknowledges this 'a lot of people don't have that and have to pay for childcare'. This suggests an implicit understanding of the socio-political consequences of this, women who do not have the unpaid care work available to them from friends and family have to pay for childcare and witnessing her sister's struggle to negotiate work around childcare, she viewed this as problematic. Paige has learnt to seamlessly step in 'well *obviously* I'll do that' to help shore up the lack of resources. Paige's experience of reduced employment choices and the 'misframing' or lack of clarity about the employment choices available to her (Fraser, 2007) informed by her experiences of

working for below minimum wage has impacted on her internalising her socio-politics around gender justice. This is shown by her description of not 'talking politics' at home.

In different contexts and in very different contextually specific ways, Erjan and Fahad demonstrate that they negotiate their power in the workplace watchful for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing' (de Certeau, 1984: xix) such as not fully disclosing employment status to government authorities, indirectly challenging racism by supporting an individual in the workplace. Shona and Paige, who are both unemployed and performing unpaid care work in their family roles, demonstrate that economic and domestic privacy can be blurred when you need to draw on those skills to find employment (as in Shona's case), or have to accept being called upon for unpaid domestic care work due to your reliance on the family home. They negotiate independence through hope in projected futures – either incorporated in dreams of family or financial security.

6.3 Gender and the repression/ expression of socio-politics in the workplace

Both Tom and Charley connected their socio-politics to wider mainstream political discourses, balancing their commitment to greater balance and equality with the limitations of the pathways for change available to them. Tom chose to be demonstrable about his socio-politics in his personal life, engaging in debates with his family and friends, and he was employed in a postgraduate job in a field unrelated to his previous discipline, in order to make money and retain financial stability in the geographical area he had chosen to remain in after university. Charley actualised her socio-politics through her work, which she fashioned around a key issue of importance to her – gender equality in her professional industry. In this analysis, I explore how both Tom and Charley resisted the spectre of the gendered expectations and machoism in the workplace, in response to the ways in which the

workplace can be machoistic and resistant to the shifting boundaries between the 'personal' 'domestic' 'economic' and 'political' spheres of life (Fraser, 2009). These tensions were dealt with in different ways by the participants, Tom described responding to the threat of not being seen as 'fitting in' to the workplace by avoiding conflict when implicit suggestions about masculinity were made, whereas Charley described challenging exclusion from her profession head on with the success of her actions and the clear issue focus and intentions of the events she organised.

Tom's workplace was male-dominated and had a corporate structure. He described 'Friday night drinks' which would predominantly involve the male co-workers and bosses drinking from a relatively early stage in the evening and preceding this by gathering around various desks of senior work colleagues sharing alcohol and 'lads talk', which was decreed 'banter' and not open to critique. For Tom to challenge any of the themes arising, were he to feel uncomfortable about a prejudiced theme, would have been to confirm himself as someone who is 'taking himself too seriously', and thereby justify the oft-referenced term bandied around the office, that liberal young people like him, are part of 'Generation Snowflake'. Tom talked about having 'heard stories' of people being told they don't want 'snowflakes' to be employed:

> **Me:** What kind of stuff in the workplace?
>
> **Tom:** The snowflake thing is infuriating. And it's used so often, at work, basically. I'm not saying I've been called it directly myself, but I've heard after people have come and been for interviews, like, "we don't want snowflakes" things like that and it's like if anything, it's almost the opposite, because surely it takes more to be like 'you are completely wrong' or 'you should be challenged on something', just to slag it off and be told you're a load of nonsense, is… well, like, or yeah – you read stuff about it and I've definitely heard stories where people have gone for interviews and been told, like, we don't want snowflakes.. but yeah, I think it's really infuriating, and it really annoys me.

> **Me:** Is that directed at you?

> **Tom:** Absolutely! They know how I feel about things, or they make a guess, and like… come and stand over my desk talking about porn or immigrants or whatever. I hate it.

The leverage of the term 'snowflake', suggesting the person being described is one of a number of "young adults of the 2010s, viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations" (Collins Dictionary, 2016), resists taking seriously individual concerns, by discrediting them. This development of terminology to make sweeping generalisations designed to belittle political activism of young people in the UK has become more commonplace, and 'snowflake' has become a term to establish the individual it is directed towards, as on the other side of the binary; "following the EU referendum, resistance against hate speech has been politicised, as part of a 'remoaner' agenda, or worse, a characteristic of generation 'Snowflake'" (Assimakopoulus, Baider and Millar, 2017:57). This, in turn, discredits a desire by those such as Tom who seek to resist reductive machoism, and / or overtly prejudiced judgements and statements based on social inequality, by dismissing these concerns wholesale, along with the validity of the individual deemed to be a snowflake.

> **Tom:** It would be very difficult to challenge. It's very easy for men to band together and be like 'oh, we're only having a laff', just having a laugh – yeah, but it's something people have to deal with, everyday. People should be able to feel uncomfortable and say that, and not have to worry about the consequences.

Tom's narrative demonstrates that he is aggressively silo-ed and punished when he demonstrates a socio-political resistance to being drawn into politicised conversations with men at his workplace that don't share his views. His narratives suggest real discrepancies between the purported nature of

equal opportunity legislation and the ways in which these are undercut by ingrained machoistic behaviours on the ground (Van Laar et al., 2019). The fact that he describes 'hating' aspects of a post-graduate role is an example of injustice. It is interesting to reflect on the experiences of a young man who would not usually fit within the obvious definitions of exclusion. Tom is white, educated and heteronormative, but his socio-politics (and the fact he is much more complex than that framing of him suggests) place him in moments of social marginalisation and exclusion when he challenges the aggressive, threatening views of his workmates. Scholars exploring this suggest the higher workplace numerical presence of members of the non-stigmatized group "triggers instances of exclusion for those falling outside of that grouping" (Van Laar et al., 2019: 4). Tom's socio-politics help him mitigate the effects of this threat, drawing as shown in Chapter Five on his family's strong and supportive sense of their own socio-politics. Nonetheless, framing this in the context of everyday life and politics, the challenges faced by young people entering the workplace and knowing 'it takes more to be like 'you are completely wrong' or 'you should be challenged on something' are clear. However, due to the precarity of their early-career status, keeping most of their overt socio-politics away from the workplace for fear of being humiliated and 'told you're a load of nonsense' helps them to mediate the difficulties otherwise inherent in the everyday experience of going to work.

Charley presented herself as very demonstrably holding her socio-politics central to her professional role. She felt that some of her overt tactics in attracting people to engage with the socio-political issues of gender equality and feminism had been successful. She also felt that she had been able to make a socio-cultural and socio-political challenge, through the success of some of her ventures, to the strategies of power of the industry she had managed to stop working for. Through some of her professional choices and opportunities, she felt she had removed herself from conventional

professional routes available to women in her industry and adopted a different way of engaging professionally, using digital social media and relying on social uptake (discussed more in Chapter Seven). Charley felt she was able to grasp the dissonance between the cultural capital-oriented world of her industry, and the potential to convey simple political messages through what she viewed as democratic opportunities afforded by some social media platforms (Loader and Mercea, 2011:4). Despite her positive portrayals of her choices, and her sense that she was living a life directly informed by her socio-politics, she had compromised adequate renumeration (she could not afford to move out of home, staying sometimes with her partner for more independence) and she still felt unable to make overt claims about gender equality and feminism within a powerful organisation in her industry:

> **Charley:** Well, the whole ethos of the [*professional reference*] is to get more females involved in like the [*professional reference*], whether that be through [*various opportunities to engage*] because. I think we felt that those roles have been very much a male domain? Since kind of the inception, really. I mean, you rarely get a female [*professional reference*] or a female [*professional reference*], I mean you are getting more and more. But I could get on to a [*professional reference*] where, y'know, I could look at loads of [*professional reference*] and there might not be no woman playing in any of those [*professional reference*], or it might be one of [them] are female and all the rest are male.

Charley felt she could use her deftness with social media, socio-politics and social capital to create an identity that she felt in control of, and even able to profit from. However, to do this, she had to be excluded herself from the mainstream strategies of power which dominated her industry. Her attempts to disrupt cultural hegemony through disruption of the social constructs in her industry which favour men's advancement speaks to Gramsci's (1975) concepts of the shifts in cultural hegemony, toward emancipatory social change, Charley attempts to 'remake' a social discourse on

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her own terms (Fraser, 2013), leveraging identity, networks and meaning, and producing 'culture'. She attempts to inform the popular culture in her local area through representation of an alternative way to approach gender equality and combats cultural hegemony by facilitating a space which directly reconsiders the ideological foundations of engagement. The social context within which these gender inequalities occur is overtly acknowledged by her engagement of the public *within* the social contexts, rather than removed and intellectualised elsewhere. Socio-politically she acts in arguably clear ways in terms of wider networks of communication, with an overt message of equality being held central. In contrast with the feeling of immovability within an industry which perpetuates machoistic ideas about how 'those roles have been very much a male domain' since 'the inception', she presents a narrative about drawing on a collective agency to challenge the discourse. Charley's ambition to empower women, which drew on her own experiences of barriers to her industry and the wider connections this had provoked with discourses of feminism, had led her to create, and embody, a tactical route of access for young women.

Considering these experiences intersectionally as well as tactically, the narratives shared by Tom and Charley suggests that they are afforded different resistances. Whereas Tom is bound by heteronormative and masculine expectations of his behaviour in the workplace and thus becomes a target for exclusion when it is clear that his socio-politics do not align with those of his workmates, Charley has found a route outside of the systemic nature of the commercial side of her industry and has been able to draw on opportunities to produce culture and contribute to subaltern counter-publics which align with her socio-politics. Both of these narratives indicate the strength of the discourses of power, and the lack of space for 'recognition' (Fraser, 2015) within these contexts for young people, but they also indicate the availability of two different approaches to the stratification

of identity that mean not all young adults are able to maintain a sense of their socio-politics within their wider, more formal networks.

6.4 Safe space? Gendered aggression in the workplace

The following examples from Abigail and Olivia examine workplace experiences that were rooted in workplace hierarchy, but also gendered. Both Abigail and Paige shared narratives of workplace aggression. Abigail's experience was of clear and explicit aggression, whilst Olivia's experience was of micro-aggression. Examining these two narratives together is useful to consider the different ways in which gender aggression operates in the workplace, and the implications for the participants' understanding of the socio-politics of gender.

Young women frequently experience gender discrimination (Swim, Hyers and Cohen, 2001), often leading to stress and anxiety and decreased achievements (Bates, 2018). The narratives shared demonstrate both young women show active agency in trying to regulate the identity threat they encounter, which arguably suggests something about their sense of socio-politics in relation to their gender. Both participants navigate ways to mitigate threat in a professional situation. The costs of threat regulation are partially mitigated by the support they reach out for, although the impact of the discrimination affects their sense of ease in the workplace. Whilst women are not always stigmatized in professional situations, we know that women are likely to be affected by systemic problems rooted in the structure of our social order (Fraser, 2016: 100), based on the expectations incumbent upon them outside of the market and in the home (Fraser, 2016: 102). Young women, as has been shown in the narratives of Paige and Shona, also feel the weight of these expectations – and are aware of the gender hierarchy which valorises hetero-normativity (Fraser, 2016: 111). This

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can be exacerbated by the age discrimination, which is not reserved for older adulthood and, intersected with gender, further impacts on experiences of oppression and resistance (Walker and Zelin, 2021). Scholars exploring situational factors relating to confronting sexism in everyday lives suggest that this was increased if the victim identified as a feminist, felt supported by collective action, or had experienced oppressive, sexist behaviour previously, but the likelihood of objecting to sexist behaviour was reduced if the perpetrator was high status, unfamiliar, or had also shown unwanted sexual behaviour (Ayres, Friedman and Leaper, 2009; Reuter et al., 2020). Gendered microaggressions are less understood than blatant gender discrimination, yet these "subtle indignities and insults" (Gartner et al., 2020: 283) can be chronic in the workplace, creating a deleterious effect partially due to their subsumed nature (Sue, 2010). Both the narratives shared tell us something about the destabilising nature of gendered aggression and its impact on socio-politics, and the ways subtle sexism and related constructs may impact on the participants' socio-politics of gender.

Abigail described herself as working for an organisation run by a female boss, who she liked. Her narrative of a hostile situation in her workplace with her male boss at work gives insight into a power dynamic that feels informed by her age and junior position, and gender:

> **Me:** I don't know, what do you feel that you are inside then?
>
> **Abigail:** Loud.
>
> **Me:** If you were like to tick a bunch of boxes.
>
> **Abigail:** I'm quite, I've got a quite strong opinion about things and like when people, like an example, the other day there was this, we were in the office and there's this man and I normally I get along with him really, really well but he does, I do hear him speak to people

like quite rude sometimes and we've got an intern at work he's – so this man is not even the intern's boss or anything like that, they work like alongside each other sometimes. And he was really like talking to him quite badly in front of, on the office floor. There wasn't a lot of people there but it was still quite like bad.

The male manager reprimands Abigail for supporting a fellow junior colleague who she felt was being spoken to 'rudely' and her comparison to her experiences at school give an insight into her sense of oppressive workplace connecting with other experiences of institutional hierarchy:

Me: On your own, took you into a room on your room?

Abigail: Yes, and he literally sat me down and once I was sitting there and I was just like this because I knew what he was – he just has a go at me for everything.

[I have redacted part of this narrative as the specifics are very identifying]

all of sudden he walked past my desk and was like, "Come in here now." And he's there with his little book, he's like two foot tall so he's definitely got small man syndrome. And he took me into the room and he was like, "Why did you ask the [*professional role*]?" I went, "I didn't even ask him, I just asked him for his opinion of what I should do." And then I was just like, I just looked out the window and I was like I can't even deal with him. And then he was just like, "If you carry on like this, I'm going to fire you." I was like, "What did I do?" And he was like, "You're looking out the window, you're not even looking at me." And he always threatens to fire me so I literally stood up and went, "Fire me then." I went, "Get rid of me right now." And he stormed out the room, thought of something to say, stormed back because I went to follow him and he's like, "No, you can sit there." Stormed back in and he's awful.

And then I was just like, oh like, I was literally like, I can't even be arsed. I went out of the meeting room and I was like, you know when you're crying because you're so angry and then he was like swearing at me like f-ing and blinding. And I was like, "You're my director and you're swearing at me." And he was like, "No I'm not. No I'm not." I was like, "Well

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you've just, you've just swore at me." So then he was just getting really frustrated because no one sticks up for themselves at all. Like he talks to people and belittles people all the time and no one will say anything to him. And that's why he hates me so much because I actually would. And then we got out onto the office floor in front of everyone and he was like, "Get your stuff and leave now." So I got my stuff and then went downstairs and as we got to the front door when it was just me and him he was like, "I haven't fired you, you're making the choice to leave." I was like, "You've just told me to get out." So I rung my dad and I was like, "Can you come and get me?"

Because this was before I started driving and then my dad and brother went in there and went mental at him. My dad was like, this is how much of an arsehole this man, and my dad was like, "You're jealous." Because my boss gets along with me really well. And he doesn't like it when you're like really close with the boss, he just gets really jealous. So he was like, "You're jealous of that." [*line manager*] was like, "I've got a Porsche, I've got a million pound house, why would I be jealous of her?" And like all of this, oh it was so, it was just, he's just like, he's just an evil man. If you ever met him you'd want to kill him because he's just horrible. He hasn't got a nice bone in his body, he's just vile. And he's like, you know you get those teachers at school where they're teachers because they love having power over people, that is what he's like. Like he wouldn't even be there if it wasn't for my boss. Like, he's just a vile person. So like I'm aware I'm quite opinionated but it doesn't go down with a lot of people. Like I will stick up for what I think it's right and if I don't think you're right, I'm going to say you're, do you know what I mean. I'll say, "No, I don't think that's right. You might but I don't."

I include a fuller extract of Abigail's narrative to give a sense of the emotion the memory provoked in her. The narrative does not contain any overt references to sexism, Abigail does not explicitly construct the narrative as gendered, and yet it is visible in the experience she relays. There seems to be a tension, for Abigail, in acknowledging the part gender may have had to play in this narrative. Arguably she resists doing so, perhaps because this experience is both gendered *and* generational, which makes the experience seem particularly disempowering to the reader. Her socio-politics mean that she wants to see herself as 'sticking up for what's right' and if she does not think something is

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right she will say 'No, I don't think that's right. You might but I don't.' Perhaps part of the nuance in her reluctance to view the experience as overtly gendered aggression is that she wanted to take on the role of protector and advocate in the workplace situation but was undermined by a man and then had to be collected by her Dad who intervened on her behalf. Abigail views herself as 'loud' and 'opinionated' and yet, from the outside, it seems that she was subordinated during this experience, humiliated and experienced the threat of losing her job.

Olivia's experience of microaggression in a workplace relationship gives insight into the deleterious effects of this type of oppressive behaviour, but it also demonstrates how she draws on friendships with those who share her socio-politics, who encourage her to 'stand up for yourself a bit more'. The friendship she mentions during the narrative is reciprocal, the friends narrate experiences of injustice or sexism and this provides them with a sense of agency in their everyday lives, despite their lack of proximity to each other. These coping strategies, at points where she may not feel able to overtly stand up for herself in the moment, help her to assert that it is ok to be a 'confident woman', and she is 'not scary'. Her narrative suggests that her male colleague seemed to wish to provoke a reaction, bringing his comments to her in their down time socialising at the pub. This further perpetuates her sense of unease, since a pub work outing treads the difficult-to-define-space between professionalism and socialising:

> **Me:** I can understand what you're saying about going away for uni and developing these friends, which becomes a safety net. And then you leave those places and perhaps enter the world of economic pressures, and those things…
>
> **Olivia:** Yeah, because when you live with your friends, you always have each other, and you always check in with your friends – that friend I was talking about I hadn't seen her for a while, or spoken to her, so I had no idea she was doing those crazy shifts. And when she

told me I was like, what are you doing that's – bat shit, you can't be doing that! When you leave uni, you miss out on those really close friends who know you, and check on you, and can say to you 'you need to stand up for yourself a bit more'. and it's really weird, like, when things happen at work it's always like 'oh I need to text so and so, I need to see what they think about it'. Like, I remember this guy at work – he's more senior than me, he's not loads older than me? But he's like 29. But there was umm… we went to the pub after work one day, and he told me he thought I was scary? And it was really weird, like. he told me I was scary, and I was like, whatever, maybe he's just not used to confident women or something and then he said it, like, the next time. and he was like 'yeah, you're just really scary, it's not a bad thing… you're just really scary' and then immediately when I left the pub I messaged my friend and I was like, 'am I scary? Why does he think I'm scary, do I come across like that??' Yeah, it's just funny how you reach out to those people in moments like that.

The narratives of Abigail and Olivia demonstrate each woman's gender politics in different ways. Abigail does not overtly define the narrative she shares as being gendered, but she does emphasise her desire for agency in her description of herself as being 'opinionated' and showing that she wants to 'stick up for what's right' when she views other people in vulnerable situations. This suggests that her socio-politics have an awareness of discrimination, and she recognises the situational injustice of the workplace situation she is in – likening it to school. She reaches out for intergenerational, male support – asking her Dad to come and support her in an aggressive situation where she needs support to get home after being theoretically fired. Olivia on the other hand is more willing to suggest that her male colleague may have been trying to make her feel vulnerable, threatened by her being a 'confident' woman, and 'reaches out' to a friend who she knows will reinforce that she is right to stand up for herself more. These examples highlight the particular harm that can be done to young women by misrecognition. It also demonstrates the institutionalised nature of misrecognition of women, and young women's experiences are perhaps amplified by their likely junior status, youth and gender (Fraser, 2003). The experiences of social marginalisation and misrecognition that the

young women share also show how misrecognition, and the potential ensuing harm done, could have a reciprocal impact on maldistribution as the marginalisation of senior colleagues' places barriers in their professional way. This further affirms Fraser's (2003) argument that distributive justice and the justice of recognition must mutually inform one another. Although only two examples, it is interesting to consider whether Olivia's prior socio-political identification as a feminist may have made it easier for her to express her concerns about the gendered nature of the microaggression she experienced (Moradi and Subich, 2004).

6.5 Conclusion

Held collectively, the narratives in Chapter Six suggest that relational dynamics of power and the potential of oppression in the workplace can play a part in shaping young people's socio-politics, whilst simultaneously creating scenarios where they must internalize this. Viewing these dynamically as de Certeau suggests, the innumerable ways that individuals 'bricoler' (adapt) become clearer. Drawing on their socio-politics and values, the participants find ways to exist within the dominant cultural economy so that they can still achieve their own ends. The participants' experiences also demonstrate that issues emerging from hetero-normativity and machoism in the workplace affected socio-political considerations of both the young women and men, but disproportionate care responsibilities in this sample fell to young women and were not overtly recognised as gendered (Fraser, 2016). Given these examples of injustice creeping in along gender lines at an early stage in young adulthood, Fraser's Universal Caregiver model which suggests building institutions on the assumption that everyone has caregiving responsibilities could provide a policy-based response.

This chapter examined the ways that we can understand the participants' socio-politics more clearly through their experiences within the workplace. Earlier literature (Chapter Three) challenged blanket notions of young people's lives as precarious, and yet in different ways it can be argued that each of the participants in this study experience professional precarity (Furlong et al., 2018). Their experiences actually belie a lot about the normalization of this precarity (Berry and McDaniel, 2020a; Furlong et al., 2017). The narratives show us how their socio-politics interacts with this, and to what varying degrees they recognize these experiences of precarity are socially constructed. The narratives reinforce Fraser's arguments for an equal consideration of recognition and redistribution (2003) for social justice and demonstrate the particular impact of the intersectional factor of 'youth' when it interacts with other marginalizing identity factors. They suggest that although the current insecurity connected with employment may feel like the new 'normal' (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017), the experiences of social marginalization reinforce aspects of their socio-politics and the significance of intimate relationships. Examining daily practices in more formal networks has provided insights into the ways in which young people are capable of reflexive socio-political action in the face of dominant norms, but also vulnerable to the marginalization these can create.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MEDIATING SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1 Introduction

The data analysed in the previous chapters contained several references to social media and to online interaction. The way that social media usage emerges interwoven with the participants' lives tells us much about how integrated digital social media has become with the development of their social relationships. This chapter addresses more explicitly how digital social media usage has become a key domain of young adults' lives, with distinctive considerations for socio-politics (Ëkstrom and Östman, 2015). It addresses the research questions by exploring how social media facilitates understandings of social issues, impacts on the micro and macro worlds of young people through issues of privacy, surveillance, and what it shows young people about the macro-political world.

This analysis aims to add to understandings of this by examining how the participants' narratives focus on issues of privacy, surveillance and the risk of exploitation. Despite acknowledging they used digital social media regularly, engaged in creative production and interacted with political networks, privacy and surveillance were at the forefront of the participants minds. All participants used social media regularly throughout the day, even if financial preclusions prevented them from accessing this on mobile devices. Largely, their patterns of reported usage were consistent with previous research suggesting young people aged between 18-25 generally used social media platforms to organize their everyday activities, connect with friends and generally maintain their myriad relationships (Gangneux, 2019; boyd, 2011).

The chapter focuses on how social media impacts on the participants' experiences of privacy and surveillance, and what this shows us about the participants' socio-political thinking, exploring this through their stories about their awareness of this in online contexts. Framing this preoccupation with aspects of privacy, through de Certeau's ideas for the relationship between strategies and tactics, I examine how digital social media has impacted on what young people expect from agentic relationships with producers, and whether their narratives demonstrate politically homogenous networks (Kim and Ellison, 2021) or more spontaneous interactions based on resistances to invasions of privacy.

Fraser problematises the notion of the 'transnational public sphere' (Fraser, 2007: 7) arguing it obscures the initial intention of the concept of the public sphere as one through which to scrutinise democracy. Thus, she says if we are talking about the possibility of a transnational public sphere "it matters who participates and on what terms" (Fraser, 2007: 7). Considering this, it is interesting to interrogate the role of youth, gender, disability, sexuality and ethnicity and how these narratives suggest there is not participatory parity on digital social media. This has a corresponding effect on participants' confidence in socio-political digital social media interactions (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014), as they experience the mediums prioritising market-oriented goals over parity. On the one hand, the chapter explores how the participants engage with digital social media as a way to reinforce their understandings of these aspects of their identity, in particular when popularized social issues become hot topics online. On the other, the chapter explores how the crossover of these popular discourses into other spaces, e.g., their workplaces, interpersonal relationships and so on, can be problematic and threaten their ability to be open about their socio-political stances.

7.2 Reticence, privacy and empowerment: negotiating the limitations of privacy online

In the networked age, issues of privacy and surveillance in online interaction affect young people in disparate ways yet can sometimes be dovetailed into the same issue (Montgomery, 2015). In reality, it can often be harder to achieve privacy without the privilege and freedom to choose how to operate within spaces online. For young people who are marginalised, it can be especially difficult to navigate both privacy and surveillance in all aspects of life, and uninformed assumptions about how privacy operates online can further exacerbate their increased risk in everyday life, and impact on their socio-politics (Montgomery, 2015; Tilleczek and Campbell, 2019; Adorjan and Ricciardelli, 2018).

Erjan's disability had implications for his engagement with social media due to social media platforms differing in their inclusivity. Erjan's concerns about surveillance, the DWP and the potential for identifiability between and through the different elements of his micro-worlds troubled him. This was evidenced by his regular references to the potential for identifiability through photos on social media depicting his activism, as well as his concerns (discussed in Chapter Five) about the coalescence of information pertaining to his work hours and disability benefits. This was the first time I had considered (naively) that some social media might not be inclusive because of its design, and the wider implications of who else that might exclude, and how that might feel, but of course this had been an awareness for Erjan since he had begun to engage with it. The exclusion / inclusion implications of social media connect to wider political issues centring on disability and access, and are another example of spaces (de Certeau, 1984) and transnational public spheres (Fraser, 2014), albeit virtual, where Erjan's intersectional identity experiences as a young, disabled

man, were not fully considered. There was a reticence when Erjan talked about how he actually used social media, more often referring to how others might use information relating to him and expose him in some way. Erjan explained that he was 'used' to having to neglect some online platforms in favour of others, due to their accessibility. The practicalities of accessing social media changed the modes of engagement:

Me: "can you give an idea of anything that you use or interact with regularly?"
Erjan: "Umm… Mostly I like people who… but then some of them also… some of them are also the press as well, so obviously, I can't say things what I wish on Twitter, and obviously some of them are [*professional job relating to his employment*], some of them are [*professional job relating to his employment*], as well. I mostly like music videos, hmm… mostly pop music…

Me: To your TV mostly? What about your phone?

Erjan: I mostly use my iPad at home, because it saves my vision – saves my eyes. Which is actually quite an important thing".

His disability impacted on the time he spent using social media, which he said he interacted with "mostly in the afternoon (…) because also everything's there"; as a part-time worker he was at home at that time and able to access the internet through the TV screen:

Me: When you were reflecting on your social media use, what came up for you?

Erjan: Just mostly that I use it like to take photos like, and videos, that kind of thing
Me: How often do you use it?

Erjan: I mostly view the news (…) 'cause obviously some have heavy subtitles, and some are heavy to watch, and so some we don't watch anymore. Obviously the BBC is impartial…

Together with other comments he had made which I have made a decision to exclude because they are identifiable, I got the sense that he had ideas about trusted sources for political content. It is interesting to note that he regarded the BBC as impartial whilst being suspicious of other social media platforms' intended modes of use. He described social media warily saying:

Me: When is social media intrusive into your life?

Erjan: When it like… it wants too much information about your personal life.

Me: And you say you access information about current affairs through social media?

Erjan: Yeah. Cause I can break it down more easily (…) you can see what people have said.

This synthesisation of information, the 'breaking it down' that Erjan describes is important. His description of the approach he needs to take to engage with the online narratives gives another insight into the ways in which information presented online about current affairs is not immediately accessible for everyone. For people affected by disability which impacts upon their access to written content online, it can be preclusive. There are implications for his socio-politics of not being able to easily access and cross-reference information in the political mainstream arena. This connects to Fraser's (2014) ideas about the importance of considering who participates in the transnational public sphere, and on what terms. Experiences and perspectives of marginalised people have the potential to be missed, misrepresented or excluded altogether, if considerations of accessibility are not deeply considered by those designing the interactive style of digital social mediums online. Not

only does this hinder a whole sector of marginalised experiences from being able to directly engage with fast-paced narratives of exclusion, since digital social media is increasingly a driver for social change, but it also increases the risk of social exclusion through unequal levels of digital media literacy (Park, 2012). We can see that Erjan's experiences have had an impact on his feelings of confidence in enacting his socio-politics, indicated by his concerns about the DWP and his job (discussed in Chapters' Six and Seven), and his ongoing worry that if he exposes his activism online then he will be found out and have his freedoms limited.

Erjan relied on members of his family for access to some social media, they held the account and he communicated on some platforms with their support. As discussed in Chapter Five, Erjan's family had a significant role in supporting his access to social interaction and were advocates in his decision making around his disabilities. Though this was invaluable, and contributed to reducing social exclusion for Erjan, it is possible that Erjan's wariness of expressing himself openly on social media may have been connected to the reliance he had on family members to support his access. It is likely that the open access – via the family television – to his social media accounts and interests, in part at least mediated his desire for privacy within the family too:

> **Erjan:** We use… I forgot what we use, YouTube and stuff to Firestick… it's like you put it in your tv and it makes it a cheaper way to have a SMART TV.
>
> **Me:** Has online social media helped you, to connect?
>
> **Erjan:** It helps me to keep up, and like, see what's happening in the world, and see what my friends are up to. That side of it I enjoy, and that side of it… I experience new places and all of that stuff. That side of it is enjoyable.
>
> **Me:** What about the other side?

> **Erjan:** Some of my friends will say how they feel on social media. I wouldn't want to do that, it's like, why do you want to air that? I wouldn't want to do that. It's like, say it the old-fashioned way, why do you wanna type it out?" No, no, no. cause it's like awkward. It's like a digital argument.

> **Me:** [*laughing*] What's a digital argument? I love that phrase. What do you think about people who use it like that?

> **Erjan**: It's fine to a point, but like… it's kind of like, people like me just see it a different way

Erjan's awareness of the dual nature of social media here depicts an awareness of negative consequences for expressing socio-politics on the same medium you keep up social interactions. The 'awkwardness' of being opinionated on social media was not Erjan's only concern, however, and he tactically managed the information available about him, partially through the tangible fear that it could discredit his claim for financial and professional support:

> **Erjan:** I'd be worried about potential employers as well as the Work and Pensions, because… if it was a job I went for, then I could understand the employer going through the person's details, because obviously I know that some people do, do it.

Erjan articulates a very real concern that he, in particular, was subject to discriminatory checks when it came to employment. Thus, he made a tactical choice to use social media to communicate and coordinate discreetly with his activist charity work, and he benefitted from the ways that social media platforms presented news in contained articles, and video clips:

>Erjan: I can break it down more easily (…) you can see what people have said (…) I mostly view the news online (…)

Erjan negotiated social media platforms, despite limitations in his ease of use, with what appears to be an intentionally tactical approach. Erjan tentatively shared elements of his political activism but felt real concern that the exposure of these to the Department for Work and Pensions might hinder his access to the resources aimed at supporting his disability. A concern that may have been heightened and informed by his awareness of cases of exploitation, and the network of people close to him who felt similarly outraged at these contradictions in access to resources. Consequently, he mediated his content, guarded his privacy and details of his daily life, and used the platforms for his own benefit as a way to break down complex information into manageable chunks. This was his tactical way of mediating some control over the 'traceability' of his identity online, whilst still affording him access to current affairs and networking.

Shona also said she used social media daily but limited the social media platforms she interacted with. She went to some lengths to gain access to the free resource through public services, confiding that she could not afford £2 a day to connect to the internet through her phone:

>Me: So how does logging into the internet here work?

>Shona: Um, basically you put it in, Facebook account, username and password, sort out your settings, make sure… it's private and no one can get into it, make sure it's private (…) yeah, it's quite straightforward.

>Me: And what can you access?

>Shona: Facebook, basically.

Me: You stick to Facebook?

Shona: Well, yeah, I have to.

Accessing the internet in this way, through public services, restricted her to the social media platforms Facebook and Facebook Messenger. Shona preferred to use digital social media to connect with a small number of close and trusted friends and pursue personalised interests. In fact, the resistance of identifiability was paramount for Shona, who feared being accessed by her abusive father, or bullied by old school friends. Shona frequently used the word 'privacy' when discussing her usage; "Um, basically you put it in, Facebook account, username and password, sort out your settings, make sure… it's private and no one can get into it, make sure it's private (…) yeah, it's quite straightforward". The repetition of the word in relation to digital social media suggests she was undertaking a gamble on her privacy being protected in order to interact on the medium, with more of a focus on maintaining her privacy in her micro-world than managing any malintent from digital social media producers. In a similar way to Erjan, despite her internet usage being more public and observable due to her having to access this through a public facility, she found ways of regaining control over this by keeping all aspects of her account 'private', with minimum personal details observable.

The added security measures required by the public service host she accessed Facebook through also provided some reassurance. Shona felt that her commitment to her privacy was reinforced by her limiting her online engagement to games and quizzes. However, she didn't seem aware that a lot of these online activities are really about harvesting information from users. Her chosen mode of interaction reveals an interesting way that the producers of culture, in this instance the social media

platforms themselves and companies designing games to be hosted on them, manipulate the users through strategies aimed at exploitation. It also demonstrates the potential real-life consequences of abuses of trust between digital social media providers and consumers, all of whom have a right to privacy and some of whom are in increased personal danger when this is compromised. Digital social media was something Shona interacted with, as many young people do, yet it had already had serious consequences for her personal life. As a result of a previous Facebook account, she had been accessed by a family member who was not legally allowed to have any contact with her, and she had also experienced bullying which had significantly knocked her confidence:

> **Me:** You seem quite wary of social media. I was just thinking about that lovely album you showed me, in the first interview, and you saying you wouldn't post them...?
> **Shona:** I wouldn't post them. I wouldn't post them. I think because, umm… I don't really want to post it on Facebook in case everyone else sees them and says, like, 'oh this one's funny, this one's this, this one's that' and then I'm gonna be upset and they'll say something about my mother, or my Nan, and that would put me in a deep, deep, deep anger [laughs]

> **Me:** So does that mean you have people in your friends' list who would behave like that? Or… how do you select…

> **Shona:** Ugh… well, unfortunately, I'm gonna shut this Facebook down… so I'm gonna shut this one down and set a new one up, because I've had so many problems. With it. And then I'm gonna set one up, and just add people I like, like my family, and one or two friends but no one else.

When I asked Shona about why she was wary of online interaction, she explained that she had been bullied online in the past, continuing on from experiences of bullying at school and college. Photos of her family members had been mocked, and she had had to 'close' several Facebook accounts to avoid bullying or contact from people she did not want to find her. "I was doing a competition

about who knew me best [referencing an online Facebook quiz], and no one knows… no one knew" she told me, and asked me to participate in the quiz, saying that although I had not known her for long, I should have a go. The questions featured baseline information; binary choices between what her favourite food item was, where she would ideally go out, and so on. When I guessed some questions correctly, she said "You know me, sort of...!". This was an insight into the complex relationship she had with social media: she trusted the platform with accessing personal information about her for the purpose of quizzes and interactive games but did not trust the presentation of information which it actively encouraged its users to display to an external audience, because the risks to/ from some of the relationships in her micro-world were significant. She chose not to display a recognizable profile photo, shut down her 'basic information', and her profile did not relay any details to strangers. Shona also resolutely shut down access to information about those close to her such as her Mum, boyfriend, and closest friends. This was occasionally compromised, in video clips. Shona considered her political views to be private in the same way that she considered her loved ones should be protected from identifiability on her Facebook profile. When she shared her Facebook social media feed with me, I noticed there were very few posts beyond the links to games she had played:

> **Shona:** Umm… that's all my posts for that year.

> **Me:** What sort of things do you like to share? I noticed you wouldn't post anything about a world event.

> **Shona:** No. I wouldn't post anything of me and my boyfriend either.

> **Me:** I suppose… are you careful about posting information that would make you identifiable, on Facebook?

Shona: Yep. Very.

It is significant that Shona correlates her personal politicism with her personal relationships, in the same breath, suggesting she equates a similar value and a desire to protect both of these aspects of herself. This resolve was not solely connected to a fear of access from family members who were dangerous to her, it was also a recoil from a school life that had been overshadowed by constant bullying, which had spilled into her online life, despite long since leaving school:

> **Shona:** Unfortunately I'm still being bullied online, so I've had to change my profile picture, but I've changed it so many times… Argh I've been logged out again. There you go, that's my… that. Yeah, I need to change it actually, I need to select a new one. I need to change it. Basically people were being nasty about. About me, and umm. I was really pissed off about that, but… there's nothing really to it anymore"

Shona was resolute about her privacy, but in many ways by engaging with digital social media she had much less control over it than she realised. Despite her careful management of her online image and monitoring of content, Shona felt herself vulnerable to harm through the medium she nonetheless spent a considerable time each day making an effort to connect with. Shona felt the need to hide her political affiliations and interests from her social media feed and she, like Erjan, seemed to feel the need to be careful about what aspects of her socio-politics she shared online. In Shona's case this was because she was worried about sharing too much of herself and being bullied, or worse still being located by dangerous family members. Both examples demonstrate how despite interacting with digital social media for a considerable amount of their everyday lives, both participants felt they must manage and withhold aspects of the convictions and personal experiences that feel important to them for fear of how these may be used against them.

Shona's continued engagement with a medium which, by her need for careful mediation of it, reinforces aspects of her own social exclusion tells us a lot about the complicated relationship young people can have with social media. Shona's engagement with social media felt like a balance between a necessity, a space to reassert her control over her identity and who had access to this, and a way for her to tentatively explore connections beyond her immediate world. Unlike Erjan's concerns about surveillance online, Shona's focus on privacy is interpersonal. Nonetheless, both feel concern for a targeted loss of privacy, and both are mistrustful of the machinations of the mediums they engage with – due to fears about other people overcoming their attempts at maintaining privacy. What this tells us is that the process by which some young people engage with digital social media as a political information tool is in no way straightforward, or equal. Because they are also mediating the interaction through an online identity version of themselves, it is not a straightforward information gathering tool. Social exclusion has a big part to play in the experiences of both Erjan and Shona, in different ways.

If we view social media as a consumer relationship, we can see the opportunities for producers' complex manipulation of young people who use social media due to the fact that the level of integration digital technology has with (most) young people's lives (Bowe and Wohn, 2015), and sometimes as a social coping mechanism (Dwivedi and Lewis, 2021) are considerable. Shona uses the bare minimum of Facebook's social interaction materials, and yet spends a considerable amount of her day logging into the medium in a way that is inconvenient and costly. Erjan does not have complete autonomy over his social media profiles and the lack of inclusive modes of interaction mean that there is very little that he can use on digital social media without considerable help from a family member, and yet he commits to spending most afternoons using the medium. What this indicates is the extent to which social media has become a necessity in these young people's lives,

both in informing them about what is happening in the world around them, and in giving them access to some social inclusion. However, the lack of inclusivity tells us that young people who are financially disadvantaged, or disabled, are not always experiencing feeling prioritised by the producers of digital social media. This is ominous for what 'types' of young people can be included in digital technology, in 'culture' production, and in political participation.

7.3 Dip in, dip out: taking what you need from social media

The previous section discussed some of the ways accessibility of digital social media and its powers over privacy and surveillance can exclude its young users. The young people's stories also suggested that limitations with digital literacy and access can affect online confidence. This section explores what the possibilities are of young people navigating controls when they interact across a range of different social media platforms that are part of their everyday lives. Drawing on the participants social media literacies, it examines how mitigating risk can inform socio-politics, and how these tactics to circumvent the strategies of the producers can also contribute to their feelings of safety, security and autonomy. Arguably, these participants engaged in practices to actively take what information they felt they wanted from digital social media, but with some awareness of how to moderate what they give back. I explore this through the examples of Tom and Fahad, who participated in social media with concerns for their privacy and surveillance of their activities, and would describe themselves as watchers of online content rather than co-creators.

Tom described himself as feeling 'annoyed' by the active distribution of personal material on social media platforms, another level of privacy invasion that connects with Erjan and Shona's concerns. However, he still used their tools for access to current affairs and was able to navigate them

confidently due to high levels of digital literacy. His socio-politics are demonstrated through his critique of the truncation of news articles due to their conversion onto online platforms, which he says has made them 'superficial'. He also describes feeling 'angry' whilst watching videos of an antagonistic right-wing influencer in the following extract:

Me: So have you had a chance to look at any articles at all?

Tom: It's a weird one, and it's not to disappoint, but I don't really use social media that often. So for example, I pretty much just use Facebook to keep in contact with people, and that's it. However, I was thinking to myself what do I look at and what do I read, half the time, and sometimes it's just sports and stuff like that, which is really lame, but then if I'm sat reading something on Facebook it would more likely be news articles, or opinions of recent news articles, or something like that. Other than that I'd say it's used for keeping in touch with people, promoting things, and stuff like that, like the music side of things. We use it literally just for our stuff. But that's really simple anyway, and I use that less than the others. And we probably use Instagram more for that anyway, so I'm often looking at it like 'I wonder what we're doing' half the time as much as anyone else! So yeah, it's not something that. I... would use. Like it annoys me that I have Facebook to be honest, it annoys me that I feel that I have to have it, and the others I don't use at all. Really. Errm…

Me: Why does it annoy you?

Tom: Because I feel compelled to check it, which, I don't like. And… I get annoyed by a lot of stuff on it. In particular, because there was a while where – say if I wanted to read an article and stuff – I'd look on The Independent on Facebook and just become annoyed by it. Because it would became so snappy, so you'd have a story and it would be like 'this is just crazy', and it would just seem stupid, such a superficial way to, like, read news. That kind of just bugs me, but then if I'm looking through things it will be different perspectives of what's currently going on? I think there was, on Saturday morning I was just annoying [*girlfriend*] by watching videos of Milo Yiannopoulos, 'cause we were talking about her dissertation, and what we were doing this time last year, so we were talking about that, and

then I was watching it and I just got like, really angry? But yeah, yeah… which, in a way is funny but is also just a way of getting angry for the sake of it.

His narrative suggests he is engaged in actively filtering the news articles, platforms and influencers for a sense of impartiality so that he can draw inferences for his own socio-politics, but he describes the experiences as provoking a range of negative emotions, feeling 'bugged', 'angry', that things are 'stupid' and 'superficial'. Some elements of his description may have been performative and defensive, given he had an innate understanding of various digital social media platforms and clearly interacted with them relatively regularly. However, the fact he described having to actively think about 'what do I look at and what do I read' does also point to the extent social media is integrated into his life. He explained he used each of the platforms for different social purposes, to interact with different groups of friends and associates. His narrative does suggest that he recognised the potential of what he was up against, and this in turn tells us something about his desire to resist and the implications for his socio-politics and enactment of agency.

Tom seemed to at once embrace, and resist, being defined by his online behaviour. He did not want to be aligned with people who "may have a really weird connection to it where they use it every day and stuff, and update it every hour and stuff" and part of his tactical work was to resist the suggested formats for identity portrayal, and obvious routes for interaction presented to him:

> **Tom:** But umm… yeah, I also think it's a good way to see different perspectives from the same shores, which can be healthy, cause some people – also – there is a way with social media of just managing it so you don't see what you don't want to see. Which can be a good way of managing it, I guess, because you can go out of your way to.. come across things that you disagree with. It doesn't mean you have to share them but it does mean you have to realise that they are there, and people are looking at it and sharing it, and I think that's really

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healthy as well, yeah, cause otherwise you wouldn't come across it. I wouldn't see people with certain opinions and certain views, if I didn't use the internet. Yeah, you just don't come across those views I guess, so… in terms of using it myself, I guess it is just a… it's kind of like a news platform, I think, and some of it's good and some of it's absolute rubbish and you have to realise that some of it's rubbish and some of it is really interesting. And the thing is it is so, so current, and if you're on a lunch break you can check social media and you'll see instantly about 30 news stories which is… quite strange. You know if you just click on The Guardian, you can just flick through The Guardian Twitter, that has tonnes of stuff. So I guess the way I would use it, I don't access it every single day, but it's become a way for companies to reach people, really certain views, reach a certain demographic.

Me: What demographic do you think that is?

Tom: Not necessarily fixed, to be honest. I'd say it's more, it's more likely to be young people, but then. I say that, like my parents wouldn't be flicking through Twitter and stuff like that, but a lot of parents embrace it and they're like 'this is fantastic' and stuff like that, use it all the time, so I guess it just depends, but I would say it's a younger generation thing, I guess. Errm. Yeah. Because I would say lots of people wouldn't use it necessarily in the way that I would or my friends would or people at work would, but. Yeah. I don't feel like I… because some other people may have a really weird connection to it where they use it every day and stuff, and update it every hour and stuff and I. I don't know. I've never really felt compelled to do stuff like that? Or like, personalise it? Which is probably a weird thing, but umm… yeah, I've never really felt the need to update it or like, share, or have an online personality, or presence, I guess. I'm just not that bothered by it, I guess, but yeah

Supposedly intrinsic qualities of social media, that it is connecting and convenient, were weighed up by him against the more complex impacts of using a tool that is (and that makes the user) so readily accessible. Tom made a distinction between social media as a source of information for consumption, and as a way of sharing about yourself. He talked about feeling he had an innate understanding of the targeted, constructed nature of social media platforms designed for different

purposes, and felt he was able to control dancing between them. These performances of control in itself suggests there is socio-political significance here for him, as he wants it to be known he makes an active choice to try not to be manipulated. Tom's articulations of his love-hate relationship with social media, his distancing of Facebook's desire for personalisation coupled with his taking advantage of the same platform's news article circulation gave an insight into the ways in which he made the onslaught of daily information and connectivity work for him.

Tom argues in defence of his social media interaction, by restating his awareness of the 'danger'. However, he cites an online article as evidence that online platforms are considering a more balanced portrayal of news items. His concerns about privacy or sharing too much personal information himself are mirrored by a concern that what he is shown on digital social media is not always accurate, reflective or reliable.

Tom's interview suggested he felt he was aware of the wide scope of knowledge afforded to him, but how this was balanced against a need to be aware of the interplay of power between the user and the producer. He was cautious of full acceptance of everything he read, including an article suggesting social media platforms intended to take responsibility for dissemination of news materials, remaining dubious and measured as to their intentions, with his remark that "I guess is like" suggesting he is doubtful. Tom seemed aware that the relationship between user and producer was influenced by the tactical behaviour of the users at any given time, and he highlighted this a few times during our conversation about social media – that he felt ultimately social media is what the users want it to be. The following excerpt illustrates the tension between his knowledge that changes in digital social media usage are subtle, and can therefore entice you into new ways of using purely because the changes are incremental and happen gradually. Equally, he suggests that in a

sense platforms have to mutually adhere to the way they are going to be used, when he suggests that 'if everyone was using Snapchat to like spread news, filming things and saying 'this is happening, right here' and sharing it, then it would change how people would use it'. This illustrates an important point about the perceived co-constructive nature of socio-politics online, and the ways users sometimes feel they use social media platforms in appropriated ways, creating digital news narratives that they believe then partially direct broader cultural changes in digital technology (McCombs and Guo, 2014). Influence over how the political agenda is formed is a key source of power (Chadwick, 2017), and Tom's comments seem to suggest that he believes the consumer has a stake in how this is decided. However, his caution about digital social media's strategic objectives as producers of content mean that he views any strategic changes they propose to make with scepticism:

> **Tom:** Facebook themselves have realised that they're kind of like a news page, yeah, because… I think I read something the other day about like they want to manage the sites that people access so that they're less public and more to do with your friends, I guess. So people treat it like Reddit, I guess. Because erm. also different social media and stuff also have the challenge of addressing things like fake news, which is. yeah probably more difficult, I think, on social media where things are shared instantly. Errm. It can quite clearly be fake, but also believed by a load of people and then shared again and again. So, there's that danger. I think I read something about different organisations already highlighting that they've got a duty to manage all the access and views or whatever, umm, which I guess is like a new interesting element of social media. But again, that could have been around for years, but it's only just become apparent that they need to manage it. Because people are realising that they do use the sites like their news, they're taking it more seriously. Umm.
>
> **Me:** Can you imagine a time when Facebook becomes news, and is taken seriously in that way?

Tom: Possibly, but then you have to bear in mind. Like, when I started using it I was younger anyway, so there'd be a natural progression there anyway. I'd say, in that sense I'm not sure if it's more to do with where my interests lie now or where they were at the start if that makes sense. Like I'd say in the last four or five years, you notice the difference with news organisations and authors and things like that, having a presence on social media, and therefore they're part of it, and consequently each social media site reflects their views and reflects how they use it. Because that's all they're doing, so if everyone was using, like, not to oversimplify but if everyone was using Snapchat to like spread news, filming things and saying 'this is happening, right here' and sharing it, then it would change how people would use it. Which kind of does happen in a slight way, but then because it's seen as a bit of a novelty an a bit of a joke it's used for like, new year's eve, here's what's happening in Australia, here's what's happening in like eastern Europe, London, Newcastle, so it is documenting certain events but then it's just the nature of that – on that advert it's just kind of trivial, but I do think the way people use it is reflected in that it just kind of becomes the way that people use it is what it becomes anyway.

Tom demonstrated consideration before allowing his socio-political decision making to be framed by accepting any political messages that he came across online "Like, I think it's good to read it and think it's a load of shite". Tom indicated he did not see politics, as presented online, as inevitably being synonymous with fact. Rather, a reflection of 'differences of opinion'.

Tom: No, I think it's important. I think social media is reflecting politics, it's reflecting differences of opinion, it's sometimes reflecting fact. And I think it's good, then, to have to consider umm. the effect that would have on someone, the effect it would have on different people, in different contexts, as well, so yeah- I would say absolutely. Mainly because of how it is so kind of part of every life and context, I guess.

Tom's socio-politics are informed by his interactions with digital social media, but he suggests they are not led by them. We can ascertain from his narratives that he goes to considerable lengths to

make sure that the information he gathers online is being accessed from a range of different perspectives, including engaging directly with political actors he finds antagonistic such as Milo Yiannopoulos who he describes as making him 'angry'. Although he presents a measured perception of the impact of social media on his socio-politics, he also finds that some interactions provoke emotional responses. Tom's wrestles with social media suggest he understands the intractability, and his attempts to behave unpredictably by suppressing elements of his identity online imply a socio-politicised orientation to resist. Tom makes a point of clarifying that he saw social media as only 'sometimes' reflecting fact. He understood its power, and 'how it is so kind of part of every life and context' thus his awareness that there was considerable potential to impact on 'different people, in different contexts', and the ungovernable scattergun nature of this potential impact, is readable. However, the breach between the extent to which he felt he may have successfully extracted himself from the impact of this, and the actual success of this compartmentalisation is negotiable. Nonetheless, the intent is socio-politically significant. However, the discourses presented to him through the producers he 'trusts' he sceptically allows to inform his socio-politics.

Fahad also presented a narrative that suggested a cautious attitude to the political information he encountered online. Despite this, like Tom, he regularly engaged with a variety of digital social media platforms and followed online discussions to 'read the comments'. This seems to support research which suggests some young people are participating in new forms of political participation online (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014; Beaunier and Veneti, 2020), but Fahad and Tom's narratives seem to suggest that their interactions comprise a follow-on from their exigent socio-politics and approaches to socialisation offline. Both participants describe their interactions in their virtual micro-worlds as reflecting the cautious, aware and measured approach they take to their

experiences in their physical micro-worlds, but they also describe coming across new perspectives and viewpoints that they never knew had existed previously. Like Tom, Fahad relayed narratives that demonstrated he felt he could handle the unreliability of digital social media, however his reticence also felt connected to his experience of growing up sheltered in a boarding school, and he talked about it being 'very good' to see so many things that he didn't previously know existed:

> **Fahad:** It's definitely going to have an impact because there's so much information that, I think personally it's a positive and a negative because there are so many opinions online and then when there's a young mind online where the mind is still forming, where you're still forming who you are and you go online and you see a video and, I don't know you like read the comments and kind of thing like. Because like, when I go into a virtual space online, like I already know, because of my age and because I didn't start using social media until I was 16, 17... I kind of was like, there with my opinions.

> **Me:** Do you think it helps people to form opinions or harms the way that people form opinions when they escape the space that they're in and go online?

> **Fahad:** Again, I think yes, it's a positive and negative. It depends on the person and the space that they're in. For me it was, it was very good because obviously it, you go into a virtual space and you're like, you see so many things that you never knew kind of exist.

Fahad saw social media as 'spaces' to explore new ideas and worlds unseen, interacting with content and discourses without engaging directly with other users. However, he explained that the online abuse and 'trolling' he witnessed in some social media discussions reinforced fears he had about the social world becoming less tolerant. Fraser's theory of recognition designates "an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal" (Fraser, 2003: 10), and this need for recognition we see partially demonstrated, but also thwarted, by Fahad's desire to go to 'many spaces' and yet never fully emerge into the dialogue. Fahad felt liberated in some respects by the

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ability to watch online discussions unseen, and by not participating in these discussions he could hide aspects of his identity that could be challenged in the physical space of real life – his mixed ethnicity and homosexuality, which he felt acutely aware of since the EU Referendum results. Fahad framed a lot of his reflections through his experiences of growing up in the UK as a young person with mixed ethnicity. These reflections and how they connect to his digital social media interaction are particularly relevant as a way to understand his encompassment of space:

> **Fahad:** Like, today, we met up [*location*] but it feels like since we last met it feels like I've been to so many spaces since then, online. I don't feel as engrossed in my space when I am in a virtual space.

Fahad's exploration of multiple online spaces 'I've been to so many spaces since then' contrasted with his descriptions during our interviews of what he perceived to be more monotonous daily circumstances since leaving full-time education. Fahad felt unsure exactly what his next move would be and focused on maintaining his mental health. He described feeling able to navigate social media and seemed to perceive the physical world space as being concomitant with virtual space, describing moving between them. Fahad describes an awareness of the impact of escaping to virtual spaces 'where the mind is still forming', but also justifies the potential for expansion of a sense of possibility, away from binary limitations. Having stepped away from higher education, he referred to feelings that he had lost himself in the mindlessness of his zero-hour contract job, and the lack of stimulation he felt had heightened awareness of Brexit-born racism and tensions. However, his sense of socio-politics was clarified by the change from an urban space that felt accepting and open, and one that felt difficult to live in as a mixed ethnicity person knowing the choice to 'Leave' the European Union, and all that entailed, had been popular in his local area. Coupled with his

observations of political interactions online, it had sharpened his sense, socio-politically, that he was a 'liberal' living in a country which seemed increasingly polarised:

> **Fahad:** [interacting with social media] definitely is going to change the mindset like broadening the horizon like, kind of people aren't… Young people growing up with social media with that virtual space are going to be more interested and obviously everywhere else like, which is good because I remember when I was, when I grew up in [*country*] it was a very, like, the space was very, like, you know that this is, it kind of felt like this was where I was going to be my whole life. (…) I think that changes… again, that changes how say, like, I'm a liberal. It [Brexit] changed my perspective of my space kind of… I don't know if you remember the first weeks after that, after you know we voted to get out and I was just very like, I thought this was, like I had a different interpretation to where, what this country was I think.

On social media platforms, Fahad was able to act out agency - if not by being part of online discussions, then by feeling part of wider debates by simply being there. His socio-political identity could be a given, but he could explore other perspectives which he described as being surprising and not what he thought 'this country' was. His sense of a space that he felt he understood suddenly feeling unrecognisable had made him look at how he existed within other spaces, both virtual and physical. The plasticity between online opinions and face-to-face opinions felt more problematic, and potentially more threatening. Fahad felt much more aware of the marginalised aspects of his identity and his increased vulnerability since Brexit. This permeated his daily life in new ways, through racist tensions at his workplace as discussed in Chapter Five, and the visibility of negative opinions he witnessed online. By not participating in these discussions himself, he arguably leant into the status quo. But perhaps at considerable cost to his own confidence to assert his socio-politicism, and aspects of his identity.

Fahad's unwillingness to 'reveal' himself is tactical in itself, but it is also self-protective given his ethnicity, age and sexuality can make him feel marginalised and even at risk in some spaces. Fahad positions himself to benefit from observing political discourses as they emerge, but he does not engage himself with the direction of any discourses. He selects his topics of interest, but then follows the unpredictable path down which they lead, as they at times reinforced his fears of division and retribution. Nonetheless his sense of socio-politics remains relatively consistent, he is a 'liberal', and his viewpoints are reinforced by the information he gathers.

Tom and Fahad's cautious approach to digital social media and, in particular, to political engagement online seem to correlate with research suggesting that there are new forms of socio-political participation online which do not relate to traditional participatory activities (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014; Vremon, Xenos and Loader, 2015; Xenos, Vromen and Loader, 2014). As previous research has suggested, their already exigent socio-political interests where explored, but not created, by online interaction. The negative aspects of political participation online, such as relinquishing privacy or becoming part of an aggressive exchange put them off overt interaction with the political themes and discussions they observe. Nonetheless, the interaction does provoke emotion such as 'anger' (Tom) and an awareness that it will 'have an impact' (Fahad) on mental health and wellbeing.

Through de Certeau's conceptualization of space we can conceive of ways that Tom and Fahad's choices in both physical and virtual space correlate to a socio-political choice to be seen, or not, on his own terms. However, understanding how their intersectional identities contribute to these experiences is key. Tom identified as a white, heterosexual, educated young man, and consequently though he is angered by some of the spaces and debates he encounters, they do not necessarily

create the sense of danger that they do for Fahad, whose identity as a gay, mixed ethnicity, precariously employed young man is more vicarious in both online political discussions and physical spaces. If we take de Certeau's conceptualization of space as being understood from a dual perspective- Icarus as flying above, and Daedalus in the "mobile and endless labyrinths below" (1984: 92)- we can see how Fahad navigates both the city space, and the online spaces, "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (1984: 93). There are deliberate socio-political choices he is making, that are tactical in the sense that he engages with small political resistances (such as in his workplace against his racist boss, described in Chapter Six) and observes unseen those who would objectify aspects of his identity. He does so by concealing any obvious intersectional markers that could be dangerous for him, in physical spaces that he felt were dangerous, only to unfurl into anonymous curiosity into virtual spaces of his choosing that then allowed him to articulate his own spatiality, by choosing the forums and online debates he wished to engage with. Tom is certainly vulnerable to aggression due to his socio-politics, and his family history of being immigrants in the UK contributes to his awareness and empathy for marginalised people, but broadly speaking his online choices to stay muted are his own to make.

7.4 Navigating young womanhood and visibility online

In this section I examine the ways three of the participants, all of whom identified as female, managed aspects of their gender online and how this can tell us more about their socio-politics being both gendered and interpersonal. Paige, Abigail and Charley talked about an awareness of the potential for their images, information and communications to be abused. They saw this potential for harm potentially coming from individuals they knew, wider friendship circles they were loosely connected to, and the digital social media platforms themselves. In different ways, this ominous

threat impacted on their feelings about privacy, surveillance and gender equality, and their sense of these issues being present in their online interaction had a direct impact on shaping their sense of socio-politics.

Like Tom, and to some extent (though they did not have equal access to digital social media platforms) Erjan and Shona too, Paige, Abigail, Olivia and Charley navigated different platforms, sometimes simultaneously with the same group of friends, for different social purposes. Their comments about their digital social media disaggregation of groups make them very identifiable, so I have not been able to include these here. Facebook Messenger would facilitate group nights out and family conversations, What's App would facilitate social discussions about the complex friendship relations and how they might be impacted by the night out and segmented family groupings and SnapChat would be used to capture images of preparation / the night out itself. Paige would use different applications for different relationships, preferring to speak to her family through Facebook Messenger, and her friends on either SnapChat or What's App for more personal messages. She felt part of her role in the group as a friend was keeping and printing images of her friendship group that felt important to her, charting their closeness and shared experiences over a number of years.

Paige saw herself as a 'caretaker' in her relationships with friends and family, and to some extent this involved taking care of the archives of photos of her friendships, vetting photographs before they were shared both by her and by her friends, and thinking through the consequences of posting information on social media 'I'd be like I wouldn't put that one up, because_____'s in that group, and she knows him'. The anxieties and consideration involved in posting material online was

constant, if subconscious to many in the group; Paige recognised the potential impacts of online decisions, and saw her role as guiding her more spontaneous friends if she was present:

> **Me:** Tell me more about these photos?
>
> **Paige:** Yeah, so every time I get a new phone, the old photos go on there automatically. Sometimes I just get my phone and go through it and delete ones I don't need, so now I've got them organised going back five years now. That's not stuff I'd put online. I love seeing photos of how we developed. I used to have a lot of photos of when we all looked really nice, and now I just have photos that are just of us in whatever moment type of thing.
>
> **Me:** what do you put online?
>
> **Paige:** You just have to be careful what you put online, like, you put the best stuff up, I guess, but you'd never share stuff that's between all of us.

The importance of these images, offline, were clear to Paige, and her discernment about what she would then transfer online can be seen more socio-politically and tactically - it suggests she is aware of gendered implications of putting anything less than 'the best stuff up' online. She describes having to be 'careful' about what she puts online, and takes that responsibility seriously. There was a distinction, in Paige's mind, between these intimate photographs, moments of indiscretion between friends – which would stay on her phone or hard drive, and the staged photos of friends on nights out, which would be shared on Instagram. However, Snapchat, due to its feature of deleting photos and videos once they had been seen (unless they were saved as a screenshot) was a space to share pictures of 'the hangover', or the 'make-up gone wrong', or drunken exploits, which would be posted to 'stories'.

These choices can be viewed socio-politically by considering the consequences inherent in online imagery for young women, given there is research to demonstrate that widespread media images contribute significantly to socio-cultural beauty ideals (Tiggemann and Slater, 2013; Thompson, et al., 1999; Staniewski and Awruk, 2021). Recent research into the impact of online imagery of young women and their self-identity suggests that people can feel immense pressure to copy images of thin-ideal Instagram celebrities, or mirror poses and image composition in their online photo posts. Paige's decision-making and sorting process for what images remained available where, can be viewed as a process of self-protection and camaraderie amongst her close female friends. The friendship group all knew the 'rules' of friendship photography (Worcman and Garde-Hansen, 2014), what should be made more publicly available and what should remain within closer quarters and as arbitrator of the group's photographs Paige supported the networked and connected experiences of their everyday lives (Worcman and Garde-Hansen, 2014). In comparison, we can see that without due diligence over what imagery is available where, young women may find themselves in a vulnerable position. Research exploring the impact of body shaming and problematic digital social media use has drawn correlations with negative outcomes such as problematic monitoring of one's own body image and pictures online (Fox and Vendemia, 2016; Gioia, Griffiths and Boursier, 2020). Abigail describes how disaggregation of photos online can be used against people, if images get into the wrong hands:

Me: So judgement you've mentioned a few times in the interview.

Abigail: Yes like, [*location*] is so judgy. You get judged for everything. Like, I don't know like I hear stuff hear all the time, like if a girl puts a picture on Facebook or Instagram and stuff and then they say like, they get seen in the street obviously not wear – because when you post a picture on Instagram you're obviously looking your best aren't you. You're creating that image because you think that's a nice photo of you and that's you looking your

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best. And then when people see like you in the street and stuff, they'll be like oh, like a word called catfish. They'll be like, oh she's a catfish. I hear it about people saying about girls all the time, like saying, "Oh she's catfish." Just because she doesn't look like what she does in that photo, even though that photo's been edited and stuff. And it's just sad because people feel the need to like, like there's girls on Instagram in my year and the year below who edit like everything about themselves and they'll make their bum bigger, boobs bigger like literally. And then, where sometimes you can see that they've done that, like boys what have screenshot it, and then put it on Twitter and like, embarrass them. And I just think it's so nasty because these girls feel like they have to try and be something that they're not. Do you know what I mean? They haven't got their big bum, they haven't got those big boobs but they feel like they have to make themselves look like they do to impress people.

(…)

Like, I hate social media. Like, I wouldn't live without it because that's just what I'm used to, but I don't really like it, I think it's really judgy and patronising. And I think it's a lot of, like, bullying. Even if it's not like, everyday bullying, it happens. I don't know, like, you'll be scrolling through Instagram and you'll see a not very nice picture of someone, and you'll screen shot it and put it in the girls' chat. And then everyone will talk about it. And I know how nasty that is, but everyone does it? Like, I do it. And it shouldn't be like that, but it is, and that's what everyone's like? Like, my photos probably end up in so many girls' screen chats. It shouldn't be, but that's how it is.

Abigail's story brings to the fore the contradictions in young people's feelings about social media, on the one hand viewed as an essential tool for communication, but on the other overtly encouraging manipulation of visual messages. She has a nuanced analysis of the gender politics of online presentation of self, but her coda is really revealing because she admits that it probably does happen to her, too, and that she engages in this practice with her friends. Abigail's clear sense that young women's imagery can be objectified and damage their sense of self-identity, and yet they still

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'feel the need' to edit their bodies for approval, indicates her socio-political position as a young woman who is aware that there are gendered implications to socio-cultural interactions online.

Abigail displaces the behaviour of 'these girls', distancing it from herself, and yet she shows empathy with the women rather than disdain. Abigail describes experiences of young women she knows being targeted and humiliated for not looking like they do in online photos, and she describes 'boys' putting these images on other digital social media platforms 'to embarrass them'. She described the pressures created by social media platforms creation of features, editing and visual enhancing tools that arguably encourage ordinary women (and men) to edit their photos to look like the staged and 'perfect' images of celebrities (Marwick, 2015). The 'thin ideal' promoted in social media imagery, that is a pressure – particularly for young women – to maintain a youthful, thin, sexually attractive appearance in their online images, becomes a circular and addictive behaviour 'I wouldn't live without it because that's just what I'm used to, but I don't really like it, I think it's really judgy and patronising', with young women in particular internalising and comparing themselves with their peers and idealised images online (Thompson et al., 1999).

The exposure of young women to these sexualised ideals, and resultant societal pressure – demonstrated by Abigail's description of 'boys' who can 'see where they've done that, they'll screen shot it and put it on Twitter to embarrass them', but also reinforced by 'girls' who will 'see a not very nice picture of someone, and you'll screen shot it and put it in the girls' chat' and, despite the empathy Abigail clearly wants to demonstrate, she will nonetheless continue to do it because 'everyone does it'. The negative impact of sharing online 'sexualised selfie' images of young women has been examined in recent research (e.g., Fox, Vendemia and Brehm, 2021; McLean et al., 2015), but there is less research on women's perceptions of other women's self-editing (Daniels and

Zubriggen, 2016), and the impact of knowing images are actively edited, which is what makes Abigail's response interesting in the context of this research. We can explore it through the frame of tactics, to see how despite Abigail's assertion that she has mastered the techniques of the social media platform, she is still contained by the strategies – the design, proliferation, need for connection to other networks – "it shouldn't be like that, but it is, and that's what everyone's like?" forced her acquiescence to conform, despite her offline principals being troubled by her online interactions

Olivia also presented herself as being conscious of using different mediums for different types of relationships; Facebook Messenger for her family interactions, What's App groups for keeping up with old university relationships, sourcing and offering support dealing with transitional difficulties, like the gender aggression she experiences at work, described in Chapter Six. This suggests an appropriation of digital social media as a coping mechanism, to remind each other of upbeat times and to continue connections when their lives took them into more isolated spaces. Her narratives further suggest a sense of gendered narratives of social media practices, as she describes it 'not being worth' sharing private photo imagery online. Olivia used Instagram like a private scrapbook of some special moments and places she visited. Olivia's use of digital social media imagery and connections were aimed at creating empowerment in other spaces in her life, privately, in alignment with her values as a feminist she says she does not feel it would be 'fair' to put up photos of others without their consent. She preferred to restrict her digital social media interactions to sharing 'articles' about what current affairs to engage in, discussions, and exchanging and co-creating solidarity with other young adults she knew. This use of digital social media can be seen as a measured way of engaging socio-politically, maintaining connections and offering solidarity to those

she is close to, but being self-aware about the risks, perhaps particularly as a young woman, of putting images of herself and her friends online:

> **Me:** So you communicate with your family on Facebook Messenger? What else do you use?
>
> **Olivia:** Yep, so… my Dad, he loves a bit of Facebook Messenger, so he started a group on there for me and my [*sibling*]. Then we ended up getting my gran on there, and my auntie on there, so [laughs]. And it was nice. And then I suppose, it's been nice to have that, that contact with them all when I was at uni. Like, those photos I showed you – I wouldn't put them up anywhere. The family ones, and I think the friend stuff is only moments like, like.. when you finish uni. Everyone maybe posts something up, then you're tagged. But, I don't really… And yeah, you always check in with your friends, with little photos between you – articles – all that stuff. What's app, Snapchat sometimes if it's. if something funny happens at work, or if something big happens in the news, like… like it's a way of staying close now we're all spread out. But they never go online, that wouldn't be fair. I'd never put loads of photos up, it's just not worth it.

In comparison with Paige and Abigail who described collective practices amongst close friendship groups, and the pressure of images going beyond interpersonal spaces and being misused, and in a different way from the bounded way that Olivia simply doesn't put photos up permanently onto public digital social media platforms at all (though arguably participating in any digital social media is sharing images publicly), Charley positioned herself as using her images in a more professional and overtly politicised way. Charley made specific content aimed at delivering a political message and advertising events, and presented her producer knowledge to me in our interview, about a range of social media applications, whilst also deriding over-sharing and reliance on the medium for self-esteem. She distanced herself from the idea of using the platforms for sharing personal information but accepted their place in the background of social planning and making arrangements with friends (Woodman and Wyn, 2014). Charley saw her online interaction as being on her own

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terms, and – although situated within a power dynamic overtly in favour of the strategies of the social media corporations – she used the connectivity they encouraged for her own benefit. In the process, she delivered a political message, and was even to some extent able to subvert the pressures of youth employment, by creating a business that paid her.

Charley: Again, obviously I use it personally as well, but personally it's all very much. whereas before I would say I used it on a personal level, y'know, keeping in touch with my friends, maybe adding a status, but to be fair, y'know, I can't remember the last time I've actually written a status! Usually I put up stuff I'm doing for [event] and share it to my personal Facebook so that people in my network can then see it… if they don't necessarily, y'know, they're not familiar with my network they can see it on my Facebook page, it's a bit like tagging it along, sort of thing. But in terms of actually being an entrepreneur or a promoter, or. like, having a page, having a business, like some people might have a page selling home-made jewellery or something, and they'll have an online Etsy event and invite people along, or – I think in terms of that it's really effective, it's a great platform, because it gets that word out there a bit more. I think it's you know, it's image. It's kind of. following, or whatever. so with Instagram and Facebook its obviously quite different because my Facebook I privatise so that anyone who's friends with me can see my stuff, so you can choose who you interact with. Whereas – I think everyone does that with Facebook actually, but with Instagram it's different you can either private your account, so you can decide who follows you, and who sees your pictures, so only your followers can see your pictures, so you can confirm who follows you, or not

Me: So is it a bit more tailored?

Charley: Yeah. Exactly.

Her assuredness about her socio-political position on this, the sophistication that she describes, and her diffidence about upkeep of her own personal social media profiles, nonetheless belies a need to navigate a connection in order to remain relevant in her field. Although Charley is at pains to

present herself as 'making use' of the features and designs of the platforms, her business relies on the dynamism she presents to the audience 'it's really effective, it's a great platform, because it gets that word out there a bit more'. The extent to which Charley masters uniquely tactical use of social media that are not directed by the social media corporations design, is in some ways immaterial. By overtly adopting the uses of certain platforms and working within these strategies, her interaction becomes tactical, because she repurposes these strategies to draw traffic toward her own professional work and commercialized socio-political intent.

The ways that Paige, Abigail, Olivia and Charley in this section individually manage their imagery online, and indeed Shona in the previous section (although her overall use of digital social media spoke to a very specific fear for personal safety, and privacy), all speak to tactical use of digital social media use for their own purposes. In this way, they share a commonality with the other participants, Erjan, Tom and Fahad, who do likewise. However, it is important to distinguish what their particular concerns over their self-imagery tells us about their experiences of digital social media as a gendered space. Paige describes a protective, pre-empting of what images of her female friends should and should not go online, drawing an overt distinction between 'the best stuff' and 'stuff that's between us'. Arguably, this tells us that there is a recognised and gendered pressure for young women to present themselves in a certain way online, but this also tells us about a gendered solidarity and ways that her socio-politics informs her care for her interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Abigail describes instances of gendered misogynistic bullying, and her own gendered solidarity with the young women experiencing this. Olivia makes a clear decision that 'I don't really' put images up online, and the intimate family and friends photos she shared with me in our interview 'I wouldn't put them up anywhere', because 'it's just not worth it'. Again, this indicates a sense of foreboding, likely informed by her stated feminism, about what can happen when images

are shared and misused. Charley uses digital social media in an overtly tactical way, and for her own commercialized reasons. We know from her previous narratives that she does not agree with her cousin's images being shared online for likes (Chapter Five), and we can infer that it is important to her, socio-politically, to 'decide who follows you' 'decide who sees your picture'. We can see the young women's tactical actions as socio-political, and their decisions are influenced by their gender and how they know their gendered imagery can be mis-perceived online.

7.5 Conclusion

Chapter Seven examines how participants have described themselves as carrying out a purposeful tailoring of their identities and interaction on different digital social media platforms for different aspects of their lives. Research suggests young people have a sense of, but not a precise understanding of, how data mining works and who is using their personal information (Pybus, Coté and Blanke, 2015), and this has been a consistent theme of this chapter. The participants narratives suggest an active disaggregation of personal information to inform some levels of control about how they are used by the strategies of the producers of culture. This also represents a tactical contribution to creating culture on their own terms. They disaggregated their personal information and used digital social media platforms in ways that supported their social interaction, but were not necessarily consistent with the straightforward intentions of the producers.

Early on, as digital technologies were being adapted in industrialised countries, digital technologies and their possibilities were seen as a key means for governments to address issues of social exclusion (Selwyn, 2002). However, the data suggests that in fact there are problematic issues of exclusion that have implications for the formation of the participants' socio-politics. The analysis

suggests that in different ways the participants self-exclude, or by dint of aspects of their

intersectional identities, *are* excluded from equal participation in digital technology.

My research suggests there are emergent tactics observable in the participants' behaviour as they

negotiate control over their identity, privacy, and relationships. Viewed more broadly, the potential

for young people to use unpredictability as self-protection tactics in their digital social media use,

e.g., boycotting, mass engagement or disengagement with online resources, and 'cancelling' online

of brands or celebrities with questionable views (Barraza, 2021), can be seen as ways to regain some

control over their online identity and consumer power. The self-excluding can be read tactically,

against a wider context of experiences within their relationships with family and friendships,

employment, and wider networks.

De Certeau's conceptualisation of the duality of space (1984: 92) helps to understand the ways in

which the participants are actively managing their identities in both virtual and physical spaces.

They make deliberate socio-political choices to disengage with debate online and therefore retain a

sense of privacy over their views, despite making choices to demonstrate active resistances, based

on their socio-politics, in their physical worlds. In both spaces, this creates moments of socio-

political autonomy – they choose to protect their privacy online, reducing the risk of misuse of their

data, and choose tactical moments to enact their socio-politics in the physical world. However, the

narratives shared for this study indicate tangible inequality of access and discernible issues of

misrecognition online, related to age, dis/ability, gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality. In

terms of digital social media's relevance as a positive component of socio-political identity, perhaps

the problem needs to be framed with the need for participatory parity (Fraser, 2007: 20). It is hoped

the chapter indicates the importance of understanding young people's relationship with digital social

media as complex, problematizing its potential for divisiveness as well as empowerment, and

exploring how tactical behaviour can try to resist these experiences of exclusion.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter draws the research to a close, reflecting on the project as a whole, including substantive contributions to knowledge, limitations, suggestions for future research, implications for policy and practice, and some reflections on the starkly different context of the UK post-Brexit and the global Covid-19 pandemic, amongst other societal changes. The findings from the study suggest there are possibilities for understanding young people's socio-politics better by understanding the intricacy of young people's inter-relationships between the domestic sphere to the economic (work) and political spheres (Fraser, 2009), and the ways their tactical interplay between these informs their socio-politics (de Certeau, 1984).

Tethering the meaning of the socio-political to a range of experiences in their everyday lives helps to see the connections between them, and the way they impact on each other in terms of building a layered sense of socio-politics. Understanding the participants' relationships as a site for socio-political (in)security also connects the individual aspirations with the communal discourses (Hopkins, Botterill and Sanghera: 2018) of intimacy and heritage. Taking it further to understand how the relationships might leverage support and a sense of identity in spaces such as the workplace and on digital social media centres the importance of allowing young people to reveal socio-politics in relation to the issues they feel take precedence in their lives. By creating a methodology which embraced the 'messiness' of social life (Law, 2004), and facilitated the participants to (broadly) take the lead on the subjects they felt to be significant, the study has

revealed some inter-connections between areas of young people's lives where connections about socio-politics can be missed by focusing on specific themes in silo.

Presenting the embodied nature of young people's politicisation exposes the significance of the intersectionality of their age, ethnicity, gender and class. It renders visible the social structures of inequality, and illuminates the particularities of the "shifts in the boundaries between "political" "economic" and "domestic" spheres of life" (Fraser, 1989: 292), as experienced by younger adults. Understanding their experiences as situated in everyday life exposes their views on the structures of power and social control that attempt to dictate ways in which their 'needs' can be defined. The examples of misrecognition inherent in the participants' stories show their social status as young people can leave them open to heightened "patterns of disrespect and disesteem institutionalised, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, public education, and / or the social practices and group mores that structure everyday interaction" (Fraser, 1998: 25-26). Seen through a Certeaudian frame of tactics, I have shown how socio-political tactics may not fit within the narrow margins of popular discourse about mainstream politics, but nonetheless may demonstrate a resistance. Equally, I have demonstrated that there are spaces where resistance feels difficult for the participants. Reading the data through the theories of Fraser and de Certeau allowed space for understanding how the participants felt they were both in control of, and subordinated by, power struggles in their daily lives. It highlighted the origins of oppression and the opportunities for resistance in their stories, acknowledged intersecting categories and still gave insights into the wider meaning of the 'political'.

I argue that the application of theory in my work has advanced conceptualisations of youth socio-politics by demonstrating how young people's lived experiences interconnect with their socio-

political understanding and action, and must be understood relationally. The young people in the study leveraged support to enact agency, at times sublimated their socio-politics to tactically survive institutional repression, and through shaping some autonomous practices on digital social media protected their privacy and identity – making tactical choices about how they connected with (and made connections between) their macro and micro worlds. The following discussion examines the key findings in relation to my research questions and considers how substantive contributions from the study can help to move the academic discourse on young people's socio-politics forward. I also reflect, in my limitations section, on the challenges I experienced whilst conducting my research as I balanced reflexivity, practicality and centring my participants' narratives at the heart of my research.

8.2.1 Contextualising contributions to knowledge

The overarching aim of the research was to explore how young people's socio-politics are connected to their own life worlds and rooted in their narratives. Reviewing the literature indicated the extent to which, socio-historically, political agendas have dictated the way young people's politics are framed and understood. The study aimed to show that examining young people's socio-politics in their words would expose the disjunct between media and governance discourses on young people's politics, and the evidence emerging from lived experience research. Over-simplification of young people's socio-politics is indicative of a lack of knowledge, and not evidence of simplicity.

As I went into the research, I defined socio-politics as comprising the connection between social and political participation. Coming out of the process of the PhD, I feel my definition of socio-politics has deepened and been defined in response to what I have learned from the participants.

They made connections between social issues, people they cared about and who cared for them, digital social media and institutional experiences, and importantly they made the choices to present these experiences to me on terms they were able to co-define. I now see youth socio-politics as a term which allows space for the breadth of these experiences to be included, without being held against an external measure of political participation. This built on the evidence from previous scholars whose studies had informed mine, who resisted simplistic understandings of complex socio-politics (Phoenix et al., 2017), and focused on "opening up spaces" (Sarre and Moran-Ellis, 2014).

The commonalities of social issues that took precedence in the lives of these young people emerged as three overarching foci through which to explore eight participants' unique narratives and socio-political responses. These became relationships with those they cared about, experiences of negotiating socio-politics through their workplaces, employment status and formal relationships, and the implications of digital social media and their concerns for privacy and what this revealed about their socio-politics. These issues being at the fore of the participants' minds connects with previous literature referenced in Chapter Two, that young people are making socio-political sense of the impact of constructed social inter-dependency upon their care relationships and networks (Colombo and Rebughini, 2020). Their increased likelihood of being in contingent employment, and tendency to maintain social dynamics through digital social media interaction (Osgerby, 2020), means they refract pressures throughout the day through communication with loved ones, exchanging care and support. The following summations set out the ways my findings contribute substantive knowledge, including methodological and theoretical contributions, in response to the research questions.

8.2.2 Substantive contribution 1: Intimate relationships and socio-politics

A benefit of the methodology I used was the opportunities for the participants to contribute talk by introducing me to familiar things in their lives- on their own terms. This responded directly to calls for "temporally, spatially and relationally-sensitive" explorations to contribute to the vocabulary of youth socio-politics. It became evident during my data collection that the participants did not distinguish heavily between family and friends when it came to their understandings of 'family' and significant relationships. The participants were not asked directly to talk about their relationships, yet when they brought in photos as a way in to our conversations, the photos all contained at least one image of family members, and / or friends. The connections they described between family and wider (almost kin) relationships, conceptualised as being 'like' family if not biological relationships, were of interest as paradoxical to the kind of idealised family conceptualised by neoliberal perspectives (Thelen and Alber, 2018: 157). These relationships centralised care exchanges, and gave insights into the "diverse caring practices" (Bartos, 2018: 66) of young people and how these shape their orientation toward socio-politics. The emphasis on a wider network of close relationships is not surprising given the literature discussed in Chapters One and Three, which shows the centrality of relationships in quotidian lives (Jamieson, 2012; Nilsen and Brannen, 2014; Wilson, 2018; Cooper, 2019; Furlong, 2015; Halls, 2019; Boddy, 2019; Edwards and Weller, 2014). Nonetheless, it is important that the participants foregrounded the significance of intimate relationships themselves on their own terms, in *direct relation* to their socio-politics. Given the explicit framing of the research for participants as focused on everyday socio-politics, the emphasis on significant people in their lives and how these care relationships helped to inform their socio-politics is striking. It suggests the benefit of methods foregrounding complexity is what they allow us to understand that other approaches do not reveal.

- In a historical period where division and over-simplified binaries shaped over-arching public political discourses, what social issues take precedence in the everyday lives of young people?

The choice of research methods enabled understandings of family relationships to move beyond the immediate parental/ sibling relationship to include very close friends. Analysis of the home, family and friendships presents them as domestic sites of geopolitics, impacting on and co-constituting emotional and political life (Brickell, 2012; Pain, 2009), and these relationships and the socio-politics gleaned from and within them clearly took precedence in the lives of these young participants. This is important because it supports the concept that at the particular stage in life the participants were at, they had amplified reliance on a family of their own making – comprising biological and personal relationships – which they drew on in order to tactically navigate experiences in the workplace, in their personal lives, and daily situations which piqued their socio-political thinking. The emphasis placed on friendships also connects with research asserting that spaces of sociality are increasingly important in creating both a sense of social belonging and a site for peer-to-peer politicization for young people (Pfaff, 2009). Although the participants did not allude to specific examples of overtly political conversations with their friends, the intimacies they portrayed suggested that the significance of friendship and a sense of belonging contributed to how they processed wider challenges to their agency. Significantly, the wider resonance (Mason, 2017) of the research also demonstrates how marginalization and a lack of feeling of belonging, or unequal access to resources, can impact on reducing young people's sense of project for the future. Through my research analysis I demonstrate how, for the participants affected by additional intersectional

factors such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality or disability, their conceptualization of their future lives were mediated by a clear sense of where they were excluded from. In some cases, unable to envision a clear route through for their own young lives, the projections of future were extended instead to future children, for whom they hoped societal structures would change significantly enough to offer them greater hope.

The young adults' decision to bring their relationships into the fore from the outset centred care and intimacy, revealing that socio-politics mattered most when they, or those they cared about, were connected to socio-political discourses. Analysis of these relationships – some intimate, some challenging – revealed the complex web of social activity that became sites for understanding the socio-political world the participants experienced.

The participants explicitly incorporate the need for care in their intimate relationships, in order to support their access to both resources and mental health wellbeing. Viewing this needs-talk through the frame of Fraser's "complex and intersectional analysis of claims-making strategies" (Fraser and Naples, 2004: 1104) allows us to understand young people's potentially heightened social marginalisation and experiences of economic precarity, as they fight for recognition of their identity facets and a fair redistribution of economic resources. The participants' sense of self impacted upon, and was impacted by, their socio-political relationships with family and friends. They brought aspects of new thinking back into, and through, the personal sphere in order to challenge and understand both their micro and macro worlds better.

- How can locating the study in the context of everyday lives help to better understand the ways in which young people's micro worlds inform their socio-politics?

- How does the experience of these young adults as a group help us to understand ways youth can be a specific site for social marginalization?

The analyses take forward ways the participants' micro-worlds inform their socio-politics, and how youth can be understood as a site for social marginalisation through examples of why and how social issues felt important to the participants, what aspects of their intimate relationships seemed to impact on these, and how taken together this interlocking relationship between their age, their intimates and their sense of agency in their worlds can tell us how factors can combine to marginalise young people. The analysis of the literature is amplified by the data which challenges any delineation between micro and macro worlds as being a clean boundary. This ratifies points laid out in the introduction, by demonstrating how the participants were actively and tactically combining elements of both worlds – connecting experiences of friends with how they would approach difficulty in the workplace for example, or negotiating intimate relationships privately by scattering their identity through several different digital social media communication platforms. 'Tactical moments' (de Certeau, 1984) thus emerged in part because of, or with the encouragement of, close relationships. These relationships; some intimate, some challenging; are proxies for understanding the complex social world. This combination informed their decision making, their allegiances, their socio-political participation and their meaning making within their worlds.

Chapter Five suggests connectedness with others they cared about had an important role in how the participants understood socio-politics. These are themes explored by Fraser, and I draw here particularly on her work on the crisis of care, which demonstrates the heightened pressures on women throughout socio-history to take up the slack of care work. The analyses demonstrate,

through the narratives of some of the participants, that these roles continue to be taken forward – and importantly demonstrate direct connections between their perceptions of these roles and their socio-politics. The research allows us to understand the ways young people connect family, friends, work and responsibility, and at times make choices to de-emphasise or suppress elements of these in order to maintain their sense of their personal socio-politics. Fraser's theories on recognition/ redistribution anchor the ways misrecognition can amplify economic injustice for young people and vice versa, and the primary and co-original nature of these.

Drawing in considerations of care, care work and the unrecognised labour that facilitates the capitalist system, helps to pinpoint ways this system continues to penalise young people by dint of their age and life stage. We can see that these converging connections and pressures sometimes force an acquiescence that they recognise to be structural and unfair, and that sharpens their understanding of socio-politics, either through resignation or inner defiance. Fraser's 'Talking about needs' (1989), discussed in Chapter Two and referenced in the data analyses, describes the way people make or contest political claims for resource allocation. The analyses suggest that the boundaries between 'domestic', 'economic' and 'political' spheres have shifted for young people, influenced by social control and power that metes out fewer resources yet permeates many areas of their lives. For example, it becomes a family issue when the government's resource allocation for disabilities threatens to hamper a young person's independence, and the boundaries between these spheres are obscured – demonstrating that social marginalisation is potentially increased the less agency and support you have within each sphere.

8.2.3 Substantive contribution 2: Negotiating socio-politics in the workplace

The structural factors that impacted on the participants' experiences where evident from the ways they shared both seen, and unseen, mechanisms that affected their lives. Research calling for greater understanding of youth political participation explored against macro-world factors, suggests that this needs to be understood contextually and relationally within everyday lives. This study contributes to this by showing how participants made sense of the impact of these mechanisms in their daily structures. They drew on the support of loved ones and made socio-political connections about social structures and their relationship to these, recognising the mechanism of 'advantage' in our institutions (Huxham, 1996). The constraints of social structures, agency, choices and understandings, showed how these relationships impacted their socio-political behaviour and thinking across worlds.

- In a historical period where division and over-simplified binaries shaped over-arching public political discourses, what social issues take precedence in the everyday lives of young people?
- How can locating the study in the context of everyday lives help to better understand the ways in which young people's micro worlds inform their socio-politics?

I discussed the work of Furlong (1992, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) and Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011), Nilsen and Brannen (2014) and Boddy, Bakketeig and Østergaard (2020), and the need to both challenge assumptions of problem-focused narratives and precarity in youth and understand the particular experiences of growing up and entering the workplace at a time of increased likelihood of insecure employment. The data suggests that the participants secured support and survival in institutional settings by drawing on their close

interpersonal relationships, constructing stories of hope, and masking aspects of their socio-political and / or intersectional identity in heteronormative spaces which emphasized hierarchy.

The primary analytical claim from the data shared about the workplace is that the processes of becoming socio-political are grounded in the agency, individual experience, decision making and social actions that are solidified by institutional experiences that block their agency. The data explored this claim through analysis of the embodied and situated nature of the socio-political in the workplace, or in relation to their concepts about employment, and the ways in which socio-political talk and expression necessarily shifted. The data suggested that socio-politics can be used as a tactical tool in some encounters, for example in justifying suitability for a position through experience and socio-politics of care, or negotiating agency by suppressing information about socio-political activism to retain a position and 'go under the radar'. It also revealed that institutions can reinforce socio-politics around gender, ethnicity and disability and the often heteronormative spaces that young people encounter in their early careers can harden an inner sense of justice and injustice.

The data showed that in moments of precarity, unemployment or subordination due to hierarchy, some of the participants tactically sublimated aspects of their socio-politics and navigated their true feelings and agency through connections with friends, often through message communication on digital social media. This responds to calls for deeper understanding of the new enactments of politicisation and agency in young people's micro-worlds, as their lives are impacted by deepening financial and societal inequality. This evidence further justifies the finding that socio-politics amongst young people is relational – incorporating institutional experiences, interpersonal relationships and connections to the macro world, but importantly prompting socio-political resistances when beliefs about the macro-world clash with unjust, subordinating treatment in their

institutional micro-worlds. By understanding the range of their everyday experiences through their narratives, we can see that socio-politics are negotiated – both overtly and implicitly – in an intricate web of their relationships, institutional experiences, and digital lives, as they resource themselves with agency and balance their constructed social dependency (Colombo and Rebughini, 2020).

- How does the experience of these young adults as a group help us to understand ways youth can be a specific site for social marginalization?

Part of the aim of this study was to understand sites for young people's potential experiences of social marginalisation, and we can understand the workplace and the formal relationships it often induces as representing a connection between the macro and the micro world. The narratives demonstrate the personal spaces and socio-politics which are clearly significant to the participants. The participants' narratives about their experiences in the workplace and the significance of their interpersonal relationships in mediating difficulties suggest a desire and need for recognition of aspects of their identities with their concomitant desire and need for a fairer redistribution of resources and opportunities. As we read these needs for recognition through the frame of tactics, we can see these felt resistances are often hidden. The precarity and sense of misrecognition that seems to induce this supports Fraser's (2003) argument that issues of distribution and recognition interpenetrate, and must not be viewed distinctly and in isolation. The participants' narratives suggest that institutional marginalisation can be further amplified by intersectionality with ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation and other marginalised identities that are "discriminated against in the labour market [whilst simultaneously] patterns of cultural value privilege some traits (…) [such that they] are constructed as deficient and inferior others who cannot be full members of society" (Fraser, 2003: 23).

The data suggests that the participants faced a range of marginalising experiences in different settings, and the workplace demonstrated an amplification of any vulnerability caused by aspects of their intersectional identity, or their personally held socio-politics. If we take the idea that "the best need interpretations are those that do not disadvantage some groups of people vis-à-vis others." (Fraser, 1989: 313), we can see how this is particularly highlighted by the experiences of these participants – especially when contrasting aspects of their intersectional identities give them access to contrasting support. This heightened their sense of what defined their socio-politics as they saw the needs of themselves and those around them, more widely in society, pitted against each other. In various ways, the participants felt the need to sublimate aspects of their socio-politics in order to blend into institutional situations. When they did not sublimate their personal socio-politics, some of the narratives relayed experiences of being met with aggression and isolation. These narratives of subordination, negotiation and brokered agency within institutions correspond, and add detail, to the empirical picture painted by Sloam and Henn's (2019a) evaluation of changing youth political behaviour, which presented potential reasons for the frustration with mainstream democratic politics.

At the end of Chapter Five, I mentioned the possibilities of Fraser's Universal Caregiver model (1994) as one possible alternative to the current institutional set-up which begins to marginalise young women along gender lines as they progress in their working lives. Fraser sketches this model for gender equity (1994: 596), proposing that a model in which men become more like women, that incentivises the adaptation of life patterns that balance both work and caregiving, could deconstruct gender norms and activities "effectively dismantling the gendered opposition between breadwinning and caregiving" (1994: 611). There have been objections that this model would overburden

employers. However, I argue that based on this small sample's experiences of marginalisation, implementing support in the workplace that moves away from androcentrism and toward gender equity could build confidence, loyalty, creativity and enhance a multitude of skills that would enhance these young participants already existent caregiving strengths and professional capabilities. The data showed that the participants drew on multitudinous complex experiences, social relationships, and carescapes to inform their socio-politics. The personal strengths and skills gained from these negotiations, currently refracted and subdued in certain spatialities through fear of derision at work, or invasion of privacy online, would have the potential to contribute significantly to social and institutional change, if harnessed. This could only be for the greater good. This study suggests a better understanding of the role of institutions in impacting on young people's socio-politics, and the ways they transfer these experiences into their long-term beliefs about what they can expect from institutions and political participation, could be key to grasping the attraction to alternative ways to actualise their socio-politics.

8.2.4 Substantive contribution 3: Digital social media interaction and resistant socio-politics

Some of the participants' narratives about digital social media described resistant and tactical behaviour, and expressions of connection or disconnection practices (Gangneux, 2019). The analysis examined ways in which the participants practiced control over their socio-political identity in their social media interactions – either implicitly or explicitly. The analysis suggests that the young people who took part in this study had concerns for privacy and surveillance which were informed by their socio-politics, and impacted upon their tactical behaviour online. Their narratives suggested bounded and arguably confined relationships within social media, and ways in which these connected with their overall decision-making and sense-making in relation to socio-politics.

Against this context, we see that whilst digital social media platforms have the overt control as facilitators of mass participation, young people have on their side the unpredictability of 'tactics' and the complexity of self-identity enacted in a moment of resistance means the hegemonic site of digital social media remains both contested and contestable.

- In a historical period where division and over-simplified binaries shaped over-arching public political discourses, what social issues take precedence in the everyday lives of young people?

- How can locating the study in the context of everyday lives help to better understand the ways in which young people's micro worlds inform their socio-politics?

This thesis has reflected on the ways democratic political institutions may be connecting less clearly with young people's socio-politics. Some argue that transnational social movements (often heavily populated with younger people) have enabled a global level 'public of publics' (Bohman, 2007; Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol and Qiu, 2009), and these are now generally mobilized online. However, Fraser challenges the legitimacy of a transnational public sphere that cannot be equally accessed. This study shows different ways young people may experience unequal access, and try to mediate these inequalities. Responding, in part, to Cingolani's (2014) call for greater understanding of the emancipatory potential of understanding young people's politics in everyday contexts I present the findings of this study to suggest that there are spaces for emancipation and tactical revolt through the convergence of multitudinous temporal and spatial relationships in young people's experiences, which nonetheless appear fragmentary through the data collected about their digital behaviour. It can be said that the participants' interactions with digital social media, which is arguably a transnational communication tool, created experiences that shaped their socio-politics.

This study ratifies Fraser's challenge and evidences issues of unequal access. The study also shows young people make associations between global social media companies and institutional experience, and therefore mediate their online identities. These mediations of personal identity, shared through the participants' narratives, seem to create obstacles to their ability to communicate openly and thus incorporate their digital lives with their everyday socio-political lives. At times digital social media can create opportunities for young people's political expression (Penney, 2020), social cohesion and connections with cultural diversity (Harris and Johns, 2021) and at other times it can be highly problematic, with internet use contributing to risks of privacy invasion, surveillance, social isolation, solicitation, harassment and exposure to problematic content (boyd, 2008; Prievara, Piko and Luszczynska, 2019). The analysis suggests that the participants have internalized the need to moderate and mediate their identities and socio-politics online, so that rather than being the space they freely express themselves, digital social media has become the space that contributes to their sense of the world as comprising institutional spaces which must be managed tactically.

- How does the experience of these young adults as a group help us to understand ways youth can be a specific site for social marginalization?

The narratives were informed by the ways the participants experienced social marginalisation (and, arguably, empowerment) through experiences of omittance or exclusion from their interactions online. They also indicate tangible inequality of access and discernible issues of misrecognition, related to age, dis/ability, gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality. A dilemma for strategic producers is how to reconcile 'difference' with the kind of universalism interaction with digital social media can demand, in a way that does not continue to exclude marginalised groups.

The power of the instability and impermanency of tactics (de Certeau, 1984), means that the one weakness of strategies producing digital social media, is the significance and usage of it amongst young people unpredictably changes. The data shows that the participants' tactical behaviour on digital social media was amplified by the threat of invasion of privacy and surveillance. Digital social media companies make their money by attracting and retaining a high number of users, and mimic tactics in order to retain relevancy by allowing their users to direct and create content. However, the data suggests the impact of these mimicked tactics to create engagement are weakened when the content that young people interact with online is mediated through their personal socio-politics – the data highlighted cases where the participants mediated their use due to clashes with their personal socio-politics on the representation of women in images online, the presentation of divisive politics, their rights to disability activism, and importantly their concerns for personal privacy. I argue that the increasing reticence to overshare amongst young adults (Gangneux, 2019) is a socio-politically motivated choice which creates an opacity of their (for some, already structurally marginalised) intersectional identities that works in their favour.

As de Certeau suggests, the victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (de Certeau, 1984: xix), are visible in their adaptations of everyday actions in relation to powerful institutions. These adaptations can create some spaces of ownership over digital space (De Ridder, 2015). However, the dominance of heteronormative ideals, the pressure on maintaining intimacies and simultaneously guarding privacy impacts upon meaningful choice and autonomy. Considerations for future research and practice centre on ethico-political issues of inclusion, and on whose values inclusivity should be designed (Light, 2011; Cassidy and Light, 2014). What the analyses in this study suggest is that some young people find a way to navigate their intersectional identities, their intimate relationships and their socio-politics by using their agency to maintain an intimate life,

translating socio-political thinking into action in their physical, everyday lives by dispersing their communications through a number of different platforms for different purposes. Accessibility and inclusion are central to doing this successfully, and the participants' narratives showed that for them this is heavily impacted by socio-economic circumstances, ethnicity, gender, dis/ability and sexuality. Viewing digital social media experiences as an important part of everyday life, in which young people engage tactically as a matter of course, demonstrates the significance of considering online spatialities when researching young people's personal socio-politics.

8.2.5 Substantive contribution 4: Socio-politics and the centrality of care

Collectively, the narratives shared by the participants and theorised through the works of de Certeau (1984, 1997) and Fraser (1987, 1992, 1994, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2016) centralise a key factor present in socio-political formation that is arguably depoliticised in the UK welfare state: Care. The study shows through the narratives that the participants' relationships are central to their lives and take precedence in how they shape socio-political ideas. Care has been demonstrable through stepping in to support vulnerable family members, drawing on intergenerational support for decision-making, ongoing residency in the family home, and the crucial role of personal relationships in managing experiences of social and institutional marginalisation. Importantly, I have seen that they have negotiated social marginalisation, barriers to resources and the precarity of expected transitions by drawing on and investing in these care-oriented relationships, without which their outcomes would have been more precarious and isolating.

This poses important questions about how this care is resourced, who provides it, and what the absence of care might mean for young people who do not feel networked. This empirical study

evidences care's role in young people's sense of socio-politics and wellbeing more generally, and this corresponds with scholars who have focused on the ethics of care (Tronto, 1993), and care as a significant site for political struggle (Hoppania, 2015; 2019). This study, though limited by its sample size, nonetheless suggests that care – how it is received, given and the spaces in which it is needed – has a central role in forming young people's socio-political experiences. The impact of austerity measures and increased economic pressures for young people is not sufficiently recognised by polity. Subsequently, this study suggests young people lean into their carescapes to resource themselves against systemic inequality and power structures. Arguably the negative impacts are 'apoliticised' by ignoring the heavy-lifting role of unpaid care work (Hoppania, 2019: 39). The centrality of care for these young people reflects "our current political and sociotechnical moment [and] sits at the forefront of philosophical questions about who cares, how they do it, and for what reason" (Hobart and Kneese, 2020: 3). Further research and analysis must be done to examine why the burden of / role of care in young people's lives and its interconnected significance in their socio-political identities, is arguably taking the place of external support mechanisms that should be prioritised by governance. This needs particular consideration now, given the acute impact of austerity measures and the Covid-19 pandemic upon young people (Hastings, 2021). A refocus might also give some insights into why young people, who this study shows care and are cared about, feel detached from governance that ignores the centrality of care.

8.2.6 Substantive contribution 5: Connecting the dots of youth socio-political experiences

Finally, reflecting on the substantive contributions presented already, I venture to suggest that an important part of the contribution to future study is to present the sites of young people's

interpersonal, institutional and digital experiences explored in the findings as intertwined and irreducible from one another, foregrounding the messiness (Law, 2004). The significance of this contribution is that the participants were able to foreground the inter-relationships, and thus bring to the fore the issues they felt to be most pertinent to their socio-politics in combination, rather than in silo. This responds to my reflection on the dangers of the silo-isation of young people's experiences: the interpersonal, societal and economic contexts of their everyday lives benefit from being understood relationally. Imposing delineation risks removing impacts of intergenerational interdependence that can impact upon developing socio-politics in relation to intersectional identity (McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies, 2000), redistribution (Cooper, 2017), and wider economic precarities (Shildrick, MacDonald and Webster, 2013).

8.3.1 Limitation 1: Learning how to relinquish control

Central to the thesis was a desire to understand young people's socio-politics from their own life worlds, rooted in their narratives, in order to demonstrate that the disjunct between media and governance discourses on young people's politics and the evidence emerging from lived experience research is indicative of a lack of knowledge, not evidence of simplicity. Importantly, I drew on feminist praxis and theory as a researcher, and wanted to address hierarchical relationships in research settings through my methodology. However, in practice this was uncomfortable, and I had concerns about relinquishing all control over the directionality of the interviews. I used prompt cards at the end of the first interview, worrying that having not framed the interviews in relation to any specific political discourses we might talk about entirely unrelated subjects. In fact, as I have discussed, all subjects are related – this is the nature of everyday life research and socio-politics. I have some regrets about using the prompt cards as I do not think they were necessary to prompt

the broader themes which they featured. The participants did choose words they felt resonated and talk a little more about these, and they did serve a kinaesthetic purpose which broke up the end of the interview, but they did not prompt bounded descriptions in relation to the words and the narrative approach to the interview could have been fully embraced for the entire interview. I do not feel they added much, and I could have relinquished this aspect of directionality as it was unnecessary.

The particulars of my own study aside, I have also reflected on the experiences of other feminist researchers who have talked about the unpredictability of research and the inner struggles around researcher performance and prioritising equality and ethical balance (Swauger, 2011). Arguably, a face-to-face interview posits the researcher as 'expert' and the participant as 'informant' (McGarry, 2016), and I wanted to negate that imbalance as much as possible by foregrounding the participants' ownership in the interview space. However, as I reflect on my own practice in this study from increased research experiences, I feel that I could have left more spaces for delicate moments to open up and relinquished the role of expert more. Arguably, the data suggests another story – that rather than failure, the moments where I asked questions and became a co-constructive part of some aspects of the data created discussions between the participants and I that could not have been predicted. I know this research has contributed greatly to my sense of how to find a better balance in future. I wanted to move into uncomfortable spaces for reflexivity during my reflections for this study, though, and I would not be telling the full story of the research if I did not express that. The purpose of differing forms of reflection, and the place for them, are important experiences that I will continue to take forward and explore beyond the PhD experience.

8.3.2 Limitation 2: Sample heterogeneity

When I began the research study's recruitment phase, I was keen to recruit a heterogenous group of young people. I felt that hearing narratives from a range of intersectional experiences would contribute depth to the research, and I wanted to include the voices of young people who may have been marginalised by an aspect of their identity. To an extent, I did achieve a mixture of voices and experiences, and arguably heterogeneity is not a simple concept, to be read entirely based on people's identity characteristics. For example, study of young people's digital lives has pointed to "pronounced heterogeneity in media life" exhibiting "divergent media lives incommensurable to a generation" (Westlund and Bjur, 2014: 36), and even within an homogenous sample, 'Generation Y's' employment choices and preferences can be hugely heterogenous (Guillot-Soulez and Soulez, 2014).

However, part of the benefit of a PhD is the hindsight it affords to learn from, and the omission of black British voices from my study replicates a wider lack of literature paying sufficient attention to the impact of race and racialisation on young black British people's socio-political experiences, experiences which I know have "a profound impact on black and minority ethnic respondents' conceptions of, and engagement with, the political" (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007: 179). Racially minoritized people are increasingly aware of the risk of being socially constructed as problematic and insular (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2013) in relation to wider discourses around national identity, such as Brexit and Black Lives Matter. At the time of the research, the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of Black Lives Matter in response to the murder of George Floyd were still several years away, but the convergence of these discourses now make it even clearer that an omission of young black voices in research on youth socio-politics must be remedied. I have since contributed to research on

racially minoritized socio-politicisation through my research work at the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, at The University of Manchester. In future I hope to add to the original study by extending the sample to include the experiences of black British participants.

8.3.3 Limitation 3: Co-coding

Although I was unable to plan a further stage of co-coding into the research, I think that co-coding would have supported the young people taking part to take ownership over their own words by creating their own codes and priorities. Unfortunately, there are natural limitations of the length of a PhD and the amount of time realistically that can be spent in the field. Only a week after fieldwork was completed I left for maternity leave, and I knew when I designed my study that it would be unlikely to be less than a full year before I would be able to reconnect with the participants and co-code alongside them. Whilst I have tried to stay as close to what I feel reflects the key themes presented by the participants, this is still limited to being framed by my own interpretation as an adult researcher. In future research, I would like to involve my participants in some aspects of the coding process in order to fully support young people's agency in understanding their socio-politics. Doing so might also identify opportunities to support the participants to build power to enact their socio-politics, as well as share them.

8.4.1 Implications for future research 1: Institutional impacts

This study suggests that we can understand heightened areas of social marginalisation for young people by exploring their everyday experiences over multiple sites. De Certeau thought of social change as being a possibility immanent in the structures of social life, rather than through a rupture

from current structures (McNay, 1996: 77), and de Certeau considered institutions to be fundamental to the self-constitution of the user. Given this, we can see that it is to the benefit of both users and producers for them to learn to work with and around power relations. Scholars in the field of youth studies and exploring the political economy of youth could explore the long-term impacts of experiences of social marginalisation in the workplace, how this contributes to perspectives on civic engagement and socio-politics, and opportunities to enact agency.

Evidence shows that disengagement with the workplace has long-term consequences for young people (Loprest, Spaulding and Nightingale, 2019), and this will inevitably have negative outcomes for society at large, too, already facing increased economic precarity due to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. It is in the wider interests of the whole community for there to be deeper, applied understanding of the complexities of young people's experiences as they pertain to life both inside, and outside, the workplace. This study points to the possibilities of doing collaborative research with young people. The use of narrative methods, or aspects of narrative methods, allow for connections that could complement a wider quantitative study into young people's workplace experiences. Studies exploring everyday experiences of employed, and unemployed, young people to examine both the specific issues that young people centralise as being barriers to work, and the external societal pressures that contribute to feelings of precarity in the workplace, could establish a youth-informed model of good practice in the workplace.

This PhD's findings suggest young people leaned heavily on close relationships at times, in order to feel supported through difficult work experiences yet, worryingly, a recent report says "30.7% of young people were not confident that they had a good personal network and 24.5% were not confident that they had relevant work experience" (Youth Employment UK, 2021: 12). Further

research exploring the relationship between supportive personal relationships and agency in the workplace post-pandemic, could address the potential for wider institutional disengagement. This is especially important given recent research suggesting young people's mental health, wellbeing and sense of isolation are now a huge cause for concern (negative impacts on mental health have increased considerably in response to the lockdowns imposed by the UK government since 2020) (Creswell et al., 2021),

8.4.2 Implications for future research 2: Narrative research, care and 'opening up' the everyday

This study has demonstrated that narrative-influenced research can facilitate participants experiencing aspects of social marginalisation to centralise and shape in interview what they feel to be most important to them, socio-politically. Research shows that categories of risk have expanded as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (McCluskey et al., 2021), and that long-term solutions need to fully engage with the interlinked nature of care, social marginalisation and the significance of systemic support. Further narrative research could contribute to understanding what now stacks up as being of key importance to young people at greater risk of isolation, in the context of political decision-making that has impacted on all of us by challenging what we understand of our freedoms, our social responsibilities and our sense of risk. Centralising the role of care in this focus would add to much-needed literature examining the relationships between the depoliticization of care and increased pressures on society – including the exacerbated effect on young people.

Research suggests that young people have borne the brunt of the more recent social changes and lack of social structures in some aspects of their lives, such as the consequences of exam

cancellations on transitions through education, of lockdowns on seeking economic independence, their social relationships and sense of future pathways (McCluskey et al., 2021). Further narrative social research into how the various dimensions in young people's everyday lives have impacted on each other, but also been mediated or heightened by networked care (or the lack thereof) could illuminate aspects of youth experience that we as scholars might not anticipate. Such research could inform where socio-political agency is, and is not, experienced in these fast-changing changing global circumstances.

8.4.3 Implications for future research 3: Longitudinal perspectives on space, place

Further longitudinal, perhaps interdisciplinary research in both Sociology and Geography could contribute to our understandings of evolving inter-related effects of relationships, space and place on socio-politics. My study suggests that further examination of young people's personal relationships, relationships with institutions and digital social media interaction, and how this relates to their spatial practices and identities over time, could give remarkable insights into socio-political identity in the making. Capturing socio-political, temporal and spatial processes together over a longer period of time would also allow an exploration of how changing social inequalities and privileges are mediated, and impact upon socio-political identity. The findings indicate that the complex dynamics of young people's social lives, including the mobilities associated with a sense of belonging, or necessitated by finding work or negotiating different home spaces (perhaps living with family or friends, or the impacts of relocation for education or work) could open up new possibilities for understanding young people's agency and participation in the socio-political issues of importance to them.

8.5.1 Implications for policy and practice 1: Youth employment policy

The research has highlighted examples of greater pressure for young people to accept unequal working relationships and transgressions that further marginalise them. In this study, workplace marginalisation seemed to impact disproportionately on young women, ethnic minorities and the participant who experienced living with disability. Some of the findings point to a toxic hierarchy and subordinating heteronormativity in the workplace which risks further marginalisation for young people. In 2022, post-Brexit and post-pandemic, the risks of social marginalisation and youth unemployment are heightened by the economic precarity of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. The loss of access to the European Union's support with regards to employment, social affairs and inclusion requires a considered approach to what replaces this, given that in the UK "26.8% of young people have lost a job" due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and "42.1% of young people said their motivation to apply for opportunities had been impacted 'A Lot' or 'A Great Deal'" (Youth Employment UK, 2021: 10).

UK young people no longer have ready access to the benefits of the European Union's resources post-pandemic, including the European Network of Public Employment Services, a stronger evidence base on how to create better access for social protection for young people, and the Action Plan for the Social Economy (European Commission, 2020). In lieu of the benefit of these, and other, resources a comprehensive look at the ways young people in the UK could be supported to thrive in the workplace, particularly examining the barriers they may face on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class status *and* socio-politics could focus attention on what resources young people need to support progress with their employment. Workplace policy initiatives, led by a government focus on deepening insights into the sublimation of young people in the workplace,

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could improve the outcomes for young people experiencing heightened pressures of social marginalisation.

8.5.2 Implications for policy and practice 2: Digital social media- who is included?

We have seen an increase in societal reliance upon digital interaction and, in particular, digital social media since the Covid-19 pandemic. This raises significant questions about what the cost of this may be to young people's mental health and wellbeing, but also – crucially – who might be being left behind. The pressure to connect online since March 2020 as a means of accessing work, education, loved ones, or ongoing information about the changing Covid-19 pandemic and national guidelines, has potentially increased the risks of harm caused by digital social media whilst simultaneously increasing producers' profits without much call for reconsideration of digital policy or toxicity. A recent report from the House of Commons suggests that it is largely 'councils' who have been tasked with bridging the digital divide (Local Government Association, 2021), but this risks depoliticising some of the issues of exclusion that are being raised by my study and others (Williamson, Eynon and Potter, 2020; McKinney, Hall and Lowden, 2021; Bonner-Thompson, 2021).

A recent policy paper (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021) alludes to the risks of digital technology, but also foregrounds "Digital technologies are key to our future prosperity" (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021: 3). The danger of what might be lost in terms of deeper questions of accountability for digital technology producers with these opposing foci are obvious. The Covd-19 pandemic has amplified digital technologies' role in the UK as a necessity, rather than a choice. In the context of Brexit and current government policy's aim to

"drive growth and unlock innovation" (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021: 3) with digital technology, academics and regulators must ensure that the government balances any emphasis on financial opportunity with a responsibility to socially marginalised people, including young people.

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Dear

Thank you very much for considering taking part in my research. Please find enclosed in this pack an Information Sheet that gives you some more details about the research project you may wish to participate in.

This research project promises to be an exciting opportunity for young adults to share their experiences of forming political identity, and becoming engaged in issues around them, that affect their everyday lives and wider experiences.

The Information Sheet will explain what is involved, when it is taking place, what your rights are as a participant, and how I will store information about you. The Consent Form enclosed gives you an opportunity to see what you would be agreeing to, should you wish to participate. I will also bring a Consent Form with me to the first interview.

You are very welcome to contact me at any stage. My contact details are below and on the information sheet, should you have any further questions or queries about the research and your participation. I am more than happy to explain any parts of the research you are unsure about.

I look forward to hearing from you soon

Many thanks,

Jenny Hewitt
Doctoral Researcher

Email: jh544@sussex.ac.uk
Telephone number: 07779 632875

INFORMATION SHEET

Hello! Thank you for considering taking part in my research project. In the next three pages you will find everything you need to know about why I am doing the project, what I'm hoping to find out, what participation involves, any risks and benefits, and what I'm going to do with your information. My contact details are at the end of the information sheet should you have any further questions before deciding to take part in my study.

What is it all about?

I am currently studying for a doctorate in social work at Sussex University. I am interested in better understanding about young adults' political and civic engagement in the context of their everyday lives, and how young people's experiences can help us to understand the changing nature of politics. I am doing a study, which would potentially involve you and a small number of other young adults living in Brighton. There is currently a lack of knowledge about the way young adults become politically aware, and make political choices both in the wider world and in their everyday lives. My aim is to explore the similarities and differences in experiences of a small group of young adults, in order to offer a counter - balance to the wider representations of young adult in the media, which can often seem overly simplistic.

What can I expect, if I agree to take part?

There will be three interviews per participant, and I will be scheduling all interviews with participants over a four month period between September 2017 and end of February 2018. The first one will be in a safe, comfortable and private space, and I can come to meet you at your home, or we can arrange another venue if you would prefer. The second interview will involve us going on a 'move and talk', and you can show me a little of your local area, or an area that you identify with in relation to the research topic. The third will again be in a safe, comfortable and private space, and will involve us looking at your social media feed together before chatting about your thoughts on social media and politics. During the interviews I will ask you some questions about your politics; how you have experienced politics both locally and nationally, and I will also talk to you about your perceptions of the civic, by which I mean your thoughts on things that happen in relation to your city or local area. I am interested in understanding the ways in which your everyday lives are connected to these things.

What will happen to the information you give me?

Over the course of the research, I will make some audio recordings. These will include:

- Audio recordings of our conversations
- Audio recordings of our walking interview around your chosen area / neighbourhood - Written records of my observations of our interactions

The interviews will be taped and then transcribed. I will remove your name and any other real names that you use (e.g. friends, family) when I turn your interviews from sound into text. Any information about another person or your family will be fully anonymised when the interview is transcribed.

The recordings and transcriptions will be stored safely on servers at the University of Sussex, they will be password protected and I will be the only person with the password and able to access the recordings and transcriptions. Sometimes recordings may be encrypted in researchers' password protected laptop. This means that only I will be able to access what you talk to me about, and show me. These recordings will be analysed by myself to find out about the issues that concern and interest you, in relation to the research aims.

Given the possible limitations of confidentiality (I will anonymise all data and protect confidentiality as much as possible, however there is the small risk of identification through details in the information shared through your answers), I will be clarifying and seeking consent iteratively, and throughout the research process. There will be opportunities to check the data through discussion with me, and to remove elements you would rather remain with the researcher and are not revealed in research dissemination.

When would it take place, and for how long?

I am planning to complete all the interviews between September 2017 and February 2018, and will get in touch with each participant to arrange a convenient time for us to meet. The three interviews will take no more than 60 minutes of your time for each one. I will prepare a short report outlining some of my key findings and give all participants an opportunity to comment on the findings before my report is finalised. The final thesis will be submitted to the university; parts of the thesis will be used for publication in scientific journal articles. A final public summary of the project will be sent to all participants – this will outline the significant themes from interviews and give an overview of my findings.

Can I leave the study at any time?

You can change your mind about being involved in the study at any time, and withdraw your participation up until May 2018. You can leave the study with absolutely no consequence to you.

What are the risks or benefits of participating?

Political views can be sensitive and private and you may feel cautious about disclosing them to someone you do not know. I have taken every precaution to ensure that the information you provide me with is

stored securely and treated anonymously and respectfully. It is not my role to judge your political views and I am not approaching this research seeking out 'right' or 'wrong' political views. What I am interested in is understanding how young people's political views come about, the contexts, situations and relationships in which they are formed, and what experiences count as 'political' for young people. The research has been reviewed by the University of Sussex's Social Science Research Ethics Committee and has been deemed safe as described in this information sheet. While you will not benefit personally from taking part in the research I hope that the process of reflecting on and sharing your views with an impartial and non-judgmental observer might be enjoyable and thought provoking.

Limits of confidentiality

If you reveal that you are in serious or immanent risk of harm or of harming others (especially serious criminal activity with consequences for others) I am bound by law to disclose what I know to the relevant authorities.

What happens next?

After thinking about the information in this Information Sheet, if you agree to take part in the study, I will be in touch in the next 2-3 weeks to arrange our first interview date, time and location. I will call you in the interim period in case you have any questions you would like to ask, and you are welcome to contact me on the information provided here.

Before the interview, I will ask you to sign a consent form, to confirm that you agree to take part. A copy is attached for your information - I will bring a copy for you to sign when we meet.
I hope that this gives you an overview of the project. Please do let me know if you have any questions – otherwise I will be in touch soon to arrange a time for us to meet.

My contacts details: jh544@sussex.ac.uk

My supervisors contact details: this study is being supervised by Janet Boddy
J.M.Boddy@sussex.ac.uk Melissa Nolas S.Nolas@sussex.ac.uk

Funder: this study is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number).

Ethics approval number: ER/JH544/2

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CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex study. I have had the study explained to me, and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for my records. I have asked questions which have been answered to my satisfaction.

-     I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to (please tick below):
* Take part in the three interviews, which are as follows; an initial face-to-face interview, a 'walking interview' in my neighbourhood or another meaningful to me locale in Brighton, discussing my social media feed live during an interview
* Allow these interviews to be recorded;
* Allow the researcher to collect basic information about me and my circumstances

2) I understand that I will participate in the study using a fake name (pseudonym) and that most of the time no one will know it is me who said what I have said, or has shown what I have shown.

3) I understand that the researcher will work with me to make sure that I am comfortable and happy with anything that is made public about me and my personal information (e.g. name and contact details) will never be connected to what I say and shown the researcher.

4) I understand that anything I tell the researcher is confidential unless I reveal that I am in serious or immanent risk of harm or of harming others; the researcher is then obliged to disclose what they know (especially serious criminal activity with consequences for others) to the relevant authorities.

5) I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can choose to withdraw from the study at any time without being punished or disadvantaged in any way.

6) I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act, 1998, and relevant, current EU legislation.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Appendix 4: Extracts from Transcripts

<u>Extracts from interview with Fahad:</u>

Fahad: Yes, definitely. Do you want me to give you like--?

Me: Do you see people noticing that they're being treated differently?

Fahad: There was this one, an ██████ man came in and one of my colleagues was serving him. She's █ years old, she's-- I don't think she's from ████████ I think she's from ████████ but she's moved down here and yes. So, she served this customer, sorry after you. She served this customer and he asked her if she had any, if she had any tissue paper and to which she kind of looked at him and she was like, she was trying to kind of do sign language in a way and it was kind of, I don't know if you know what I mean because English isn't someone's kind of-- because there's that barriers of an accent it's kind of automatically like not seeing them as the same level as you. Like thinking that you're more intelligent if you know what I mean like. So, he asked for tissue paper and she thought he was asking for pepper so she started shouting at him like, "We don't have peppers, like, go." Like kind of stuff and then so I quickly went and I was like because I think also because I've grown up in ████████] so I'm used to people speaking English with a strong accent. So, I was you know, I went up to him and I was like we don't have any tissue paper but let me get you some kind of thing and yes.

(…)

But yes, then that got me thinking did I, because of the space that I was in growing up like I said like, being used to because a lot of people speak English in ██████ and yes, being used to kind of

someone's accent and kind of just thinking if I've been in this space as in I've grown up here with just a British identity like, would I have acted kind of differently and stuff.

Me: Yes, yes. I mean how does it make you feel in a way seeing that?

Fahad: It made me want to look at both sides but I do kind of yes, because the more you kind of see subtle things like that happening but on the internet there's so, do you know what I mean, on the internet it's literally like, "You're a racist, you're this, you're that." And but it, like oh we're just walking towards the ████.

Me: Yes, I think that's so interesting, that you're talking about space that's real and then, I don't know how you describe the internet. It's real but it's not--

Fahad: --That is, yes oh my god that is such a good point yes exactly. I think that's another thing that, like today we came to ██████████ and we met up two days ago to meet up at ███████ ██ but it does feel that I haven't been to like██████████ and like other spaces even though I've been living here the whole time. And, yes, I do feel that I personally like don't feel as engrossed in my space when I am in a virtual space.

Me: Yes, yes, yes. Do you think that's something that might affect young people in a different way from people from people different generations? How they view maybe like ownership of space?

Fahad: Yes. I think, sorry, I'm just, I'm trying to think how to like say it within the context of--

Me: -- Say whatever you like.

Fahad: Yes, it's definitely going to have an impact because there's so much information that, I think personally it's a positive and a negative because there are so many opinions online and then when there's a young mind online where the mind is still forming, where you're still forming who you are and you go online and you see a video and, I don't know you like read the comments and kind of thing like. Because like when I go into a virtual space online, like I already know, because of my age and because I didn't start using social media until I was 16, 17 I kind of was like there with my opinions. Do you mean, you mean like younger people like?

Me: No, anything, everything you're saying is interesting.

Fahad: Yes.

Me: And you moved when you were about █.

Shona: Yes.

Me: Right, which is very, tricky time for most people -

Shona: Well actually, no we moved when we were █ because he died in ███████ ɪ, my birthday's in ███████ ɪ. So.

Me: Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Tell me more sorry.

Shona: We lived up ███████████████████████████ way. Cause he used to take me to the park, to see the ducks. He was in [unclear 00:05:16] once or twice a week, he didn't go out much because he was working because he worked as a ████████████████ street cleaner. He used to go round with his ████████████████████████████. My favourite memories of him was when it was like really, really windy and it was Autumn and sometimes he was it really nice and warm and he was clearing up leaves, he was putting them into piles. It was windy, the leaves would go everywhere and he'd be like, "Oh for god's sake." And then like if it was nice and warm when he was clearing up the leaves, the kids would get in and do that and kind of be like, "Get out of it you silly little toft."

Me: What a lovely memory.

Shona: Yes he used to do that. I remember when he used to do ▮▮▮▮▮ now I used to help my grandad do the gardening at nana's garden so when he passed away, I used to be like I tried to do gardening to help my nan but I didn't really like it because I missed him because it just brought back -

Me: - Happy memories?

Shona: Happy memories yes, because I just really missed it. So now my nan's got a new gardener and I did gardening with him sometimes when I see him. It's like every, not every ▮▮▮▮▮ about a few times a month or once a month or something if I'm there and he tends to be there. I help do the gardening and he's teaching me about all these different leaves and grass and their Latin names. I still can't remember them but he teached me about different types of weeds like grandad used to do. And the first time when I did gardening with him, my nan got really upset because it showed that bond I had with my grandad. And I had that bond with the other gardener so we were like, I was helping like trim bushes and plants. Plant flowers and weeding and yes it was really nice. Quite happy as well.

Me: What a lovely memory. And what a nice thing you then got to [unclear 00:07:08] isn't he because you learn about all that stuff.

Shona: Mm.

Me: So that's you and him, and that's you when you're quite little by the looks of things.

Shona: Yes, I think I was about three, two, three, four.

<u>Interview 1- Face-to-face topic guide</u>

Experiential exploration of the terrain of 'personal life'

'The turn to narrative inquiry shifts the role of the researcher from being a knowledge-privileged investigator to a reflective passive participant

during the storytelling process'.

1) Explanation of consent terms, and the aims of this interview

This interview is about, in some ways, the story of your life. As a social scientist, I'm interested in hearing your story, as you remember it, and your thoughts, as you want to express them.

Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential between us.

Do you have any questions?

2) Photo elicitation:

Participants, prior to interview, have chosen three photos, that loosely:

Represent themselves

Represent their local area (what is their local area?)

Represent their everyday life

Or photographs that don't necessarily fit that theme, but that they would like to share.

Let's start with the photos you've chosen…

- Why did you choose this photo?
- What happened here?
- Can you tell me a little more?
- + Any specific questions that arise in relation to photographs

Thank you,

3) Will you tell me a bit about your story now?

[STORY EXPECTED TO BE MAJORITY OF INTERVIEW]

Words: Words to elicit discussion IF this has not already come up: Family / Gender /

Ethnicity / Nationality/ Values / Society / Everyday Life / Identity

I'm going to just put down some words on the table, and we can perhaps go through them one by one. You can choose whichever one you prefer first, and then tell me a little bit about what you think about this word, and then what it means to you in relation to your own life:

4) Physical terrain and individual ideas about space

Finally, I just wanted to put down a map of ██████ on the table. In the next interview we're going to be doing a walking interview, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about where you'd like us to go?

5) Checking in

Lastly,

What has this interview, here today, has been like for you.

What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview?

How do you think this interview has affected you?

Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Interview 2: Walking Interview Topic Guide

Exploring public place and everyday life

Themes:
- o **Space and 'place'**
- o **Temporality and place**
- o **Technology and mediation of time and space**
- o **Exclusions / Inclusions within spaces**

I'm going to use the words 'space' and 'place', to mean not just specific sites of geography but areas that in your mind feel defined and hold meaning for you. I may also use the words 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', and by this I literally mean places where people may feel included or excluded. If I use the word 'socio-political', I am talking about socio-political in terms of where and how you view issues of importance in your life.

Identity and space / place:

- What can the 'place' and 'space' they have chosen to show me / take me to, tell me about their sense of their own identity? Do they feel that they have different aspects of identities in different places?

- Can they tell me a bit about what kind of people they imagine feel 'included' in the spaces they feel 'excluded', or can they imagine types of people who may feel 'excluded' from the area they have chosen to show me, if that feels applicable?

- How does the mobility of technology (on phones, etc.) shape their experiences of the spaces they inhabit, does being connected to social media and connected generally, impact on their transition into new cultural spaces?

- Is identity defined by place, or by experiences, or something else entirely?

- Taking temporality, time, into the equation – have their perceptions changed over time, and if so how / why?

- how does the 'socio-political' show itself in everyday life and their environment?
- When it comes to making socio-political decisions, how does their sense of 'space' and 'place', and their experiences in these 'spaces' and 'places' impact on decision making? Taken on a wider level, how does it affect this?

Interview 3 – Social Media Topic Guide

Exploring private space and social media interaction – reconfiguring of private and public space, how does social media 'mediate' this?

Pre-interview tasks for Participants:

All participants have been asked to save, or screen shot, 4/5 articles or 'posts' from social media platforms they interact with, that catch their eye. I have asked that they don't overthink this too much, but that they are prepared to chat about it when we meet.

I have asked participants to think about:

- o What they would point out to me on their timelines? Why?
- o What do they feel this says about them or their stance on community / political issues?

<u>Interview:</u>

1) Defining parameters

At beginning of interview, in line with ethical guidelines and previous research approaches, I will reassure participants that no part of their Facebook content will be directly quoted; only the interview transcription and joint data we formulate together.

2) Points of interest

In order to initiate conversation and relax into the topic, as well as to make note of the choices they make when using social media platforms and to discuss how they may be influenced by / influence what they interact with, we discuss the 'saved posts'.

3) Frequency

We discuss the day that they recorded the number of times they interacted on social media platforms.

- Can they describe the events of the day that they made a record of their social media use? What happened in the morning / afternoon / evening? How does this correlate with the times they were interacting? Have they any thoughts about this?

4) 'Scroll back'

Participants are invited to 'scroll back' through their timeline feed, and to narrate the story of their timeline. With respect to the effect that such delving into past life events can yield, I will be mindful of supporting participants so they feel comfortable and in control of the process.

Considering each event they choose to focus on; how did events 'shape and develop' their socio-political experiences?

What do they share on social media?

AGED 18 - 25?

Want to share your experiences & counter the assumptions made about 'youth today'?

Email jh544@sussex.ac.uk

Jenny Hewitt

*all research undertaken is confidential

Appendix 7: Ethics Form

Ethical Review Application (ER/JH544/2) Jenny Hewitt	
Amendments: ER/JH544/3, ER/JH544/4	Parent Application:ER/JH544/1
Project Title	Exploring Young Adults' Political Identity and Civic Engagement through Multiple Case Studies (COPY)
Status	Approved
Email	jh544@sussex.ac.uk
Phone No.	07779632875
Applicant Status	PG (Research)
Department	Social Work and Social Care
Supervisor	Nolas, Sevasti-Melissa
Project Start Date	20-Sep-2017
Project End Date	31-May-2018
External Funding in place Yes **External**	
Collaborators	No
Funder/Project Title	
Name of Funder	ESRC

Ethical Review Application ER/JH544/2 (continued)

Project Description

The proposed doctoral research comprises of repeat interviews designed to capture qualitative detail about young adults' political and civic engagement in the context of their everyday lives. The research design incorporates space, time, and identity as key themes.

Underpinned by theories on intersectionality and everyday life, the aim is to understand the myriad ways that young people in the City of Brighton experience political and civic identity formation in their community.

There is growing evidence that young adults in the UK have a complex and nuanced relationship with political and civic engagement, which needs to be understood beyond the statistical analysis of electoral data. Research suggests that, despite the apparent dearth of qualitative analysis examining this complexity, "young people's lives are frequently held up as a 'social barometer' of wider societal change (Jones and Wallace, 1992), whether for good or ill, and as such are constantly in the spotlight" (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver & Ireland, 2009).

The project will ask important questions about the emergence of political identity and civic engagement in young adults, through its longitudinal qualitative research design. It is guided by three research questions:

- HOW does the experience of this group of young adults help us to understand the political?
- WHY can locating the study in the context of everyday lives help us to better understand the meaning of political?
- WHAT can the context of everyday and ordinary lives add to our understanding of young adults' political and civic engagement?

The research is informed by an intersectional approach to the concepts of political and civic identity and engagement, and their interplay with everyday lived experiences. I draw on these theories to explore how the nuances of young adults' engagement can be informed by understanding the complexity of multiple identities within social activity and, help us to better understand whether / how society shapes this in return (McCall, 2005; De Certeau, 1984).

As an area of focus, I have chosen the City of Brighton, widely considered a liberal enclave due to its election of the first British Green MP, but also known to harbour darker conflicts, demonstrated by the 'local disillusionment' with foreigners.

The project will involve interviewing a heterogeneous group of 10-14 young adults recruited from three distinct areas of Brighton. Participants will volunteer to be part of the project, following an outreach process. There will be three waves of interviews; an initial one- hour semi-structured interview in a safe, private and quiet location, a 'walking interview' where participants will show me around an area of their choosing, and we will discuss why it evokes ideas about political and civic experience, and finally a one-hour interview when we mutually discuss and analyse a social media feed of their choice. Interviews will last up to an hour and will follow a semi-structured format . Questions will be designed to access the participants' feelings about experiences of political and civic engagement / disengagement. The themes of the interviews will be: in what ways they consider themselves to be politically engaged / disengaged, what experiences and interactions have shaped this, how they experience politics and civic issues in relation to their day-to-day lives.

Empirically, this research suggests a novel way to look at the relationship between young adults, everyday lives, and identity. The analysis will comprise an exploration of the relationship of these experiences to the multiple identities they inhabit in everyday contexts.

I will fall in line with the University of Sussex' Ethical Guidelines (University of Sussex, 2016; BSA, 2002). My research prioritises reflecting best practice with regard to ethical considerations, meeting legislative and funding stipulations, and safeguarding the University's reputation.

Ethical Review Form Section A (ER/JH544/2)	
Question	**Response**
>> Checklist	
A1. Will your study involve participants who are currently or potentially vulnerable or unable to give informed consent or in a dependent position (e.g. people under 18, people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities)?	No
A2. Will participants be required to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places), and / or will deception of any sort be used? Please refer to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (or similar guidelines) for further information.	Yes
A3. Will it be possible to link personal data back to individual participants in any way (this does not include identifying participants from signed consent forms or identity encryption spreadsheets that are stored securely separate from research data).	No
A4. Might the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks likely to be encountered in the everyday life of the participants?	No
A5. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour, potentially illegal activities)?	Yes
A6. Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) be administered as part of this study and will any invasive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind will be used?	No
A7. Will your project involve working with any substances and / or equipment which may be considered hazardous?	No
A8. Will your study involve the taking and/or storage of human tissue that falls under the Human Tissue Act (HTA)? http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/erp_overview/humantissue	No
A9. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses, compensation for time or a lottery / draw ticket) be offered to participants?	No
>> Risk Assessment	
A10. If you have answered Yes to ANY of the above questions, your application may be considered as HIGH risk. If, however you wish to make a case that your application should be considered as LOW risk please enter the reasons here. Researchers should note that SREOs or C-RECs may decide NOT to agree with the case that you have made.	

Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/JH544/2)	
Question	**Response**
>> Risk Checklist - Participants	
C1. Is DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) clearance necessary for this project? If yes, please ensure you complete Section C24a below	No
C2. Are alcoholic drinks, drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) to be administered to the study participants?	No
C3. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to participants in this research?	The methodology involves the participants taking part in three detailed personal interviews, to better understand their lives and experiences in relation to the study themes. The two key issues to address here are the potential for personal conversations to elicit emotional stress, and the potential that personal details will make the participants identifiable. Potential emotional stress caused by personal conversations: My participants are being asked to talk openly about their identification with political affiliates, experiences which they feel they would define as political, and their perceptions of the political experiences of family and friends. It is likely, therefore, that through our semi-structured interviews the questioning will raise sensitive topics. These may include statements about childhood and family circumstances, declarations of affiliations to political groups, and statements about political belief that may make judgements about ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status of themselves and others, to give a few examples. These topics have the potential, through sharing, to make my participants feel vulnerable to judgement (Sieber & Stanley, 1988). The implications of discussing experiences of political identity and civic engagement can create feelings of guilt, shame, frustration, anger, stigmatisation or embarrassment, and they can also incite joy, excitement and hope. The potential for discussing life experiences can be emotionally exhausting, and I have planned to lessen the impact of this by having several weeks between each research cycle to allow the participants to process what they talk about during the interview session. The discussions are about experiences in both the private and public spheres, and because often politics are evoked from private and personal experience, there is likely to be a direct connection to personal experiences that involve levels of emotional stress (e.g. a participant who has particular feelings about public services due to the way they experiences a bereavement, or a participant who has particular feelings about gender or ethnicity after experiencing an assault). Potential for identification due to converging features: In some cases, participants in qualitative research studies can become identifiable by a combination of features that are unique enough to reveal their identity to those who know them, for example; if research is being done with an individual who identifies as being part of an ethnic minority, female, and living in a location which makes them easily identifiable because the location has very few ethnic minority citizens. Individual participants who have

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	been involved in oppositional protest, or have religious and / or political affiliations of any kind that counters the status quo of dominant discourses from main political parties may also be vulnerable to identification, stigmatisation, and incrimination, based on their views and accounts of actions.
6/1/2022 >> Risk Checklist - Researcher(s) Safety and Wellbeing	
C4. Does the project involve working with any substances and/or equipment which may be considered hazardous? (Please refer to the University's Control of Hazardous Substances Policy http://www.sussex.ac.uk/hso/policies).	No
C5. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially have an emotionally disturbing impact on the researcher(s)?	Yes
C5a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to help the researcher(s) to manage this.	Researcher safety is a consideration in the sampling of the three neighbourhoods in the City. This is particularly the case for areas of low income, where crime and public safety can be an issue. I will deploy a buddy system when I begin recruitment, and through all the cycles of my research. I will develop safety protocols / guidelines (attached, supporting document) designed to protect both the participants, and myself as the researcher. An examination of the participants involved in the research, identifies; myself, the participants, and more minimally supervisors supporting me, as being at potential risk from the sensitive issues that can arise when discussing political and civic experiences. The University has an established academic community and support network to connect with, with clear channels of support that I know how to contact, so that I am not working entirely alone. By outlining potential emotional stress and finding ways to balance this in the pre-emptive protocol / guidelines design, I go into the research process knowing the steps I will take to diffuse a potentially emotional interview, and the nominal people - my supervisors and doctoral support - who I would turn to for extra advice, if needed. This in itself makes me feel prepared to handle difficult situations, should they arise. I have been keeping, and will continue to keep, a field diary, which will aid with clearly documenting any processes and changes in approach, as they arise.
C6. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially expose the researcher(s) to threats of physical violence and / or verbal abuse?	No
C6a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to mitigate this.	
C7. Does the research involve any fieldwork - Overseas or in the UK?	Yes

C7a. If yes, where will the fieldwork take place? (All research requiring overseas travel will require the submission of a fully completed OTTSRA form). In the event that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has travel warnings in place for the country (ies) to be visited you will also need to provide a detailed risk assessment.	The fieldwork will take place in the City of Brighton, in the UK. I have provisionally selected three areas, based on their socio-economic deprivation / education standards statistical information, which have been made available by the Office for National Statistics. The recruitment will involve direct appeal to public, through the distribution of a simple leaflet outlining the research project, to individuals who seemingly fit the 18-25 years age bracket. This will involve mapping the three areas I have selected to identify spaces where I might meet a range of individual participants (e.g. public spaces, cafes, job centres, colleges, etc.), and then actively recruiting participants. Following recruitment and retention of approximately 8-14 young adult participants, the fieldwork will continue in Brighton. The first round of interviews will be conducted in either participants' homes, or another agreed safe location (e.g. a hired room in a library, a quiet cafe, etc.). The second round of interviews will be conducted as walking interviews, which will involve the participants identifying a small area they feel has some connection to their own exploration / experience of political identity and civic engagement, and showing this area to me whilst we interview. The third method of discussing social media etc. will be conducted in either participants homes, or another agreed safe location with Wi-Fi access.
C8. Will any researchers be in a lone working situation?	Yes
C8a. If yes, briefly describe the location, time of day and duration of lone working. What precautionary measures will be taken to ensure safety of the researcher(s)?	I will be working alone as I conduct each of the interviews with my participants. The location will be determined by where my participants live or where we select that is suitable for both the participant and myself that is an agreed safe, quiet location to interview. The interviews will all be conducted around participants schedules, but for my own safety and well-being, I will seek to end all data collection no later than 8pm on a given day. I will take the precaution of setting up a buddy system with my husband / friend, which will detail the time I begin and am expected to finish my interview, and the area it is taking place in, I will check in with this individual once I have finished my interview. My phone will be switched on to location services so that I am easily traceable by police if needs be, although this is highly unlikely. All research will take place in the City go Brighton. I will ensure that my buddy has address and post code information for the location of the interviews, whilst still protecting the names of the participants.
C9. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to the researcher(s) in this research?	Participants might want to know where I personally stand in my political views and experiences. I am also easily identifiable as a woman in her 30s, who is of both English and African heritage, which will conjure up different stereotypes and representations of who I am and what I stand for. My assessment is that the risk of encountering emotional abuse or sexist and racist language directed at me and with malicious intent during the research is minimal. I have prepared a detailed safety guidelines / protocol, which I will follow, which I see as minimizing any risk further. Should I feel threated or unsafe at any point and in any of the research encounters I will end the interview, leave the location and check-in with my buddy.
>> Data Collection and Analysis (Please provide full details)	

C10. PARTICIPANTS: How many people do you envisage will participate, who are they, and how will they be selected?	Though I aim for 14 participants, this number reflects the maximum number of participants who I will engage, and is more likely to be between 8 - 14. Recruitment to the study will be done through active community outreach in the three areas selected; distributing flyers to young people who seem to fit the criteria of being aged 18 - 25 years old, and this may also stimulate word of mouth and online recruitment. The participants will be selected to create a heterogeneous group, and so attempts will be made to select, from the participants who agree to become involved with the project, a good distribution of gender, age, sexuality, disability within the demographic. By dint of carefully selecting areas for recruitment based on including a spread across socio-economic and education experiences, I expect my participants to have varying backgrounds and income experiences. A secondary aim will be to ensure diversity by aiming to include participants of different ethnicities and religious affiliations, however, given the population (the largest ethnic group in Brighton & Hove is white 94.3%, whilst 1.6% of the population stated that they are Irish, and 4.6% described themselves as other white in the 2011 census), a representative sample is unlikely to include large numbers of ethnic minority young people. I would attempt to create a sample that reflected the local population whilst balancing the impact of the influx of international young adults resident studying in the City's University.
C11. RECRUITMENT: How will participants be approached and recruited?	I will spend a period of a week in each area, researching local hubs where young adults tend to congregate and engaging with local youth services to gain insight into where more alienated young adults may also be engaged with. I plan to advertise the research to participants as an opportunity to engage with issues of care and concern in the local area, avoiding overt focus on macro politics. This is so that I do not either; alienate young adults who may be feeling saturated / disaffected by recent political events that have occurred in quick succession (Brexit, local elections, and a General Election), nor limit my scope by engaging only with young adults who are very politically engaged and not representative of the vast majority of young people who have more complex and nuanced relationships with polity. The research will be explained via an initial flyer, and I will reach further participants, via word of mouth and online recruitment, through those who are initially engaged, making a selection of a heterogeneous sample from those who respond positively and appear committed.
C12. METHOD: What research method(s) do you plan to use; e.g. interview, questionnaire/self-completion questionnaire, field observation, audio/audio-visual recording etc.?	I plan to use semi-structured interviews throughout my research project, but under various conditions (detailed in the below location section). All interviews will be recorded using a Dictaphone, and I will also take field notes during interview, as well as keeping a field diary. The walking interview I may track during the interview, using a mapping application on my phone, in order to analyse what came up in the interview discussion at which point and analyse any particular connection between location and topic.
C13. LOCATION: Where will the project be carried out e.g. public place, in researcher's office, in private office at organisation?	The first method will be face-to-face, and in a quiet, safe location, such as the participants home, a library room, office, or cafe. The second method will be walking interviews, with the location determined by participants and then agreed upon with myself. The third method will again be face-to-face interview, but also discussing the medium of social media, and analysing participants interactions with social media as we talk, again in a quiet, safe location, such as the participants home, a library room, office, or cafe. All interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder, and I will also make field notes after the interview. The walking interview I may track during the interview, using a mapping application on my phone, in order to analyse what came up in the interview discussion at which point and analyse any particular connection between location and topic.

>> Ethical Considerations (Please provide full details)	
C14. INFORMED CONSENT: Please describe the process you will use to ensure your participants are freely giving fully informed consent to participate. This will usually include the provision of an Information Sheet and will normally require a Consent Form unless there is justification for not doing so. (Please state this clearly).	I will give each of my participants a cover letter, an information sheet, and a consent form, after we have informally discussed the possibility of participation in the research project. The cover letter and information sheet will detail the aims of the research, the methods to be employed and how the resulting data will be stored and used (copies of draft information sheets are provided with this application). I am engaging adults in the research (over the age of 18) who have the legal capacity to consent or dissent to participation in the research.

I envisage operationalising consent as follows. I will meet with / send individuals cover letter information sheet and consent form to read three weeks before the first set of interviews takes place. This will enable the participants time to digest what is required of their participation, and to raise any concerns or questions, or indeed to discontinue involvement at an early stage, and give me an opportunity to discuss the risks and benefits of participating in the study via a follow-up phone call part way through the three-week period. why I would like them to take part, and what taking part in the research project will involve.

I will require a consent form from each of my participants; however, I recognise the risk that formal processes can become barriers to participation for some individuals. I aim to minimise this by making explicit the research relationship (e.g. reminding them that this is a research project, and that any information is thus protected by the anonymity agreement we hold). I will revisit the issue of informed consent throughout the project, and may record further consent agreement in my field notes, or on a digital tape recorder, if situations arise that are not covered by the initial consent agreement. I will hold the principles of consent as central to the research, reminding participants of their rights in this respect at each stage of the research.

In terms of provision for continued informed consent, at every new meeting I will check-in with the participants, to discuss whether they are still happy to be part of the research. I will also introduce each meeting with a short summary, recapping our last conversation, and giving an opportunity for them to reflect back / change any information they feel they want to. Finally, on the last occasion I meet with each participant, I will provide them with a short 2-3 page text and visual summary of some of the data that I have collected. This will be organised around lines of communication that are particularly interesting, and it will be an opportunity for discussion; generating further data, but also providing an opportunity for clarification, reflection and to establish consent on what can be made public, and what needs to remain with the researcher. |
| C15. RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL: Participants should be able to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants should also be able to withdraw their data if it is linked to them and should be told when this will no longer be possible (e.g. once it has been included in the final report). Please describe the exact arrangements for withdrawal from participation and withdrawal of data for your study. | Participation in the project will be entirely voluntary and all participants will be informed explicitly both through the information sheets and through verbal discussion that they have the right to leave the research project, and withdraw their data from the study, for whatever reason and with no consequence to them, up until the end of the data collection period (precise dates will be given in the information sheet). In order to withdraw they will need to inform me, orally or in writing. I will remind them of this right throughout the project. |

C16. OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES: If you answered YES to anything in A.1 above you must specifically address this here. Please also consider whether there are other ethical issues you should be covering here. Please also make reference to the professional code of conduct you intend to follow in your research.	In Section A, I answered Yes to the following questions:
	A2:
	Yes, there will be discussion of information pertaining to individuals who are not directly consenting to be part of the research project. This will be especially true of any individuals my participants choose to discuss during the social media feed analysis interview (third cycle of the interviews), and it will be true of any family members / friends / social groups or affiliated groups who are mentioned during any of the interviews, in relation to political identity and civic engagement.
	The social media analysis requires both myself and the participant to discuss elements of their social media that they feel able to make available, which means indirect involvement of individuals who are privately connected to the participants on Facebook / Twitter / Instagram, etc., but who have not agreed directly to participate in any research with me. Such issues will be discussed with participants and the following options given, so that they only share what they feel comfortable sharing:
	- the participants will have the option to view their social media interactions on a phone / tablet/ computer facing away from me, so that I cannot see any names and details of their private connection and friends
	OR
	- we can look at the screens together, but they will have the opportunity to look at and vet the information before they show it to me.
	I will also explain that the same process of coding, anonymisation and privacy applies to any individuals they discuss during their interviews.
	A5:
	Yes, the study may involve discussion of sensitive topics, which might include statements about childhood and family circumstances, declarations of affiliations to political groups, and statements about political belief that may make judgements about ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status of themselves and others, to give a few examples. I have planned for the potential interventions if such discussions become distressing either to the participant, or to myself.
	If the sensitive nature of what is discussed becomes distressing to a participant, and a participant indicates that they are experiencing high levels of emotional stress, or begins to exhibit behaviours that suggest to me that they are experiencing distress (crying, shaking, looking uncomfortable in their surroundings, etc.), I will cease the interview, placing the safety of myself and the participant first. After stopping the interview, I will ask the participant how they are feeling, whether they feel able to go on with their day, and whether they feel safe. If the participant feels able to carry on, I will then resume the interview. If the participant does not feel able to carry on, I will discontinue the interview and remove the participant to a quiet, safe location. I will encourage them to contact their local GP or a mental health practitioner, or make enquiries about support groups for them (e.g. The Samaritans), if relevant. I would follow this up with a courtesy phone call, and encourage them to contact me if they continued to feel distress in the hours / days following the interview.
	If the interview became abusive to me in any way, I would also take the steps to cease the interview and respectfully withdraw from the space it has taken place.
	The research design incorporates the need for space and time between discussing

	potentially personal issues with the researcher. This should go some way toward diffusing the impact of emotional stress on participants, and on myself as the researcher. Participants will be made aware in the information sheet of the limits of confidentiality. Namely, that if they reveal that they are in serious or immanent risk of harm or of harming others (especially serious criminal activity with consequences for others) that I am bound by law to disclose what I know to the relevant authorities.
>> Data Protection, Confidentiality, and Records Management	
C17. Will you ensure that the processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)? (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/policies/information/dpa)	Yes
C17a. If you are processing any personal information outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) you must explain how compliance with the DPA will be ensured.	
C18. Will you take steps to ensure the confidentiality of personal information?	Yes
C18a. Please provide details of anonymisation procedures and of physical and technical security measures here:	The primary method I will use to anonymise data from participants is the use of pseudonyms for participants and for the details of the location of the research (beyond asserting the research will be in Brighton and in three distinct areas). I will remove any identifiers as soon as possible so that there is no overt connection remaining between the data and the individuals; breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals, such as micro-aggregation. I will store the codes for data separately and safely, so that I am able to unlock the paper trail, but no one else has public access to this. As detailed later, I will store the research in a secure manner, in accordance with obligations under the Data Protection Act. I will anonymise my interview transcripts at point of transcription; any personal data and identifiers about the participants (e.g. telephone numbers, addresses and email addresses) which I will use to contact them will be held in a separate password protected file which only I will have access to, I will select suitable pseudonyms at the outset, and these will be logged in a different file. If I discover that the pseudonym I have selected is the same, or too similar, to a name of someone in the young persons immediate family or friendship circle, then I will change it. I will review my transcripts and field notes using the word search function find and replace, to check that actual names have not inadvertently slipped into the data. If my participants should see or guess their pseudonym, e.g. when I am feeding back to them, I will re-psuedonymise their data. When I am writing up my research I will strive to further de-identify my data be changing the gender of a participant, or changing some details about them. My physical data will be held under lock and key in my home office filing cabinet. My electronic data will be stored on my personal folder on the Universitys G Drive, which is password protected at the point of log in. I will carry out regular back ups of my data onto an external hard drive, which will in turn be stored under lock and key in my home office filing cabinet.

	I will not geographically anonymise the City I plan to research in, as the results of the research may prove useful to inform policy outside of academia, and the real life implications are lost if the City is anonymised such that it could be anywhere. I will begin the anonymisation at district level. I will not name the three areas I select to recruit my participants, to lessen the degree of social stigmatisation synonymous with areas viewed as socio-economically deprived or otherwise, I will also pseudonym the details of the walking interview locations, which may make the participants identifiable. I will devise descriptions of the areas with relevant details, in order to aid thematic development of ideas about space, place and time, but I will not overly name the locations. I will take steps to eliminate the risk of mismanagement of data post- embargo. It is my decision that the right to open access to my data remains with me, and if my supervisors, examiners and myself deem it too sensitive to be given open access, the data will not be available as a public document. I am mindful of the University's philosophy about, and academia's promotion of, the re-use of research data. If once I have collected the data I decide to peruse a data-archiving route, then I will return to my participant and negotiate separate permissions for making the data open access.
6/1/2022	
C19. Will all data related to this study be retained and shared in a form that is fully anonymised (separated from information that can identify the participant)?	Yes
C19a. If you answered "no" to the above question you must ensure that any limitations to full anonymity are detailed in the Information Sheet and that participant consent will be in place. If relevant, please outline limitations here:	
C20. Will the Principal Investigator take full responsibility during the study, for ensuring appropriate storage and security of information (including research data, consent forms and administrative records) and, where appropriate, will the necessary arrangements be made in order to process copyright material lawfully?	Yes
C20a. If you answered "no" to the above question, please give further details:	
C21. Who will have access to personal information relating to this study?	I will be the only person with access to personal information relating to this study, and the only individual able to de-code who each participant is in relation to their data. This will be upheld by keeping physical data under lock and key in my home office, and electronic data stored (password protected) on the University's G Drive. I cannot mitigate every risk to my participants in contributing to my research, but I will

	explain the calculated risks I do take, so they are fully aware. Though I will make every ethical effort to protect anonymity once research has been released into the public realm, I do not deem it as necessary to separate identifying information away from coded emerging theory about my participants experiences, by separating it on to different devices, though I will codify, password protect and store the files separately on the University's secure GDrive.
C22. Data management responsibilities after the study. State how long study information including research data, consent forms and personal identification will be retained, in what format(s) and where the information will be kept.	As well as the previously detailed modes of storage, which will make my research accessible to third parties in an appropriate manner, I also plan to make my research findings available online via my institutional website (I am aligned with CIRCY, part of the School of Education and Social Work). In all cases where the findings from my research are being published on fora that is not managed by myself directly, I will ensure that the principles of ethics are upheld in my research; that my participants are fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research at point of involvement, what their participation signifies, and any potential risks inherent. Being aged 18 years and over, my participants have the right to make the individual choice as citizens as to what degree of involvement and anonymisation they feel comfortable with.

I am also considering creating my own website, which will exhibit the final results of my research in the form of a digital map at metadata level (metadata in this case referring to the levels of detail that my planned research methodology will yield on different elements of the young adults lived experiences). Any images and text that I do choose to use will be watermarked, if I go down this route. I plan to publish by submission of journal articles to a publication, and this will also increase access to my research findings on a legitimate platform.

Short-term storage and data management

Since my electronic data volume will be high, I plan to store my media on my Macbook Pro, Mac computer, a separate external hard drive and Sussex Universitys GDrive and Dropbox.

For recordings, I will use a digital voice recorder, creating MP3s, which I will transcribe into Microsoft Word. Notes from my interviews will, likewise, be transcribed into Word. I will use Nvivo to work on draft documents, and final versions will be stored as detailed below. Working Nvivo documents will be stored as raw data and then reconfigured into Word periodically.

I have thought carefully about a strategy for naming and ordering my files; keeping file names brief and meaningful, ensuring no more than four sub-files are stored with any main file categories and classifying broad types of files clearly. I will order the background literature and relevant pre/ post reading materials by subject. Data will be ordered by type, initially, and then by date. Folders of materials for research in the field (e.g. semi-structured interview questions, consent forms, etc) will be stored in a separate main tree folder; numbered in order of creation. I will be the only person working on the files, stored on my laptop and my home computer, and any files that are shared will be in read only format, and with colleagues bound by the University's Privacy Statement (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/aboutus/website/privacy).

Deposit and long-term preservation. I plan to embargo my data for a length of time deemed appropriate, so that I can continue to use it for my own papers. |

Appendix 8: Ethical Approval Certificate

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Social Sciences & Arts C-REC
c-recss@admin.susx.ac.uk

Certificate of Approval	
Reference Number	ER/JH544/2
Title Of Project	Exploring Young Adults' Political Identity and Civic Engagement through Multiple Case Studies (COPY)
Principal Investigator (PI):	Jenny Caroline Hewitt
Student	Jenny Caroline Hewitt
Collaborators	
Duration Of Approval	8 months, 9 days
Expected Start Date	22-Sep-2017
Date Of Approval	22-Sep-2017
Approval Expiry Date	31-May-2018
Approved By	Ana Pereira
Name of Authorised Signatory	Liz McDonnell
Date	22-Sep-2017

*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.

Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:

Amendments to protocol
* Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.

Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects
* Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.

Feedback regarding any adverse(1) and unexpected events(2)
* Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences and Arts C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.

Monitoring of Approved studies
The University may undertake periodic monitoring of approved studies. Researchers will be requested to report on the outcomes of research activity in relation to approvals that were granted (full applications and amendments).

Research Standards
Failure to conduct University research in alignment with the Code of Practice for Research may be investigated under the Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research or other appropriate internal mechanisms (3). Any queries can be addressed to the Research Governance Office: rgoffice@sussex.ac.uk

(1)   An "adverse event" is one that occurs during the course of a research protocol that either causes physical or psychological harm, or increases the risk of physical or psychological harm, or results in a loss of privacy and/or confidentiality to research participant or others.

(2)   An "unexpected event" is an occurrence or situation during the course of a research project that was a) harmful to a participant taking part in the research, or b) increased the probability of harm to participants taking part in the research.

(3) http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/rqi/policy/research-policy

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Appendix 9: Safety Guidelines

Safety Guidelines

Risk in the fieldwork site:

I will plan the research interaction in advance, checking the location of home interviews and ensuring that I have informed someone about where I am going and when I am expected to return. I will discuss with them in advance what they should do if I fail to check in with them by a specified time, e.g.: how long they should wait before they inform the police. I will check the council register of dangerous persons if doing a home interview.

I will wear sensible, smart clothing suitable for the area in which I will be working, and avoid carrying valuables and wearing expensive jewellery.

I have planned for recruitment style which involves either direct face-to-face, or telephone contact, before interview - allowing me to assess the individual and their circumstances before we meet for interview.

I will make myself aware of any localized issues of cultural / ethnic tension.

Risk in respondents:

The topics for discussion, such as social exclusion, unemployment, etc., may provoke strong feelings.

In respect of harm to respondents:

The topics for discussion in many social research interviews - for example, poverty, unemployment, relationship breakdown, social exclusion, bereavement and ill-health - may provoke strong feelings in respondents. I have designed a strategy to implement if this should arise during interview; namely, ceasing the interview, checking the participant's welfare and ability to continue, and if continuing the interview is not appropriate, I would terminate the interview and pass on details of any relevant organisations (such as The Samaritans) who may be able to provide further support. I would then check-in with the participant later that day or the following day to make sure they are okay and assess their readiness to reschedule an interview, without pressurizing them to do so. Any information which is revealed to me as presenting potential harm to any participant, as stated in the Information Sheet and Consent Form, would be passed on to relevant agencies who can provide support and help to the individual.

In respect of harm to myself, I will take the following precautions:

I will contact potential participants in advance to ask about preferences and expectations in regard to the research process. In order to manage any risk to myself as a lone, female researcher, I will operate a Buddy system so that someone knows my expected timings, as well as allow my location, to be detected via my mobile phone. I will let the participant know that I have a schedule, and that others know where I am. I will arrange for calls to be made to me, if we go significantly over interview-time, and leave my mobile phone switched on. I will assess the layout and quickest way out.

For the safety of both myself and the respondents, I will carry a form of identification that participants can check for authenticity.