Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Social Policy

At Massey University, Manawatū

New Zealand

Amanda Hay

2022

Abstract

Adult-led civic and political contexts play a critical role in shaping the experiences of young people in social and political activism. These contexts are shaped by social and political constructs that continue to regulate youth participatory rights and overlook their contributions in broader contexts. This qualitative-exploratory research explored how young people are developing their political agency through social and political activism.

As a qualitative-exploratory study it utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews to explore young people's understandings of their political experiences. The data was analysed using thematic analysis informed by a social constructivist theoretical framework and underpinned by relevant literature. The research found that young people's understandings of the political world were inconsistent with widespread beliefs about their ability to contribute. In contrast, with common misconceptions of their apathy and disengagement, the participants in this study were participating actively in social and political activities within broad civic and political contexts around issues of significance to them. Consistent with findings in other literature, the research also found that social contexts, access to political experiences, and connection to social and political issues of concern to young people were critical in nurturing their political agency.

The research findings highlight the need for a shift in the way formal political institutions frame young people's participation. It also calls for a cultural shift in civic and political settings to consistently provide genuine space for their active participation in these settings. Further research into young people's lived experiences in these contexts and into different patterns of youth political engagement across various social and cultural groups in society may provide insight in to how best to nurture their political agency and reduce disparities in political participation.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

The voices of young people are often coloured by past experiences with significant others in their lives such as parents, friends, teachers, and others who they come into contact with in various settings. These experiences can have long-lasting effects on their beliefs about their capabilities, place, value, and identity in society. Policymakers play a critical role in providing young people with meaningful opportunities to enter and contribute to political life (Boulianne, 2019). How young people perceive, and experience political participation, is key for developing policy that will engage young people in political arenas and nurture their political agency as they strive for autonomy.

Young people's active participation in social and political activism is often overlooked due to the way that understandings of political participation are framed in the adult-centric political world. Today, young people are embracing new ways of communicating and expressing their agency through digital technology and global movements that are relevant to their everyday lives. These new ways of engaging challenge traditional understandings of political participation. These adult-led traditional understandings often lead to views of young people as apathetic and disengaged from formal politics and limits their ability to be heard in civic and political settings (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019).

This study sought to explore how young people are developing their political agency through social and political activism. In doing so, it hopes to offer further understanding around how and why young people politically engage, and how these experiences serve as a learning platform for their growing political independence.

This chapter outlines the rationale for this research, including its objective and aims. It then provides background on the significance of this study within the Aotearoa New

Zealand context. The chapter then outlines the study design, definitions of key terminology, and the structure of the report.

Research objective and aims

This research explores the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. It aims to do this by:

1. Examining definitions of political agency and political participation.
2. Identifying the ways that young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are engaging in social and political activism.
3. Exploring the ways in which these experiences serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency.

Research design

This research is a qualitative-exploratory study utilising face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six young people to explore the development of young people's political agency through their experiences of social and political activism. It is framed by social constructivism which highlights the unique experience of individuals and emphasises that our understandings are based on social and cultural constructions on which the context of our experiences and knowledge of the world are based (Patton, 2015). This research design was appropriate for the study as it enabled participants' individual experiences and understandings of their political experiences to be explored in depth (O'Leary, 2017; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004).

Background to the topic

The context in which young people's political agency in Aotearoa New Zealand, and in other neo-liberal and Western societies, is framed continues to be dominated by adult-centric beliefs around the capacity of young people to fully contribute within a political community (Bowman, 2019; Elwood & Mitchell, 2012; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2008; Loader et al., 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; O'Toole, 2016; Percy-Smith et al., 2019). Although there is increasing acknowledgement of young people's capacity to contribute to society (Phillips et al., 2019) and increased youth voice heard through global movements about social, environmental, and political concerns, youth agency and contributions are often overlooked and undervalued (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). These contributions from young people often go unnoticed because their positioning to enact political change and to have a genuine voice in decision-making processes is still defined by an adult-led political framework (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Harris et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2002; Wray-Lake, 2019). This adult-led political framework measures young people's contribution to society based on their engagement in formal political arenas, such as, electoral politics (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012: Russell et al., 2002).

Although challenging to these institutionally regulated political structures, broader understandings of political engagement offer accessible opportunities for young people to engage in social and political activism in their everyday lives around issues that are meaningful to them (Beaumont, 2011; Henn & Foard, 2014; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wood, 2013). This includes acknowledging young people's contributions across different political platforms that are relevant to them, for example, including engagement with online forums and within their communities (Breeze et al., 2017; Farnham et al., 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Xenos et al., 2014). By seeking to understand young people's perspectives of their political experiences in these contexts, this research explores the power that sociocultural and political constructs have on how young people frame their identity within the political world and how this knowledge can be used to reduce disparities in participation for them and nurture their political agency.

Definitions of key terms

This section provides definitions for the key terms used throughout this thesis.

Formal political participation: Engagement in traditional political institutional activity such as voting, union membership and political parties.

Informal political participation: Engagement in civic-minded endeavours through such things as classroom-room based activities, volunteering for a community organisation, youth leadership roles in local council[1], signing a petition, and attending a protest about a social, environmental, or political concern.

Political agency: The capacity of individuals to act independently from others and to make their own decisions about politically engaging.

Social and political activism: Any form of engagement around social and political issues.

Young person: A young person in this research is someone aged 16-20 years of age to reflect young people either side of the legal voting age of 18 years in Aotearoa New Zealand who, therefore, have full access to formal political participation opportunities.

Thesis structure

This thesis has six chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by a literature review in Chapter Two which explores young people's political participation and examines its

---

[1] The governing body of a city, town, or district in New Zealand which is comprised of a board of elected officials.

contested understandings and theories. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and methods utilised in the study. It details the qualitative-exploratory approach informed by social constructivism used for the research design and the process of thematic analysis used to analyse the results. Chapter Four presents the results from the six face-to-face semi-structured interviews under the six main themes that emerged from the thematic data analysis process. Chapter Five discusses the findings using a social constructivist lens and theories of youth civic participation to guide the discussion. To conclude, Chapter Six presents the key findings of the research, potential policy implications, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter summary

This research uses a qualitative-exploratory design to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. The research design is underpinned by social constructivism and face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect the qualitative data. This introductory chapter has provided a brief background on the sociocultural and political constructs that influence young people's participatory rights within the political world, and therefore, affect their political agency. The following chapter provides an analysis of the literature on youth political participation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an analysis of the literature on the way that young people develop their political agency through social and political activism. Focus is given to exploring young people's political participation and the key role that informal social and political experiences can play in the development of their political agency. It examines youth political participation perspectives and theories and considers the barriers to their participation of adult-regulated settings and perceptions of the rights of children and young people. The chapter concludes by exploring new international research on formal political participation and initiatives being adopted in some countries to try to engage more young people in these arenas and relates this to the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The literature review draws on contested understandings of young people's engagement in social and political activism from the last twenty years. The researcher accessed key social science online databases to search for the relevant literature. These included Discover, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Index New Zealand. Various search terms were used relating to young people's participation in social and political contexts to locate international and Aotearoa New Zealand content journal articles and books. This included a process of refining dates from an original unrestricted search to between the years of 2000 to 2021, limiting the search to the English language, and sourcing articles using the reference lists of other relevant texts. The literature was reviewed through a process of analysis that involved the recording of literature surveyed and the organising of material utilising tables to identify key ideas, themes, and topics across the literature. This analytical process ensured that the literature reviewed was organised and mapped out to provide a context of understanding upon which the research could build.

Understanding youth political participation

Youth political participation is evolving through digital media[2] and global contexts changing the ways in which young people politically engage. Support for their active participation in political arenas is often hindered by the adult-led political world, pre-existing discourses of their apathy and disengagement from formal politics, and views of their developmental capacity to meaningfully contribute (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). Although these new ways of politically engaging are challenging to traditional frameworks of engagement, understanding the diverse ways that young people are formally and informally politically engaging is important for understanding how they are developing their political agency and for informing the development of policy that will reduce disparities. This section looks at the contested understandings, theories of youth political participation, and historical understandings of youth political participation. It outlines how these understandings and theories have shaped and continue to influence opportunities for young people to contribute within civic and political arenas in society. Finally, it looks at the shift from adult-centric to youth-centric approaches to participation and how it is important to make these meaningful and authentic by embracing methods and platforms that are relevant to young people today.

Contested understandings and theories of youth political participation

The ways in which young people politically engage in informal settings are challenging to institutionally regulated political structures that are framed by adult knowledge, beliefs, and values around traditional understandings of the capacity of young people to meaningfully contribute as 'full citizens' within a political community (Bowman, 2019; Elwood & Mitchell, 2012; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2008; Loader et al., 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; O'Toole, 2016; Percy-Smith et al., 2019). These political structures focus on formal political engagement in voting, union membership, political

---

[2] Any communication medium that uses internet technologies or electronic devices. For example, online platforms used for information exchange such as Facebook.

parties, and organisations as a measure of young people's contribution to society (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012). They do not consider the ways in which young people are engaging in informal settings such as volunteering for a community organisation, youth leadership roles in local council, or attending a protest about environmental concerns (Harris et al., 2007, 2010; Henn & Foard, 2014; Wood, 2011; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019).

The exclusivity of this structure, and its parameters of what constitutes political engagement, not only potentially alienates young people from formal political arenas but also leads to conclusions of their apathy and disengagement (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). These structures and conclusions have influenced adult perspectives on the part that young people can play in formal political processes and of the relevance of formal politics to them. Adult perspectives have also been influenced by findings in research where patterns of young people's declining engagement in formal political processes is documented, especially voter turnout (Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Collin, 2015; Farrell, 2014; Harris et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2002; Vowles, 2010). These studies use methodological tools that are written by adults and use measures that can be divisive due to their binary nature such as engaged versus disengaged or enfranchised versus disenfranchised (Bowman, 2019; Farthing, 2010). Although statistical evidence of engagement is necessary for informing such areas as electoral policy and campaigning, it can portray young people as disinterested in politics and discount the ways in which they are otherwise engaging in informal contexts (Breeze et al., 2017; Xenos et al., 2014).

Contemporary understandings of political engagement challenge traditional frameworks of political participation by recognising the broader contexts in which young people find their political voices and independence through experiences in community-minded or classroom-based activities (Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019; Hayward et al., 2015; Wray-Lake, 2019). Informal political learning experiences and social relationships with family, friends and teachers offer young people an opportunity to develop the confidence and skills to engage in more diverse ways, and to demonstrate greater independence or political agency through meaningful participation that connects to their daily interactions

(Beaumont, 2011; Henn & Foard, 2014; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wood, 2011; Wood, 2013). These contemporary understandings, of the ways that young people are engaging, acknowledge formal and informal participation across different political platforms that are easily accessible today such as online forums and community-based contributions (Breeze et al., 2017; Farnham et al., 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Xenos et al., 2014). They highlight that youth political participation is not only about formal political participation, but also about informal civic and political participation that young people feel connected to in their everyday lives (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn et al., 2014; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019; Yeung et al., 2012).

The connection that young people have to formal politics is affected by their ability to genuinely enact change and to feel like they belong and that their voices are heard within the adult-centric framework of government structures (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Harris et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2002; Wray-Lake, 2019). The political and legal framework of policies enabling their full participation in formal political arenas provides a structure of support for them as they transition to adulthood. Historical conceptualisations of children and young people as passive and developing citizens inform this framework (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Hayward et al., 2015; Lister, 2007; Marsh et al., 2007; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019; Wood, 2011; Wood, 2013). This framework can also be conflicting as while it does not enable young people to have full citizenship rights to vote until age 18 it does allow them to leave school of their own volition at age 16, take up full employment and be financially independent, and pay taxes to a government in which they have no representation.

An individual's perception of their ability to influence political processes and government decisions is important for nurturing political agency (Beaumont, 2011; Geurkink et al., 2020). Discriminatory lines of exclusion, such as voting powers in decision-making processes, in civic and institutional cultures decrease young people's beliefs that society is fair and government institutions trustworthy (Beaumont, 2011; Deimel et al., 2020; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Flanagan, 2013; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002). These include

tokenistic[3] attempts to include young people that are adult-centric, and the use of divisive political policies and tools, for example, age restrictions, cost, and youth representative roles in organisations where there are no genuine outcomes. It is imperative that participation opportunities for young people are genuine and meaningful for them to feel heard and that their decisions matter in political decision making (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Flanagan, 2013; Geurkink et al., 2020; Harris, 2006; Yeung et al., 2012). Political agency is not just about the individual but about the sociocultural and political settings that surround them, and it is these contexts that have the power to shape conditions for change (Allen, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2014). This is a key focus of this study as the social construction of young people's political identity influences their understandings of their participatory rights in political settings. The way that adult-led civic and political contexts engage with and involve youth is crucial for them to feel that their voices matter in the political world and for nurturing their political agency.

This section highlights the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in formal and informal political participation. It identifies the need for the way in which political engagement is measured by traditional frameworks to be challenged. It discusses the multiple ways in which young people are engaging across political arenas today, and how by broadening understandings of political engagement to include these, that their contributions in the community may be more accurately reflected. These broader understandings may provide valuable information about the political socialisation of young people, and how best to nurture their political agency.

Historical understandings

Historical understandings of young people's political participation are framed by adult perspectives of their status as developing, dependent, and transitioning to adulthood and full citizenship (de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013).

---

[3] Making a symbolic effort to include young people rather than truly engaging with them and sharing power.

These traditional perceptions of children and young people as developing and dependent on adults for protection and support originated in the thinking of the Enlightenment period[4] (Phillips et al., 2019), and they continue to influence participatory opportunities for youth in civic and political arenas today.

Participatory opportunities for youth are framed by political and legal structures in neo-liberal and Western societies such as Aotearoa New Zealand. These structures have excluded young people from full citizenship rights and responsibilities (de Winter, 1997; Hobson & Lister, 2002; Lister, 2007; Morrow, 1994; Phillips et al., 2019; Wood, 2012). The neo-liberal tradition of citizenship is influenced by T.H. Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class* on liberal citizenship, where full citizenship is associated with adulthood and being full members of a political community in which an individual's social and civil rights are an integral part of their membership (Marshall, 1950; see also Lister 2007). In particular, the right to full citizenship in a political community is enabled through the enfranchisement or the right to vote which is age restricted (Lister, 2007). This neo-liberal tradition of citizenship is therefore rooted in the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens and relies on a strong legal and human rights framework to guide and support its implementation (Lister, 2007).

An individual's age as a significant identifier of full citizenship rights and responsibilities within a political community has shaped understandings of citizenship and young people's access to formal political arenas continuing today (Lister, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Oinas et al., 2017; Osman et al., 2020; O'Toole, 2016; Percy-Smith et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2019). Although contemporary citizenship is constructed within broader understandings that enable young people to actively engage in civic participatory opportunities, formal political arenas continue to be constrained by policy that restricts full participatory rights for youth, highlighting the historical context

---

[4] This period's philosophical and political discourse were important in the foundation of modern political ideas in the West and continue to influence social and political structures in Western societies today (Porter, 2000). Influential thinkers from the Enlightenment period (1685-1815) such as Locke and Rousseau conceptualised children and young people as immanent, innocent, developing and impulsive (de Winter, 1997; Morrow, 1994; Phillips et al., 2019). Like other ideas from this period, these views of children and young people continue to restrict young people's political rights in Western societies today (Phillips et al., 2019).

in which their political agency is framed (Hart, 2009; Lister, 2007). For example, young people's right to vote in formal political arenas is restricted by their age which, therefore, affects their political agency. This continued regulation of young people's participatory rights in formal political arenas reinforces the notion that they are undervalued in this context and therefore potentially affects their motivation to engage when opportunities do present themselves. As young people frame their identity around the sociocultural and political constructs within their lives (Batsleer, 2008; Buckingham, 2008), their political identity is shaped by the dominant adult-centric culture in formal political structures which restricts their participatory opportunities (Hart, 2009; Lister, 2007). The next section provides an overview of the shifting perceptions of children and young people's ability to contribute to society in a worthwhile way.

Shifts from adult-centric to youth-centric

Traditional adult perceptions of children and young people as passive recipients are shifting to acknowledge their potential contribution to society. This is occurring due to the rights of children gaining recognition internationally in literature, legislation, and international Conventions, and through studies highlighting the issues of adult-shaped understandings of citizenship, youth, and political engagement in the political socialisation of young people (Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2007, 2008; Lister et al., 2003; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019; Quintelier, 2015; Wood, 2011; Wood, 2013). The movement of international perceptions in neo-liberal and Western societies of the rights of children and young people has increased their recognition as active and agentic[5] members of society (Bartos, 2016; Wood, 2013). This shift in perceptions has been reflected in international conventions[6] such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which New Zealand has been a signatory since 1993 (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). However, it is not always reflected through genuine opportunities for young people to engage or acknowledgement

---

[5] Active citizens. Capable of fully participating in society.
[6] Articles 5 and 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 5 highlights the role of parents/caregivers in the direction and guidance of their child(ren) on their rights as appropriate with their developing capacity. Article 12 states that every child has the right to express their views and for these to be respectfully heard (see Lansdown, 2005; United Nations General Assembly,1989).

of their capacity to contribute meaningfully to society (Hayward et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2019). This is because although their rights to express an opinion are upheld, their participatory rights in formal political arenas are often constrained by adult-centric views that continue to dominate and overlook youthful agency (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2007; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019).

To shift from an adult-centric to youth-centric approach, civic organisations, and policy processes at a government level need to genuinely involve young people in areas of interest to them and their futures (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Finlay, 2010; Wray-Lake, 2019). It is important that an approach is used that is authentic and not tokenistic, providing a space for young people's active participation and voice in decision-making processes (Boulianne, 2019; Henley, 2015). A genuine youth-centric approach reflects a culture of equal participatory rights where the autonomy of the young people involved is respected, and power and responsibility for decision-making is shared by both the adults and young people participating (Barber, 2009; Sotkasiira et al., 2010). It seeks young people's views to understand how best to support and facilitate their participation through platforms that are relevant to them such as social media (Harris et al., 2010; Henley, 2015). These contexts embrace new ways of communicating through modern online technologies (Harris et al., 2010), and provide meaningful outcomes so that youth see their voices are heard and have an effect, for example, online petitions (Seider & Graves, 2020; Wray-Lake, 2019). It is important that youth voice is captured through platforms that are relevant to young people and that strategies continue to be identified to support their genuine participation (Wray-Lake, 2019).

Changing perceptions of the capacity of young people to contribute meaningfully to society are shifting understandings on the rights of children and young people as active members of society. Through these shifting understandings a youth-centric approach may offer genuine involvement for young people in civic and political arenas and therefore facilitate their political participation. Other key facilitators and barriers to youth political participation are outlined in the next section.

Facilitators and barriers to youth political participation

The key facilitators and barriers to youth political participation provide valuable information for engaging young people in civic organisations and formal political arenas. This knowledge can help to shape initiatives and policy development in these areas to reduce disparities in youth engagement and empower them to engage by nurturing their political agency. The way that young people enact their political agency today is challenging to adult-led traditional understandings of what it means to politically participate (Harris et al., 2010). These traditional understandings shape the context within which their political agency is understood and can create a barrier to their participation by affecting their level of confidence and trust in formal political processes as an effective way of being heard (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Harris et al., 2010). This context is framed by institutionally regulated political structures based on adult-centric views of young people's capacity to contribute meaningfully and autonomously to civic and political life (Bowman, 2019; de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013; Percy-Smith et al., 2019).

Contemporary ways that young people are engaging involve informal social and political participatory actions such as signing a petition, attending a protest, and joining an online group about a social or political issue of significance to them (Häkli & Kallio, 2014; Harris et al., 2010; Ndlovu, 2021; Oinas et al., 2017). Although these new ways of engaging have increased the profile of young people's agency, their positioning to enact political change is still frequently defined by the parameters set and led by adults (Bowman, 2019; Wood, 2020). These parameters refer to both the policies and legislation that frame full citizenship rights and responsibilities to individuals in society and to the very tools and approaches used to measure political engagement. These political structures, tools and approaches to measurement focus narrowly on formal political participation[7] as an indicator of young people's engagement which has often framed participation studies (Bowman, 2019; Farthing, 2010; Marsh & Akram, 2015). By broadening understandings of political participation and political agency to include

---

[7] In particular, voting.

alternative forms of engagement through a variety of actions not just by individuals but also by groups of people collectively, young people may feel more valued and see the efficacy in their participation (Häkli & Kallio, 2014; Henn & Foard, 2014; Norris, 2011; Sloam, 2007).

Barriers to participation are also present in community organisations, such as youth councils and church-based groups. In these contexts, consultation with young people is often required to ensure their representation as part of the community. This enables organisations to meet their legal requirements, provide education to the next generation of community leaders, and to ensure that young people's wellbeing and perspectives are being considered in their work (Henley, 2015; Kay & Tisdall, 2012). However, these opportunities that are meant to facilitate young people's involvement in their communities can have unforeseen barriers (Finlay, 2010; Henley, 2015; Smith et al., 2003). Barriers may include the time involved in participating on top of other school or work demands, access to opportunities (youth representative roles are often distributed selectively), the age appropriateness of the processes involved, and adult-led cultures in organisations not necessarily equally valuing the opinions of younger members. It is important that attempts to engage young people through deliberate consultation are perceived as genuine by young people and that their voices influence the outcome of decision-making to build their confidence and trust in civic and political processes (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019). It is also important for civic organisations to be mindful that their engagement of young people cannot necessarily be seen as representative of all youth as it is often the civic-minded who choose to be a part of, or are selected to, roles in advisory or decision-making processes (Finlay, 2010; Smith et al., 2003). As the aim of this research is to explore young people's political agency these matters are important for informing civic and political engagement processes that will reduce the barriers to participation for youth.

Disparate civic learning opportunities are evident across social and cultural groups in society (Flanagan, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019). Civic inequality amongst groups of young people arises from socioeconomic disparities (Levinson, 2010; Wray-Lake, 2019). Socioeconomically-advantaged young people with educated parents, who have higher

academic achievement, and who are of European ancestry are more likely to have access to civic learning opportunities than those from lower socioeconomic groups (Kahne & Maddaugh, 2008; Schlozman et al., 2012). Opportunities for youth political development in disadvantaged or marginalised groups is affected by lower adult engagement in civic activities, underfunding and under-resourcing in schools (Kahne & Maddaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2010), and by how political development is affected by the context of those who hold the power and privilege in a society (Flanagan, 2013). Civic learning opportunities provide a key role in nurturing the political agency of young people (Beaumont, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019) and therefore opportunities for these among diverse groups need to be identified and socioeconomic disparities reduced (Levinson, 2010; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Youth political participation is facilitated through a broadening of traditional adult-led understandings of political engagement by institutionally regulated political structures to include informal political participation opportunities. This broadening enables a more contextual understanding influenced by different social and cultural dynamics within our everyday lives in which social connections, genuine learning opportunities, and movements that are current and topical play a critical part in the mobilisation and political development of young people (Breeze et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Nissen, 2019; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). The experience of inequality, such as racism, can also motivate youth as they can take on greater meaning to them, again mobilising their engagement (Buckingham, 2008; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Wood, 2012).

These multiple factors of political socialisation occur within young people's immediate contexts and provide meaningful participatory experiences (Boulianne, 2019; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Nolas et al., 2017; Pancer, 2015; Pruitt, 2017; Quintelier, 2015; Wray-Lake, 2019). They include political talk through everyday interactions at home, in school and in their communities around social and political issues of significance to them that they can connect with through social media or classroom-based activities. Shared experiences in classroom-based activities can provide opportunities to increase civic knowledge and engagement (Beaumont, 2010; Deimel et al., 2020; Pontes et al., 2019;

Seider & Graves, 2020). Also, recent global rises in student protest around issues[8] of pertinence to young people have been enabled through online forums (for example, Facebook, the Hive, and Instagram[9]) and, in some cases, support from parents and teachers to enable and support young people to attend protest marches (Brooks, 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Nairn, 2019; Seider & Graves, 2020; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Immediate contexts in young people's everyday lives provide an authentic environment[10] for young people to engage in civic-minded activities around social and political issues that they can connect to and are of significance to them (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Harris & Wyn, 2009; Harris et al., 2007; Manning & Ryan, 2004; Wood, 2012; Yeung et al., 2008, 2012; Youniss et al., 2002). They do this by providing conditions where they feel safe to share their opinions, their voices are valued, and their participation may produce social and political change (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Wray-Lake, 2019). As research highlights, young people are embedded within the settings and relational interactions in their lives, and it is through these settings that they are learning to be political and developing their own political agency (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019; Yeung et al., 2012). Longitudinal research has documented age-related increases in young people's political efficacy, knowledge, and behaviours (Eckstein et al., 2012; Zaff et al., 2011), and that informal political learning experiences and social relationships with significant others that build up over time provide an important mechanism for more complex political actions (Breeze et al., 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019). These findings from the literature are crucial to this study as one of its key aims is to explore the way in which young people's experiences of social and political activism serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency.

---

[8] Such as environmental and human rights concerns.
[9] Online social media and social networking platforms.
[10] Authentic environment meaning genuine and trustworthy, and therefore of relevance to young people in their everyday lives.

The role of social media in young people's political socialisation is an area of growing interest due to its prominence in contemporary society as a form of communication. This platform is enabling young people to communicate with their peers about social and political issues of significance to them both online and through coordinated protests about environmental and human rights issues that they feel connected to such as climate change and the Black Lives Matter[11] movement. The contribution that social media could make to facilitating greater involvement from young people in wider political arenas is important to identify to remove further barriers for them, and to inform policy development that may embrace new forms of communication relevant in society today (Valenzuela, 2014; Xenos et al., 2014).

Taken together the literature in this section highlights the importance of removing barriers to young people's political participation, in formal and informal political arenas, by broadening understandings of political engagement and embracing new ways of communicating that are relevant today in facilitating political thought and action. The ways in which young people are provided with opportunities to politically engage and experience political participation is key for reducing disparities in participation for young people and nurturing their political agency as they strive for autonomy. Identifying barriers of power and regulatory control[12] over young people in societal and political institutions is an important insight for informing future policy (Wood, 2011). These barriers can affect young people's level of political efficacy or trust in societal and political institutions, and therefore hinder political participation and agency (Finlay, 2010; Flanagan, 2013; Gray, 2013; Henley, 2015; Wood, 2013). As this research seeks to explore how young people are developing their political agency, this literature provides a context of understanding to inform this study around the facilitators and barriers to political participation for young people.

---

[11] A social movement protesting police brutality that is racially motivated. Originating in the United States in 2013, the movement has come to highlight racism, discrimination and inequality experienced by black people across the world with the #BlackLivesMatter Global Network.
[12] Through policy and legislation.

Youth political participation today

Youth political participation today involves a broad range of formal and informal political actions across a wide range of platforms enabled by technologies that link individuals not just locally but nationally and globally. This section outlines the ongoing debate about the participatory rights of young people in electoral processes and policy reforms that have been adopted to attempt to further engage them. Alongside this, the section considers the global rise in student protest internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand around environmental, social, and political issues as well as the role of social media.

The underlying adult-centric belief that young people are apathetic and disengaged from formal politics, and dependent on adults for protection, has affected their participatory rights in the electoral processes of nation states (Breeze et al., 2017; Lister, 2007). As previously mentioned, these adult-centric views sit alongside a shift in the rights of children and young people to be heard (Bartos, 2016; Lansdown, 2005; Phillips et al., 2019; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). It is within this context that ongoing debate is occurring around the enfranchisement of young people under the age of 18 years, and that youth-led campaigns to lower the voting age are emerging, such as the "Votes at 16" campaign by the United Kingdom Youth Parliament and the "Make It Sixteen" campaign in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hall, 2019; Radio New Zealand, 2019, 2020a).

Internationally, different patterns of youth voter turnout have occurred in recent years due to electoral reforms being adopted such as the preregistration of voters at age 16 and 17 years of age and lowering the voting age to 16 years (Breeze et al., 2017; Fowler, 2017; Hart & Youniss, 2017). These policy reforms have been adopted to attempt to increase young people's engagement in the electoral process by capturing them at an earlier age, and to offer them genuine engagement in a formal political process to build their level of trust in political participation opportunities and to increase their agency (Fowler, 2017; Nolas et al., 2017; Pancer, 2015; Wray-Lake, 2019). Accordingly, they appear to have offered young people, in the countries where they have been adopted, such as Austria,

Brazil, Scotland and Norway, genuine opportunities to enter political life (Breeze et al., 2017; Hart & Youniss, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019).

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the Electoral Act 1993 section 82(2) allows 17-year-olds to register on the Electoral Roll and hold a provisional status until their eighteenth birthday, and as of an amendment made to the Act in 2020, the ability for unregistered voters of any age 18 years and over to enrol and vote right up to and on election day (Section 60(g)(ii)) (Electoral Commission, 2020a). Statistics from both the 2017 and 2020 General Elections show increases in the number of young people voting in the 18 to 24 age group (Foster & Taylor, 2019; Electoral Commission, 2017, 2020b). Links between these types of electoral reforms and voter turnout statistics may provide valuable feedback on how to provide young people with the stimuli to engage with the electoral process for future policy development around elections in the future (Breeze et al., 2017; Henn & Foard, 2014). In the same way, these electoral reforms and voter turnout statistics, both here and overseas, provide an interesting background context for this study on how best to facilitate and nurture the political agency of young people.

As noted previously, there has been a global rise in student protest around environmental, social, and political issues pertinent to young people, such as climate change, #Me Too[13], and the Black Lives Matter movements (Brooks, 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Nairn, 2019; Nissen, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019). These issues are relevant and meaningful to young people as they affect them and their futures and therefore, they feel connected to them and motivated to engage and to have their voices heard. The global rise in youth voices in these areas has been enabled by online technologies that facilitate young peoples' communication with one another in their communities, nationally and internationally. This includes access to online news media that can be accessed at any time in which these environmental and societal concerns have been given growing high-profile coverage due to their relevance to contemporary global issues pertinent not just to young people but to adults, governments, and nations throughout the world. In this way

---

[13] A social movement protesting sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter[14] are having a globalising effect on young people by engaging them in everyday politics (Loader et al., 2014; Ndlovu, 2021; Osman et al., 2020; Wray-Lake, 2019). They illustrate the individual and collective agency that they are capable of when the tools that they have to communicate with are relevant within their everyday contexts (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Breeze et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016).

Online platforms are not only resulting in engagement online but also in political actions in the real world, such as the Arab Spring series of anti-government protests and uprisings, the Zucotti Park protest in New York about economic inequalities, the student protest during the Chilean education reform movement, and Hong Kong's anti-authoritarian protests (Ho & Hung, 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2014; Xenos et al., 2014). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the role of social media in young people's political socialisation can be seen through youth political participation that is influenced by global environmental, social, and political issues (Nissen, 2019). Young people here have engaged in protest for global climate change concerns in the School Strikes for Climate New Zealand[15] and the Black Lives Matter movements (Radio New Zealand, 2020b). Social media is enabling young people to make their voices heard by providing a platform for them to advocate independently and collectively about issues which are relevant to them and through contexts to which they can relate. Embracing social media as a tool for capturing youth in both informal and formal political arenas may result in their increased engagement and reduce political inequalities (Xenos et al., 2014).

In summary, this section has outlined youth political participation today, their participatory rights in electoral processes, and policy reforms that have been trialled to further engage young people in formal political participation. It also considered the changing nature of young people's political participation, including the global rise in student protest and the role of social media as a vehicle for mobilising and facilitating

---

[14] An online social networking and microblogging platform.
[15] Youth-led climate change activist movement, where school students strike from school in support of climate change action.

youth engagement. This changing nature of young people's political participation and the place of social media in its facilitation provides insight into how youth political agency and political participation is evolving integral to this study.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature on how youth political participation has evolved and why it is very contested. To do this it reviewed traditional and contemporary understandings of youth political participation by looking at contested understandings and theories of youth political participation, historical understandings of young people's political participation, and shifts from adult-centric to youth-centric frameworks for working with young people in civic and political contexts. The literature highlights how adult-led discourses and political frameworks have marginalised young people's active participation in political arenas by creating barriers to their participatory opportunities. By breaking down these barriers of power and regulatory control and moving to approaches that facilitate youth engagement through genuine representation of their voice, young people's political agency may be nurtured and disparities in their participation broken down. Adult views of children and young people need to change to view their participation as active rather than passive, and to take seriously their ability to contribute socially and politically to society to nurture their political agency.

As this research aims to look at the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism, this chapter focused on the opportunities that young people have to engage in political arenas formally and informally. Therefore, this chapter outlined the importance of broadening understandings of political participation to include the multiple ways and contexts in which young peoples' political socialisation develops to include informal participatory opportunities in young people's immediate contexts through platforms that are relevant to them. In reviewing platforms that are relevant to young people, it also considered the role of social media in young people's political socialisation today, and to electoral reform initiatives that may encourage young people to participate in electoral politics. Overall, the literature review highlighted the critical

role that social and political contexts play in the development of young people's political agency, and the knowledge that everyday lived experiences of young people can provide for policymakers, educators, parents, and civic organisations in working with youth towards greater politicisation. Crucial to this research, which seeks to explore the development of young people's political agency in social and political activism, the analysis of the literature provides an understanding of the context in which young people are learning to engage with and navigate the political world today.

The chapter that follows moves on to explain the methodology, methods and theoretical underpinnings that guided the research process through its exploration into the development of young people's political agency.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods used in this research which seeks to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. It provides a rationale for the qualitative exploratory approach adopted for the research design and unpacks the social constructivist theoretical framework used to inform this by reflecting on the ontological and epistemological positioning of the research paradigm. Through this discussion of the methodology the researcher is able to position the research within the social constructivist theoretical paradigm, validate the methods used to collect and analyse the data, and make explicit their positioning in relation to knowledge and how their worldview may influence the research process.

The second part of this chapter addresses the methods used to collect and analyse the research data. It details the use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews to collect the data and a field journal to manage subjectivities through a process of reflexivity. The methods section then outlines the process of thematic analysis used for analysing the data collected through the interviews. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the research are discussed, along with the ethical considerations and processes adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the research and to ensure the autonomy of participants.

Research objective

This research explores the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. It aims to do this by:

1. Examining definitions of political agency and political participation.
2. Identifying the ways that young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are engaging through social and political activism.
3. Exploring the ways in which these experiences serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency.

Research design

The research design was a qualitative exploratory approach using thematic analysis informed by social constructivism. Qualitative research was appropriate for the study as it sought to explore the development of young people's political agency through the complexities of the participants' individual experiences and understandings of political engagement (O'Leary, 2017; Stebbins, 2001; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). It looked to do this by examining the way in which political agency is defined and what influences this has on youth political engagement, identifying the ways that young people are engaging through social and political activism, and exploring how these experiences may serve as a learning platform for increasing young people's political participation.

A qualitative research approach prioritises depth over quantity through the authentic gathering of data in context (Patton, 2015). It values participants' perspectives of how they construct their worlds, interpret their experiences, and how they give meaning to them (Flick, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was appropriate for the study as it enabled the complexities of the participants' individual experiences and understandings of their political experiences to be explored in depth (O'Leary, 2017; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). By prioritising each participant's perspective, it also accepted that there can be multiple understandings rather than a single truth consistent with a qualitative exploratory research design (Patton, 2015). Therefore, in this study, each of the participant's perspectives of their political experiences are valid.

The qualitative data was collected through in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This enabled rich contextual descriptions through participants' own narration of their experiences in political engagement. It helped the researcher to understand participant's interpretations of their political experiences. These experiences were analysed from the ground up through an inductive process of thematic analysis relevant to a data-centred piece of exploratory research seeking to understand participants' perspectives (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Flick, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the research sought to develop ideas from the raw data rather than being shaped by theory

(Braun & Clarke, 2006), an exploratory research approach helped to produce an holistic account of participants' political experiences and perspectives (Stebbins, 2001).

To ensure participants' subjective positions were prioritised throughout this research process the researcher engaged in a process of reflexivity[16]. A qualitative exploratory study calls for the researcher to acknowledge their worldview and any biases that they may have that may affect the research process (Patton, 2015; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This required the researcher to consciously manage subjectivities to ensure that the views of the participants in the study were accurately represented and that the findings were trustworthy (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The following section on the theoretical framework used to underpin the research process again discusses the importance of this process of reflexivity.

Theoretical framework

The qualitative exploratory approach of this study embraced a social constructivist paradigm to inform the design, data collection, data analysis, and findings of the research. Utilising this constructivist paradigm involved an unpacking of the philosophical assumptions around how knowledge is viewed and understood to establish an ontological and epistemological position for the research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Social constructivist research brings together a set of beliefs about knowledge and how knowledge is developed that accepts that there is no single truth or reality, and that knowledge is complex and subjective (O'Leary, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007). Therefore, it falls under the umbrella of the post-modernist worldview which accepts that there are complexities inherent within the social world, that people are complex, and that different individuals may have different interpretations of the same event (O'Leary, 2017). Relativism and subjectivism also fall under this post-modernist worldview as approaches that accept that knowledge is chaotic and complex (O'Leary, 2017). Relativism accepts that findings from one context cannot be generalised to another as knowledge is relative to the

---

[16] Detailed later in the chapter.

sociocultural environment in which it sits and can only be understood in relation to this (O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). Similarly, subjectivism holds that there is no objective universal truth as experiences are subjective to an individual's own meaning making and knowledge building (O'Leary, 2017). The post-modernist worldview is relevant to this study as it explores young people's individual experiences and accepts that the subjective reality of one participant may be quite different to another participant.

Research grounded in social constructivism highlights that our understandings are based on social and cultural constructions from which the context of our experiences and knowledge is based (Patton, 2015). It asserts that all knowledge is constructed and reflects the dominant views in a society at any time and place of those who exercise the most power in that culture (O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). A social constructivist positioning for this research required the researcher to be mindful of power dynamics that may be present to manage subjectivities (Burr, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2015). This was important because traditional understandings of youth and young people's political engagement have been viewed through an adult-centric worldview (Lister et al., 2003). The research achieved this circumspection of power through a reflexive process which enabled participants' perspectives to be unpacked providing an accurate reflection of their experiences. As part of this process the researcher made explicit their worldview and how it may impact on the research (Bryman & Becker, 2012). The researcher also critically examined views of youth and young people's political engagement, and the limited status and rights given to them. This process of critical analysis and reflexivity was important to the researcher for understanding their relationship to knowledge and truth, and how their worldview may influence the research process.

Social constructivism is relevant to this qualitative-exploratory study as it aims to investigate young people's understandings of their experiences in the political world through face-to-face semi-structured interviews that facilitate participants' own narration of their meaning making. This data collection method is reflective of a research process informed by social constructivism which seeks to capture multiple understandings and realities and is based on the idea that all knowledge is constructed (Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). It does not aim to provide generalisable data but to develop

rich data from a specific population of young people to inform and build on existing knowledge (Patton, 2015; Ryan et al., 2007). As each participant brought a distinct perspective through their individual understandings of their experiences, the semi-structured interviews prioritised participants' subjective positions and allowed for the collection of diverse understandings within context (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Burr, 2015; O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). Further details of the research methods used to collect and analyse the data are presented in the following section.

Research methods

This second part of the chapter details the methods used to collect and analyse the research data, including the participant recruitment process, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, field journal and thematic analysis. These methods are informed by the social constructivist paradigm underpinning this qualitative exploratory study into the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. They are reflective of social constructivism because they enable participants' subjective positions to be prioritised, facilitate participants' own narration of their meaning making, and enable the collection of multiple understandings integral for a piece of qualitative-exploratory research seeking rich in-depth data.

Participant recruitment

In qualitative research the aim is to ensure that the sample provides rich in-depth and contextual data for analysis from a specific population of young people (O'Leary, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007). A purposive sampling approach was used to meet the needs of the study in exploring young people's experiences of the political world. This sampling approach is non-random and involves recruiting participants for a defined purpose (O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). The recruitment criteria used was that the young people were aged between 16 and 20 years, and had engaged in some form of political participation, formally or informally, for example, the School Strikes for Climate protests, Black Lives Matter movement, #Me Too movement, engaged in a social media forum, or

voted in a local or general election. Recruiting the sample involved asking for volunteers by sending out an advertisement (Appendix A) to youth organisations around an urban location in Aotearoa New Zealand, from which a small in-depth sample of six participants were recruited. The participants included two males and four females, the youngest of 16 years and oldest of 20 years. The ethnicity mix comprised of Filipino, Māori, Chinese, Italian, and New Zealand European[17].

Participants were recruited through youth organisations that collaborate with young people and encourage them to participate in civic activities (Appendix B). The researcher made initial contact with the organisations through a letter seeking their assistance in recruiting participants for the study (Appendix C). This involved seeking permission to display flyers (Appendix A) advertising the research in their centres and on any social media platforms that they may use. Of the seven youth organisations approached two responded positively. Interested young people were asked to make direct contact with the researcher who made available information sheets (Appendix D) outlining the research design, criteria for recruitment, interview structure and time commitments involved in participating.

Once participants had been given the opportunity to read the information sheet and respond with their interest in participating, the researcher made direct contact via email to arrange an agreed time and location to conduct the interview. This process sought to ensure the research enabled young people to freely decide to participate by providing conditions that promoted their autonomy from the beginning of the relationship (Massey University, 2017; O'Leary, 2017). These conditions were ensured through a transparent informed consent process. An informed consent process involves the participants in a research study being made fully aware of its purpose and the process involved, including what their rights and responsibilities are, before agreeing to participate (O'Leary, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007). This is an ethically important part of the recruitment process as it ensures that both the researcher and the participants are protected (Bryman & Becker, 2012). The interview schedule allowed time and space at the beginning of each interview

---

[17] See next chapter for a full breakdown of demographic data, p. 48.

to go through the informed consent process (Appendix E) with each participant. This ensured that participants fully understood the research process and had the opportunity to ask any questions. This process included gaining participants' consent to digitally record and use otter.ai transcription software to transcribe the interviews. The audio recording enabled all the data from the interviews to be captured at the time of interview, protecting it from bias and preserving the data for reviewing later (O'Leary, 2017). This process was conducted in line with *Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation involving Human Participants[18]* (Massey University, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews

The research utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a data collection method that provide a flexible structure. They involve the use of open-ended questions, that allow the researcher to guide rather than lead the interview process, to draw out participants' understandings and enable any unexpected data to be explored (O'Leary, 2017). This involved the use of specific open-ended questions to guide the narration of participants' own experiences in social and political settings of interest to them (Patton, 2015; Walliman, 2016). This data collection method was appropriate for the research because it prioritised participants' subjective positions, facilitating the narration of their own meaning making, therefore giving insight into the ways in which these experiences and understandings affected the development of their political agency (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Dwyer & Limb, 2001; O'Leary, 2017).

The researcher used an interview schedule (Appendix F) to guide the interviews so that the same questions and themes were pursued with each participant to ensure that all relevant topics and questions were covered (Patton, 2015). The interview structure was based on open-ended questions organised around key ideas to allow for flexibility within the interview schedule. This enabled rich contextual descriptions and themes from participants' experiences in political engagement to be drawn out, and for any unexpected

---

[18] Detailed later in the chapter.

data to be collected as well for coding and analysis (Burr, 2015; Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; O'Leary, 2017; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). The flexibility in this structure also helped the researcher to facilitate the interviews with the participants rather than to take a leading role. By valuing participants' perspectives this data collection method reflects a research process informed by social constructivism which seeks to develop rich data and capture diverse understandings (Burr, 2015; Flick, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Throughout the interview process consideration was given to ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment for the participants. This involved a flexible research approach that accommodated participants' circumstances and commitments, such as interview times and locations that did not cause disruption to school or work commitments. The researcher used text messages and emails to communicate with the participants around these logistics. The interview questions guiding participants' narration of their political worlds used age-appropriate language, and the interview process allowed time and space at the beginning for building rapport. Taking time to establish this rapport with the participants helped to facilitate a respectful and comfortable environment where they felt they could share their views and opinions (Irvine, 2012). This approach aimed to empower and engage participants (Collin, 2008; Irvine, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Field journal

Data was also collected through a field journal alongside the interviews. A field journal was used throughout the research process for recording observations, reflections, and any other relevant information pertinent to the study regarding participant recruitment, interviewing, interpretation, and analysis of the interview data. The use of the field journal enabled the researcher to adopt a conscious position in managing subjectivities by making explicit their worldview to reduce its impact on the research process (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Lietz & Zayas, 2010; O'Leary, 2017). This involved the researcher being aware of their own existing knowledge, perceptions, and biases that could be implicitly influencing the study (Bryman & Becker, 2012; O'Leary, 2017; Riessman, 2003).

As noted earlier in the chapter, a social constructivist positioning for this research required the researcher to be mindful of power dynamics that may impact on the research. The field journal enabled an iterative process of reflexivity and critical analysis of dominant discourses and researcher bias, important for accurately reflecting and recording participants' experiences in social and political activism of significance to them (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This process of reflexivity involved the challenging of assumptions and dominant discourses throughout the research process to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The field journal data was thematically analysed alongside the interview data to ensure that participants' subjective positions were prioritised throughout the analysis process.

Thematic analysis

Prior to the analysis stage, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews through email. This was done to make sure that they were satisfied with its accuracy. The participants were asked to respond to this email consenting to their transcript to be released to the research project (Appendix G). This process is known as member checking or participant validation and is a tool used to ensure that the research is credible and trustworthy (Birt et al., 2016; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). One participant did amend their transcript to clarify their meaning, but this did not impact on the overall meaning being conveyed.

The data collected through the field journal and the interviews was thematically analysed. Thematic analysis involves an iterative process of searching for themes and patterns in the data to enable the interpretations of participants' meaning making to be prioritised (Braun & Clark, 2006; O'Leary, 2017). This involved a process of identifying, analysing, recording, and categorising patterns (Braun & Clark, 2006). The aim of the analysis was to provide a synthesis of the meanings from the qualitative data collected in an insightful and credible way. This involved the researcher keeping an open mind by challenging assumptions through a process of reflexivity and allowing the participants' meaning

making to direct the study through an inductive process of thematic analysis (Patton, 2015). This inductive process of analysis facilitated participants' experiences of political participation to tell the story from the ground up by enabling the themes from the data to emerge (Ryan et al., 2007).

The first stage in the analysis process involved the researcher becoming familiar with the data. This included reflecting on the initial thoughts recorded after each interview in the field journal and the transcribed interview dialogue. The researcher identified common themes and patterns in the data. This iterative cycle of searching for themes used an inductive process to draw out the data from the interview questions within the context of participants' experiences to organise and code for core themes that could be mapped and verified (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; O'Leary, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007).

As the research process used semi-structured interviews, focusing on the understandings of individual participants in social and political activism of relevance to them, the analysis of the data was also alert to subtle differences within the interviews in responses and speech (Patton, 2015). This included considering sociocultural and political contexts alongside connections between the researcher and the subject (Patton, 2015; Riessman, 2003). These considerations involved the researcher interpreting multiple meanings from participants' understandings, including their interpretations of their experiences. The interpretation of meaning is complex and different individuals may interpret events and make meaning from them in different ways (Dwyer & Limb, 2001). The complexities inherent within this process of reflexivity, involving the interpretation of multiple realities and a critical analysis of and management of potential power imbalances between the researcher and participants, are representative of the postmodernist worldview, in which relativism, social constructivism and subjectivism paradigms are relevant (O'Leary, 2017).

Direct quotations were used to provide additional evidence of the underlying themes in the research, and to further illustrate participants' individual experiences and understandings of political engagement (Patton, 2015; Phoenix, 2012). Observations and

reflections recorded alongside the raw data in the field journal were used to help inform the analysis and interpret the data. Referring back to the field journal helped to provide a conscious viewpoint about continuing to manage subjectivities. It also enabled the researcher to keep an open mind about alternative explanations from unexpected data that was collected (Bryman & Becker, 2012; O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015; Watson, 2005).

Six main themes were identified within the data, they were: (a) defining political agency and participation, (b) engaging with politics, (c) the place of youth voice, (d) social connections and relationships (e) the impact of societal structures, (f) informing the future. These themes are presented in the next chapter of the thesis.

Limitations of the study

The methodological design of the study has some limitations as social constructivist research prioritises deep and rich understandings of phenomena rather than being focused on the collection of data generalisable to a larger population (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The aim of the research was to represent the perspectives of the research participants as closely as possible by conducting in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of young people who had been involved in a formal and/or informal experience of political participation (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Several steps were taken in the research to authentically gather and accurately represent these views of participants to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Qualitative research does not use the same standards as quantitative research, instead relying on other factors such as trustworthiness (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The trustworthiness of the study was ensured by addressing the credibility, transferability, auditability, and confirmability of the data through an iterative process of evaluation (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Particular attention was given to documenting the research process, from participant recruitment to the interpretation and analysis of data, to ensure its auditability. The credibility and confirmability of the

research was maintained through the capturing of authentic in-depth data, reflexivity, keeping a field journal and member checking. The researcher took care to adopt a conscious position about managing subjectivities throughout the research process by acknowledging the need for reflexivity, being mindful of bias, and keeping the written journal mentioned above (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Watson, 2005).

The semi-structured interviews enabled flexibility in the process for the narration of participant's own understandings and for any unanticipated data to be collected (O'Leary, 2017). The audio-recording of the interviews enabled the data to be captured at the time of interview protecting it from bias (O'Leary, 2017). The participants were also given the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews to check for inaccuracies through the process of member checking, important for ensuring a credible and trustworthy research process (Padgett, 2008). Although the sample size was small, the purposive sampling technique facilitated the gathering of meaningful and credible data from a specific group of young people, thus providing transferable findings for future research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

Ethical considerations

Social constructivist research demands reflexivity to ensure ethical issues are mitigated throughout the research process (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Consideration was given throughout the research process to ensuring a robust ethical approach. An ethical approach involves taking steps, and giving consideration throughout the research process, to being respectful to participants and safeguarding their rights (O'Leary, 2017). This requires a transparent process where participants are informed throughout the research process about the purpose of the study, what information is being sought, and how the information will be used (Ryan et al., 2007). This research was conducted in accordance with the *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2017). The ethics application went to the Human Ethics Northern Committee in April 2021 and was

approved in May 2021. The application approval number is 21/23, and a copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix H.

The research process was framed by the ethical principles of autonomy, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, avoidance of harm (non-maleficence), benefit (beneficence), justice, and special relationships.

The ethical principle of autonomy implies that participants have full understanding of the research that they have agreed to take part in and are making independent or self-directed choices about being involved (O'Leary, 2017). The autonomy of participants was protected throughout the research with an open and transparent research process, where young people were freely able to decide to participate, were provided with all relevant information regarding the study, and given space and time to ask any questions to fully understand what they were consenting to by taking part in the study.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, an important part of protecting the autonomy and rights of participants in the research is through a transparent informed consent process. Informed consent implies that participants have a clear understanding of the research information and the autonomy to decide to participate freely in their own right and to give consent to the process (O'Leary, 2017). The participants in the research were provided with an information sheet (Appendix D) and informed consent form (Appendix E) with information on the purpose of the study, what information was being sought, how the information would be used, and about their right to withdraw from the study at any stage (Ryan et al., 2007). The steps in the research process were made clear to participants. Time was allocated in the interview to go through the informed consent process with them allowing for any questions that they may have had. Informed consent was also sought for the interview to be audio-recorded and digitally transcribed.

It is important that the privacy and confidentiality of participants is always maintained, and that any information collected during the research process is safeguarded (O'Leary, 2017; Punch, 2006; Ryan et al., 2007). As face-to-face semi-structured interviews were

used, the identity of participants was known to the researcher. However, the confidentiality of participants' identities was important, and steps were put in place to ensure that these were not disclosed at any stage of the process. The confidentiality of participants' identities was maintained using pseudonyms and removing all identifiable elements from the report (O'Leary, 2017). This was achieved by ensuring that any details from the interviews that might identify any persons or organisations were anonymised. All data collected was securely stored throughout the research process. The consent forms and any printed or written data was stored in a locked filing cabinet, and all electronic documentation was protected by computer password that only the researcher had access to. All the data collected will be stored for one year following the completion of the research project and then destroyed.

The ethical principle of avoidance of harm (non-maleficence) is about ensuring that no harm comes to participants involved in the research (O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). This was achieved by maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of all the participants involved in the study. Consideration was given by the researcher to the impacts of the research on participants and how best to ensure their safety and processes were put in place to mitigate this. These processes involved taking steps to ensure a comfortable and relaxed space during the interviews that allowed time for building relationships with the participants. This principle was also ensured by providing participants with the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews, to ask questions about it, and amend if necessary. The researcher also considered their own safety in the research process and ensured that steps were in place to provide protection from harm and ensure their own safety (see Researcher Safety Plan at Appendix I).

The principle of benefit (beneficence) relates to any positive benefits for individuals or groups from the research (Punch, 2006). This research was conducted to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activity and, therefore, the findings aim to contribute to the knowledge base of the topic and provide insight for future research. The research may also be of interest to policymakers, civic organisations and other people working with young people to better understand young people's perspectives on political participation and how best to secure their engagement.

The principle of justice refers to the ethical obligation to fairly distribute the benefits and harms in the research process (Greaney et al., 2012). This was ensured by providing all participants with a fair and ethically robust environment, where the steps in the process were conducted consistently and transparently, such as mutually agreeing with individual participants on the time and place for their interview.

Reflecting on and defining any special relationships that may be present in a piece of research is ethically important to ensure that these do not affect the outcomes of the study (O'Leary, 2017). To mitigate this the researcher kept a field journal to reflect on any relationships that may influence the outcomes of the study and to protect the process from bias. There were no special relationships that existed between the researcher and the participants in this study.

Alongside these principles consideration and reflection was given by the researcher to ensuring a culturally respectful context and framework for researching within Aotearoa New Zealand (Hudson et al., 2010; Massey University, 2017). Reflection was given through the ethics application and in the research methodology to the articles in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and of the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the researcher to these (Massey University, 2017). The research design took into consideration the need to provide a respectful and comfortable space for participants. This space facilitated relationship building and connections within the research integral to working in an Aotearoa New Zealand context (Hudson et al., 2010).

Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the methodology and methods used for this qualitative exploratory study on the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. It outlined the social constructivist theoretical framework used to underpin this research and validate the methods used to collect and analyse the data. A

qualitative exploratory approach was utilised to explore the complexities of participants' individual experiences and understandings of the political world, the data collection and analysis used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to allow the participants to narrate their own experiences of political participation and thematic analysis to search for themes and patterns in the data. The interpretation of these multiple narratives involved an iterative process of critical analysis and reflexivity consistent with the social constructivist paradigm. This reflexivity helped to inform the research process alongside the key ethical principles of autonomy, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, avoidance of harm, benefit, justice, and special relationships.

In the chapter that follows, the research results are presented under the themes that emerged from the thematically analysed data.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this research was to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. This chapter presents the results from the face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted for this research. The results are presented under six main themes that emerged from the thematic data: (a) defining political agency and participation, (b) engaging with politics, (c) the place of youth voice, (d) social connections and relationships (e) the impact of societal structures, and (f) informing the future. The process of identifying themes utilised a social constructivist framework focused on the understandings of individual participants and their meaning-making through the retelling of their political experiences. The themes provide the framework in the chapter for the presentation of participants' understandings of their political experiences.

The participants

Six participants living in a South Island urban community in Aotearoa New Zealand were interviewed for this research.

Anna was a university student from a semi-rural coastal community in the North Island. She was interested in social and environmental issues. Anna had been involved in political activism.

Peter was a university student from the Auckland region. He voluntarily worked for a youth-led climate action organisation in a leadership role and described himself as passionate about its role in addressing environmental issues. Peter had also been involved in community organisations, political activism, local council youth groups, and submission processes on proposed bylaws and initiatives within local council and Bills in central government.

Isla was a university student from a semi-rural coastal community in the South Island. She was interested in social and environmental issues in New Zealand. Isla had been empowered by her own experiences of racism to reach out to others facing similar struggles, taking up the opportunity to be a part of a youth global development trip with the United Nations. She had also been involved in political activism.

Eve was a university student from a semi-rural community in the North Island. She described herself as passionate about working on the social, political, and environmental issues in New Zealand. Empowered by the injustices she had seen in her local community growing up she had been involved with local council, a select committee[19], political activism and in a prison reform consultation group focusing on Tikanga Māori.

Ethan was a high school student from a South Island urban community. In his words, he was passionate about the work he was doing in the community for youth voice and environmental issues. Ethan had been involved with community organisations, a political party, political activism, local council youth groups, and submission processes on proposed bylaws and initiatives within local council.

Sarah was a high school student from a South Island urban community. She was community-minded and, in her words, had a love of passing on her knowledge and supporting others to stand up about environmental issues. Sarah had been involved in a youth-led community organisation focused on a local environmental initiative, leadership roles in her school and political activism.

---

[19] A smaller group of members from the House of Representatives who consider issues in more detail, overseeing government policy and examining Bills. Members of the public can make written or oral submissions to a select committee about Bills before them.

Table 1 below provides brief demographic information on the participants[20].

Table 1 – The Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity[21]	School/University
Anna	19	Female	Filipino/ Māori	University
Peter	19	Male	Pākehā	University
Isla	20	Female	Chinese/Asian	University
Eve	19	Female	Māori/Italian	University
Ethan	17	Male	Pākehā	School
Sarah	16	Female	New Zealand European	School

This range of participants enabled diverse experiences and perspectives to be captured. The next section outlines the first main theme that emerged from the data on participants' views of what political agency and political participation means to them.

Defining political agency and participation

In the interviews, participants were asked to define political agency and political participation. Their reflections on what these terms meant to them focused on actively engaging in their communities. This engagement involved a range of political activities in both local and national arenas pertinent to current social issues and participants' civic responsibilities, for example, being involved in local environmental groups, local council youth representation, petitions, and voting. They also involved discussion about the importance of making an informed decision about participating in different political issues and acting independently of influences around them in their immediate

---

[20] Pseudonyms have been used to ensure participants' anonymity.
[21] As disclosed by the participants.

environments. This section reflects first on participants' definitions of political agency and then on political participation.

In their definitions of political agency, participants reflected on themes of independence and being informed to make their own decisions not influenced by others such as friends. Anna described it as *"being politically active in your own way"*, and Ethan expanded on this that *"it's the ability to educate yourself and come to your own conclusions ... and then to act on your conclusions"*. All the participants referred to the importance of knowledge, educating oneself about social issues and about what is going on politically, and having knowledge around formal political processes as being important for building their confidence to engage in different political arenas. For example, Sarah explained the importance of developing independent thought by finding out all the information that you can and that *"once you have all of those pieces of information, you can form your own conclusions and use that for your next steps"*. Collectively, the participants understandings of political agency were framed by ideas of independent thought and action, and as in Sarah's quote above, through informed, purposive action.

Peter spoke of his understandings of political agency as not only an independent concept but as a collective one as well, stating that *"political agency extended to groups of people as well"*. He believed that the collective opinion of a group or a community of people was heavily weighted in comparison to other groups depending on the status of that group within society.

> *It's fair to say some groups of people have hugely higher amounts of political agency in New Zealand than others, businesses of course, churches ... middle-class middle-aged people also have a huge amount of political agency, compared to youth and lower socio-economic groups* (Peter).

This quote highlights what Peter feels is the disproportionate influence that particular groups in Aotearoa New Zealand society have over individuals and other groups. Overall, participants' reflections on what political agency meant to them focused on the enacting of independent thought and action. Peter's description of political agency expanded on

these ideas to include collective agency and the differential power that some groups of people or organisations have over others in a particular society.

In defining political participation, participants unanimously agreed that it did not just involve voting in the General Election but *"an engagement with process more so than just voting … working with groups that influence the process in one way or another, volunteering for a political organisation, even just sharing political views with others, maybe social media, or something"* (Peter). In this quotation, Peter talked about engagement with political process which Sarah and Eve also identified as part of their understanding of what it means to engage politically. Sarah stated, *"to me it means having a say in what the government does and the policies it implements"*, and Eve used her personal experience of being involved in a petition presented to a parliamentary select committee to explain political participation as *"having a say in issues locally or nationally through petitions and maybe going to parliament to speak about that because I actually did that"*. Participants' understandings of political participation identified a wide range of political activities in different contexts, they also included not just activities that they felt that they were compelled to participate in such as voting but also engagement with government policy and political processes.

In addition, to these understandings of political participation, participants' definitions focused on contributing to their local communities as an important part of politically engaging and *"getting involved in the pressing issues[22] that we have in society, and raising awareness about that, just like being involved in the community … making sure the community is also aware of the problems that we have"* (Isla). They believed that it was important to *"start off in [their] own community"* (Sarah) and to focus on being *"involved in New Zealand issues first"* (Eve) to build the future they wanted. It was clear that participants understandings of political participation involved not just engaging with government but also about engaging with their local communities around social and political issues pertinent to them.

---

[22] Current, often high profile, problems of urgent need in society such as climate change.

Like the definitions of political agency narrated by participants, the definitions of political participation shared a theme of 'being involved' in their communities and having a say in societal and political issues. In contrast to political participation, participants' definitions of political agency referred to more than just the act of 'being involved' in their communities but to 'independent thought and action', that is, being able to act in an independent and informed way not influenced by others. The next section provides an overview of the participants engagement in informal and formal political activities.

Engaging with politics

This theme presents participants' understandings of political participation. They include a range of political activities, involving contribution within their schools, local communities, and to broader societal and political issues within Aotearoa New Zealand.

The participants discussed the range of political activities that they had participated in, including what they were currently involved in. All the participants had been involved in the climate change protests, either during their time at school or as a tertiary student or both. The way in which participants engaged in the protests varied from more passive[23] to active. Anna's role reflected a more passive involvement attending alongside friends: *"most of my involvement is very social at the surface level, not really in depth"*. In contrast, Sarah's role was more active in organising *"the banner workshop"*[24] as a leader within her school for the School Strike for Climate protest marches and of her support for a younger student at her school to speak at a protest by standing alongside her while she spoke: *"they asked if I could go on with them because they were a bit scared and so I decided I would go with them"*.

---

[23] Involving joining in socially with others and not taking on leadership roles, for example, attending a protest with friends but not doing so independently or having a role in its organisation.
[24] A banner workshop involves making placards and signs for use in a protest.

Ethan and Peter spoke of their involvement in *"direct action"* (Ethan) against climate change through the Extinction Rebellion[25] movement which is a *"non-violent ... climate activism group"* (Ethan) which aims *to "exert pressure on the political and legal systems, leading to change"* (Peter). Ethan outlined that he had been involved in quite a few protests *"just to do with the general issue of climate change"* noting recent coal train protests. Peter mentioned work with the Coal Action Network Aotearoa[26] *"including one occupation where we went into the [region] Coal Mine"*. These experiences of direct action using nonviolent civil disobedience provide another example of how some young people are engaging with politics to compel government action on environmental issues that are of significance to them.

Three of the participants had contributed to submissions and been involved in consultation processes for local and central government issues, ranging from local council policy and planning to environmental and climate concerns. Ethan spoke about his contribution to the local council planning: *"I've submitted on the [local council] 10-year plan, both through like a tech submission, and in a hearing"*. Peter noted that he was currently working on a submission for the public transportation operation model and spoke of his role in Generation Zero[27] and its contribution to getting *"through the Zero Carbon Act into Parliament"*. Eve spoke of her role as a Māori youth representative on a local council regarding environmental issues, being a part of a group of students taking a petition to Parliament on the decriminalisation of abortion in Aotearoa New Zealand and briefly speaking to the select committee about it. She was most recently involved with one of the JustSpeak[28] youth prison reform consultation groups looking at *"how Māori tikanga, customs and protocols would benefit prisons and prison reform"* (Eve). These roles were important to Eve as a way of giving back to her community and helping to address pertinent social and political issues of significance to Aotearoa New Zealand.

---

[25] A global environmental movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience to compel government action on climate and ecological issues.
[26] An organisation campaigning against the continuation of coal mining in Aotearoa New Zealand.
[27] A youth-led climate action organisation.
[28] JustSpeak is a youth-led movement for change in the New Zealand criminal justice system.

All the participants discussed the ways in which they had engaged online around social and political issues pertinent to them such as environmental and human rights concerns. They discussed social media platforms such as Facebook groups and petitions, Instagram posting, and the Hive as a source of information about the political parties and their policies leading up to the New Zealand Government's General Election 2020. Isla explained that she had mainly found out about social and political activism opportunities *"through social media"* and Anna noted that many of her experiences had been *"social media driven ... like Instagram sharing posts ... and signing petitions".* The participants' use of online platforms to engage illustrates the increasing role it played in providing accessible information and engagement opportunities for these young people.

Participants expressed an awareness of their participatory rights in society, what they were and were not able to participate in, and a feeling of not really belonging in adult spaces. Sarah's thoughts reflected other participants' feelings about their age affecting their ability to fully participate in the political world and that at times she felt *"disregarded by older people"*. She was also aware as a school student that she couldn't just attend a political activity without the support of her school, and so was reliant on her school being *"on board with the pupils wanting to have their say"* (Sarah). Both participants under the age of 18 discussed not having the right to vote as a barrier to their political participation, with Ethan noting that it was *"definitely strange to be under 18 and involved with a political party"* especially when volunteering during the General Election 2020 for that party. Ethan strongly believed that *"the voting age should be changed for multiple reasons but partly because it encourages political participation for young people [to] get involved in that process [and] to stay in that process"*.

All the participants at university had voted in the General Election 2020. However, similarly to Ethan and Sarah, the participants aged 18 or over expressed not fully feeling a part of or belonging to the adult world.

> *Being like a young person, it's kind of like, can I come into this? Do I have almost like the right to feel like I'm allowed to be in here interacting with these people who have probably got years of experience behind them* (Anna)?

Ethan believed that although youth representation has become a common, often necessary requirement for organisations, that he often felt that he was *"the youngest person in the room, and by quite a large margin [that he has] to work like twice as hard, and I'll often feel like I shouldn't be there … like I have to contribute twice as much in order to actually earn my position there"*. These reflections highlighted an awareness from participants of their place in the adult-led political world and of not fully belonging in it.

Participants' narratives of political participation reflected a range of diverse experiences, providing a rich and diverse window into the political engagement of the participants. Their understandings expressed an awareness of what their participatory rights were in society. They all shared a feeling of not really belonging in adult spaces and of not feeling that their contributions were taken seriously. The next section reflects on participants' perceptions of adult views on youth engagement and whether they feel that their voice is genuinely valued.

The place of youth voice

A common theme throughout participants' political experiences was the place of youth voice in an adult-centric world. This section reflects on how they see their voice as genuinely contributing to political and societal issues in their communities.

Participants' perceptions of how they see adults viewing the value of their voice was affected by their interactions with adults in the different political arenas that they had engaged in. Isla shared comments that she had heard leading her to believe that they are not being taken seriously, such as *"things are different in the real world [and] you guys are snowflakes getting pressed[29] about every issue that's raised"*. Peter discussed an interaction that left him feeling that his voice was not valued where on leaving a local council consultation meeting, that he and a friend had spoken at, they were *"followed out*

---

[29] Pressed meaning influenced or persuaded.

by this lady [who] came and told us all about how everything we did was wrong and how we should have said it better". These experiences reflected those of the other participants and the consistent belief was that young people do feel heard but not listened to: *"heard yes, listened to not necessarily"* (Peter).

Participants illustrated the belief that their voices went unheard by sharing examples of theirs and others' involvement where genuine outcomes were not always evident. Peter recounted examples of local council meetings where it appeared that the adult group in the room *"have a goal in mind before you even sit down"* and that youth groups run by the council can feel symbolic, referring to one youth related group as *"a tokenistic youth group in the region".* Ethan too shared local council experiences and reflected on a consultation process that he had been a part of as *"bureaucratic …even after three years nothing happened [even though] there's a lot of people sitting around agreeing"* that it needed to happen. Eve recounted the experience of a friend who *"was a youth MP, but even speaking about issues, he didn't feel like it did anything".* These interactions highlighted that the participants do not always feel that their contributions are genuinely valued or actioned, and that they feel that their voice is not necessarily listened to in the spaces set aside for youth groups and youth representation within adult-led political arenas.

Most participants had been involved in youth-led community or civic initiatives. Reflecting on her experiences in a student-led community group Sarah noted that *"it's kind of hard for adults to you know organise those kinds of things and not get involved".* Sarah believed that working with youth in their space was important in facilitating engagement, as *"when you have adults there it's a whole different environment"* compared to student-led environments where we can feel free to debate and can all come and work together. Eve, like Sarah, believed that working with youth in their space and connecting with them in *"mainly education spaces"* was important in facilitating engagement. The power of a student-led movement is one thing that participants unanimously believed made the school strikes so successful in mobilising young people by reducing *"almost all those barriers by just building a movement and having the people come, and that inherently got people along, engaged and interested"* (Peter).

These reflections highlighted that participants' perceptions of how adults view youth voice and engagement are shaped by their interactions with adults in different settings. These interactions recounted frustrations within settings which the participants felt lacked genuine outcomes. Participants unanimously agreed that there was growing space for youth voice in the community and that it had become more visible through movements such as the School Strikes for Climate. However, their experiences had led them to believe that their ideas are not equally valued and not always listened to. The next section discusses the influences of social connections and relationships on the participants' engagement in political activities.

Social connections and relationships

A common thread throughout the interviews was the importance of social connections made through key relationships with others in their immediate environments and in their communities, including family, friends, peers, and significant others. Participants provided accounts of the way that their families, friends, and their upbringing have influenced their engagement in various political arenas: *"I feel like friends and family have a large influence on you and your choices … the way you grow up shapes your philosophies"* (Anna). Sarah agreed, pointing out the significance of family caring about what's important to you as motivational for engagement in social and political arenas: *"it's always nice having family that does care about our passions"*. These accounts from Anna and Sarah reflected the significance of their families' support and influence over their political engagement.

Peter and Ethan brought up the knowledge that has been passed on to them from their families and how that has increased their access to political interaction opportunities. Peter recognised that his home life and his parents' occupations had provided him with knowledge about how to engage in different political arenas: *"I grew up in a privileged position … well aware of those interaction opportunities very early on"*. Ethan simply identified his parents' encouragement of belief in yourself and of pushing the boundaries

as a motivator for his current community and political pursuits: *"my parents refer to it as hutzpah … a moment of believing in yourself enough to try and achieve something that you wouldn't normally"*. For Peter and Ethan, it was evident that they felt their families had provided them with an environment that has facilitated their access to political opportunities.

In contrast to these accounts, Eve and Isla outlined different experiences of the way in which they have been influenced by their parents and family life, and how these have affected their motivation to participate in political arenas of interest to them. Eve shared that some members of her family choose not to vote, and that the community environment surrounding her family and her early years as a child have influenced her motivations today: *"I come as a Māori person. I've seen injustices, especially in [town] … I do want to go back to [town] and see what we could work on"*. Isla did not identify her parents as influencing her significantly or as being politically active members of the community, as they were *"not well educated, they are immigrants … well voting for example that's one where my family didn't really care about that"*. For Isla, her parents lack of engagement had motivated her to connect and *"interact with other people who are likeminded [and] to be as active as"* she can in having her say about issues of significance to her. These accounts, from Eve and Isla, highlighted that although their family environments and supports were different to the other participants that this did not affect their willingness, or access, to political experiences. In fact, it has encouraged them to become involved and to help others with similar experiences to them. These accounts reflect the various ways that parental relationships influence young people's motivation to engage in various political arenas. The voice of the participants also captured the significance of friends, peers, and significant others to their political engagement.

Participants spoke about relationships with friends, peers, and significant others as essential connections in facilitating their engagement and providing support. They all agreed that they tended to have friends who shared the same ideas and values as themselves, as Isla simply contended *"I want to be with people who share a similar opinion about the same issues"*. Although, all participants identified this support as important, it was not necessary for their political engagement when they felt connected

to the issue. For example, Sarah noted *"as long as you kind of stand up for what you believe in then it doesn't really matter what your friends believe in"*. Anna spoke of gravitating towards likeminded people but that her political engagement was not entirely dependent on theirs: *"if it affects me or feels like it's going to affect me in the future, then I'm probably going to be more inclined to get involved, even without the influence of other people"*. Similarly, Isla noted:

> *If my friends say like I'm going to this thing, or I'm going to this event … it's helpful … but at the end of the day, like that stuff matters. If it matters to me then I should go out and do whatever I can to make a change and get my voice heard.*

These views indicate that the participants' engagement in political activities was not reliant on their friends and peers' involvement.

Three participants identified the influence of their connections with peers and significant others such as teachers as being important and in having facilitated further engagement opportunities. Ethan and Peter mentioned the significance of being known in the community and having the right connections as integral in furthering their engagement. Ethan believed that most of the civic and political opportunities that he had become involved in had stemmed from his social connections in:

> *Extinction Rebellion just through a friend … shoulder tapped … I think a lot of my political involvement has been through that and the opportunities that has created … quite a few people in the local community know me, and so when opportunities come up, I get sent them or I get recommended for them. And those things come up, so yeah, personal connections and being known is probably the best way to access those opportunities.*

Similarly, Peter identified that through social connections in his work for a student-led organisation that he had been *"invited through to other stuff … I was lucky enough just to have those connections in place that allowed me to get in"*. In contrast, alongside friends and peers, Eve singled out her teachers and her wider school and university connections as significant mobilisers of her political development and engagement: *"the deputy principal and the principal helped me at my high school, and teachers, the university, the law group, the [cultural] centre they've all helped me"*. This quote

identifies that for Eve, it was not her local community but her educational environments that have provided her with the opportunities and support to be involved in social and political issues of significance to her.

Overall, participants identified connections with significant others as influential in the development of their political agency and participation. Their reflections highlighted the critical role that familial and social contexts surrounding them have played as a source of knowledge and support. The next section builds on these identified influences by looking at the participants' views on how societal structures have also influenced theirs and others' political engagement.

The impact of societal structures

Encompassing the influences of social connections and relationships on political participation and agency, participants identified societal structures that affected their ability to politically engage and the way they felt about how their voice is valued in society. This section reflects on participants' understandings of how they feel their participatory rights are restricted by adult views and perceptions of their contributions. It then extends it by identifying barriers of power and regulatory control in societal and political frameworks that have affected their access to political opportunities and may have affected other young people's access as well. Finally, it includes participant discussion on educational spaces that they have been a part of, and socio-economic factors that they identified as potential barriers to political participation.

As mentioned earlier, the participants expressed an awareness of what their participatory rights were in society. This included an awareness of their place as not fully belonging in the adult world and not being *"given the full opportunity to participate in that real world"* (Isla), of their legal rights to full civic and political participation through voting, and of the value that they perceive youth voice genuinely holds in society. These barriers of power and regulatory control over the participants were evident in their reflections on

political engagement in different political arenas where the focus was on *"youth being involved and not on what youth are saying"* (Ethan). These barriers affected the way they felt about interacting in adult-led spaces and influenced their views on what effect their voices truly held in making change.

It was consistently recognised that adult responsibilities were in the future and that the participants considered themselves as the next generation of leaders. Anna spoke of young people as not currently being in a position of influence but that they will get to a *"point of their lives where they're in the position to be more influential"*. Similarly, Peter recognised that councillors and council staff can have:

> *Decades of experience in council policy … it is inherent that people who make the big decisions in our government and parliament, and not through any fault or failing are going to be you know middle aged or so. It's just how the system works and that's fine.*

Here, Anna's and Peter's ideas, expressed an acceptance of progression through to leadership roles in political arenas that comes through experience and age.

These reflections about whether participants felt their voice was valued in society also highlighted the role that adult-led spaces have in facilitating their engagement and shaping their experiences. One adult-led space that was consistently referred to throughout participants' accounts was their educational settings of either high school or university. These settings were places that the individual participants spent a significant amount of their time.

Collectively, participants agreed that different schools' perspectives on youth political engagement provided either a conducive or unfavourable environment for young people to access political opportunities in. Peter explained within his current South Island urban context: *"schools yes and no. Like you look at [town], [school] very supportive, you look at other schools in [town] [school] and [school] often nowhere near so much [it just] comes down to who is in charge at that school"*. In addition, Eve spoke about the inconsistencies within her school's approach to supporting different issues:

> *For those major issues, yes, my school loved it … they're like yes get involved in it, be a part of it. But they [were] very conservative when it comes to the LGBTQ community. We wanted to hold a pride day and it was turned down immediately. We were just like really confused and were like why? But they just believed that it wasn't necessary.*

Eve's experience highlighted the inconsistent approach applied by her school towards different social and political issues of significance to young people.

All participants spoke about their schools' support or lack of support towards political engagement opportunities for youth, such as the School Strikes for Climate protest marches. Sarah and Peter's reflections illustrated the extremes captured through participants' narration of their experiences. Sarah felt that her school had been very supportive *"especially with the climate change marches and protests … really accepting and respectful"*. In contrast, Peter shared that his school was not supportive, that there were *"probably one or two teachers there that would have been, but the school itself no"*. Collectively, participants felt that school support for social and political issues of significance to them was varied and inconsistent.

Most participants shared that they felt schools could do more to educate young people about the role that local and central government have in Aotearoa New Zealand and how we can engage with them. Peter stated that he:

> *Never had any formalised teaching about … civics education in high school. I think if you want more young people to be engaged with the political system, a really good place to start would be actually with the Ministry of Education and that being the curriculum. Because, you know, we live in a society at the end of the day, we all have the right to participate in that society and voice our opinions and thoughts and I've only been able to voice mine because I know about the opportunities available for it, most people don't.*

Ethan and Sarah who were still at school had found education about politics *"unfulfilling"* (Ethan) and had not learnt *"about political aspects of anything … I wouldn't even know how to vote"* (Sarah). Eve stated in her experience at high school that she *"wouldn't say*

there's much" teaching about politics but that she had been lucky enough to be involved in a project about a specific human rights issue through a couple of classes that had given her knowledge about political processes. Although Eve identified a pathway to knowledge through her school, she did agree with the other participants that schools could provide more knowledge around politics and political processes and make political opportunities more accessible to all students.

The way in which the accessibility of political opportunities was affected by the transition from school to university was discussed by the four older participants. Anna and Isla noted a drop in motivational levels due to the demands of their studies, and due to needing to access resources and support independently.

> *High school kind of holds your hand … while university is like everything is your own run situation, like you're the one that has to put yourself out there, you can't rely on other people to help you out a little bit* (Anna).

Isla did note that university clubs and groups can provide *"easily accessible information [to] partake in political issues"* for students but that you needed to be motivated to engage in them. She added that her involvement with an environmental group had helped her to continue to be informed about climate change and to be involved in any relevant petitions and protest marches. Peter and Eve also identified groups and clubs as integral for their connection to political issues and movements and in more seamlessly transitioning their political engagement from school. Peter mentioned that the process had been easy because of the *"connections"* he was able to make through his previous work with groups around political issues. Eve singled out cultural support centres and groups as being pivotal in her ability to access opportunities easily. Overall, participants highlighted that the transition to university affected their accessibility to political activities around social and political issues of interest to them, however that there were opportunities available if you were motivated enough to go looking for them.

Collectively, participants' explanations of the educational spaces that they spent a significant amount of time in played an important part in facilitating their political development and access to engagement opportunities. Their reflections illustrated the

various positions held by high schools on being open to facilitating access for young people to political engagement opportunities. The four university students also identified the facilitators and barriers that they have come across in transitioning from high school to university.

Participants discussed the socio-economic barriers that they have come across in their own experiences of social and political activism. These included: travel, time, resources, social media and technology, ethnic and cultural inequalities, and youth role selection criteria. They also identified these barriers as reflective of obstacles that may be affecting the accessibility of political activities for other young people.

Three participants discussed the cost of travel to participate in events with Eve simply contending *"travelling would be a barrier, travelling cost"*. Isla and Anna also identified time constraints as affecting the amount of social and political activism opportunities that they are willing to get involved in due to the demands of their university workload. Isla put it simply that *"uni takes up a lot of time"* whereas Anna provided an explanation of how both this and the travel issue affected her as a student on a low income:

> *Something might be held like on the other side of town, and some people might not have the time to actually go there … my flat doesn't have a car each … you can't always commute through car, and it's like the whole-time constraint thing.*

In contrast, Eve mentioned that although time was a constraint, in the university environment that there was the ability to *"move things around"*. Peter also noted that he is lucky to be studying as it means he does not have an *"arbitrary restriction on what [he] can do"*, and that it enabled him to interact with the local council within their opening hours: *"they do it nine 'til five Monday to Friday and that's really inaccessible for a large amount of people"*. It was evident through the discussion that there were variations in how the factors of travel and time affected individual participants.

All participants noted a variety of resources that they have on hand that other groups of young people may not such as knowledge passed on from their parents and that has been picked up through their studies, language skills, technology, and access to social media.

Most noted that it would be good if information was more accessible and if the *"making of policies and what the parties are doing"* (Isla) could be made simpler. Peter believed that if local council and the government would accept *"verbal submissions and give them the same weighting"* as written submissions, that it would break down barriers for *"people with a limited time, or resource, or people who can't read and write"*. Participants agreed that local council and government processes needed to be more flexible to become more accessible for young people and wider society in general.

Peter and Ethan specifically brought up their position of privilege, as supported by their families' knowledge and access to resources, which enabled them to *"know about the opportunities available"* (Peter) and to have access to them:

> *I'm in a position of immense privilege to be able to participate in all of these things. And I know a lot of people who really need to participate in these things, have themselves heard and have this change happen. They just don't have the time and capacity. I don't have to work to support myself. It's just the thing I must do with my time and energy that I have, is to try and make change so that other young people don't have to work to support themselves* (Ethan).

Both Peter and Ethan acknowledged that political agency is not fairly distributed in society and that young people from lower socio-economic groups do not have the same access to resources.

Although social media was seen by participants as a vehicle for mobilising young people, by providing instant access to information and events at their fingertips, some participants identified that access to technology and, therefore, social media was a huge barrier for already marginalised groups. Peter's thoughts reflected the discussion with others around this:

> *Social media definitely reaches people like me and educated students and people who have the ability to pay for a phone and such. There's actually a large proportion of youth who work or might not have a smartphone or don't have access to that social media. So, it certainly works well to engage with youth that they're probably already engaging well with, like myself it easily reaches me no stress but*

the people who to be honest they need to engage with the most are people who don't have social media.

In this quote Peter points out that often the groups of young people needing the most support and to have their voice heard are not those who have the means to access the required technology such as a smartphone or computer.

Eve and Isla shared the belief that a critical eye needs to be given to some of the social and environmental issues gaining traction on social media. For Eve this was around the need for local issues to be prioritised, commenting that protests here have tended to be *"talking about America more [rather than] talking about the issues that are going on around our prisons and like our police force"*. Isla noted what she saw as *"selective activism"* being promoted by social media using the example of the level of coverage online for the Black Lives Matter protest marches in comparison to the Free Palestine[30] ones even though *"they're both concerning human rights"*. Eve and Isla highlighted the influence that social media can have over what issues we are hearing about and, are therefore, being called to act for when similar issues may be overlooked in both a local context and internationally.

Ethnic and cultural inequalities were also identified by Eve and Isla who shared their experiences of this. Eve saw her experience of attending a *"low decile school [seeing] how Māori people are affected, disadvantaged"* as a motivator for her in wanting to go back and make positive change in the town where she came from: *"that's what I want to do, I do want to go back to [town] and see what we could work on"*. Isla's narration of this focused on her experiences of racism at high school as a reason for wanting to connect with and support others experiencing the same issues: *"with racism in my school, where I was the only Chinese person there apart from the international students, it was like I would voice my experiences of racism and people wouldn't understand because they had never been through it"*. These narrations of ethnic and cultural inequalities highlighted that although they may be isolating for young people, that for both Eve and Isla they had

---

[30] A human rights movement protesting the treatment and oppression of the Palestinian people.

been a social learning experience that had empowered them to become more politically engaged.

One participant identified the way in which youth as a group are represented by individual young people in community organisations and on youth councils as unfair. Ethan believed that youth roles may be a reward for a student's ability in academic endeavours and therefore do not capture the views of a wide cross-section of young people in society: *"I think a lot of young people have really valuable things to contribute, but because there's this idea that in order to be a youth representative you have to be exceptional that a lot of value is missed"*. Ethan's perspective on youth roles questioned their representation of a wide cross-section of young people in society, and therefore whether they can truly be seen as representative of all youth views.

The structural factors outlined in this section indicate that the participants are not immune to the effects of these personally[31] and can also identify their potential effects on other young people's access to political activities. Their reflections highlighted the barriers that they have come across and how they may be affecting other young people. As this research seeks to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism, the next section reflects on how participants see the political experiences that they have had as a learning platform for their future participation.

Informing the future

It was evident that participants' cumulative experiences in formal and informal political engagement have increased their political agency by providing them with further skills and knowledge to take up other opportunities to be politically involved with issues that they feel connected to. As Anna concluded:

---

[31] All of the participants in the study had in one way or another been affected by structural inequalities, for example, discrimination based on their age.

> *I feel like if I wasn't involved in high school, I don't think I would want to be involved in uni or further on ... I feel like if you've already experienced being in that kind of situation then you wouldn't feel that kind of fear of actually being involved.*

Anna explained that her experiences in high school have enabled her to have the confidence to participate today by providing her with knowledge of the political world, and social connections and relationships within it.

Participants noted increased confidence in their engagement especially in the local community *"to become further involved and take on leadership roles"* (Sarah). In Sarah's case this involved a progression in school and community roles through her family's and school's support, whereas Peter's progression was through school and community related roles to where he is today feeling *"comfortable that [he] can actually turn up to a council meeting and get involved"*. These contexts in which Sarah and Peter and the other participants described their increased confidence and the progression of their participation were individual to each of them.

Eve identified that not only does she feel that her experiences have provided learning for her, but that they have also provided her with the motivation and confidence to help in the community she grew up in: *"I'm just learning and seeing what I could do"*. The knowledge and learning gained from political experiences was important for Ethan as well, enabling him to come to his own conclusions about political issues and to act on them. He contended that he has found it *"empowering to be involved in those things and to realise that actually you can make a difference"* (Ethan). Through their cumulative experience, Eve and Ethan identified increased learning, confidence, and motivation to politically engage.

In contrast, to the other participants, Isla noted that her family's influence was not as significant as her school and friends in having provided her with knowledge and skills about how to get involved with political issues: *"I found that school and friends really educated me on these issues"*. She stated she will continue to *"speak to other people*

about" (Isla) them to support others and to ensure that these pertinent issues are raised. Isla's experiences illustrated that it is not only family support that may facilitate political agency and participation but school settings and friends as well.

The voice of the participants captured the importance of experience in political activities as essential for increasing their political agency. These experiences shared by participants identified key factors through their social and political experiences that have contributed to their increased political agency and participation today, including knowledge, skills, social connections, and relationships. Participants agreed that their experiences have increased their confidence to interact in different political arenas and to take on leadership roles in the political activities that they have an established involvement with.

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results from the face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six young people about their experiences of formal and informal political participation. The results were presented under six main themes of (a) defining political agency and participation, (b) engaging with politics, (c) the place of youth voice, (d) social connections and relationships (e) the impact of societal structures, and (f) informing the future. The participants acknowledged various social connections in their immediate environments that had been significant in supporting their political agency and development. These social connections provided them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage in different political activities about social and political issues that had meaning to them. They identified structural factors that have affected their ability to fully participate in some activities, that may also be affecting other groups of young people's access to participation opportunities. There was a clear consensus from participants that political frameworks are not always genuinely engaging with young people and that they do not feel that their contributions are consistently valued.

The next chapter presents a discussion of these findings, considering previous literature and research into young people's political agency and participation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings on the way that young people develop their political agency through social and political activism. It uses a social constructivist lens and theories of youth political engagement to guide the analysis of individual participants' understandings and meaning making of their political experiences. The first section examines young people's understandings of political agency and political participation. It then explores the context in which young people are learning to understand and navigate the political world, including their understandings of their participatory rights to engage in the political world, the value of their voice within it, and the impact of societal structures on their ability to engage in social and political activism. The next section discusses the critical roles that social connections and relationships play in nurturing the political agency of young people. Finally, it explores how the cumulative experiences of young people in social and political activism may also nurture their political agency.

Young people's understandings of political engagement

This section discusses young people's understandings of political engagement. It examines adult-led traditional conceptualisations of their ability to politically engage, alongside participants' understandings of political agency and political participation. Finally, it reflects on participants' experiences of political participation through which their understandings have developed crucial to this research which seeks to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism.

Traditional understandings of young people's political engagement are framed by adult conceptualisations of their status as still developing and therefore not yet able to fully participate in the political world (de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). These discourses have

shaped policy around their participatory rights in neo-liberal and Western societies[32] and continue to dominate political spheres by influencing the context in which they are learning to understand and navigate the political world (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). As asserted by social constructivism, this context reflects the views of adults in society who hold the most political power (O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015). By understanding how young people position themselves within this context, these traditional understandings can be challenged to reflect the broader contexts within which they are engaging in informal settings such as in civic-minded activities and in protesting about their environmental concerns (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012).

This study found that young people's understandings of political agency and political participation were more than about engaging in formal political processes such as voting and political party membership but about being actively involved in their communities as well. One of the aims of this research was to examine definitions of political agency and political participation. The participants were asked to define both. The key ideas expressed in their definitions of both terms were of independence, being informed to make their own decisions, about engaging with process, having a say, and contributing to their local communities as well as to central government political processes. These understandings were considered and expansive, reflecting contemporary framings of youth political participation rather than traditional framings (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012). Contemporary understandings of young people's political participation include not only the contributions that they make in formal political settings but in broader civic and political contexts (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). They highlight that the participants' understandings of political engagement in this study were inconsistent with traditional understandings which are potentially marginalising and overlooking their agency within broader contexts (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019).

---

[32] See Chapter Two: Literature Review, p. 17.

Understandings of political agency in contemporary literature refer to individuals acting independently of others and making their own decisions (Beaumont, 2011; Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Oinas et al., 2017). These understandings were consistent with those reflected on by the participants in this study who identified independent thought and action as key themes of what it means to act with agency. It was clear that the participants saw political agency as more than showing their support through their actions for social and political issues of significance to them but about feeling able to act independently from their family and friends if needed and doing so in an informed way. This cognisance of what it means to act with agency conflicts with adult conceptualisations of their status as still developing and dependent on adults, and instead, for the participants in this study, reflects their knowledge and capability to understand conceptual ideas present in the political world. This may be explained by the participants all having been involved in some form of social or political activism, providing them with political learning opportunities to develop understandings of a more complex nature about the political world (Breeze et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). Literature highlights young people develop increased knowledge, skills, and confidence to articulate their political ideas through their cumulative experiences in political engagement within their everyday contexts (Breeze et al., 2017 Wray-Lake, 2019).

Participants' understandings of political participation involved being actively engaged in their communities about pertinent social and political issues. Another aim of this research was to identify the ways that young people are engaging in social and political issues. The participants each shared a range of diverse experiences in social and political activism. Some of these were common to all participants such as involvement in environmental political activities but others were individual such as the banner workshop for Sarah and the consultation work for JustSpeak prison reform that Eve had been involved in. These diverse experiences reflect an understanding of political participation that goes beyond traditional measures of engagement which have used formal political structures as a measure of young peoples' political engagement[33] that have led to them being framed as

---

[33] Including voting, union membership, political party membership, and organisations. See Chapter Two: Literature Review, p. 13.

apathetic and disengaged (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh & Akram, 2015; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). Young people's political identity is shaped by the sociocultural and political settings surrounding them (Häkli & Kallio, 2014). As adults hold the dominant political views and power, formal political structures are framed around their interests and needs (Flanagan, 2013). These adult-led formal political structures can be divisive as statistical data gathered on youth engagement often focuses on electoral politics rather than being inclusive of the ways in which young people's engagement is diversifying to reflect the platforms and contexts relevant in their everyday lives (Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Farrell, 2014; Harris et al., 2007, 2010; Russell et al., 2002; Vowles, 2010; Xenos et al., 2014). The exclusivity of these understandings in the adult-led political world potentially alienates young people from formal politics and downplays their capacity to play a meaningful role in society (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019).

As mentioned in the literature review, the inflexibility of these traditional understandings within the adult-led political world does not consider the ways in which young people are engaging in informal settings (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012). The results of this research illustrate that the participants were engaging in diverse ways across informal and formal political arenas, and that they recognised broader contexts in their communities and educational settings as meaningful and legitimate ways of engaging in social and political activism that they felt connected to. These findings are consistent with contemporary understandings of political engagement which acknowledge the many ways that young people are contributing within their communities around social and political issues of significance to them (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2010; Mahatmya & Lohmann, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019; Yeung et al., 2012). Their experiences within these informal settings are meaningful to them and provide them with a learning platform for more complex political actions. As research highlights, it is within these informal settings that they are learning to be political and developing their own political agency (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Furthermore, the participants' active and purposeful engagement in these informal settings contrasts with pre-existing discourses of young people as disengaged from politics (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). The experiences shared by participants were not just about the act of participating socially with friends or in merely meeting societal obligations[34] by, for example, voting. They each shared the significance of the social and political issues that they had been involved in and how they believed it was important to be informed and to come to your own conclusions before engaging. These understandings illustrated that the participants were engaged with social and political issues that they felt connected to in their everyday lives. They also highlighted the agency that they are capable of when the context within which they are engaging with is relevant to them and provides a space for their voice (Brooks, 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Nairn, 2019; Nissen, 2017; Wood, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

This section discussed how political structures have primarily been framed around adult interests and needs rather than being inclusive of young people's perspectives. The participants' understandings of political agency and political participation extended beyond formal political engagement to being actively involved in their communities. They included themes of independent thought and action, and collective action as well about social and political issues of significance to them. These understandings highlight that young people's views of political engagement are inconsistent with adult conceptualisations of their ability in the political world. It is important that adult perceptions of young people continue to be challenged to acknowledge the capabilities of young people and the meaningful contribution that they can make to society.

The social construction of young people's political identity

Discussing the social construction of young people's political identity, this section explores the context within which young people's understandings and experiences of

---

[34] Meaning an individual's perceived obligation to participate in a civic activity.

social and political activism are located. It does this by discussing young people's understandings of their participatory rights to engage in the political world, and their perspectives of the value of their voice in social and political activism. From there, it considers the impact of societal structures on young people's understandings of the political world and their ability to engage in social and political activism.

Young people's access to formal political engagement is determined by age (Lister, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Oinas et al., 2017; Osman et al., 2020; O'Toole, 2016; Percy-Smith et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2019). Age as a significant identifier of full access to formal political arenas was not only expressed as a barrier by the two participants under the legal voting age but by all the participants. All the participants believed that their age affected their ability to feel a part of the adult-led political world and to have their voices heard. There was also an acceptance that leadership roles and positions of influence over political processes and decision making were not something currently achievable and came with increased age and experience as an individual progressed through life. This construction of their identity, within which their understandings of their experiences in social and political activism are located and their political agency is framed, indicates continued regulation of young people's participatory rights in formal political arenas and reinforces their feelings that they are undervalued in this context. As young people frame their political identity around the sociocultural and political constructs within their lives (Batsleer, 2008; Buckingham, 2008), their political identity is shaped by the dominant adult-centric culture in formal political structures which limits their agency by restricting their participatory opportunities (Hart, 2009; Lister, 2007).

The dominant adult-centric culture in formal political structures is framed by the neo-liberal construction of citizenship in Western societies where reaching voting age is a significant marker in gaining full citizenship rights and responsibilities within a political community (de Winter, 1997; Hobson & Lister, 2002; Lister, 2007; Morrow, 1994; Phillips et al., 2019; Wood, 2012). This culture shapes participatory opportunities for young people in the political community (de Winter, 1997; Lister, 2007; Phillips et al., 2019). It was evident through participants' narratives of their political experiences that

they had a heightened awareness of their participatory rights in the adult-led political world. The participants expressed a feeling of not really belonging in adult spaces due to their experiences of interaction within these settings where they did not feel equally valued or listened to. Although contemporary understandings of citizenship are reflective of changing perceptions on the rights of children and young people[35] in the political world (Bartos, 2016; Wood, 2013), and are now constructed more broadly to include civic-minded activities that young people may engage in, traditional frameworks of full citizenship rights and responsibilities continue to restrict young people's access to participation within the political community (Hart, 2009; Lister, 2007). These adult-led conceptualisations of citizenship shape the context in which young people's political agency is developing. It has implications for how they see their voice as valued in political settings and therefore about whether their political engagement is worthwhile. For example, Peter's perception of how he saw his voice as valued was affected by an experience at a local council consultation meeting where he and a friend were left feeling unsupported when they were approached afterwards and told that their contribution to the meeting was ineffectual and not well presented[36]. Discriminatory lines of exclusion in civic and political cultures decrease young peoples' beliefs that society and government institutions are trustworthy (Flanagan, 2013). To foster their political agency the context in which they are learning to be political needs to change to genuinely acknowledge the contribution that young people can make to society as agentic in their own right (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2007, 2008; Phillips et al., 2019; Wood, 2011). This can be achieved through a youth-centric approach that provides a space for young people's active participation and voice in decision-making processes (Boulianne, 2019; Henley, 2015). As explained in the literature review, this is where the power and responsibility for decision-making is shared by both the adults and young people involved (Barber, 2009; Sotkasiira et al., 2010).

Social constructivism highlights that our understandings of the world are based on social and cultural constructions within which the context of our experiences and knowledge is based (Patton, 2015). It was evident, through participants' understandings of their

---

[35] See Chapter Two: Literature Review, p.18.
[36] See Chapter Four: Results, p.54.

experiences, that historical understandings of young people's capacity to meaningfully contribute and the dominant neo-liberal construction of young people's participatory rights in formal political arenas continues to implicitly shape their interactions with adults in political settings and therefore reinforce their feelings that their contributions are not equally valued. Ethan gave an example of this in his work as a youth advisor for the local council when he noted that he often feels like he must work twice as hard to earn the respect of the adults involved. This highlights that Ethan's perception of his place within this context has been shaped by those that exercise the most power in it. An analysis of power in such a context illustrates that political agency is not just about the individual but about the sociocultural and political setting surrounding the individual that shape conditions for change (Allen, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2014). As adults hold the dominant political views and exercise the most power in local council culture, Ethan's understandings of his role in that structure come from a marginalised position which leads to him feeling like he must overcompensate to effectively attempt to contribute within that context (Henley, 2015; O'Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Aotearoa New Zealand literature highlights that although there has been an international shift in the recognition of young people's rights and their capacity to contribute to society, this is not always reflected through genuine opportunities to engage where their voice is heard and considered in decision making (Hayward et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2019). All the participants agreed that they felt heard but not listened to. Adult-led cultures in organisations can have unforeseen barriers that although they consult with young people, they do not provide a space for their active participation and voice in decision-making processes (Finlay, 2010; Henley, 2015; Smith et al., 2003). Although participants agreed that there was a growing space for youth voice, and that youth had greater visibility in social and political activism, that there was a lack of genuine outcomes from their involvement. Peter articulated that the lack of genuine outcomes in some youth groups was *"tokenistic"*. As evidenced by his retelling of an experience with a local council hearing where he felt that there was little point to his contribution or other young peoples as those leading the proceedings had a predetermined goal in mind before it began. Tokenism was also illustrated by Ethan's frustration at being involved in a consultation group where there had been no progress towards the desired outcomes in the three-year period he had been involved. Individual participants' perceptions of their ability to

genuinely contribute to and influence political processes are consistent with the findings in literature that young people are struggling to have their agency recognised and to be listened to in adult-centric civic and political structures (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Boulianne, 2019; Harris et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2002; Wray-Lake, 2019). This is due to the discriminatory cultures within these civic and political structures shaping the context in which young people engage with them. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the way in which young people's political engagement within these settings is driven needs to change to provide genuine and meaningful opportunities for them to feel that their decisions matter in political decision-making.

When social and political issues are pertinent to young people and affect them directly, they feel more connected to them and are more likely to engage (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Breeze et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). This is because of the direct link that these issues have to their everyday lives and futures (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Wray-Lake, 2019), and therefore play an important part in providing a meaningful context for their political engagement (Breeze et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Pruitt, 2017, Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). Young people are influenced by the different social and cultural dynamics in their everyday settings, and it is within these settings that different structural barriers to their participation can be identified. Although there were commonalities within this study's results, as each of the participants' understandings were unique and emphasised their individual experiences, there were structural barriers of significance to some participants and not others. For example, Eve and Isla were the only two participants who identified ethnic and cultural inequalities that shaped their experiences of social and political activism. It was interesting that, although these inequalities were identified by these two participants as significant barriers, they had motivated them rather than deterred them from being involved in participatory opportunities in their communities. Marginalised experiences of societal inequality and beliefs that society should be more equal motivate social action against inequalities (Buckingham, 2008; Diemer & Rapa, 2016). As these structural barriers were part of the sociocultural context in which their political socialisation developed, they are part of their lived experience providing connection and heightened relevance to them. When young people have a lived experience in their everyday context

the social and political issues relevant in that setting can take on greater meaning to them personally and therefore increase the significance of it to them motivating their political engagement (Harris & Wyn, 2009; Wood, 2012).

Research has identified that shared experiences in classroom-based activities can offer young people an opportunity to develop skills and confidence to find their political voices (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Quintelier, 2015; Seider & Graves, 2020; Wood, 2011; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019). A common barrier in the findings of this study was around the resources and support provided within educational settings. Although Sarah, Eve and Isla discussed the support that they had found within these contexts, they agreed with the others that there was a lack of consistency applied among schools in their support of social and political issues of significance to young people. They also agreed that there was a lack of classroom experience in civic-related processes that may support them to know how to access and engage with a wider range of political activities. As a context where young people spend a significant amount of time, educational facilities play a huge part in shaping the knowledge of young people in our political system and in how they may interact with it (Deimel et al., 2020; Pontes et al., 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019). By nurturing political agency schools can increase young people's civic knowledge and engagement (Seider & Graves, 2020). They can do this by providing opportunities to practice skills that may be useful for effecting social change and by making political opportunities, regardless of the cause, more accessible to all students. For example, Eve valued the experience of a project involving a human rights issue that involved real-life social action supported by her school and peers through a petition presented to a select committee. This type of social action project about an issue in which young people are passionate facilitates an opportunity for them to engage with their local communities and potentially the political system to effect social change providing valuable experience for the development of their political agency (Beaumont, 2010; Seider & Graves, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, social and political issues of pertinence to young people provide meaningful opportunities to engage that are relevant to them and their futures directly (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Harris et al.,

2007; Manning & Ryan, 2004; Youniss et al., 2002). A pathway that did provide an opportunity for the participants to become involved in political activism and take on leadership roles was the School Strikes for Climate Change. This opportunity provided them with a platform where they felt that their voices were heard. The participants believed that the success of the movement was due to it being student-led. This opportunity about current environmental concerns in these young people's immediate contexts appeared to have provided conditions where they felt safe to share their opinions and that they felt the value of their actions were genuine and may affect changes (Beaumont, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). Although this type of engagement is inconsistent with traditional understandings of youth political participation, the study's findings support the calls of more recent literature for understandings of youth political participation to take on a more contextual form which acknowledges informal civic and political experiences across different platforms (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn et al., 2014; Hope et al., 2016; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Yeung et al., 2012). These informal political learning experiences offer young people the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, and to build their confidence through contexts that are meaningful to them (Beaumont, 2011; Henn & Foard, 2014; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wood, 2013). The pathway that School Strikes for Climate Change offered illustrates how young people are engaged and able to enact their agency when a social, political, or in this case environmental issue is of relevance to them and connects to their daily interactions. By broadening understandings of political participation to include informal contexts young people's political agency may be nurtured further through the acknowledgement of the ways in which they are engaging in civic-minded activities around issues that have meaning to them.

There is an increased use of online platforms that young people are engaging with to access social and political activism such as Facebook and Instagram (Farnham et al., 2013; Ho & Hung, 2020; Valenzuela, 2014; Xenos et al., 2014). The participants discussed the ways in which they had engaged with social and political activism online, for example, online petitions and groups through Facebook, Instagram, and the Hive. They believed that social media was a valuable tool in mobilising young people and had been significant in the success of getting information across about the New Zealand

General Election 2020 and environmental activism opportunities. However, the participants could also identify the barrier that social media may play for marginalised groups of young people without access to technology and smartphones. Civic learning opportunities are disparate across social and cultural groups in society due to the differential amounts of power held by different groups (Flanagan, 2013). Unique contexts of political development have different cultural strengths and resources available that affect the social construction of young people's political identity within these settings and therefore inform their engagement (Wray-Lake, 2019). Research has shown that socioeconomically-advantaged young people with educated parents, who have higher academic achievement, and who are of European ancestry display more political knowledge and are more likely to have access to civic learning opportunities than those from lower socioeconomic groups (Kahne & Maddaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2010; Schlozman et al., 2012). It is important that strategies to inform the political engagement of young people consider the diverse social and cultural groups in society that they come from and the resources available to them within these contexts. Although online platforms are being more readily accessed as a form of engagement for young people, this is not necessarily a representation of all youth groups in society as not all social and cultural groups have the same access to this resource. By relying more heavily on it to communicate with young people, it may marginalise some groups' access to participatory opportunities further. Broader contexts for engaging with youth need to be embraced and further strategies identified for nurturing the development of their political agency that meet the needs of the various social and cultural groups in society (Wray-Lake, 2019).

Participants' concern for the social and economic issues affecting other young people's agency reflects a considered and sophisticated perspective. It aligns with contemporary understandings of their ability to meaningfully contribute as active and agentic members of society which acknowledges their capabilities and rights to have their voices heard (Bartos, 2016; Breeze et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Pruitt, 2017; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019). This understanding and reflection on other people's points of view was evident throughout participants' discussion of barriers. They recognised that access to participatory opportunities for young people was not fairly distributed in society. They identified not only the challenges that they had faced but those they thought may be

affecting other young people. These included the cost[37] involved in participating in some political activities in their communities, and the knowledge and literacy skills needed to access these within an environment that relied heavily on the written word, and inflexible processes and work hours for those with *"arbitrary restrictions"* (Peter) on their time that they cannot afford to economically forgo. These barriers further highlight the social and cultural contexts that restrain equitable access to participatory opportunities for young people and continue to influence their political agency.

In summary, this section discussed the social construction of young people's political identity as shaped by adult-led conceptualisations of their ability to meaningfully contribute to society. This construction of their identity has influenced their understandings of their participatory rights in political settings and has formed the context in which they are learning to navigate the political world. The participants' understandings highlighted the significant role that these adult-led spaces have had in shaping their experiences of civic and political processes. Although there is an increasing acknowledgement of their agency and space for their voice in political settings, the adult-centric framework needs to provide more genuine outcomes that reflect their contributions to decision-making processes.

The critical role of social contexts

The following discussion highlights the critical role that social connections and relationships play in the development of young people's political agency. It identifies the key relationships that participants saw as significant to them in facilitating their political engagement and nurturing their political agency. Finally, crucial to the objective of this research, it discusses how these informal social contexts are reflected in understandings of young people's social and political activism and how this affects the development of their political agency within these contexts.

---

[37] The cost involved includes resources such as time, travel, and access to technology.

Multiple factors of political socialisation occur within young people's immediate contexts and provide meaningful participatory experiences (Boulianne, 2019; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Nolas et al., 2017; Pancer, 2015; Pruitt, 2017; Quintelier, 2015; Wray-Lake, 2019). Social connections and relationships within familial, educational, and community contexts play a critical role in young people's political socialisation. They help to facilitate their access to participatory opportunities in social and political activism and provide knowledge and support in nurturing their political agency. The participants identified family members, teachers, friends, and peers as significant supports in facilitating their engagement in social and political activism. These key relationships were in the participants' immediate everyday social contexts. They confirm the critical role that social contexts play in the development of young people's political agency by providing support and access to participatory experiences that enable them to find their political voices and independence (Eichhorn et al., 2014; Finlay, 2010; Gray, 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Henley, 2015; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Quintelier, 2015; Russell et al., 2002; Sloam, 2007; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Yeung et al., 2008, 2012). It is within these everyday contexts that young people are finding their political voice and developing their political agency.

Family contexts are critical for the development of young people's political agency (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). They provide important resources for political socialisation such as through political talk in everyday interactions at home. The participants discussed their family contexts and how these had provided them with resources and support to be involved in the political activities they engaged in today. Anna was particularly influenced by her family and saw her perspectives today as shaped by her family's *"philosophies"*. Sarah and Ethan noted their family's encouragement and support, and Peter identified his family life as *"privileged"* and that this had provided him with several resources that others may not. These participants' experiences reflect the family as a rich context of resources for their political development. However, structural factors may hinder the opportunities that familial contexts can provide. These structural factors include socioeconomic and cultural disparities within marginalised groups in society (Wray-Lake, 2019). In contrast, to the

other participants' family contexts, Eve and Isla's family contexts were not as significant to them in providing resources to facilitate their engagement. Their family contexts were shaped by cultural disparities which marginalised their families' political identities within society. The familial environments of these two participants illustrate culturally unique contexts that have shaped their knowledge, experiences, and political identity motivating them to support others with similar backgrounds and experiences to them. This is because they feel genuinely connected to the social and cultural issues as they are a part of the social construction of their political identity. As mentioned in the literature review, young people are embedded within the settings and relational interactions in their lives, and it is through these settings that they are developing their political agency (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). Eve and Isla's familial contexts had motivated them to support others with similar backgrounds and experiences to their ones.

The participants also identified social connections and relationships with friends and peers as significant. It was interesting to note that although participants agreed that this support was important, and that in most cases their friends shared similar views to them on pertinent social and political issues, that it was not necessary for their political engagement in issues that they felt connected to. These findings suggest that although they all identified social connections with friends and peers as significant, that these relationships were not the key contributing factor in their willingness to engage and in the ways that they engaged. In this research, the participants were willing to act independently of others in their social contexts if the social or political issue was meaningful to them and affected them directly. This type of active participation in social and political issues of significance to them illustrated the agency that the participants in this study were capable of when the issue had meaning to them (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Beaumont, 2011; Breeze et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). As the participants in this study were able to express their agency independently of significant others, these findings contradict traditional understandings of young people's political agency which relies on adult conceptualisations of their political identity as dependent on their families for support and direction (Breeze et al., 2017; de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). However, this can be explained through their individually unique cultural context which has shaped their

political development. This context that the participants in this research came from was one with rich civic learning resources through multiple factors of political socialisation occurring throughout their development, allowing them to accumulate experiences in social and political activism that have provided them with the confidence to express the agency that they do today.

Another context that provided valuable social connections and relationships for the participants was their communities. This context was particularly influential for Ethan and Peter in providing them with participatory opportunities to engage. These two participants highlighted the importance of connections that they had within the community as facilitating their access to further engagement opportunities. These included relationships within youth-led environmental movements, community organisations and local council. Although these community contexts provided these two participants with support, both participants questioned their privilege through their understandings of their political experiences and Ethan went as far as to question whether youth voice is fairly represented within civic contexts. Ethan's reflection on youth representation in civic contexts is consistent with prior studies that have drawn caution to civic organisations' processes in their recruitment of youth and engagement processes with them to avoid unforeseen barriers (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Finlay, 2010; Henley, 2015; Smith et al., 2003). As mentioned in the literature review, the engagement of a youth representative in an organisation cannot necessarily be seen as portraying the views of all youth in a community (Finlay, 2010; Smith et al., 2003). Often young people apply to and are selected to these roles based on their academic achievement and prior civic engagement in their communities. Their access to this opportunity comes from a cultural context that is resource rich and powerful. As research highlights young people who are politically interested and interact more in civic opportunities are civically advantaged over those young people who do not have the same resources and access to political opportunities (Kahne & Maddaugh, 2008; Schlozman et al., 2012).

Young people are embedded within the settings and relational interactions in their everyday lives (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). The social connections and relationships identified by the participants highlighted the multiple

factors of political socialisation in their lives. These opportunities for meaningful political engagement were occurring within the participants' immediate contexts through everyday interactions within their familial, educational, and community contexts. The findings challenge pre-existing discourses of young people's apathy and disengagement in political arenas as, by adopting a broader understanding of youth civic participation, it is evident that the participants in this study were active and engaged. Research highlights that informal political learning experiences and social relationships with significant others provide a significant role in nurturing young people's political agency (Beaumont, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). It is important that the ways in which young people are contributing to society are acknowledged through broader understandings of their political engagement that includes not just formal political structures but the ways in which they are engaging in their immediate settings around social and political issues of significance to them.

The discussion above highlighted the critical role that social contexts play in the development of young people's political agency. Young people's interactions with significant others in various contexts in their everyday lives provide important knowledge, support, and access to participatory opportunities in social and political activism. In this study, the social connections and relationships that different participants drew on as significant in their political development highlighted the importance of the multiple factors of political socialisation that occur in young people's social and cultural contexts. It was interesting that although these social connections and relationships were important to the participants in this study, the key contributing factor in their willingness to engage was about the relevance of the social and political issue to themselves directly. The knowledge that young people's everyday lived experiences can provide for policymakers, educators and significant others in their lives is integral for collaborating with them to nurture their political agency across political arenas.

Nurturing political agency

The final aim of this research was to explore the ways in which young people's experiences of social and political activism serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency. This section explores how the cumulative experiences of the participants in social and political activism provided them with increased resources to engage in more politically diverse ways. It then discusses how this can inform future strategies for nurturing the political agency of young people through social and political activism.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion, young people are learning to be political and developing their political agency through their immediate everyday contexts (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). These contexts provide an authentic environment for young people to engage in civic-minded activities of relevance to them, whilst providing an environment where they feel safe to share their opinions and feel that their participation may affect social and political change (Beaumont, 2011; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019). The findings in this study are consistent with this literature highlighting that the contexts surrounding the participants in their everyday lives provided political learning experiences that equipped them with increased knowledge, skills, and confidence. Participants' understandings of the political world were unique emphasising the individual experience of each of us in our political socialisation. It was interesting that although these pathways were unique that they all noted increased confidence and skills through their political experiences. This increase in confidence and skills supports research that informal political learning experiences in young people's surrounding environments provide an important mechanism for more complex political actions in the future (Breeze et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Longitudinal research also documents a relationship between increased age and increased political knowledge and behaviours (Eckstein et al., 2012; Zaff et al., 2011). This research suggests that as young people move through adolescence into young adulthood that their

knowledge, skills, and experiences grow increasing their confidence to politically engage. Although this cannot be seen as representative of all youth, as not all groups in society have equal resources, in this research the cumulative experiences of individual participants in social and political activism illustrated the development of their political agency over time. The participants noted increased confidence to be *"further involved"* (Sarah), and that prior experiences were motivational and *"empowering"* (Ethan). They identified that this was because of prior experiences increasing their skills and knowledge about how participation processes work in different contexts. Their access to these civic learning opportunities enabled their political development and nurtured their political agency. The findings illustrate the vital role that access to political experiences provides in the development of young people's political agency (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Wray-Lake, 2019). However, as access to these opportunities is not equally shared across social and cultural groups in society, this research is not representative of the political development of broader groups of youth. It is important that strategies to reduce disparities in young people's access to participatory opportunities are explored.

Young people's relational interactions in their social and cultural contexts provide multiple factors of political socialisation that build up over time and provide an important mechanism for more complex political actions (Breeze et al., 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019). Alongside their cumulative experiences of social and political activism, participants identified social connections and relationships with significant others as key factors in the development of their political agency by providing support, guidance, and access to participatory opportunities. These multiple factors of political socialisation highlight the critical role that social contexts and political learning experiences play in the development of young people's political agency (Breeze et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Nissen, 2019; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016). It is through these contexts and accumulated experiences that they are learning to become political and developing their political agency.

This section discussed the critical role that political learning experiences, in the social contexts surrounding young people, play in the development of their political agency. The participants in this study noted increased knowledge and confidence over time to engage

further with social and political activism. They identified both their cumulative political experiences over time and social connections and relationships with others as key factors in nurturing their political agency. These findings highlight the importance of access to civic learning opportunities within young people's everyday contexts.

Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the development of young people's political agency through their experiences of social and political activism. It did this by seeking to understand young people's perspectives of their political experiences and the social and political contexts that surround them. Although the participants' understandings of political engagement were diverse, pre-existing adult-led discourses and political frameworks continue to marginalise their voice in social and political activism. The participants' understandings of their political experiences revealed barriers due to their age, interactions in adult-led spaces where they did not feel like they belonged and that their contributions were not genuinely valued in decision-making. Identifying these barriers of power and regulatory control over young people in the political world is important insight for informing future policy in working with young people towards growing their political engagement.

Social connections and relationships were an important part of the participants' political socialisation. The research found that these provided key resources in facilitating their engagement within their everyday contexts in their families, educational facilities, and communities. Participants' engagement in social and political activism showed that they were not disengaged from informal political settings in social and civic contexts, and in fact some of the participants had engaged in formal political processes about social and political issues of significance to them. The experiences narrated by the participants of their social and political activism were pertinent to them and involved environmental, social, and political issues. It was evident that the relevance of the social and political issues to them was a key contributing factor in their willingness to engage. It was also evident that participants' cumulative experiences in social and political activism provided them with learning experiences that helped to further facilitate their involvement. These

findings highlight the critical role that social and political contexts and informal political learning experiences play in the development of young people's political agency.

In conclusion, the last chapter of this thesis presents the key findings from the research, implications for policy around it, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research explored the way that young people develop their political agency through social and political activism. It was completed using a social constructivist lens and theories of youth political engagement to guide the research design. This chapter brings the thesis to a close. It begins by reviewing the research aims and methodology. It then draws from the discussion to present the key findings. This includes a discussion of the implications of these findings for future research, policy, and processes for collaborating with young people to increase their political engagement and agency. From these findings and implications, it then outlines recommendations to provide greater understanding of how young people's political agency develops. This includes recommendations for further research to increase knowledge and the implementation of strategies and processes that may better support youth political engagement. The chapter also considers the limitations of this study.

Research design

The objective of this research was to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism. It aimed to do this by:

1. Examining definitions of political agency and political participation.
2. Identifying the ways that young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are engaging through social and political activism.
3. Exploring the ways in which these experiences serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency.

The aims of this research were achieved by completing a qualitative-exploratory study, using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six young people aged 16 to 20 years, informed by social constructivism. This methodology ensured the complexities of the participants' individual experiences in social and political activism and understandings of them could be collected and explored (O'Leary, 2017; Vishnevsky & Beanlands,

2004). As it prioritised participants' subjective positions it facilitated the explanation of their own meaning making of their experiences providing insight into how these experiences and understandings have affected the development of their political agency (Bryman & Becker, 2012; O'Leary, 2017). The social constructivist framework was important as the context in which young people are learning to understand and navigate the political world has tended to be based on social and cultural constructions that reflect an adult-centric worldview (Patton, 2015).

Thematic analysis supported a synthesis of the participants' experiences in social and political activism. This involved an iterative process of searching for themes and patterns in the participants' narratives which enabled the interpretations of their meaning making to be prioritised (Braun & Clark, 2006; O'Leary, 2017). A social constructivist lens and theories of youth political engagement guided the analysis and discussion of the findings in the previous chapter. These findings considered the sociocultural and political constructions that young people's understandings of the political world are based on and the impacts of this on the context in which they are learning to navigate the political world (Patton, 2015).

Key findings

The five key findings of this research which sought to explore the development of young people's political agency through social and political activism are presented and then expanded on below.

The key findings are:

1. Young people's understandings of political agency and political participation were placed within broad civic and political contexts.
2. Participating young people were involved in social and political activism, formally and informally, around issues of significance to them.

3. The social construction of young people's political identity is shaped by adult-led conceptualisations of their ability to meaningfully contribute to society.

4. Social contexts play a critical role in the development of young people's political agency.

5. Young people's cumulative political experiences in social and political activism, in their immediate contexts play a critical role in increasing their political agency.

Broad understandings of political agency and political participation

The first aim of this research was to examine definitions of political agency and political participation. The results of the study found that the participants' understandings reflected a knowledge of conceptual ideas in the political world inconsistent with adult conceptualisations of their status as still developing and not yet ready to meaningfully contribute to society (de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013, Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). Participants' ideas of political agency included ideas of independence, being informed to make their own decisions, engaging with process, having a say, and being actively involved in their communities. This active contribution to their communities was important to all the participants and reflects their understandings of political participation as not being limited to formal political processes and engagement with government. These understandings of political participation were placed within broad civic and political contexts, involving informal social and political activism around issues of significance to them, such as environmental issues. Contemporary literature identifies the contribution that young people make within informal civic and political contexts in their everyday lives (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019), and that acknowledges their ability to meaningfully contribute to society (Bartos, 2016; Breeze et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Pruitt, 2017; Wood, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019).

These results highlight that young people's understandings of political engagement are inconsistent with traditional framings of their capabilities that have shaped policy around their participatory rights in the political world. This traditional framework has

marginalised their agency and overlooked it in broader contexts in their immediate everyday settings. The context in which they are learning to be political needs to change to genuinely acknowledge their agency and the contribution that they can make to the political world and society.

Participating young people were involved in social and political activism

The second aim of this research was to identify the ways that young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are engaging through social and political activism. The study found that the participants were engaged in social and political activism across formal and informal political arenas. Their experiences of political participation were purposeful, connected to social and political issues of relevance to them and their futures directly. This personal connection provided a meaningful context for the participants, heightening the relevance of it to them and motivating their engagement (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Harris et al., 2007; Manning & Ryan, 2004; Youniss et al., 2002). Research supports this finding that young people are engaged in social and political activism around issues of significance to them in their immediate everyday settings (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2010; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019; Yeung et al., 2012). The participants' narratives highlight the agency that young people are capable of when the context within which they are engaging is relevant to them and affects them directly (Beaumont, 2011; Breeze et al., 2017; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

These findings contrast with pre-existing adult-led discourses of young people as apathetic and disengaged from politics. This is because the diverse experiences narrated by the participants go beyond traditional measures of youth political engagement which have used formal political structures as a measure of young people's participation (Breeze et al., 2017; Collin, 2015; Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Marsh & Akram, 2015; Marsh et al., 2007; Wray-Lake, 2019). The exclusivity of these traditional understandings within the adult-led political world do not take into consideration the ways in which young people are engaging in informal settings (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012).

Furthermore, neither do they consider young people's understandings of political engagement within broader civic and political contexts (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). They highlight the need for the way in which formal political institutions frame and measure young people's political activity to include what young people consider to be political engagement, and to be more flexible to recognise the broader contexts that young people are engaging in within informal settings in their everyday lives that connect to issues of relevance to them.

The social construction of young people's political identity

The third finding from this research is that the social construction of young people's political identity is shaped by adult-led conceptualisations of their ability to meaningfully contribute to society and the dominant neo-liberal construction of young people's political participatory rights (de Winter, 1997; Henn & Foard, 2014; Lister, 2007, 2008; Milne, 2013; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019). All the participants shared experiences of structural barriers that they had come across in civic and political cultures that had in some way affected their engagement in those contexts. These barriers in civic and political cultures implicitly affect young people's interactions with adults in these spaces and therefore shape their understandings of their agency within these contexts.

The participants' understandings highlighted the significant role that adult-led spaces have in shaping their experiences of social and political activism. In reflecting on these experiences, they all expressed a feeling of not really belonging in adult spaces as they did not feel valued or listened to. A significant factor identified in affecting the way they viewed their agency in these contexts was their age. It was evident that they had a heightened awareness of what their participatory rights were in the adult-led political world, what they were and were not allowed to participate in, and a feeling of not really belonging in adult spaces. This construction of their political identity within civic and political structures limited their agency by restricting their participatory rights within these spaces. It illustrates the power that sociocultural and political constructs have on how young people frame their identity within the political world.

In identifying the structural barriers that they had faced, the participants expressed concern about socioeconomic issues affecting other young people's access to social and political activism. They discussed access to resources readily available to them that they felt other groups of youth in society may not have, including knowledge around civic and political processes, literacy skills, and time. Literature highlights that civic learning opportunities are varied across social and cultural groups in society (Flanagan, 2013), and that socioeconomically-advantaged young people are more likely to access civic learning opportunities than those from lower socioeconomic groups (Kahne & Maddaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2010; Schlozman et al., 2012). Participants' reflections on how structural barriers may be affecting other young people challenges adult-led conceptualisations of their ability to understand social and political issues in society which potentially marginalises and overlooks their agency (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Mycock & Tonge, 2012; Phillips et al., 2019).

Together, these findings, identify that young people are engaged in social and political activism, formally and informally, around issues of significance to them. However, the findings indicate continued regulation of young people's participatory rights in civic and political cultures where youth advisory or consultative roles often do not provide space for their active participation and voice in decision-making processes. This culture continues to implicitly shape their interactions with adults in these settings, reinforcing the perception that their contributions are not equally valued in these spaces.

The critical role of social contexts

Another finding of relevance to the second aim of this research was that social contexts play a critical role in the development of young people's political agency. The participants' social connections and relationships within familial, educational, and community contexts played a critical role in their political socialisation. These key relationships were within the participants' everyday contexts, helping them to find their political voices and develop their political agency. As highlighted in the literature, young

people are embedded within the settings and relational interactions in their everyday lives (Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

The key relationships that participants saw as significant in the development of their political agency varied due to culturally unique contexts shaping their political development. Although sociocultural disparities were identified by two of the participants in this study as significant for them and the development of their political agency, these did not hinder their motivation to engage in social and political activism. This highlights the significance of lived experiences in providing connection and relevance, and of the multiple factors of political socialisation in young people's lives (Breeze et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016).

The importance of connection and relevance in motivating engagement in social and political activism weaved throughout the discussion. Although the participants saw their social connections and relationships with others as important for accessing participatory opportunities in social and political activism, their willingness to engage independently or collectively with others was influenced by the personal resonance that the social and political issue had with them. However, this does not discount the critical role that their social connections and relationships played in facilitating their access to participatory opportunities in social and political activism for young people.

This finding highlights that young people's social contexts play a critical role in their access to participatory opportunities in social and political activism. For the participants in this research, these contexts provided them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate regardless of the barriers that they had come across in their experiences of political engagement.

Nurturing political agency through access to political experiences

The final aim of this research was to explore the ways in which young people's experiences of social and political activism serve as a learning platform for increasing their political agency. The study found that participants' cumulative political experiences over time were a key factor in increasing their knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage further in social and political activism. The literature discussed the importance of political learning experiences in the contexts surrounding young people as a mechanism for more complex political actions in the future (Breeze et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2007; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray-Lake, 2019).

The participants access to these was enabled by contexts that provided rich and powerful learning experiences and come from a position of civic advantage (Schlozman et al., 2012). Each participant discussed key relationships that had been important to them in facilitating their access to participatory experiences and nurturing their political agency. It was evident that multiple factors of political socialisation were occurring in their immediate contexts, helping them to find their political voices and express their agency (Boulianne, 2019; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Nolas et al., 2017; Pancer, 2015; Pruitt, 2017 Quintelier, 2015), and providing them with a platform to further their engagement and take on leadership roles. This supports findings in other research that social contexts and access to political learning experiences provide a critical role in the development of young people's political agency (Breeze et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2016; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016).

This final finding highlights the importance of young people having access to political learning experiences in their immediate everyday settings. The results of this study show that cumulative political experiences of social and political activism serve as a learning platform for increasing the political agency of young people.

Implications

These findings have important implications for understanding how young people's political agency develops. The findings illustrate that the adult-led social and political constructs that frame the context in which they are learning to navigate the political world continues to overlook their agency affecting their civic culture, political attitudes, interest in formal political engagement, and their level of efficacy in societal and political institutions (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Boulianne, 2019; Deimel et al., 2020; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Flanagan, 2013; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002). It is imperative that the exclusivity of these adult-led cultures in civic and political structures changes to provide a culture which embraces young people's active participation and voice in decision-making processes (Boulianne, 2019; Henley, 2015). This involves a cultural change in civic and political frameworks to one where the autonomy of young people is respected, meaningful opportunities are provided, and their contributions equally valued through shared power and responsibility for decision-making (Barber, 2009; Boulianne, 2019; Sotkasiira et al., 2010).

In addition, these findings have important implications for how adults view and measure young people's political participation. Traditional understandings need to be challenged to reflect the broader contexts within which young people are engaging in informal settings (Henn & Foard, 2014; Mycock & Tonge, 2012). This involves a more contextual approach that is flexible and acknowledges young people's participation not just within formal political processes but in their immediate settings around social and political issues of significance to them (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn et al., 2014; Hope et al., 2016; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Pruitt, 2017; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Yeung et al., 2012). As participatory opportunities for young people are not fairly distributed in society, the findings also highlight the need for processes and strategies to be developed which support youth political engagement across different social and cultural groups in society to reduce disparities in access to political participatory opportunities (Flanagan, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019).

It is important that barriers of power and regulatory control over young people in the political world are identified and used to inform future policy around working with young people towards greater politicisation. Civic and political contexts need to provide young people with meaningful opportunities to enter and contribute to political life (Boulianne, 2019). This involves the processes that shape youth political engagement considering young people's perspectives in the development of policy that directly affects them and their futures (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Finlay, 2010; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Limitations

The findings in this research are subject to several limitations. Due to the small sample size of six participants, the study is not generalisable to a larger population of young people. As a qualitative-exploratory piece of research informed by social constructivism the small sample size ensured the collection of rich data rather than focusing on the collection of generalisable data (Bryman & Becker, 2012; Leitz & Zayas, 2010). The purposive sampling approach used was deliberate, facilitating the gathering of meaningful and credible data from a specific group of young people to meet the research's objective of exploring young people's experiences in the political world. Although, this sample cannot be seen as reflective of all young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, it enabled the collection of contextual data for analysis specific to the research's needs and provides transferable findings for future research (O'Leary, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007).

Recommendations

This study highlights the need for the way in which formal political institutions frame young people's political participation to change to include the informal contexts in which they are engaging in social and political activism in their immediate settings. Furthermore, adult perceptions of young people need to acknowledge their capacity to meaningfully contribute to society as agentic (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Lister, 2007, 2008; Phillips et al., 2019; Wood, 2011). These changes involve a cultural shift in the way that

adult-led civic and political contexts engage with and involve youth in processes that directly affect them (Beaumont, 2011; Boulianne, 2019; Finlay, 2010; Wray-Lake, 2019). This can be achieved by providing space for young people's active participation and voice in decision-making processes for them to feel that their voice matters in the political world (Barber, 2009; Boulianne, 2019; Henley, 2015; Sotkasiira et al., 2010).

It is important that barriers of power and regulatory control over young people that frame civic and political contexts are identified and used to inform future policy around working with young people towards greater politicisation. By broadening the contexts within which their participation is measured common misconceptions of their apathy and disengagement from political engagement may be dispelled. Furthermore, they may legitimise the context that young people are learning to be political in by acknowledging the many ways that they are contributing to society within civic-minded contexts around social and political issues of significance to them.

Further research into young people's everyday lived experiences in civic and political settings may provide valuable insight into how best to nurture their political agency by providing them with the tools they need to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to politically engage across formal and informal political arenas. Of value may be research into different patterns of youth political engagement across various social and cultural groups in society to inform strategies for reducing disparities in access to political participatory opportunities (Flanagan, 2013; Wray-Lake, 2019).

Conclusion

Understanding young people's perspectives of their political experiences in social and political activism, and the social and political context surrounding them provides valuable insight into how best to nurture their political agency and engagement. Although there is increasing acknowledgement of young people's capacity to contribute to society, adult-centric views continue to dominate formal political arenas and overlook youthful agency

in broader contexts in their everyday lives. It is imperative that young people are provided with access to political learning experiences that are relevant to them around social and political issues that they can connect with, and in contexts where they feel that their opinions are valued and that their participation matters in decision-making processes and has the potential to produce change.

References

Abbott-Chapman, J., & Robertson, M. (2001). Youth, leisure and home: Space, place and identity. *Loisir et Société, 24*(2), 485-506. https://doi.org/10.7202/000192ar

Allen, J. (2011). Making space for topology. *Dialogues in Human Geography, 1*(3), 316-318. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820611421551

Barber, T. (2009). Participation, citizenship, and well-being: Engaging with young people, making a difference. *Young, 17*(1), 25-40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308801700103

Bartos, A.E. (2016). Children and young people's political participation: A critical analysis. In K.P. Kallio, S. Mills, & T. Skelton (Eds.). *Politics, citizenship and rights* (7th ed.) (pp. 113-131). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-57-6_1

Batsleer, J. (2008). *Informal learning in youth work*. Sage.

Beaumont, E. (2010). Political agency and empowerment: Pathways for developing a sense of political efficacy in young adults. In L. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, & C. Flanagan (Eds.). *Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth* (pp. 552-558). Wiley-Blackwell.

Beaumont, E. (2011). Promoting political agency, addressing political inequality: A multilevel model of internal political efficacy. *The Journal of Politics, 73*(1), 216-231. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000976

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Blais, A., & Rubenson, D. (2013). The source of turnout decline: New values or new contexts? *Comparative Political Studies, 46*(1), 95-117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453032

Boulianne, S. (2019). Building faith in democracy: Deliberative events, political trust and efficacy. *Political Studies, 67*(1), 4-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321718761466

Bowman, B. (2019). Imagining future worlds alongside young climate activists: A new framework for research. *Fennia, 197*(2), 295-305. https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.85151

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Breeze, M., Gorringe, H., Jamieson, L., & Rosie, M. (2017). Becoming independent: Political participation and youth transitions in the Scottish referendum. *The British Journal of Sociology, 68*(4), 754-774. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12288

Brooks, R. (2017). *Student politics and protest: International perspectives*. Routledge.

Bryman, A., & Becker, S. (2012). Codes of ethics. In S. Becker, A. Bryman, & H. Ferguson (Eds.). *Understanding research for social policy and social work: Themes, methods and approaches* (2nd ed.) (pp. 61-69). The Policy Press.

Buckingham, D. (2008). *Youth, identity and digital media*. The MIT Press.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*(3), 297-298. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Collin, P. (2008). The internet, youth participation policies, and the development of young people's political identities in Australia. *Journal of Youth Studies, 11*(5), 527-542. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260802282992

Collin, P. (2015). *Young citizens and political participation in a digital society addressing the democratic disconnect*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Datzberger, S., & Le Mat, M.L.J. (2019). Schools as change agents? Education and individual political agency in Uganda. *International Journal of Educational Development, 67*, 18-28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.02.007

de Winter, M. (1997). *Children as fellow citizens: Participation and commitment*. Radcliffe Medical Press.

Deimel, D., Hoskins, B., & Abs, H.J. (2020). How do schools affect inequalities in political participation: Compensation of social disadvantage or provision of differential access? *Education Psychology, 40*(2), 146-166. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2019.1645305

Diemer, M.A., & Rapa, L.J. (2016). Unraveling the complexity of critical consciousness, political efficacy, and political action among marginalized adolescents. *Child Development, 87*(1), 221-238. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12446

Dwyer, C., & Limb, M. (2001). *Qualitative methodology for geographers: Issues and debates*. Oxford University Press.

Eckstein, K., Noack, P., & Gniewosz, B. (2012). Attitudes toward political engagement and willingness to participate in politics: Trajectories throughout adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(3), 485-495. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.07.002

Eichhorn, J., Heyer, A., & Huebner, C. (2014). *Who influences the formation of political attitudes and decisions in young people? Evidence from the referendum*

on Scottish Independence. d|part: Think Tank for political participation. Scottish Referendum.pdf (dpart.org)

Electoral Commission New Zealand. (2017). 2017 General Election voter turnout statistics. General Election voter turnout statistics 2017 (elections.nz)

Electoral Commission New Zealand. (2020a). *Are you eligible to enrol and vote?* Are you eligible to enrol and vote? (vote.nz)

Electoral Commission New Zealand. (2020b). 2020 General Election voter turnout statistics. General Election voter turnout statistics 2020 (elections.nz)

Elwood, S., & Mitchell, K. (2012). Mapping children's politics: Spatial stories, dialogic relations and political formation. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography, 94*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2012.00392.x

Farnham, S.D., Keyes, D., Yuki, V., & Tugwell, C. (2013). Modeling youth civic engagement in a new world of networked publics. *Proceedings of the Seventh AAAI Conference on weblogs and social media* (pp. 165-174). Modeling youth civic engagement.pdf (microsoft.com)

Farrell, D. (2014). *Democracy under the spotlight: An international perspective on the scale and impact of voter decline. Valuing our vote: Improving voter turnout in New Zealand*. Electoral Commission.

Farthing, R. (2010). The politics of youthful antipolitics: Representing the 'issue' of youth participation in politics. *Journal of Youth Studies, 13*(2), 181-195. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260903233696

Finlay, S. (2010). Carving out meaningful spaces for youth participation and engagement in decision-making. *Youth Studies Australia, 29*(4), 53-59.

Flanagan, C.A. (2013). *Teenage citizens: The political theories of the young*. Harvard University Press.

Flick, U. (2007). *Qualitative research kit: Designing qualitative research*. Sage.

Foster, J., & Taylor, D. (2019). Voter turnout decline and possibilities for the rejuvenation of politics. *Economic & Social Research Aotearoa, 15*, 1-12. [Voter turnout decline and possibilities for rejuvenation (esra.nz)](#)

Fowler, A. (2017). Does voter preregistration increase youth participation? *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics and Policy, 16*(4), 485-494. https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2017.0436

Geurkink, B., Zaslove, A., Sluiter, R., & Jacobs, K. (2020). Populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy: Old wine in new bottles? *Political Studies, 68*(1), 247-267. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719842768

Gray, K. (2013). *Citizenship and participation: Exploring young people's perspectives* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. http://libcontent.massey.ac.nz/handle/123456789/801

Greaney, A.M., Sheehy, A., Heffernan, C., Murphy, J., Mhaolrúnaigh, S.N., Hefffernan, E., & Brown, G. (2012). Research ethics application: A guide for the novice researcher. *British Journal of Nursing, 21*(1), 38-43. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2012.21.1.38

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*, (3rd ed., pp. 191-215). Sage.

Häkli, J., & Kallio, K.P. (2014). Subject, action and polis: Theorizing political agency. *Progress in Human Geography, 38*(2), 181-200. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512473869

Häkli, J., & Kallio, K.P. (2018). Theorizing children's political agency. In T. Skelton & S.C. Aitken (Eds.). *Establishing geographies of children and young people* (pp. 1-23). Springer Verlag. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-88-0_1-1

Hall, N. (2019). *Young people should vote from age 16*. UK Youth Parliament Campaigns. Young people should vote from age 16 (byc.org.uk)

Harris, A. (2006). Introduction: Critical perspectives on child and youth participation in Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa. *Children, Youth and Environments, 16*(2), 220-230.

Harris, A., & Wyn, J. (2009). Young people's politics and the micro-territories of the local. *Australian Journal of Political Science, 26*(2), 327-344. https://doi.org/10.1080/10361140902865308

Harris, A., Wyn, J., & Younes, S. (2007). Young people and citizenship: An everyday perspective. *Youth Studies Australia, 26*(3), 19-27.

Harris, A., Wyn, J., & Younes, S. (2010). Beyond apathetic or activist youth: "Ordinary" young people and contemporary forms of participation. *Young, 18*(1), 9-32. https://doi.org/10.1177/110330880901800103

Hart, D., & Youniss, J. (2017). *Renewing democracy in young America*. Oxford University Press.

Hart, S. (2009). The problem with youth: Young people, citizenship and the community. *Citizenship Studies, 13*(6), 641-657. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020903309656

Hayward, B., Selboe, E., & Plew, E. (2015). Citizenship for a changing global climate: Learning from New Zealand and Norway. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education, 14*(1), 19-27. https://doi.org/10.1177/2047173415577506

Henley, Z. (2015). *Speaking up and being heard: An analysis of young people's participation in civic activities* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. http://hdl.handle.net/10179/7772

Henn, M., & Foard, N. (2014). Social differentiation in young people's political participation: The impact of social and educational factors on youth political engagement in Britain. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(3), 360-380. http://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830704

Ho, W.C., & Hung, C.M. (2020). Youth political agency in Hong Kong's 2019 antiauthoritarian protests. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 10*(2), 303-307. https://doi.org/10.1086/709530

Hobson, B., & Lister, R. (2002). Citizenship. In B. Hobson, J. Lewis, & B. Siim (Eds.). *Contested concepts in gender and social politics* (pp. 23-54). Edward Elgar.

Hope, E.C., Keels, M., & Durkee, M.I. (2016). Participation in Black Lives Matter and deferred action for childhood arrivals: Modern activism among Black and Latino college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 9*(3), 203-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000032

Hudson, M., Milne, M., Reynolds, P., Russell, K., & Smith, B. (2010). *Te ara tika. Guidelines for Māori research ethics: A framework for researchers and ethics committee members*. Health Research Council of New Zealand on behalf of the Pūtaiora Writing Group. Te ara tika.pdf (hrc.govt.nz)

Irvine, A. (2012). Semi-structured and unstructured interviewing. In S. Becker, A. Bryman, & H. Ferguson (Eds.). *Understanding research for social policy and social work: Themes, methods and approaches* (2nd ed.) (pp. 291-295). The Policy Press.

Kahne, J., & Maddaugh, E. (2008). *Democracy for some: The civic opportunity gap in high school.* (Circle Working Paper 59). Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).

Kay, E., & Tisdall, M. (2012). Taking forward children and young people's participation in decision-making. In M. Hill, G. Head, A. Lockyear, & R. Taylor (Eds.). *Children's services: working together* (pp. 151-162). Pearson Longman.

Kirshner, B. (2015). *Youth activism in an era of education inequality*. New York University Press.

Lansdown, G. (2005). *The evolving capacities of the child*. UNICEF.

Levinson, M. (2010). The civic empowerment gap: Defining the problem and locating solutions. In L. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, & C. Flanagan (Eds.). *Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth* (pp. 331-361). Wiley-Blackwell.

Lietz, C.A., & Zayas, L.E. (2010). Evaluating qualitative research for social work practitioners. *Advances in Social Work, 11*(2), 188-202. https://doi.org/10.18060/589

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Lister, R. (2007). Why citizenship: Where, when and how children? *Theoretical Inquiries in Law, 8*(2), 693-718. https://doi.org/10.2202/1565-3404.1165

Lister, R. (2008). Unpacking children's citizenship. In A. Invernizzi & J. Williams (Eds.). *Children and citizenship* (pp. 9-19). Sage.

Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2003). Young people talk about citizenship: Empirical perspectives on theoretical and political debates. *Citizenship Studies, 7*(2), 235-253. https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102032000065991

Loader, B.D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M.A. (2014). Introduction: The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation and civic engagement. In B.D.

Loader, A. Vromen, & M.A. Xenos (Eds.). *The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation and civic engagement* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Mahatmya, D., & Lohman, B.J. (2012). Predictors and pathways to civic involvement in emerging adulthood: Neighborhood, family and school influences. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(9), 1168-1183. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9777-4

Manning, B., & Ryan, R. (2004). *Youth and citizenship final report*. National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, Australia. Youth and citizenship final report.pdf (docs.education.gov.au)

Marsh, D., & Akram, S. (2015). Political participation and citizenship engagement: Beyond the mainstream. *Policy Studies, 36*(6), 523-531. https://doi.org/10.1080.01442872.2015.1109616

Marsh, D., O'Toole, T., & Jones, S. (2007). *Young people and politics in the UK: Apathy or alienation?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Marshall, T.H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class, and other essays*. Cambridge University Press.

Massey University (2017). *Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluation involving human participants*: *Revised code, 2017*. MUHEC Code.pdf (massey.ac.nz)

Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Milne, B. (2013). *The history and theory of children's citizenship in contemporary societies*. Springer.

Morrow, V. (1994). Responsible children? Aspects of children's work and employment outside school in contemporary UK. In B. Myall (Ed.). *Children's childhoods observed and experienced* (pp. 128-143). Falmer Press.

Mycock, A., & Tonge, J. (2012). The party politics of youth citizenship and democratic engagement. *Parliamentary Affairs, 65*(1), 138-161. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsr053

Nairn, K. (2019). Learning from young people engaged in climate activism: The potential of collectivizing despair and hope. *Young, 27*(5), 435-450. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308818817603

Ndlovu, K. (2021). Mediated contestations about the political agency of youth in Zimbabwe. *African Journalism Studies, 42*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1861473

Nissen, S. (2019). *Student political action in New Zealand*. Bridget Williams Books.

Nissen, S.E. (2017). *Politics as creative pragmatism: Rethinking the political action of contemporary university students in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. [Doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury]. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/13600/Nissen%2c%20Sylvia%20final%20PhD%20thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Nolas, S.M., Varvantakis, C., & Aruldoss, V. (2017). Talking politics in everyday lives. *Contemporary Social Science, 12*(1-2), 68-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2017.1330965

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

Oinas, E., Onodera, H., & Suurpää, L. (2017). Evasive youth, oblique politics. In E. Oinas, H. Onodera, L. Suurpää (Eds.). *What politics* (pp.1-20). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004356368

O'Leary, Z. (2017). *The essential guide to doing your research project* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Osman, M., Miranda, D., & Jourde, C. (2020). Youth political engagement in
  adolescence. *Canadian Psychology Psychologie Canadienne, 61*(1), 1-21.
  https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000176

O'Toole, T. (2016). Beyond crisis narratives: Changing modes and repertoires of
  political participation among young people. In K.P. Kallio, S. Mills, & T. Skelton
  (Eds.). *Politics, citizenship and rights* (pp. 225-242). Springer.
  https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-57-6_2

Padgett, D. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research*. Sage.

Pancer, S.M. (2015). *The psychology of citizenship and civic engagement*. Oxford
  University Press.

Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory
  and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.

Percy-Smith, B., McMahon, G., & Thomas, N. (2019). Recognition, inclusion and
  democracy: Learning from action research with young people. *Educational Action
  Research, 27*(3), 347-361. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2019.1577149

Phillips, L.G., Ritchie, J., & Perales, F. (2019). Surveying support for child and youth
  political participation in Australia and New Zealand. *Citizenship Studies, 23*(5),
  460-485. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1620687

Phoenix, C. (2012). Narrative analysis. In S. Becker, A. Bryman, & H. Ferguson (Eds.).
  *Understanding research for social policy and social work: Themes, methods and
  approaches* (2nd ed.) (pp. 352-356). The Policy Press.

Pontes, A.I., Henn, M., Griffiths, M.D. (2019). Youth political (dis)engagement and the
  need for citizenship education: Encouraging young people's civic and political

participation through the curriculum. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 14*(1), 3-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197917734542

Porter, R. (2000). *The creation of the modern world: the untold story of the British Enlightenment*. W. W. Norton.

Pruitt, L. (2017). Youth, politics, and participation in a changing world. *Journal of Sociology, 53*(2), 507-513. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783317705733

Punch, K.F. (2006). *Developing effective research proposals* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Quintelier, E. (2015). Engaging adolescents in politics: The longitudinal effect of political socialization agents. *Youth & Society, 47*(1), 51-69. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x13507295

Radio New Zealand. (2019). *Teens campaign to lower voting age to 16*. Teens campaign to lower voting age to 16 (rnz.co.nz)

Radio New Zealand. (2020a). *Lower voting age means 'stronger democracy' – teen*. Lower voting age means stronger democracy (rnz.co.nz)

Radio New Zealand. (2020b). *Thousands of NZers march for Black Lives Matter*. Thousands of NZers march for Black Lives Matter (rnz.co.nz)

Riessman, C.K. (2003). Analysis of personal narratives. In J.A. Holstein & J.F. Gubrium (Eds.). *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns* (pp. 331-346). Sage.

Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdam, K., & Kalra, V. (2002). *Voter engagement and young people*. The Electoral Commission, London. Voter engagement and young people.pdf (electoralcommission.org.uk)

Russo, S., & Stattin, H. (2017). Stability and change in youths' political interest. *Social Indicators Research, 132*(2), 643-658. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1302-9

Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2007). Step-by-step guide to critiquing research. Part 2: Qualitative research. *British Journal of Nursing, 16*(2), 738-744. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2007.16.12.23726

Sánchez-Jankowski, M. (2002). Minority youth and civic engagement: The impact of group relations. *Applied Developmental Science, 6*(4), 237-245. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0604_11

Schlozman, K.L., Verba, S., & Brady, H.E. (2012). *The unheavenly chorus: Unequal political voice and the broken promise of American democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Seider, S., & Graves, D. (2020). Raise their voices. *Educational Leadership, 77*(6), 36-40. Raise their voices (ascd.org)

Sloam, J. (2007). Rebooting democracy: Youth participation in politics in the UK. *Parliamentary Affairs, 60*(4), 548-567. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsm035

Smith, A., Nairn, K., Sligo, J., Gaffney, M., & McCormack, J. (2003). *Case studies of young people's participation in public life: Local government, boards of trustees and the Youth Parliament*. Children's Issues Centre.

Sotkasiira, T., Haikkola, L., Horelli, L. (2010). Building towards effective participation: A learning-based network approach to youth participation. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Smith (Eds.). *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp.174-183). Routledge.

Stebbins, R. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences*. Sage.

United Nations General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Convention on the rights of the child (ohchr.org)

Valenzeula, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman, A. (2014). Facebook, Twitter, and youth engagement: A quasi-experimental study of social media use and protest behavior using propensity score matching. *International Journal of Communication, 8*(1), 2046-2070.

Vishnevsky, T., & Beanlands, H. (2004). Interpreting research in nephrology nursing: Qualitative research. *Nephrology Nursing Journal, 31*(2), 234-238.

Vowles, J. (2010). Electoral system change, generations, competitiveness and turnout in New Zealand 1963-2005. *British Journal of Political Science, 40*(4), 875-895. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123409990342

Walliman, N. (2016). *Social research methods: The essentials* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Watson, C. (2005). Living the life of the social enquirer: Beginning educational research. *Forum Qualitative Social Research, 6*(2), Art 28. http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.2.471

Wood, B.E. (2011). *Citizenship in our place: Exploring New Zealand young people's everyday, place-based perspectives on participation in society* [Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University]. https://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/handle/10063/1671

Wood, B.E. (2012). Crafted within liminal spaces: Young people's everyday politics. *Political Geography, 31*(6), 337-346. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2012.05.003

Wood, B.E. (2020). Youth-led climate strikes: Fresh opportunities and enduring challenges for youth research – commentary to Bowman. *Fennia, 198*(1-2), 217-222. https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.91089

Wood, P. (2013). *Citizenship and participation of young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. http://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/4979

Wray-Lake, L. (2019). How do young people become politically engaged? *Child Development Perspectives, 13*(2), 127-132. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12324

Wray-Lake, L., & Sloper, M. (2016). Investigating general and specific links from adolescents' perceptions of ecological assets to their civic actions. *Applied Development Science, 20*(4), 250-266. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2015.1114888

Xenos, M., Vromen, A., & Loader, B.D. (2014). The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies. *Information, Communication & Society, 17*(2), 151-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2013.871318

Yeung, P., Passmore, A., & Packer, T. (2012). Examining citizenship participation in young Australian adults: A structural equation analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies, 15*(1), 73-98. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2011.623689

Yeung, P.H.Y., Passmore, A.E., & Packer, T.L. (2008). Active citizens or passive recipients: How Australian young adults with cerebral palsy define citizenship. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 33*(1), 65-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250701875129

Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., McLaughlin, M., & Silbereisen, R. (2002). Youth civic engagement in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 12*(1), 121-148. https://doi.org/10.1111/1532-7795.00027

Zaff, J.F., Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., Lin, E.S., Lamb, M., Balsano, A., & Lerner, R.M. (2011). Developmental trajectories of civic engagement across adolescence: Disaggregation of an integrated construct. *Journal of Adolescence, 34*(6), 1207-1220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.07.005

Appendix A – Research advertisement

Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

If you are 16-20 years of age and someone who enjoys participating in civic activities, such as, Climate Change and/or Black lives Matter and/or #MeToo in some way from social media forums to protest marches, youth councils, or voted in the local or General Elections, then I want to talk to you.

I want to know about:

➢ Your involvement in participating in some forms of political action, for example, climate change protest marches, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, social media forums, youth councils, or voted in the local or national elections.
➢ How you felt about the experience and whether you felt your participation mattered.
➢ Would you participate again, and in what ways?

If you are interested in sharing your experiences with me in a one-hour face-to-face interview, please contact me via email or phone.

Contact

Amanda Payne at speakupdunedin@gmail.com or ▇▇▇▇▇▇

Appendix B – Potential contact list of organisations

Malcam Trust

████████ Manager Youth Development

████████████████████

████████████

Rock Solid Youth Aotearoa

████████ Manager

████████████████████████████

████████████

Saddle Hill Foundation Trust

████████████████ Chief Executive Officer

████████████████████████

████████████ Youth Programme Leader R@NDOM for years 9-13 students

████████████

Oar FM ████████

████████████████ Youth Coordinator

████████████████

████████████████████

████████████

███ Youth Wellness Trust

████████ Chairperson

████████████

████████

Generation Zero

████████████████ Convenor

████████████████████

███ City Youth Council

████████ Chief Executive Officer

████████████

████████

Appendix C – Letter to community organisations

Name of Organisation

Address

Date

Tēnā koe (name of contact person)

My name is Amanda Payne and I am a Master of Arts student at Massey University. As part of my study, I am conducting some research into the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As part of my research, I will be conducting face to face interviews with young people who are between 16-20 years of age and have been involved in some form of political participation, for example, have been involved in:

- Climate change and/or Black Lives Matter and/or Me Too movements in some way from social media forums to protest marches.
- Youth councils,
- Voted in a local or general election.

I seek your help to recruit participants by allowing me permission to display my research flyers on your notice boards and/or if you have a social media presence placing a photo of the flyer on that forum. I have enclosed a copy of the flyer and information sheet.

I would appreciate an indication on whether you would be happy to display the flyer and pass on details of my research to young people involved in your organisation. If you are happy to do so, I will send you further copies of the information sheet for participants where they may contact me directly.

Please feel free to contact me on speakupdunedin@gmail.com or ██████████.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

You can also contact one of my supervisors:

Dr Vincent Wijeysingha   Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke

V.Wijeysingha@Massey.ac.nz   N.Stanley-Clarke@Massey.ac.nz

Ph: 06 9516503

Ngā mihi

Amanda Payne

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Appendix D – Information sheet

Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

My name is Amanda Payne and I am a Master of Arts student at Massey University. As part of my study I am conducting some research into the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore how young people are developing their political agency through social and political experiences in, for example, the climate change marches, Black Lives Matter, Me Too movements, youth councils, and/or through voting. Political agency refers to the different ways that you are participating in political activities, and about how you decide what to get involved in and why.

Invitation to young people and recruitment

This research invites six young people aged between 16-20 years from the Dunedin City area to participate in individual interviews to talk about their experiences of political engagement.

These experiences may include, but are not limited to involvement in:

- Climate change and/or Black Lives Matter and/or Me Too movements in some way from social media forums to protest marches.
- Youth councils,
- Voted in a local or general election.

Research procedures and participant rights

I am looking to interview the first six young people who meet the above criteria. If you are selected, I will travel to meet you at a mutually agreed place and time. You will need to be able to give up to 15 minutes of your time to read the research information and between 60-90 minutes to attend an interview which will be audio-recorded and digitally transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software.

You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview approximately one month after the interview and to correct any inaccuracies, this process should take between 30-60 minutes.

There is no obligation to participate in this research. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times and all participant contributions will be presented anonymously.

Any young person who does participate in the research will have the right to:

- Withdraw from the study (up until the approval of the transcripts);
- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded; and
- Bring a support person with you to the interview, if you choose.

The data collected for this research will be used for the purposes of this study and any subsequent papers written as a result. All transcripts will be kept in password protected files and deleted after use.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Research Contacts

If you wish to participate (or if you have any further questions) please contact me on speakupdunedin@gmail.com or ███████.

You can also contact one of my supervisors:

Dr Vincent Wijeysingha   Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke

V.Wijeysingha@Massey.ac.nz   N.Stanley-Clarke@Massey.ac.nz

Ph: 06 9516503

- *This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 21/23. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800, x 43347, email* humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix E – Participant consent form

Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Participant Consent Form - Individual

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree for transcription software to be used.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Full name – printed _____

Appendix F – Interview schedule

Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

<u>Whakawhanaungatanga</u> - Brief introduction about me and the research. Build rapport with interviewee.

- Tell me about yourself?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What do you like most about living in Dunedin?
- Tell me about the school(s) you are at/went to?

Including covering the consent form and answering any questions that the participant may have.

<u>Consent form</u>

- Go through with participant;
- Answer any questions;
- Gain written consent.

Political participation

Prompt - I want to hear about your experience of participating in some form of political action.

1. Tell me about what political participation means to you?

2. What role do you think it should play in our lives/communities?

3. What kind of political activities have you participated in? (Examples: climate change, Black Lives Matter or Me Too movements; social media forum; youth councils; voting in an election, or something else).

4. How did you find out about participating in the activity(ies) that you have?

5. In what ways did you participate in this activity? What part did you contribute to?

6. How did you become involved in this activity and what motivated you?

7. Tell me what factors helped you to participate in this activity? For example; friends, family, school, media.

8. In what way would you encourage other young people to be involved in this/these type(s) of political activity(ies), or others?

9. What were the barriers, if any, that you came across in your participation?

10. What other barriers do you think may prevent other young people from participating?

11. What could be done to make access to opportunities for political participation easier for young people?

12. Where would you go, look for, if you wanted to find out about other opportunities?

Political agency

Prompt - An exploration of whether these experiences serve as a learning platform for other participation in political arenas.

1. Tell me what do you think political agency is?

2. Why do you think political agency is important?

3. In what ways do you feel that you (young peoples') participation in political activities matters?

4. Tell me in what ways do you feel like your contribution helped to make a difference to the outcome?

5. What would make you participate again in the same political activity?

6. In what ways has your experience motivated you to participate politically in other ways?
7. Tell me how important it is for you to have friends and family participating and sharing the same view/experiences as you?

8. In what ways would you participate in a political activity even if your friends, family, or school were not involved?

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Conclusion

Thank the young person for their time.

Explain what will happen next.

Explain how the results will be disseminated to them.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Appendix G – Authority for release of transcript

Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Authority for release of transcripts

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Full name – printed: _____

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Appendix H – Ethics approval letter

Date: 18 May 2021

Dear Amanda Payne

Re: Ethics Notification - **NOR 21/23** - **Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Northern Committee** at their meeting held on **Tuesday, 18 May, 2021**.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz W http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz

Appendix I – Researcher safety plan

Researcher safety plan for conducting interviews.

The researcher will take all reasonable steps to ensure their own safety during the interview process by leaving the details of how long they will be away with another person, and the details of where they will be in a closed envelope if they are not heard from after this specified time. The researcher will also take a cell phone with them to the interviews so that if they feel unsafe, they could phone someone appropriate.

Activity	Risk	Preventative Actions
Communication with participants via email or social media.	Disclosure of private or sensitive details.	All messages will be a private message and/or via a specific email for the research project.
Interviews.	Environment becomes unsafe for researcher.	Researcher will carry a cell phone to make an emergency phone call if necessary.
		Researcher will leave details (see below) in a sealed envelope with a safe contact person that contains information on interview location and expected length of interview.

Interview Information	
Researcher	Amanda Payne
Contact Number	██████████
Interview Venue	[name] [address] [phone]
Interview Start Time	00:00 pm
Expected length of interview/travel time	120 minutes