

‘It’s a problem of the politics, not the place’: A participatory study of young people’s experiences of community belonging and loneliness in a coastal town.

By Gillian Holt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

October 2023

STUDENT DECLARATION

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award and is solely my own work

Signature of Candidate:

Type of Award: Doctor of Philosophy

School: Health, Social Work and Sport

ABSTRACT

Current research suggests that where young people live can be related to their experiences of loneliness. However, the evidence for why this is and what young people themselves think about it is limited. Sense of place, defined by both the physical environment and social and cultural aspects of communities, is related to belonging. However, when a community and a place is stigmatised, a tension can exist between 'feeling' this stigma and the sense of belonging and attachment to where one is from. Social connections are important to understanding loneliness; strong community connections and a sense of belonging can improve individual outcomes, including reducing loneliness.

This PhD research examined how young people living in the unique environment of a coastal community experience loneliness and how sense of place and belonging to the community affects these experiences. Knowledge about young people's experiences of loneliness was generated from participatory research with young people living in the coastal town of Morecambe, where the relationships between these concepts was explored.

Twenty two young people, aged 13-24, participated in research sessions which took place at their local youth groups. Sessions consisted of engagement activities such as quizzes and games and three main creative methods were used to generate the data: 1) maps of the local area were used to explore perceptions of different spaces (Seyer-Ochi, 2006); 2) photovoice was used to examine sense of place through the eyes of young people (Wang & Burris, 1997); and 3) the Splot drawing method (Tolstad et al., 2017) was adopted to explore their sense of belonging. Data generated included transcripts of group discussions, maps, pictures, photos and other creative outputs that were thematically analysed with a Young Researchers Group, formed from 13 young people who took part in the data collection.

Key findings included how young people's perceptions of place were in tension, evidenced through their contrasting experiences of place, as well as themes related to

economic exclusion, threat and shame. The variations in young people's relationship with community were explored, with inconsistencies in when and where they feel belonging apparent, as well as an important finding related to how young people conceptualise community and the language they use to describe it. Lastly, the different intrinsic and extrinsic factors of loneliness offer subjective insights into young people's experiences of loneliness with increasing accessibility of mental health support and educational inputs about loneliness proposed as potential supportive measures.

This thesis reveals that young people's perceptions of the coastal place in which they live is shaped by different socio-environmental factors, including the stigmatisation of place by outside entities. This subsequently has implications for how they experience belonging to geographical communities and to whether they feel lonely. A place-based stigma loneliness model is proposed which offers an approach to understand how these different dimensions interact and impact on whether young people feel lonely. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the implications of this study for future research about young people's experiences of loneliness and the importance of the physical contexts in which they live their lives.

CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Contents	3
Acknowledgments	7
List of Tables and Figures	8
Abbreviations	10
List of Appendices	11
Preface: A Personal Perspective	12
Chapter One: Introduction	15
1.1 Study Aims & Research Questions	16
1.2 Thesis Structure	17
1.3 Conclusion	19
Chapter Two: A Sense of Place, Stigma and the Coast	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Meanings of ‘Place’	22
<i>Making place meanings</i>	23
<i>What influences place attachment</i>	27
<i>How identity relates to sense of place</i>	30
2.3 Place Resources and Young People’s Perceptions	31
2.4 Territorial Stigmatisation	33
2.5 Sense of Place on the UK Coast	36
2.6 Chapter Two Summary	39
Chapter Three: Community Belonging and Young People	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Definitions of Community	41
3.3 Considering ‘Social Capital’	43
<i>Community capital</i>	46
3.4 What is Belonging?	47
3.5 Young People and Community Belonging	49
3.6 Barriers to Young People’s Community Belonging	52
3.7 Chapter Three Summary	55
Chapter Four: The ‘Place’ of Young People in Loneliness Research	57
4.1 Introduction	57
4.2 What is Loneliness?	58
4.3 Different Approaches to Loneliness	59

4.4 Consequences of Loneliness	65
4.5 Why Young People can Experience Loneliness	66
<i>Technology and loneliness</i>	76
4.6 Loneliness and Young people Through a Place-Based Lens	77
4.7 Interventions Tackling Young People’s Loneliness	79
4.8 Summary of Chapter Four	81
Chapter Five: Research Methodology: Design, Include, Create, Collaborate	82
5.1 Introduction	82
5.2 Theoretical Context	82
<i>Defining what is meant by ‘young people’</i>	83
<i>A rights based approach</i>	84
5.3 Research Design	87
<i>Participatory research</i>	88
<i>Recognition of young people</i>	93
5.4 A Study in Two Phases	94
<i>Phase one feasibility study</i>	95
<i>Online data collection</i>	96
<i>Phase two Morecambe case study</i>	100
<i>Morecambe as the research site</i>	100
<i>In-person data collection</i>	101
5.5 Data Collection Methods	103
<i>Creative Method 1: Mapping</i>	103
<i>Creative Method 2: Splot</i>	104
<i>Creative Method 3: Photovoice</i>	105
5.5 Study Sample	106
5.6 Data Analysis	110
<i>Involving the Young Researchers Group in data analysis</i>	111
5.7 Ethical Issues	120
<i>Risk of harm</i>	121
<i>Informed consent</i>	122
<i>Confidentiality and anonymity</i>	123
<i>Use of incentives</i>	124
5.8 Approach to Reflexivity	124
<i>Power and representation</i>	128
Chapter Six Findings: A Place of Contrasts.....	129
6.1 Introduction	129

6.2 Critical comparisons of Morecambe	129
<i>Negative comparisons with other places</i>	142
<i>Contrasts of the past with the present</i>	145
6.4 Exclusion through economic factors	148
6.5 Sense of threat is common in the community	152
6.6 The impact of shame of place	163
<i>Outsider stigmatised views of Morecambe</i>	166
<i>Distinguishing between oneself and 'others'</i>	168
6.7 Conclusion	171
Chapter Seven Findings: Inconsistent Community (Non)Belonging	172
7.1 Introduction	172
7.2 Engagement with the concept of community	172
7.3 A variety of spaces can promote belonging.....	177
7.4 Supportive relationships with peers and professionals	185
<i>'Authentic' belonging achieved through mutual respect</i>	189
7.5 Let down by the school community	192
7.6 Conclusion	195
Chapter Eight Findings: Internal and External Forces of Loneliness.....	196
8.1 Introduction	196
8.2 Loneliness as a sense of nothingness	196
<i>Making friends in your 20s is hard</i>	199
8.3 Exclusionary behaviour and attitudes of others	201
<i>There's a lack of understanding and empathy</i>	205
8.4 Powerlessness in navigating challenging circumstances.....	208
8.5 Learning social and emotional skills	211
8.6 Improving accessibility to services and spaces.....	213
8.7 Conclusion	216
Chapter Nine: Key Findings and Implications	217
9.1 Introduction	217
9.2 Main Themes	218
<i>A spectrum of opinion about Morecambe</i>	218
<i>Morecambe means different things to different people</i>	219
<i>A damaged bond with Morecambe</i>	223
<i>It's stigmatising coming from Morecambe</i>	224
9.3 Young People's Views of Community Are Nuanced	226
<i>The language of 'community' can be a barrier to engagement of young people</i>	227

<i>School as community of belonging</i>	227
<i>Morecambe as a community</i>	228
<i>Online community belonging and loneliness</i>	232
<i>Authentic or superficial belonging?</i>	232
9.4 Young People’s Experience of Loneliness	233
<i>A place-based stigma loneliness model</i>	236
9.5 Implications for Addressing Youth Loneliness	240
<i>Educational settings should support young people who are lonely</i>	241
<i>Timely mental health support</i>	242
<i>Support needs to be available 7 days a week</i>	242
<i>Safe and inclusive spaces for young people in the community</i>	242
<i>Involving young people in decision making about their communities</i>	243
9.6 Methodological Implications	243
9.7 Implications for Future Research.....	245
<i>Living in a stigmatised place can shape young people’s experience of loneliness..</i> 246	
<i>Research should start with young people’s conceptualisations</i>	246
<i>Research should explore young people’s ideas about loneliness and support</i>	247
<i>Research into the intergenerational factors influencing loneliness is needed</i>	248
<i>Research needs to recognise and value young people’s voices</i>	248
9.8 Research Limitations	249
9.9 Dissemination	251
Final thoughts	252
References.....	254
Appendices.....	305
Appendix 1 Young people’s information leaflet	305
Appendix 2 Consent form (young people)	307
Appendix 3 Consent form (parent/guardian).....	309
Appendix 4 Support information sheet	311
Appendix 5 Young Researchers Day invitation	312
Appendix 6 Young Researchers Day information sheet	313
Appendix 7 Photovoice exhibition poster	315
Appendix 8 Executive Report for stakeholders	316

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to Professor Julie Ridley, Dr. Rebecca Nowland and Professor David Morris for their feedback, guidance and support through every single stage of the research. Their knowledge and expertise have been invaluable throughout the PhD endeavour. Also thank you to Professor Hel Spandler for encouraging words and advice over the last three and a half years.

Secondly, I would like to thank all of the young people who took part in this research whose engagement and enthusiasm made this PhD possible. This is also true of the staff at the youth organisations in Morecambe, whose interest in the research and support with the fieldwork was also invaluable.

Thank you to all of my friends and family for their support and encouragement over the past three and a half years. Thanks to Suzanne, Holly and Tara for the many supportive chats and coffees.

I would like to especially thank John, Emilia and Matthew for their patience, love and support through this entire process.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 4.1: A summary of studies which examine young people’s conceptualisations and/or experiences of loneliness using a qualitative approach.....	70-75
Table 5.1: A summary of participants in phase one.....	95
Table 5.2: Summary of online research sessions.....	97
Table 5.3: Summary of main research activities.....	102
Table 5.4: Summary of the different research sites.....	108
Table 5.5: Summary of phase two Morecambe case study participants.....	110
Table 5.6: Themes co-created with Young Researchers.....	113
Figure 5.1: Lattice of participation model (Larkins et al., 2014).....	91
Figure 5.2: Example from the online powerpoint (introduction, session two).....	96
Figure 5.3: A research box sent to phase one participants.....	98
Figure 5.4: A conceptual model based on the findings from the feasibility study.....	99
Figure 5.5: Location of Morecambe.....	101
Figure 5.6: Young Researchers Day.....	111
Figure 5.7: Young Researchers Day data analysis activity.....	112
Figure 5.8: Final table of codes and themes.....	116-118
Figure 5.9: Photovoice exhibition at the Good Things Collective, Morecambe...119-120	
Figure 6.1: View from the promenade.....	131
Figure 6.2: View from the Stone Jetty.....	132
Figure 6.3: Unique metal seabirds which feature around Morecambe.....	132-133
Figure 6.4: Exterior of the Midland Hotel’s Rotunda bar.....	135
Figure 6.5: Morecambe town centre.....	136
Figure 6.6: Empty shopping unit in town centre.....	136
Figure 6.7: Boarded up windows in town.....	137
Figure 6.8: Morecambe town centre.....	138
Figure 6.9: Litter around Morecambe.....	140-141
Figure 6.10: Eric Morecambe statue.....	145

Figure 6.11: Areas where young people feel unsafe.....	154-155
Figure 6.12: Where young people feel safe in Morecambe.....	160-161
Figure 7.1: Young people’s understandings of ‘community’.....	173-174
Figure 7.2: Examples of three Splots showing the importance of youth groups for young people’s sense of belonging.....	178-179
Figure 7.3: Splot showing the Venus and Cupid statue as a place to belong.....	181
Figure 8.1: Loneliness metaphors.....	197
Figure 9.1: A place-based stigma loneliness model.....	237

ABBREVIATIONS

RSA – Royal Society of Arts

LSE – The London School of Economics and Political Science

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WHO – World Health Organisation

UCLan – University of Central Lancashire

UN – United Nations

EU – European Union

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

NEET – (Youth) Not in Employment, Education or Training

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Others

Reflexive TA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

CVS – Council for Voluntary Service

CYPMAF – Children Young People Multi-Agency Forum

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Young people's information leaflet
- Appendix 2: Consent form (young people)
- Appendix 3: Consent form (parent/guardian)
- Appendix 4: Support information sheet
- Appendix 5: Young Researchers Day invitation
- Appendix 6: Young Researchers Day information sheet
- Appendix 7: Photovoice exhibition poster
- Appendix 8: Stakeholder report

PREFACE: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Unlike the majority of the thesis, I have written both the ‘Preface’ and my ‘Final Thoughts’ in the first person to explain my personal motivations for the research which contextualises young people’s experiences of belonging and loneliness in a coastal setting. The inspiration for this research evolved from my own interests and connections to the North West coast: I live (and also grew up) in Lancaster, the next door neighbour to the coastal town of Morecambe in the North West of England. I spent a lot of time in Morecambe as a child, building sandcastles on the beach, riding my bike along the prom and putting an endless amount of two pence coins into the slot machines at the arcades. As a teenager, I went to my first ever concert at the Morecambe Dome (now the site of the planned Eden Project North) and went to the Frontierland theme park with friends on a Friday night. As a newly qualified secondary school teacher, I taught English in the local high school for more than eight years, working daily with young people aged between 11 and 18 years old who lived in the heart of Morecambe. As a parent, I now take my own children to Morecambe to enjoy the beach, the prom and the arcades, along with the newer additions of the bowling alley and trampoline park. Furthermore, my maternal grandparents (both now deceased) used to visit Morecambe on holiday post-war in the 1940s and 1950s, down from Lanarkshire in Scotland. When my parents moved to Lancaster in the late 1980s they always made a point of taking a trip to Morecambe. Although many things had changed over the decades, the views over the bay have remained the same.

Many coastal towns in the UK, like Morecambe, are often depicted as relics of days gone by; faded versions of their former vibrant selves, many of which are now imbued with a variety of social and economic problems, partly due to the decline in tourism in the latter half of the twentieth century (Gale, 2005; Smith, 2004). Morecambe itself is probably most known (at least in the UK) as a once popular holiday destination of the early to mid-twentieth century which can also claim fame for its connection to the British comedy duo Morecambe and Wise (with Eric Morecambe’s statue still a popular attraction along the promenade) and its well-known art deco hotel, The Midland. But arguably, it is perceived as a place that in more recent decades, has fallen on challenging times (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021) and can be

categorised in the ‘faded relics’ group along with places like Blackpool, Skegness, Scarborough, Great Yarmouth, and so on.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on how to address the ‘problem’ of coastal places in the UK. How to aid the regeneration of town centres which have been too long neglected; how to better the educational outcomes and narrow the gap between coastal schools and inland areas; how to improve health outcomes in coastal populations; how to increase employment opportunities (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021; Foresight Government Office for Science, 2017; House of Lords, 2019). There certainly is a large agenda which has been set by various bodies, from the UK government to local councils. However, from my reading to assess the existing literature about coastal areas, what was clearly missing was what young people thought about these issues in their own words and what the impact was on their day to day lives. And I found this surprising.

When the opportunity to develop a doctoral research proposal about young people and loneliness arose, I was interested in contextualising this subject in a coastal community because it seemed like the perfect opportunity to hear what young people had to say. Given that at the time of planning the proposal in 2019, there was not very much evidence of how place might relate to young people’s experiences of loneliness, I felt that the unique setting of the coast, in particular of Morecambe, could provide a new perspective on how environmental and socio-economic factors affect young people’s sense of community belonging and loneliness. Additionally, I would be able to embark on this interesting and important research topic in a community that I knew well and loved. In my past relationships with young people through my role as a teacher, I got to know a bit about young people’s lives in Morecambe, such as the places they liked to go, what they liked to do and what they thought about certain things in the place. I had a strong suspicion that in speaking to local young people that they would not shy away from saying exactly what they thought and felt about living in Morecambe: exactly what I thought was missing in the literature I had read about coastal areas.

From my perspective, the opportunity for young people in Morecambe to have a platform to share their views and experiences through the process of research was the most important aim of my PhD.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

How young people relate to the concept of loneliness and how they describe their experiences is important to gain a more detailed understanding of loneliness from their perspectives. This may have implications for how interventions are developed and facilitated to support young people. Furthermore, as outlined in the previous section, the significance of place in relation to how loneliness is experienced has recently emerged as a new, important factor in the study of loneliness (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2022). With other governmental agendas also concerned with addressing the social and health inequalities which exist in many British coastal towns (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021), contextualising research about young people's experiences of loneliness in a coastal community is particularly timely. Exploring how place and community belonging are associated with loneliness through the lens of a coastal town with significant deprivation can offer a different perspective to the extant literature which is dominated by quantitative based approaches. Although quantitative research measures are highly important and valuable, qualitative research can offer more nuanced and in-depth accounts.

This research adopted a qualitative, participatory and creative approach towards exploring the research themes, building on the innovative 'Loneliness Connects Us' research by Batsleer et al. (2018) which highlighted the power of utilising said methodologies. In their research, workshops were initially used to explore loneliness and develop trusting relationships with each other through games, group walks and cultural stimuli, such as music or literature for discussions. This approach was also used in the sessions with young people in this research; adopting creative methods can help to navigate the potential sensitivities which can arise when talking about loneliness - the focus can be on the activity itself. In addition to this, working with existing organisations, meant that there was an 'in built' support network in place should any young person need to access it. A further aspect of the methodology was to work collaboratively with young people in not only the generation of data, but also in analysis and dissemination activities, in recognition of how important engaging them in research about their own lives is.

1.1 Study Aims & Research Questions

The first main aim of the research was to develop knowledge of the three key concepts of place, community belonging and loneliness from the perspectives of young people. This research has explored how young people who live in a disadvantaged coastal community perceive where they live and how this influences their lives. The term disadvantaged coastal town is understood in this research to refer to communities where there are significant inequalities in health, education and socio-economic outcomes for residents when compared to inland populations. These disadvantages are shaped by the geographical factors which mean that coastal communities are often more physically isolated, as well as the impact of declining industries, therefore limited employment opportunities, on local economies (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021; House of Lords, 2019). With regards to community belonging, how young people understand and relate to their communities as an entity for belonging and social connection were articulated. Accounts of how young people from disadvantaged coastal communities experience loneliness have been generated, as well as their ideas for improving how young people who experience loneliness might be better supported in their communities.

A second main aim of this research was to generate insights about young people's loneliness from a place-based perspective. Current governmental agendas (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021; House of Lords, 2019) which focus on reducing inequalities in disadvantaged coastal areas in the UK, provide a unique and important perspective in the consideration of how place-based stigma may impact young people's sense of belonging to their communities and, consequently, loneliness.

The research set out to generate answers to the following four research questions:

1. What do the concepts 'place', 'community belonging' and 'loneliness' mean to young people who live in a coastal setting?
2. How do young people experience belonging to a coastal community of place?

3. How do young people feel loneliness is affected by the place they live in and the social connections that they have with others?
4. What do young people in a coastal community think would change experiences of loneliness?

1.2 Thesis Structure

Chapters Two, Three and Four concern a review of the related literature.

Chapter Two: A Sense of Place, Stigma and the Coast. This chapter begins with a focus on the key concepts of sense of place and place attachment, as well as considering the importance of place resources in how meanings are created from place. Then, the concepts of stigma, and specifically the stigma of place, are reviewed providing the lens for which this research is viewed. A brief summary of coastal places in the UK is then provided as a suitable setting for place-based research about community belonging and loneliness from young people's perspectives.

Chapter Three: Community Belonging and Young People. Community, a complex and multi-defined term, is explored in relation to some well-established definitions in the first part of this chapter. Reflections on social and community capital are offered in association with the importance of social relationships in communities. Following this, different meanings of belonging are discussed, then a review of literature which offers insights to how young people can experience community belonging and its associated benefits. The latter part of the chapter considers what the different barriers to community belonging can be for young people and what the effects of this can be.

Chapter Four: The 'Place' of Young People in Loneliness Research. This final literature review chapter concerns previous research about loneliness. Firstly, different understandings of what loneliness are discussed as well as some of the different approaches which can be adopted in the study of loneliness. Next, there is a specific focus on literature which explains some of the reasons why young people feel lonely, as well as what the consequences can be, including detrimental impacts on mental and

physical health. The final part of the chapter reviews the limited literature about place and loneliness in relation to young people, in addition to what is known about interventions to support those who experience loneliness

Chapter Five: Research Methodology: Design, Include, Create, Collaborate. The methodological approach utilised in the research is described in this chapter. Firstly the social constructionist philosophy adopted is outlined, suitable because young people's experiences of their own worlds are prioritised in the creation of knowledge. Who young people are and their participation rights are then established, with reflections on different participatory frameworks to support research which recognises young people as experts in their lives (Cahill, 2007; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Next, the research is specifically situated in Morecambe; here the coastal town is described with some further details of its suitability. The research design of two phases is then outlined, including the reporting and reflections on a first phase feasibility study which was conducted in order to hone the design for the second phase Morecambe case study. This included the three main creative methods which are described, before summaries of the research sessions with young people, including a Young Researchers Day where collaborative data analysis was conducted. The methodological approach used for data analysis – Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2019) – is described and justified. Finally, ethical considerations in the research, as well as the positionality of the researcher are presented.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight all concern the findings from the research.

Chapter Six Findings: A Place of Contrasts. The findings in relation to young people's experiences of place are described. The main themes include different types of 'critical comparisons of Morecambe'; 'exclusion through economic factors'; 'sense of threat is common in the community' and 'the impact of shame of place'. The types of data analysed in this chapter include quotations from young people, as well as relevant examples of photographs and maps.

Chapter Seven Findings: Inconsistent Community (Non)Belonging. This chapter focuses on the findings related to young people's experiences of community belonging. Quotations from young people, in addition to creative 'Spots' and flipchart work are the types of data analysed. The chapter is structured around the main themes of 'engagement with the concept of community'; 'a variety of spaces can promote belonging'; 'supportive relationships with peers and professionals' and 'let down by the school community'.

Chapter Eight Findings: Internal and External Forces of Loneliness. Young people's understanding and experiences of loneliness are presented here. The main themes are 'loneliness as a sense of nothingness'; 'exclusionary behaviour and attitudes of others'; 'powerlessness in navigating challenging circumstances'; learning social and emotional skills' and 'improving access to services and spaces'. Data is predominantly quotations from young people, as well as some examples of their creative work to illustrate the themes.

Chapter Nine: Key Findings and Implications. A discussion of the three findings chapters is drawn together in this chapter, structured around headings of young people's sense of Morecambe; how community is conceptualised by young people and the implications of these discussions for young people's experiences of loneliness. Furthermore, reflections on the methodological contributions made are also presented. Finally considered are the implications for future research and the study's limitations.

Final Thoughts. This last section of the thesis reflects upon the research as a whole: the main 'takeaway' message from the study, as well as the researcher's own personal thoughts about the whole process.

1.3 Conclusion

This research is timely. The current direction of research concerning youth loneliness recognises the importance of place and environmental factors (Marquez et al., 2022) but there are limited studies at present because this is a somewhat more recent

approach to the study of loneliness. Additionally, adopting a participatory and creative methodology with young people to research loneliness is relatively novel and has the potential to generate rich and nuanced accounts. This may well have important implications for not just how loneliness in young people is understood, but also in terms of support measures for those who experience loneliness. Although the body of literature concerning 'loneliness interventions' is evolving, it is still relatively underdeveloped in comparison to studies about older populations.

Finally, to reiterate, the context of the study is significant. Young people who live in coastal areas have a unique set of environmental conditions, as well as associated socio-economic factors which provide an interesting and novel backdrop to examine their experiences of belonging and loneliness. Much of the literature which concerns improving the coastal places and the lives of those who live there is not 'spoken' in the voice of young people. This research seeks to redress this imbalance of views with young people placed directly in the centre.

CHAPTER TWO: A SENSE OF PLACE, STIGMA AND THE COAST

2.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the meaning of 'place' as the context for this research about young people's experience of loneliness. As this study is concerned with how young people who live in a coastal setting make meanings about the place where they live, the literature which explores what 'sense of place' is as a concept is established.

The literature examining the different meanings that young people take from the place where they live is located across key literature from human geography, including Relph (1976), Massey (1994) and Cresswell (2015). It is also important to consider the meaning of 'sense of place' and attachment to place and what the literature highlights that these mean for young people. Seamon's (2013) six processes describe the key dimensions of place attachment. Closely linked to attachment to place is the effect the strength of the relationship to place has on how young people's identities are formed. These clearly need to be considered in the context of coastal communities. Moreover, the resources of a place (both the inside and outside spaces, as well as clubs, groups and activities) can also shape the degree of place attachment as well as young people's wider sense of place (Nowell et al., 2006).

Key literature about places that are stigmatised is considered, given the research was conducted against the backdrop of a coastal community that is regarded as disadvantaged, to examine how stigma can also shape young people's sense of place. This includes Goffman's (1986) seminal text about stigma, and Wacquant's (2007, 2008) theory of territorial stigmatisation which builds on these earlier theories. Tyler's (2020) argument that stigma is a form of power which reinforces existing social inequalities within the context of place-stigma is explored. This builds a rationale for adopting a place-based stigma perspective in this research. Further literature is then discussed which illustrates some of the consequences of place-based stigma for residents.

Finally in the last part of the chapter, a general overview of UK coastal towns is outlined, including a reflection on some of the main points raised by the House of Lords (2019) report into ‘The Future of Seaside Towns’. A consideration of factors such as levels of deprivation, local economies and geographical isolation is discussed in relation to coastal towns and how this may affect young people’s sense of place of where they live. Concluding remarks draw these main concepts together to frame the ‘place’ aspect of the research.

2.2 Meanings of ‘Place’

Trying to establish what the concept of place means is challenging; on the surface level, as a term which is used in everyday language, it seems simple and straightforward (Cresswell, 2015). However, this is not the case. A tension exists between those who view place as a fixed, location-based entity and those who take a more philosophical stance (Cresswell, 2015); indeed the concept of place varies in different disciplines, as well as within disciplines themselves. In this research, the term ‘place’ is defined as a location which is meaningful (Cresswell, 2015). Firstly, this is because physical location is important in a study about a coastal place, and secondly because meanings made from young people’s perspectives are at the centre of how place is related to their sense of community belonging and experiences of loneliness. With this general view of how ‘place’ as a single word is understood, the main objective of this chapter section is to examine a key concept in this research, that of ‘sense of place’.

Understanding how young people *perceive* place is critical to this research. Having a positive sense of place is thought to be important because research has shown that connecting to places positively can motivate people within their communities both individually and collectively to take actions as responsible citizens to protect their communities (Lewicka, 2011) and improve the health and wellbeing of community residents (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). However, there are also difficulties in how consistently this is defined (Nelson et al., 2020). In order to be clear about how ‘sense of place’ is understood in the context of this research, several different definitions will be presented, followed by an assertion of which description is most appropriate.

For example, Anholt (2009) describes sense of place as the different features of a place which make it unique and create its character. Others emphasise the meanings formed from the social interactions contextualised by the physical, historical, social and cultural aspects of place (Ardoin et al., 2012; Campelo et al., 2014). For Kyle and Chick (2007), the relationships and social interactions between people are more important for sense of place than any actual physical place factors. In contrast, Jorgensen and Stedman (2011) assert that physical characteristics are important in people's creation of 'sense of place' and that these are balanced with their *social interactions* which occur in that context. Furthermore, attitudes are important to describe people's feelings towards place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2011). In a coastal setting, where distinctive geographical features can characterise place, adopting this approach which acknowledges the importance of said features alongside the social relationships is suitable for how 'sense of place' is understood.

It is suggested that when people have a strong and positive sense of place, the greater their attachment and sense of belonging (Hummon, 1992). Therefore, the subsequent two sections of this chapter are concerned with 1) how place meaning might be created; and 2) what factors influence attachment to place.

Making place meanings

Three key contributions to the field of human geography will be briefly outlined for consideration: Relph (1976), Massey (1994) and Cresswell (2015). How these approaches may be suitable for understanding young people's place meaning-making will then be reflected upon.

Relph's (1976) influential work 'Place and Placelessness' provides the language to articulate the meaning of place. He adopts a phenomenological approach; the way humans experience the world. It includes physical aspects (the natural environment, design, accessibility, safety) and less tangible entities (feeling at home, rootedness of place, social boundaries and place-stigma). Central to Relph's conceptualisation of place is the concept of 'insideness' and 'outsideness'. Insideness refers to the strength of attachment people feel to place; the extent to which humans feel safe, secure and

comfortable in a place. The greater this feeling of insideness is, the more an individual will associate their identity with that place. In contrast, outsideness describes opposing feelings towards place; the experience of feeling separate from a place will incur a division and a dissociation of identity. The strongest versions of insideness and outsideness can be prefaced by the word 'existential'. In the case of existential insideness, it describes a profound and unconscious immersion in place which is most associated with 'home'; whereas existential outsideness is the complete alienation from place which would be generally associated with strangers to a locale (Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Relph also coined the term 'placelessness' in relation to the denigration to people's 'authentic' sense of place where modern living is erasing the uniqueness of places. He described it as 'the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardised landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place' (Relph, 1976, Preface). He argues that placelessness arises from the combination of kitsch which relates to the general acceptance of indistinct principles to place, as well as technique, which prioritises the notion of proficiency above anything else in relation to place. Placelessness occurs through people's easy acceptance of this status, where the uniqueness of places is undermined by 'anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments' and he particularly blames mass tourism for this erosion of uniqueness and character (Relph, 1976, p. 143).

Relph's book has not been without its criticisms, including the argument that it does not hold as much relevance in today's modern, hyper-connected world, where place is not seen as a static and fixed entity (Massey, 1994). Furthermore, other criticisms have expressed that the apparent dualisms in Relph's conceptualisation are too simplistic; insideness/outsideness; place/placelessness (Massey, 1994). And yet Relph's work is still cited in much of the place literature reviewed here; this is surely an endorsement of the relevance of these concepts. Arguably, through the phenomenological approach itself, Relph offers a highly flexible language to describe the different experiences of place at different times; the broadness of his approach recognises the many different dimensions of human experience which should all be considered in the understanding of place (Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Another major influence in the conceptualisation of place in research is Massey's (1994) 'globalisation' of place, which contrasts with Relph's phenomenological approach. For Massey (1994), place is not a fixed, inward looking entity but rather subjective, relational and progressive. Place is constantly evolving rather than being demarcated by boundaries; it is shaped by many different and complex forces across the world:

For what is happening is that the geography of social relations is changing. In many cases such relations are increasingly stretched out over space. Economic, political and cultural social relations, each full of power and with internal structures of domination and subordination, stretched out over the planet at every different level, from the household to the local area to the international. (p. 175)

Place is something which is constantly in flux and is formed from many outside influences where time-space compressions creates a globally connected world. Massey argues that power geometry, where different groups and individuals have different control over how these global interactions shape and progress place, is important. For example, from the political figures and business people who make far reaching decisions; to those who move physically through travel, such as migrants; and those who 'stay where they are' but use global products, ranging from foodstuffs to television programmes, in their everyday lives. Massey argues that place should be thought of as a meeting place where the many different social relations intersect and that the 'character' of a place can only really be constructed through connecting it to other global places. In summary, Massey's progressive view of place can be summarised with reference to four main factors:

1. Places are not fixed entities.
2. Places do not have to have boundaries.
3. Places do not have singular identities.
4. Uniqueness of place is derived from a combination of both local and wider social relations.

This account provides a convincing argument that in today's highly connected world, place cannot be considered as a distinct, fixed geographical location associated with a particular community (Antonsich, 2010) but needs to be understood in the context of the wider world. However, Cresswell (2015) argues that Massey's conceptualisation contradicts the importance for human sense of rootedness to place; in Massey's view, place is something incidental to the intersection of social relations, creating a more generalised sense of place which is at odds with the humanistic argument that people will always need to be able to identify with place; it is an important part of being human (Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Cresswell's (2015) reflections on different conceptualisations of place as three levels goes some way to address this tension between the global sense of place and the intrinsic human need for place rootedness. Building on Agnew's (1987) conceptualisation, that place is a meaningful location created by geography, locale and sense of place, Cresswell adds that it is also important to consider the concepts of space and landscape as distinct but related. Space, to Cresswell, is a less tangible entity than place, which exists without meaning until human activities attach meaning to it; then it becomes place. Landscape is referred to in terms of both its geographical form and substance, as well as how it is shaped by human practices.

The significance of place as a way of 'seeing, knowing and understanding the world' is underlined (Cresswell, 2004, p. 18): a lens which affects how people know their worlds and make meaning. He describes three levels which can be used to approach place. Firstly, a 'descriptive' approach, where place is considered as a separate entity and is unique, with a focus on its own particularities which give it a distinctive character. Secondly, a social constructionist approach to place which utilises a combination of particular physical aspects of place and the social processes which occur under particular structural conditions, for example, capitalism or patriarchy. Finally, level three describes a phenomenological approach used in humanistic geography (for example, Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1975). Here the unique features of place are not of particular interest; rather it is the human experience which takes precedence. In this research, a social constructionist approach to place has the most relevance as young people's sense of place will be contextualised through the structural conditions

of stigma power (Tyler, 2020). This is described in more detail later in the chapter. However, Cresswell (2015) does emphasise that all three levels overlap and that no single level has more importance than another. Therefore in order to capture young people's place meaning-making, there will be reflections which also touch on the other two levels.

Another important concept which Cresswell articulates that is relevant to this research is how power is a significant factor in the conceptualisation of place because it can be used as a social structure to determine who belongs in which places (Cresswell, 2015). When things are in the wrong place, or deviate from the 'norm', Cresswell uses the term 'anachorism' to describe this out-of-placeness. The construction of place itself can be used to produce 'outsiders' because they do not conform to the 'expected relations between place, meanings and practice' (Cresswell, 2015, p. 174). There are potential consequences for how the construction of place and meanings made may include or exclude young people. To current knowledge, there is limited research which examines how this might affect young people's experience of place in particular. This has relevance when considering how place is related to belonging and loneliness.

What influences place attachment

An important aspect of sense of place also relates to attachment; what it means and how it relates to young people is considered here. Place attachment can be described as the deep connection that people have towards particular places over time, through recurrent *positive* experiences (Giuliani, 2003; Milligan, 1998; Scannell et al., 2016) and has been said to rely on social features, physical features or a combination of both (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). It is suggested that place attachment develops over time and that people who have a strong, positive attachment to the place where they live are more likely to develop a stronger sense of community as well as better relationships with other residents and social ties (Long & Perkins, 2007). It can be inferred from this that robust attachment to places is likely to be important for preventing and/or reducing experiences of loneliness.

Seamon's (2013) approach to place attachment contrasts with Scannell and Gifford's (2010) more individualistic model through its collectivist perspective. He articulates six connected processes which relate to the varying intensity of place attachment. Firstly, he describes 'place interaction' which refers to the familiar, typical day-to-day 'goings on' in a place; 'goings on' that can be disrupted by certain negative actions which in turn can undermine the sense of place. Secondly, 'place identity' is associated with when people who live in a place regard it as being an important part of their world and consequently associate it with their identity. Both place interaction and place identity are mutual processes. Thirdly, Seamon describes 'place release' which relates to different, unexpected or spontaneous occurrences and events which can be either positive, for example, encountering an old friend who you have lost contact with; or negative, for example, being hurt in some way close to home. Fourthly, 'place realisation' is the character of place, related to both environmental features and human activities. He notes that sense of place can become damaged when realisation deteriorates in some way, for example, an increase in local criminal activity. This can negatively impact both place interaction and identity. The fifth and sixth processes are closely related. Fifthly, 'place creation' relates to how invested people can actively shape place in positive ways, such as through making changes in local policies. Sixthly and finally, 'place intensification' describes how these creations – of policies or design plans for example – can improve place.

These six processes are a useful approach to place attachment, as they build on some of the key aspects of Scannell and Gifford's (2010) individualised model of place attachment, such as personal and group experiences of place and different emotional responses to place, through the descriptions of the six, nuanced and interacting processes. Seamon presents place attachment as dynamic where 'place experience and meaning, is a spectrum of emotional engagement that ranges from appreciation, pleasure, and fondness to concern, respect, responsibility, care, and deep love of place' (Seamon, 2013 p. 18). Conceptualising place attachment as a relationship which is dynamic and affected by the interaction between the six different processes is how it is understood here. As this research is contextualised within the setting of a coastal community where there are unique benefits and challenges to living there, Seamon's phenomenological approach means that residents' experiences are central to

understanding their relationship with place. The six processes outlined can capture the nuances and contrasts of place and their dynamism means that place attachment is not fixed, but rather can flux and change.

It is known that place attachment can provide a protective function, providing people with a sense of safety and security (Fullilove, 1996). People who feel attached to the place where they live develop a stronger sense of community, neighbourhood relations and mutual assistance, these being key factors of social capital (Long & Perkins, 2007; Perkins & Long, 2002) which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Conversely, when place attachment bonds are disrupted in some way this sense of safety and security can be negatively impacted, decreasing the likelihood of support from neighbours and limiting connections (Bellair, 1997).

Some commentators also suggest that attachment to place can be strengthened through multiple generations of family living in an area (Stockdale et al., 2018), creating strong social memories which intensify the bonds of people to place. For some people, these long-term connections and strong roots create not only a strong place-related identity, but also the benefits of protective health effects in youth, such as fewer occurrences of self-harm or experiences of bullying behaviours, due to belonging to a supportive neighbourhood collective (Chester et al., 2019; Klemera et al., 2017). However, tensions can also exist for some young people with these roots who are simultaneously drawn to 'broader horizons' in a desire to seek out other opportunities in new places (Frost & Catney, 2020). In some urban environments, especially those which are tempered by socio-economic and ethnic inequalities, although the desire to experience other places is present, the challenge to uproot oneself can be a difficult obstacle to overcome (Frost & Catney, 2020; Hargie et al., 2011; Thomas, 2016; Wenham, 2020). The suggestion is that when attachment to place is in tension in some way, the robustness of the connection to place is compromised. Examining this view with young people who live in a disadvantaged coastal place can also provide some insight into how instability in attachment to place impacts their present and projected future lives.

It is also important to note that practical elements of place, such as lacking adequate street lighting can invoke feelings of anxiety and danger, resulting in place-avoidance and a sense of exclusion from certain areas (Thomas et al., 2018). Fear of place can be further exacerbated through local reputation, narratives of danger, including racism, homophobia and violence, resulting in damage to attachment bonds and deeper exclusion for some young people (Clayton, 2012; Frost & Catney, 2020; Kelly, 2013). Place resources are discussed later in the chapter. However, it is important to highlight in relation to place attachment that for certain marginalised groups, for example, young women from different ethnic groups or LGBTQ+ young people, (Craig et al., 2015; McDowell et al., 2014) the disruption to attachment bonds and consequent exclusion can be even more significant.

How identity relates to sense of place

Finally, it should be emphasised that place attachment, therefore sense of place, is closely associated with both personal and social identity (Low & Altman, 1992). How place is socially represented influences how young people think about themselves both in the present and in the future (Prince, 2014). As Low and Altman (1992) state:

place attachment may contribute to the formation, maintenance, and preservation of the identity of a person, group, or culture. And, it may also be that place attachment plays a role in fostering individual, group, and cultural self-esteem, self-worth, and self-pride. (p. 10)

As young people develop, there is a shift away from the family towards the peer group, in terms of social time spent together, as well as time to develop a sense of identity and autonomy (Bauer, 2008; Low & Altman, 1992). Young people's attachment to the place where they live and their overall sense of place, is therefore important to how they create their identities. When attachment to place is strong and sense of place is experienced in positive and optimistic ways, the impact on identity is correspondingly affirmative. However, when the opposite of this is experienced; when place attachment is weak and sense of place is damaged, the impact on identity is

adverse. How the identities of young people who live in coastal places relate to their attachment to place and sense of place is important to understand because the associated consequences of self-esteem, self-worth and self-pride may have implications for both belonging and loneliness, as well as general physical and mental health.

2.3 Place Resources and Young People's Perceptions

The resources available to young people in the place where they live can help to protect young people's wellbeing from other negative effects (Lenzi et al., 2013); this is especially true in places which are considered to be disadvantaged, such as some coastal areas in the UK. Place resources refers to inside and outside spaces available to young people, as well as groups, clubs and activities available in their locale. This is important, as young people can often want increased independence from the family home, meaning that they are likely to explore different places within their communities where experiences are had and memories made (Scannell et al., 2016; Whitlock, 2007). This in turn can promote feelings of confidence and self-esteem in young people (Nowell et al., 2006).

In a study of the physical aspects of urban communities, young people and adults both described the sense of belonging and identity that the physical characteristics of places fostered (Nowell et al., 2006). For young people, physical spaces, such as youth centres, offered spaces outside of the school environment where they could interact with their peers, increasing belonging (Estrella & Kelley, 2017; Scannell et al., 2016). This is important to consider because the number of youth centres in the UK is eroding, with those which have closed down since 2010 being more than 760 (UNICEF, 2021) and the impact this has had on young people's ability to make connections in a safe space outside of the school environment has been reduced.

Also important is the physical design of places because this can affect how easily young people can connect with others, and feelings of loneliness can be exacerbated (Worsley et al., 2021). For example, local outdoor areas in urban areas, such as parks,

were viewed as important by young people, partly because they are free and partly because they allow autonomy for young people to connect with their peers how they wish (Nissen et al., 2020) without adult surveillance. Furthermore, research has found that the outside can also offer restorative spaces for young people (Mathers et al., 2015; Thomas, 2016); good accessibility of spaces such as local parks is considered vital for overall wellbeing during youth. This includes mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, as well as the promotion of physical activity, social connection and sense of belonging to the community (Birch et al., 2020; Britton et al., 2020; Hignett et al., 2018).

Southby et al. (2021) found that community wellbeing projects can help to address social exclusion and to promote better wellbeing, such as improved mental and physical health, skills development and more opportunities for social interaction. Furthermore, taking part in community-based activities can lead to increases in individual wellbeing, including the benefit of reduced social isolation. Group membership, such as to sports, drama or activist groups, can give marginalised young people somewhere to go, fostering social inclusivity and connections with others (Kelly, 2013; Montague & Eiroa-Orosa, 2018; Morgan et al., 2019; Turner-King, 2018). How well resourced a place is in terms of having these types of groups for young people to attend, is therefore a significant factor in relation to sense of place. Whether less affluent places are under-resourced in this respect may have detrimental consequences for young people's sense of belonging. However, it may also be the case that quality is more important than quantity too. A greater understanding of how limited resources in a place which has higher levels of deprivation than the average UK town or city, affects young people's experiences of the place itself can increase awareness of how they could be more effectively mobilised to increase young people's sense of belonging.

A final point to make in relation to place resources, is that young people's access to spaces in which they wish to spend time can be impacted by affordability (Wilson & Milne, 2016). For example, access to transport in urban settings can afford social inclusion and belonging to a city or community, in addition to autonomy and physical health benefits (Jones et al., 2013; Nissen et al., 2020). Concessionary fares and

reduced costs enable young people to explore and familiarise themselves with the resources within a place (Jones et al., 2013). However, in areas which have significant levels of poverty, there may be implications for young people's ability to make connections in a place.

2.4 Territorial Stigmatisation

For certain communities, there is a strong awareness of outsiders' preconceived ideas about them, through local reputation, national political agendas or media portrayals. When these are negatively articulated, there can be a range of consequences related to health, employment and the economy, among others. This is the concept of territorial stigmatisation, which refers to a 'taint of place' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 238) which can detrimentally affect people who live in particular areas.

Territorial stigmatisation, conceptualised in Wacquant's book *Urban Outcasts: a comparative sociology of advanced marginality* (2008), draws on Goffman's (1986) three factors which discredit differentness and exclude individuals from society and Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power. Goffman believed that negative labelling due to 'abominations of the body' (such as disabilities); blemishes of individual character (such as moral failings); and the 'tribal' stigma of race, nationality or religion lead to a 'spoiled identity' and disqualification from society. Bourdieu's theory conversely adopts a 'top down' approach where the social world is defined by powerful authorities and agents who define societies in accordance with their own best interests and have the power to enforce these definitions, becoming a kind of 'truth' (Wacquant et al., 2014). Wacquant adds the idea that a 'blemish of place' can also lead to territorial stigmatisation, creating a 'virtual' social identity for people from particular places thus leading to a rejection from others. Wacquant's belief that the combination of Goffman and Bourdieu's standpoints, as well as considering the blemish of place, can 'advance the grasp of the ways in which noxious representation of space are produced, diffused, harnessed in the field of power by bureaucratic and commercial agencies as well as in everyday life in ways that alter social identity, strategy and structure' (Wacquant et al., 2014, p. 1273).

Tyler (2020) goes further, emphasising the importance of how macro structures, such as governments, utilise stigma as a strategy to promote shame in certain populations and subsequently legitimatises ‘the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices’ (Tyler, 2013, p. 212). Her reconceptualization of stigma as a machine provides a powerful visual metaphor of how those in positions of power (from above) literally impress upon the bodies underneath in subjugation of their capitalist practices and systems. This collective approach to stigma has evolved from Goffman’s early work, where deeply embedded macro structures exert stigmatised power which ‘functions through the amplification of stigmatising forms of difference’ (Tyler, 2020, p. 267) and shapes perceptions that those who live in poverty have *chosen* to do so. Incorporating Wacquant’s description of territorial stigmatisation into Tyler’s stigma machine, that is, to view stigmatised places through a lens of ‘top down’ power, can offer a different perspective to extant literature which examines young people’s experiences of the place where they live.

Studies which examine territorial stigmatisation have predominantly been conducted in larger cities, looking at the variations across different urban landscapes. Applying this theory to smaller towns, and particularly UK coastal towns which arguably have distinct characters due to both specific socio-economic and geographical features, is mostly absent from existing literature. An important aspect of territorial ‘taint’ is how outsiders perceive places, and this can be influenced by political agendas and media representations. For example, Thomas (2016) examined how outsider perceptions, including those shaped by negative media representations, do not necessarily ‘tally’ with those who live there. The Welsh town of Merthyr Tydfil, classed as a post-industrial, deprived town with low levels of education, income and employment, has been represented by both local and national media as an example of the problems with the notion of the ‘welfare state’. This was summarised in a 2010 Sky documentary where young people in this town were depicted as lazy and uncouth. These depictions fuel territorial stigmatisation and create what Wacquant (2007, 2008) calls a ‘discourse of vilification’. For the young people who live in Merthyr Tydfil, interviews with participants showed that although some of the social problems in the community presented in the media were recognised as being significant issues, these could be counter balanced by factors such as the open, natural spaces of the town, as well as

strong social cohesion between friends and families (Thomas, 2016). Both of these aspects are associated with health benefits, including reducing loneliness.

Examining these strong social connections fostered by a 'blemish of place' and how experiences of loneliness are impacted as a result is underexplored in reference to young people. It is an important area which should be probed, as a significant finding in Thomas' (2016) study is that although many of the young people characterised their town as a collective space, some simultaneously differentiated between their part of the town and other parts of the town, rejecting being like other residents and showing that they are in fact different (MacDonald et al., 2014) or displaying 'disidentification' (Savage et al., 2010; Skeggs, 1997). Thomas describes this as 'multiplicities of place' which links to Wacquant's (2007, 2008) theory that people can distance themselves from certain groups in their communities by relocating the stigma to others, therefore the whole community is not tarred with the same brush (Thomas, 2016).

Similar to the media presentation of Merthyr Tydfil, it can be argued that many coastal towns in the UK are broadly presented in the media as disadvantaged in terms of economics, education, employment and health. It has been argued by some that such stigmatisations can in fact weaken communities (Keene & Padilla, 2014). Whether young residents recognise these issues or not, or whether they relocate the stigma to other young people from certain areas of their coastal town is largely unknown. This highlights the need for collaborative research into the views of the young peoples who live in these places. The argument that the concept of 'Us' and 'Them' can also exist within communities and not just with 'outsiders' could be significant for loneliness research from the perspective of young people because it is known that peer connections, rather than those that are familial, are found to be the most important to young people to reduce loneliness. If a young person views some people from certain parts within their communities as 'Them', examining how this may impact their feelings of connectedness to the community as a whole could be important to understand the mechanisms of loneliness within the community of place for young people.

Place-based stigma can also affect how young people experience place-belonging or exclusion and this can have negative health implications and detrimental effects on life chances (Thomas, 2016; Wenham, 2020). Social problems associated with areas of poverty, such as substance use and violence, may lead to financial investment or so called 'regeneration' but the effects are often short-term for existing populations and furthermore can arguably be seen to devalue the people who live there (Paton, 2018). For example, during the London 2012 Olympic Games, the borough of Newham received financial investment to improve the neighbourhood, in terms of aesthetics, safety and security and Thompson et al. (2014) reported that residents, including young people, spoke of pride in their neighbourhood, improved social interactions and general wellbeing. However, after the event, residents believed that life reverted back to how it was before. Gentrification of urban stigmatised places is a visual sign of change but Butcher and Dickens' (2016) study of Hackney, suggests that although young people could identify benefits, the transformation felt exclusionary for some, as rises in cost of living meant staying was not sustainable, and some felt 'displaced' and no longer certain how to 'be' there. As many UK coastal areas have been identified as places needing significant regeneration (House of Lords, 2019), how young people view this and whether their opinions have been actively sought in planning, is important to understand the impact these decisions have on their lives and their sense of place and belonging.

2.5 Sense of Place on the UK Coast

The UK has 11,000 miles of coastline and approximately 17 per cent of the UK population (more than 11 million people) live in coastal communities of varying prosperity. Research suggests that there are growing risks for the health and wellbeing of residents (Government Office for Science, 2017). As a result, increasing research has been generated related to UK coastal towns. Over the past few years, various reports, studies and media outlets have focused on the gap between many coastal towns and inland residing counterparts; a move away from previous research which focused on social exclusion as being a more rural/urban divide (Ward, 2015). A report by the House of Lords identified that young people in some UK coastal towns are being 'let down and left behind' by poor standards in provision (House of Lords, 2019,

p. 5). Factors such as high levels of economic deprivation and unemployment, (Beatty et al., 2008) and drug and alcohol misuse (Office for National Statistics, 2018), in addition to the increased likelihood of suffering from poor health (House of Commons, 2007), have been widely presented. Research has shown that matters related to socio-economic factors such as poverty, the physical environment, educational opportunities and access to social activities and facilities can contribute to youth loneliness (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019; Rönkä et al., 2018), as well as fragile community cohesion and greater community division (Smith, 2012). For example, it is documented that coastal schools have higher numbers of children receiving free school meals, indicating higher levels of poverty which has been associated with increased loneliness (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Considering that the criteria for the entitlement of free school meals is associated with lower wages, the sense of low expectations for future educational and employment opportunities may also be a key factor to examine in terms of loneliness in young people.

Reid and Westergaard (2017) argue that young people who live in coastal communities are restricted to having a 180 degrees outlook, as opposed to the 360 degrees of inland residing young people, because of the sea. They argue that this perspective offers limited opportunities for employment, and the physical limits of the geographical location could perhaps be applied to other opportunities also. It is known that health and wellbeing is closely related to economic activity and levels of employment and that some coastal communities have the highest levels of deprivation in the UK (Beatty et al., 2008). Coastal areas may have a combination of generations of families who have always lived there, along with transient groups who move in and out to secure seasonal employment and young people, who in some cases, have been labelled as 'left behind' (House of Lords, 2019). Whilst these variations exist in other urban and rural towns, coastal communities in the UK can be seen as distinct and unique from other communities. This is not least because of the representations that many have recently endured in the media.¹ The negative media representation of

¹ Example headlines include 'Seaside towns among the most deprived communities in UK (The Guardian, 2017); or 'Heroin deaths highest in Blackpool and coastal areas (BBC, 2018); or 'Britain's fragile seaside towns lay bare a dysfunctional economy (Financial Times, 2019); or 'How the seaside town of Blackpool has become a county lines battleground with kids hiding knives in their socks' (The Sun, 2019).

particular UK coastal towns has been further enforced with official reports (Government Office for Science, 2017; House of Lords, 2019; Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) which can further exacerbate territorial stigmatisation or taint of place (Wacquant, 2007, 2008). Studies which explore this concept in relation to young people who live in coastal towns and how it affects their wellbeing, particularly in terms of feeling lonely, are scarce and it seems pressing to address this gap to learn how young people in these communities might be better supported.

Of course, the contexts of different coastal towns can vary hugely in terms of social, economic and cultural aspects. Therefore it is important to ensure that research is clearly contextualised, acknowledging the differences in communities to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. The juxtaposition of deprivation evident in some coastal towns with the environmental health benefits which have been recognised (Ashbullby et al., 2013; Ryan, 2012) make coastal places a fascinating context for new research which focuses on the perceptions of young people. There is limited research which studies young people's experiences of belonging and loneliness in coastal towns and particularly from a place-based standpoint. It is possible that young people's opinions of where they live may highlight differences with what official reports suggest. The conflicting evidence regarding how the stigmatisation of living in certain places affects young people which has been discussed in this chapter warrants further investigation. Whether the negative media representations of communities, and in particular the current focus on UK coastal communities, is felt by the young people who live there and has an effect on their wellbeing and makes them feel lonely, is unclear. Or whether there is a strong sense of community cohesion fostered by a shared history and the positive physical and mental effects of living in the coastal environment may mean a different approach could be needed by agencies to support these communities. Research to understand the experiences and views of young people could offer new knowledge about how they perceive their communities and how this may relate to their feelings of connectedness and loneliness. At present, this information is largely untapped but could provide new insight to develop different strategies to support young people who live in coastal towns.

2.6 Chapter Two Summary

In summary, this chapter has reviewed the literature concerning different conceptualisations of sense of place; including how meanings are made from place; place attachment; place identity and place resources. Furthermore, how the stigmatisation of some places might affect sense of place was also considered. From a review of the literature, it is evident that many different factors can influence how young people might perceive where they live and that depending on their overall sense of place, they can either experience positive physical and mental health benefits, such as feelings of safety and security, or detrimental effects if their sense of place is 'damaged'.

Additionally, young people's sense of place can be affected by others' perceptions of where they live, both from within and from outside of the community, in accordance with territorial stigmatisation theory (Wacquant, 2007, 2008) and the exertion of stigma power (Tyler, 2020). As a consequence, it can be argued that this may impact how young people experience belonging to their place-based communities, and therefore also affect experiences of loneliness. This point of view is particularly relevant in the context of some UK coastal towns which have been identified as being among some of the most deprived places to live in the country (House of Lords, 2019).

How the young people who reside in such coastal places experience a sense of place is under researched. The question of whether stigmatisation of place impacts young people's sense of belonging to where they live in positive (cohesion, unity) or negative ways (division, loneliness) is an important one that this study will explore from young people's perspectives.

CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNITY BELONGING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, community, like place, is recognised as a complex concept of which there are a multitude of definitions. This is not something which is viewed as problematic though; rather the multiplicity of meanings is regarded as something ripe for exploration and further development through the research undertaken with young people. Firstly, conceptualisations of community are considered from Willmott (1987), Cohen (1987), Lee and Newby (1983) and McMillan and Chavis (1986, 1996) to consider how the notion of community is highly flexible and subjective. Secondly, the key concepts of social and community capital are described; including why they are important for young people's sense of community and overall wellbeing.

Next, different understandings of 'belonging' are considered, with relationships identified as the central dimension to what belonging means (Beaumeister & Leary, 1995). Following this, the different benefits of community belonging for young people, including communities which are online, are described in relation to the literature, including as having a positive impact on overall wellbeing and mitigating loneliness (Beaumeister & Leary, 1995). In the final section, what is known about what creates barriers to young people's community belonging in the extant literature is discussed.

Although there are studies which examine community in relation to young people, it is evident that there is a more substantial research regarding older age groups. This is an important research gap as young people experience and understandings of community may be different. Furthermore, a participatory approach to examining community and belonging with young people can deepen understanding of the nuances which exist. This will inform new strategies about community inclusivity and engagement for young people who live in an economically disadvantaged coastal town, as well as potentially developing new understanding about existing effective mechanisms which can be shared with other places.

3.2 Definitions of Community

The term 'community' can mean many things to different groups; indeed, the contextual lens from which it is viewed can have many meanings to individuals also. Within the context of the social sciences, the generation of definitions and theories have instigated debate, particularly in the modern societal context (Cohen, 2001). A general consensus is that 'community' involves a group of people who have something in common. However, the description of what that 'something' is has potentially infinite possibilities and can be subjective. It is widely agreed that being connected to a community is important, as it offers networks to help reduce social isolation and loneliness, increase wellbeing and increase both human and social capital (Kearns et al., 2015; Parsfield et al., 2015; Ridley & Morris, 2018).

Willmott (1987) argued that the meaning of community could be understood through three main categories: firstly, the geography of a place, or a 'territorial community'. Secondly, he defined other shared characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, occupation or leisure activities as an 'interest community'. Willmott's third distinction of community refers to the attachment or 'spirit' of community, defined by collective action. Of course, he acknowledged that these three categories can overlap and are not separate entities which is symptomatic of the many different approaches to community studies. For example, Cohen's (1987) theory of community was developed through the empirical study of community on Whalsey in the Shetland Islands. Key aspects of community membership and belonging are seen to include the communication of customs and habits which are central to developing a sense of belonging. This is constructed 'symbolically' by people and connected to their identity; they are not necessarily tangible entities, but symbolic facets that can exist alongside actual facets (Blackshaw, 2010). Cohen stated 'whether or not its structural boundaries remain intact, the reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture' (p. 118). He also argued that the concept of community may be as much about difference as similarity, as the concept expresses a relational idea; that a community is a group of members who have something in common with one another which makes them distinct from other groups.

Lee and Newby's (1983) emphasis on locality, local social systems and communion, shares some similarities with Wilmott's approach. 'Locality' in their view, does not effectively describe the concept of community in a sociological sense, as mere geography does not account for how inhabitants interact with one another. 'Local social systems' implies that people are connected by social networks as well as geography. 'Communion' refers to a shared sense of identity, like Willmott's 'community attachment' and this is a more abstract concept than the other two strands but is arguably the most powerful of the three. As Stacey (1969) points out 'physical proximity does not always lead to the establishment of social relations' (p. 144). When placing these concepts of attachment or communion in a more current context where technology allows to bring together people from all parts of the world unlike ever before, some may contend that the emphasis on geography or locality is much less significant than expressed in these earlier conceptions. This describes a duality or tension which exists in modern communities where people can belong to many different communities, including their local, geographic community as well as other virtual communities.

McMillan and Chavis' (1986) Sense of Community model has been widely regarded as the most encompassing model of community. Its four dimensions are recognised within community literature: belonging, influence, connectedness and fulfilment of needs. However, critical debates have highlighted that the model does not fully lend itself to gain understanding regarding participation and social action. Therefore in 1996, McMillan coined the dimension 'spirit of community' to address the missing concepts of emotional security, recognition and values. Whether termed as community attachment, communion, symbolic community or a 'sense' of community, the notion that community as a concept can be subjective and differ for individuals according to context is significant. Thus approaching how young people make sense of 'community' should be not predetermined, but open and flexible. The nuances between the many different definitions could be argued as a strength because this is reflective of the diversities both within and outside communities. Some of the literature reviewed here originates from different countries and examined the concept of community through different cultural lenses. The variety of literature included gives a snapshot of diversity which is a prominent argument for the heterogeneity of

communities and a no 'one size fits all approach'. Many of the studies reviewed here have used various versions of a 'Sense of Community Scale' (for example, Chiessi et al., 2010; Perkins et al., 1990; Prezza et al., 2001) to quantitatively relate sense of community in different ways to young people's experiences of loneliness, but there is a scarcity of research which explores perceptions and experiences in a qualitative and participatory way. It is recognised that this is important to develop a wider range of more qualitative and collaborative research methods to better capture how multifaceted the concept is (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015; Crow, 2018). This is vital to capture detailed views about the relationship young people have with their communities and how this relationship may affect loneliness.

3.3 Considering 'Social Capital'

The concept of social capital has been much theorised, and far from new idea, it only truly entered academic and political arenas as a way of exploring social and economic debates from the 1990s (Lin, 1999). Social capital is an important concept to consider in relation to young people and their communities. It is rooted in trust, social networks, norms, relationships, values and beliefs, which foster beneficial communal action (Bhandari & Yasobu, 2009). It is a significant factor for individual psychosocial development, health and subjective wellbeing (Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1993, 2000) are regarded as the three key figures in conceptualising social capital and their approaches to the concept are outlined below. Following this, how these incarnations of social capital can be integrated into community capital will be discussed.

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition – in other words, membership to a group' (p. 248). In other words, Bourdieu's understanding of social capital can be seen as the benefits and advantages which are gained from social connections. He argued that the size of the network and the volume of economic or cultural capital affects the richness of social capital available to the members. There needs to be continuous investment from the members in order for it to be maintained.

Coleman (1990) defined social capital as a beneficial resource which is a result of positive interactions between individuals and Putnam's (1993) definition can be more closely aligned with this. He states social capital is 'features of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit' (p. 35).

There are three key dimensions of Putnam's social capital: social relations, trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 1993, 2000); if one has positive, strong relationships, has high levels of trust with others and experiences mutual help with others, then they can be considered to have high social capital. It has been reported that high levels of social capital are strongly linked to subjective wellbeing, including for young people (Laurence, 2019; Tuominen & Haanpää, 2021). Furthermore, Putnam (2000) made distinctions between bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding capital refers to the 'inward' looking relationships that might include peers or family members. In some instances, strong bonding capital can aid the development of both bridging and linking capital wider networks because of the support provided (Holland et al., 2007). Bridging capital relates to 'outward looking' relationships where differences can create further reaching networks which may open up opportunities. Linking capital describes networks of relationships between people which function across particular powers or authorities, such as decision-makers in government or employment. However, in other cases, the benefits of bonding capital can be limited because the strength of the bonds may actually prevent people from forming wider connections, creating 'insular' networks which can sustain disadvantage (Leonard, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2005). Putnam (2000) observed vulnerable young people are more likely to have low social capital, however if their social capital can be increased then they are more likely to experience even greater benefits, such as better mental and physical wellbeing and higher educational attainment (Ferguson, 2006). However, despite these observations, it is less clear how experiences of loneliness may be positively or negatively impacted by young people's levels of social capital. Examining this relationship in the context of a disadvantaged coastal community provides a novel setting where young people can have a range of different social and economic challenges to navigate, therefore there is a greater likelihood that many will

have low social capital. Exploring how this may or may not relate to feeling lonely could offer insights about the relationship between these two concepts.

In this earlier literature, children and young people did not predominately feature in many of the studies as they were viewed as the products of adult socialisation. However, the new sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997), recognised and placed importance on the agency of younger groups and the need to focus on the present benefits of social capital on their lives rather than future projections. In more informal terms and in relation to young people, Putnam (2000) later stated ‘social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids’ (p. 296). This is important in terms of the subjective wellbeing of young people in their communities. Various studies which examined young people’s membership to different groups outside of the school community reported the social capital benefits gained from such membership. For example, sporting activities, such as skateboarding, offered young people several key benefits from membership to the local skate park; inclusive of developing new relationships, maintaining existing relationships and increased opportunities for interaction (Walker et al., 2014). A further study revealed that the benefits of social capital in youth can have longer-term benefits - adult men who were committed member of the Scouts as young people, demonstrated higher levels of social capital and community engagement as adults (Polson et al., 2013). The retrospective nature of this particular study demonstrates how youth participation can affect adult social capital, although the immediate impact for young people is under researched.

Central factors of social capital also include social networks and community engagement and it can be broadly defined as a ‘collective asset’ in the form of ‘shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits’ (Bhandari & Yasobu, 2009, p. 480). These social capital factors can be arguably relatively unaffected by economic variables and this could add weight to the argument that deprivation is not always a factor that heavily influences a sense of community from an insider viewpoint, hence the mixed findings across studies. Social capital is seen as playing a key role in the psychological wellbeing of young people (Ngai et al., 2013). For example, in all age groups, a low level of trust in the community, a key factor of social capital, is

associated with loneliness and particularly for younger people (Matthews et al., 2019; Nyqvist et al., 2016). Frequent contact with others in the community and a strong sense of neighbourhood belonging is more likely to result in decreased loneliness. As Matthews et al. (2019) observed, some features of communities may increase or decrease loneliness regardless of whether the area is rural or urban, deprived or affluent, densely populated or not and high or low levels of crime (Matthews et al., 2019). This again reinforces the importance of listening to the voices of people who live in different communities to develop a detailed picture of understanding their experiences and perspectives.

Community capital

Community capital can be defined as ‘the sum of assets including relationships in a community and the value that accrues from these’ (Parsfield et al., 2015). Utilising concepts from both Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), research undertaken initially by the RSA in collaboration with the LSE (Parsfield et al., 2015) and subsequently by UCLan (Ridley & Morris, 2018) understands community capital as ‘net of social assets and resources which, if managed through the socially productive means of supporting greater social connectivity, generates benefits for the members of a community’ (Parsfield et al., 2015, p. 21). Here, social relationships are recognised as the most significant assets in communities.

Parsfield et al.’s (2015) research has established across age groups an association between both social connection and belonging and increased citizenship, wellbeing and capacity together with a probable economic benefit. This research found that strong networks of support in communities, including those for young people, have been found to both improve individual outcomes and to increase overall community capacity. For community members to reap these four dividends, there needs to be investment in community capital. To do this, an understanding of the particular locality is essential as every community has different assets and patterns of social connections; this underlines the importance of working collaboratively with community members to develop new connections and dividends in their particular context (Parsfield et al., 2015). In this research, understanding the context of a coastal

community - the assets and social connections – from the perspective of young people, is important. Gaining insight to how young people perceive these aspects of their community can provide clear evidence of how supporting the growth of community capital can be promoted and how it can impact young people’s experiences of loneliness.

3.4 What is belonging?

Related closely to social and community capital is the concept of belonging because of the central importance of social relationships (Ahn & Davis, 2020). Interest in the conceptualisation of belonging can be dated back to Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs where he identified sense of belonging as a fundamental human need. The concept ‘belonging’ is frequently used to describe connectedness, acceptance and security in social relationships, displayed via memberships to community or social organisations (Fabiansson, 2018). Identifying with others plays an important role in both a person’s wellbeing and sense of self (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Much referenced in the literature concerning belonging is the need-to-belong model (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which proposes that humans have a fundamental drive for ‘a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships’ (p. 497). It also therefore demonstrates that when an individual’s needs are unmet, the person can experience unpleasant, painful outcomes, including an increased risk of loneliness (Baumeister, 2011). This theory highlights the importance of *relationships* above all else for belonging; this is significant in the exploration of how young people experience belonging, especially in disadvantaged communities, where other resources and activities associated with belonging may be more limited (see Bell, 1999, below). More recently, Yuval-Davis (2006) builds on this idea further, positing that belonging is a result of the relationships between social locations, emotional attachments and ethical and political views. In other words, belonging is rooted in connections and interactions with others. For Bell (1999), belonging is constructed through the everyday tasks and activities, and therefore is created through action or ‘performance’. As with approaches to community, belonging is subjectively defined and felt by

individuals in personalised ways, therefore notions of belonging are wide and varied, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed.

For example, belonging has been viewed through the perspectives of citizenship (Arnot & Swartz, 2012), educational belonging (Gowing, 2019) or from the perspective of ethnicity and race, particularly from the views of migrants (Visser, 2020). Anthias (2006) defined belonging as being ‘accepted as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in the future of such a community of membership. To belong is to share values, networks and practices’ (p. 21). This resonates with other definitions. For example, belonging is concerned with ‘connection, membership, attachment and sense of security’ (Habib & Ward, 2019, p. 1); in other words, the relationships, being ‘part’ of something and the sense of protection that is incurred are key to understanding belonging.

Among young people, a sense of familiarity and experiences within their local communities are places to experience feelings of belonging (Cicognani et al., 2014). A longitudinal study of young school leavers by Cuervo and Wyn (2017) of belonging in rural communities, found that for some residents, regardless of living in the same place for their whole lives, it was the relationships that defined their sense of belonging. However, it was also found that some young people simultaneously experienced the desire to move outside of the area in which they lived, creating a conflict which could lead to feelings of not belonging to place. Cuervo and Wyn (2017) described this finding as *multiple layers of belonging*: the tension that can exist between having some sense of belonging whilst simultaneously feeling that you are an outsider. For others, sense of belonging to a community goes beyond the relationships with people and is firmly rooted in the place itself. Connection to the physical environment, therefore over time, establishes a sense of belonging completely synonymous with where one lives which could not be recreated anywhere else (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). It is possible that these experiences might be found in many different types of communities. However, examining the tension between a sense of ‘rootedness’ whilst simultaneously desiring to move away to other opportunities seems particularly relevant to young people and especially those who reside in coastal

communities many of which have specific challenges related to educational attainment and employment (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).

What is central to definitions of belonging, are the social connections which are related to acceptance or safety or membership. This is key to how belonging is approached in this PhD: that it is *relational*. Cuervo and Wyn's (2014) three dimensions of belonging provide a suitable understanding of the concept for this research. Firstly, a 'place' dimension is described. This refers to rootedness or attachment to place; a dimension which has already been considered in Chapter Two in relation to young people's sense of place. Secondly, a 'people' dimension is articulated. This refers to the relationships young people have with the people who are important in their lives, for example, family members, neighbours, friends, as well as other members of their community. Thirdly, the dimension of 'times' provides an important and interesting way to reflect on how young people create their lives based around the time in which they live; in other words how different contextual factors, such as social, cultural, economic, political and ecological matters shape their belonging. The final point of relevance here is that belonging is something that is in 'negotiation;' it is a *process* rather than something which is achieved and then remains static (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014). This is a suitable approach to belonging for the research because it emphasises the importance of relationships as a central component of belonging for young people, as well as enabling understanding about how contextualising factors of place and the 'moment in time' shape belonging.

3.5 Young People and Community Belonging

Examining the benefits of community belonging is well researched in relation to older adults, however, there are fewer studies which specifically consider the different benefits that young people can experience. For example, in older adults, benefits include associations between strong community belonging and self-perceived physical and mental health (Michalski et al., 2020; Shields, 2008). Due to the restricted number of studies related to young people and community belonging specifically, the literature reviewed in this section includes studies which examine young people's 'sense of community'. As outlined earlier in the chapter, according to McMillan and Chavis'

(1986) conceptualisation of sense of community, belonging is a key dimension, therefore studies which consider young people and sense of community can also be regarded as relevant.

In a study by Chipuer (2001) young people's community connectedness was examined, and it was found that support, safety, activity and friendship were inversely related to their perceptions of loneliness. Other research has found that young people who report higher levels of 'community' in their neighbourhoods report lower levels of general loneliness and better psychological health (Goodenow, 1993; Kearns et al., 2015; Prezza & Pacilli, 2007) and likewise weaker ties and belonging can lead to higher levels of loneliness (Nyqvist et al., 2016). Studies have also found that belonging to a community carries high importance as a protective factor against loneliness in adolescence (Baskin et al., 2010; Hall-Lande et al., 2007). Additionally, community belonging is also considered to be important for a person's sense of wellbeing and identity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Young people's sense of belonging to the *school* community in relation to loneliness has been examined by some studies. Findings from several studies have suggested that belongingness to the school community has an effect on mental health, wellbeing and loneliness in youth (Arslan, 2021; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2013; Witvliet et al., 2010). Furthermore, other studies have found that strong belonging at school is significantly related to a strong neighbourhood sense of community (Chipuer, 2001; Prati & Cicognani, 2019). Examining the relationship of how young people feel about their school communities and how this might be related to their experiences of community connectedness could be explored; there is limited literature about this. Following the review of literature about schools in coastal areas in the previous chapter which identified the challenges of educational isolation, such as socio-economic disadvantages and limited cultural opportunities (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019), this certainly seems to be an important theme to examine for a joined up approach between schools and community organisations to develop support and interventions for their young people who experience loneliness.

In terms of community based groups and activities, young people who participate in them or are ‘part of something’ in their local community can experience a greater sense of belonging (Riley, 2019). For example, participation in theatre groups or drama-based activities has been widely used as an intervention tool with disenfranchised groups and communities to increase belonging (Boal et al., 1979). Furthermore, young migrants who can experience significant marginalisation in some communities and have complex relationships with belonging, have used performance to explore their experiences (Gembus, 2018). This particular study highlights the power of community to create transformation for marginalised groups; using drama to create a ‘safe space’ to express the conflicts such groups may experience can be particularly advantageous when trying to understand their complex narratives and enhance belonging (Gembus, 2018).

Sports-based participation can also provide opportunities for the social inclusion of young people, in particular those who may be vulnerable in some way (Morgan, 2019). Where young people can establish strong, positive and trusting relationships with staff (for example, coaches) there is evidence of the promotion of better social integration and sense of belonging. This is also evident in the participation of young people in other types of interest groups, where similar positive enhancements to sense of belonging are suggested (Hoffman, 2021; Montague, 2018). For example, belonging to a youth activist group can enhance wellbeing as young people can follow their own interest and work together as a group, increasing connections which may ultimately lead to change (Montague, 2018). This highlights how young people’s wellbeing can benefit from belonging to different smaller communities that they are involved in, although it is not clear whether this is preferable to the wider local community.

Of course, in the modern world, having a sense of belonging in communities is not restricted to just physical interaction, as social networking sites can allow for community connection at any time of the day or week. Social networking sites can be defined as ‘mediated online environments where people communicate with existing relationships, form new ones, cement ties with others and re-establish old friendships’ (Spears et al., 2012, p. 9). It has been found that young people who connect with

others through online communities can benefit from making emotional connections, as well as sharing experiences (Reich, 2010). Although there are many studies which look broadly at different platforms and the positive and negative impacts on young people's wellbeing (Craig et al., 2015; Deters & Mehl, 2013; Lilley et al., 2014; McCrae et al., 2017), there is less research which takes a more nuanced approach centred around a specific purpose, for example, the use of online platforms to develop and strengthen existing offline community connections for young people. Young people's use of technology for connection is further considered in Chapter Four, in relation to its effect on loneliness.

3.6 Barriers to Young People's Community Belonging

Being recognised, valued and welcomed is critical in the development of a sense of belonging (Robinson et al., 2020). When young people experience discrimination, for example, because of their sexuality or a disability, they can be excluded from communities and activities or they may exclude themselves through the fear of negative experiences (Robinson et al., 2020; Toft, 2020). The importance of specific communities, where young people can connect and belong to a group with others in who they can identify with can be important, in particular for young people who experience multi-layered discrimination, such as young disabled LGBT+ people (Coleman-Fountain, 2017; Toft, 2020).

Poverty is a dominant factor which impacts young people's sense of belonging, as well as affecting increased levels of loneliness. Previous studies have examined this relationship in adults (Kearns et al., 2015; Macdonald et al., 2018; Scharf et al., 2004), although it has been less studied in relation to young people. However, having limited financial means can result in fewer opportunities for young people to 'join in' and have access to certain local facilities. If a young person has fewer opportunities to integrate socially with their community, they may experience a low sense of belonging. Several studies have confirmed this view in young people, for example, Chipuer et al. (2003) examined youth experiences of loneliness and community connectedness in relation to perspectives of quality of life. They found that those who

had what they deemed as a lower quality of life and lower sense of community were significantly associated with higher levels of loneliness. This was shown to be dynamic and vary throughout adolescence, with early adolescents reporting a higher quality of life than middle and late adolescents. Batsleer and Duggan (2021) likewise found that a lack of money can make it more challenging for young people to keep connected with peers in their communities and that having limited funds is also associated with a sense of shame as well as loneliness in young people.

However, findings from other studies have conversely found that socio-economic disadvantage does not always lead to poorer community relations and heightened feelings of loneliness. It has been identified that some young people from deprived communities do not necessarily perceive themselves to be disadvantaged or as being from a disadvantaged community, and that they think where they live is a good place to live and that this did not depress their aspirations for the future in any way (Kintrea et al., 2015). In older populations, a small study of people who lived in four deprived communities found a greater number of social connections and a stronger sense of community were associated with a lower level of loneliness (Beech & Murray, 2013). Although this has been explored less in young people, it provides a rationale for further investigation to establish how much this resonates with different age groups. It is important to consider the variation in these findings; how disadvantage - or other perceived negative aspects of a community - is measured from an outsider's perspective, may not necessarily match that of those who live in the community. In order to understand how young people experience community belonging in an area of coastal deprivation, it seems pertinent to explore their experiences to understand what mechanisms affect belonging from their own perspectives.

Related to financial hardship, it has also been established that having inclusive local spaces is important for young people to develop a sense of belonging to community; therefore accessibility to these spaces is vital for young people to engage meaningfully with others. Provision of concessionary transport, and a wider understanding and acceptance of the need for this, can help young people to combat social exclusion by enhancing their sense of belonging to place and community (Jones et al., 2013). For many young people, the peer group provides a significant role in identity development

and social capital, therefore financial barriers to participation can inhibit a sense of belonging and exacerbate exclusion (Spyrou, 2013). Young people with poor financial means may not be able to participate in activities or go to places which their friends and peers can. Understanding the different ways which financial barriers can impact young people's sense of belonging to community should be further examined beyond the practical need for concessionary transport.

Times of transition, for example beginning secondary school, can be especially challenging for some young people and social connections and relationships are especially important as mechanisms for supporting belonging (Francis et al., 2021). This is particularly true of marginalised groups of young people who are looked after. Systems which exist in schools to support looked after young people can sometimes mark them out and create a stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1986) and this can inhibit young people's belonging in school (Jones et al., 2020). It appears that identity can be central to how young people experience belonging, therefore when young people feel different to others, this can make belonging more difficult as they can experience 'othering'. According to Bannister and Kearns (2013), people make an assessment of the object of tolerance based upon their own interests and values so that:

We may dislike, object to, be offended by, oppose, disapprove or condemn a particular conduct because we believe it to be a threat to social organization or to our own or society's accepted norms or values. (p. 386)

For young people who are marginalised, experiencing a lack of tolerance from others can be exclusionary, resulting in a low sense of belonging. For example, a study of young people of Muslim heritage who were in foster care, suggested that their religion had an enduring impact on their identities. However, a greater understanding from the perspectives of the foster carers of their religion and culture was vital to help them settle and form stronger bonds with them (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2021). Research about how different support systems impact marginalised young people's sense of identity and belonging are sparse, and especially when examined through a

stigma-based lens. It is important to further include young people's voices in research to gain a richer understanding of first hand lived experiences.

In some of the literature reviewed here, it is suggested that some young people from a variety of ethnicities and religions have identified with the concept of being different, or an 'otherness' which can both enhance and diminish community belonging. Some young migrants, for example, have been found to claim a 'hyphenated' identity, simultaneously claiming an identity which is occupied by both the country of their birth and the UK (Clayton, 2012; Sime, 2020) by negotiating through the various multicultural contexts of everyday life. Others experience a more challenging identity formation, for example, due to experiences of xenophobia or racism and therefore a sense of community belonging is negatively impacted (Sime, 2020; Tyrrell, 2019).

3.7 Chapter Three Summary

What has been clear in this literature review chapter, is that there is limited literature which focuses on young people and community belonging, especially in comparison to the number of studies relating to older populations. The literature which has been reviewed, examined the multiplicity of the concepts of community and belonging, suggesting that it may be important to establish what these mean to young people to understand their experiences.

Furthermore, the literature has shown that young people who experience strong community belonging are often found to have overall better wellbeing and there are lower levels of perceived loneliness. Examining the nuances of community belonging from young people in the particularity of a coastal place could be important to understand ways to help young people increase their social and community capital, to enhance belonging and reap the associated benefits. However, suggestions that the relationship is not always clear cut in this way is important to bear in mind; for example, it is possible that belonging to a community can create in the 'othering' of different individuals and groups. To what extent this happens in a disadvantaged coastal town has been explored in this research with young people.

Therefore, it can be argued that in light of the complexities identified, to develop a fuller picture of how young people relate to the concept of community that a more differentiated approach is required. Adopting a participatory approach with young people, in contrast to the predominately quantitative based methodologies in much of the literature, may highlight more of the details within these highly complex relationships.

Drawing together findings from this and Chapter Two, it is clear that the concepts of community belonging and place are interlinked. This is particularly regarding relationships and the strength of attachment to place or strength of belonging to the community. Whilst it is important to examine how these concepts interact with one another, it is also important in this research to examine their distinctions because this offers a more nuanced picture of how young people's experiences of loneliness are unique to them.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE 'PLACE' OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN LONELINESS RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

There is a growing body of literature which examines loneliness in young people and the impact that it can have on physical and mental wellbeing. However, in comparison with older age groups, there are still significant gaps in the research which need to be addressed in order to gain a fuller picture of how and why loneliness is experienced by young people, and what measures can be developed to support said young people.

Furthermore, many of the existing interventions are largely based on the work which has been done in adult populations. This is important as loneliness has been found to peak in adolescence, and although this is part of a normative adolescent development, more chronically experienced loneliness can have implications for health (Harris et al., 2013; Qualter et al., 2013). What is presently limited the literature, is knowledge about the experience of loneliness in young people and whether and how it differs from the experience of loneliness in adulthood. A place-based participatory approach which examines how connections to where young people live can impact feelings of loneliness could address this gap in the literature (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2022).

This chapter reviews key literature about loneliness in young people. Firstly, there is a consideration of different definitions examined from across several decades to identify commonalities. Then various conceptualisations of loneliness, including Weiss' (1973) seminal work, through to more recent conceptions from Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010) and Rönka et al. (2018) are examined. Following this, a brief overview of how loneliness has been measured in previous studies, with considerations of both strengths and limitations of these methods. Following this, there is a focus on what is known about the different causes of loneliness for young people and the impact that youth loneliness can have. Finally, an overview of current interventions targeted towards young people who experience loneliness is presented, with some reflections about their effectiveness from the literature. Identifying key gaps in the extant literature will clearly articulate what needs to be addressed in this research.

4.2 What is Loneliness?

The term 'loneliness' has many different definitions and arguably this diversity is a reflection of the fact that there are few who have avoided the experience of feeling lonely (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Sullivan's (1953) definition describes loneliness as 'the exceedingly unpleasant and driving experience connected with an inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy' (p. 290), observing that loneliness stimulates individuals to initiate social interaction even though such interactions may be anxiety inducing. Weiss (1973) states that loneliness is caused by 'not being alone, but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships' and is 'an absence of some particular relational provision' (p. 17). One often cited definition is that of Perlman and Peplau (1981) that describes loneliness as an 'unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively' (p. 31). Woodward (1988) describes loneliness as a feeling of being alone and disconnected or being alienated from people, places or things. Parkhurst and Hopmeyer (1999) described loneliness as 'a sad or aching sense of isolation, that is, of being alone, cut off, or distanced from others...associated with a felt deprivation of, or longing for, association, contact, or closeness' (p. 58). DeJong Gierveld (1987) suggests that loneliness is a 'situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships' (p. 120).

The common thread through these definitions is that loneliness is synonymous with how one's level of social isolation is perceived; it is a subjective experience and can vary by context (Young, 1982) whether the experience is transient, situational or chronic. It has been observed that people can live fairly solitary lives and yet not feel lonely, in the same way that those surrounded by others can feel loneliness in spite of a busy social life (Cacioppo et al., 2009a; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2013). Therefore it is not simply the requirement of the physical presence of others which reduces feelings of loneliness, but the subjective feelings one has of trust, connection, shared goals and support with others (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). It is clear that those who perceive inadequate social networks and experience loneliness can feel severe pain and distress,

in addition to the risky health behaviours and health outcomes associated with loneliness (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Qualter et al., 2013).

For young people, particularly during the period of adolescence which can be defined as a crucial developmental period and is partly characterised by different physical, emotional and social changes (Steinberg & Morris, 2001), a tension can exist between the desire to be part of the peer group alongside the desire for individuation and independence (Larson et al., 1996). Increased complexity in the construction of youth social worlds can help to explain why loneliness can be particularly prevalent during this period (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Maes et al., 2017). Although some studies have suggested that loneliness has a certain level of heritability, a larger portion can be attributed to different environmental entities, and these experiences of loneliness can fluctuate depending upon situational circumstances (Boomsma et al., 2007). By examining loneliness in young people through a place-based lens, how connection to where you live and sense of community belongingness can impact young people's experiences of loneliness can be investigated. The community can arguably be a 'bridge' between the aforementioned tensions of being part of the peer group whilst seeking independence, therefore this approach could offer new sources and networks of support for young people.

4.3 Different Approaches to Loneliness

A range of approaches have been proposed to explain the concept of loneliness, including those which regard it as unidimensional or global, singular concept which is the same for everyone across different contexts and is measurable using a single scale (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Russell et al., 1980). Other frameworks recognise loneliness to be a complex, multidimensional concept, where it may assume different forms depending on individual characteristics as well as different contexts. Dominant theories include a social needs perspective (Weiss, 1973), a cognitive approach (Perlman & Peplau, 1981) and an evolutionary approach (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Weiss' (1973) social needs approach proposed one of the earliest multidimensional models distinguishing between the loneliness of social isolation and the loneliness of emotional isolation. His approach to loneliness was influenced by Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, suggesting that loneliness can occur when one perceives a lack of engaging social networks and can only be alleviated by connecting to a social network. In contrast, emotional isolation can be rooted in a lack or loss of a close, intimate relationship and can only be alleviated when reinstated or replaced. Connections to other people and the quality of these connections is central to understanding loneliness causes and remedies. Weiss identified six key social dimensions that different relationships provide: attachment, social integration, reliable alliance, guidance, reassurance of worth and opportunity for nurturance. In order for one's needs to be met, a range of different relationships is required to maintain overall wellbeing. Where one of these six social provisions is not satisfied, a person may feel lonely.

Weiss suggests where the loneliness of emotional isolation is experienced, attachment needs (i.e. an intimate, emotionally supportive relationship) are not being met, whereas in the loneliness of social isolation social integration (i.e. a group or network) is absent. Weiss also proposed various different symptoms associated with these two types of loneliness. Social loneliness would be associated with boredom, feelings of exclusion and feelings of marginality, restlessness and aimlessness (Weiss, 1973). Emotional loneliness is concerned with oversensitivity and anxiety, heightened awareness of threat and a continual consideration of who would be able to provide the sought relationship(s). Weiss also stated that both types of loneliness have numerous commonalities, including distress, disturbed sleep, disengagement and depression. This social needs approach posited by Weiss focuses on the presence or absence of different social connections, although this approach does not consider the individual differences that people may have in their social needs.

Peplau and Perlman's cognitive approach (1981) addressed the role of individual differences in perceptions and experiences of loneliness. Loneliness is affected by the presence or absence of relationships. A decrease in an individual's satisfaction, or a discrepancy between the desired and actual level of their social relationships may lead to loneliness. This can be described by the two main sources of loneliness. Firstly,

when there are changes to a person's social which means that they are no longer satisfactory. Situations such as death, divorce or moving to a new community may cause this. Secondly, there can also be changes in a person's social requirements throughout the different life stages. Such changes may promote loneliness if there are not correspondent changes in relationships. This can be particularly true during the period of adolescence where young people experience the desire for independence and autonomy and an emphasis is placed on the peer group, not the family (further discussed in relation to Marcoen & Goossens, 1993).

According to Perlman and Peplau (1981) the symptoms of loneliness include feelings of unhappiness, anxiety and emptiness, as well as suggesting that lonely individuals are more likely to have increased sensitivity about their personal relationships. Situational factors can also create loneliness in individuals. Some constraints, such as money, or 'being different' from those around them may have fewer opportunities to start and maintain new relationships. Perlman and Peplau (1981) argue that factors which increase the opportunities for social interaction are likely to affect the frequency of loneliness.

In terms of adolescent development specifically, Marcoen and Goossens (1993) suggest a four factor model which represents peer/friendship related loneliness; family loneliness; a positive attitude to aloneness and a negative attitude to aloneness. This comprehensive model places feelings of loneliness in a more general context and in particular considers how people's attitudes to being alone mediate to what degree an individual may feel lonely when they are alone. The positive attitude recognises being alone as an experience that can be positive and allow for opportunities to enjoy *self-discovery or self-actualisation*. The negative attitude refers to an *inability to be alone* and negative feelings towards solitude. It has been reported that an adolescent's attitude towards solitude moderates peer-related loneliness, therefore the attitude of the individual tempers the experience of loneliness.

Hawkey et al. (2005) developed a framework which corresponds to Weiss' model, but includes a third dimension. In this model, what Weiss referred to as emotional

loneliness, is termed intimate isolation/connection. This is the perceived presence or absence of a close confidant and/or romantic partner, demonstrated by married participants who were lower in intimate loneliness than those who were not. Secondly, what Weiss terms social isolation, is coined relational isolation or connection in this model. This refers to the perceived presence or absence of friendships and/or family connections. Regular contact and connection through these relationships demonstrates overall lower levels of relational isolation. The third dimension, which is absent from Weiss' framework, is termed collective isolation or connection, which refers to quality connections and relationships to groups/organisations to which an individual belongs (for example, school, local community groups). Greater belonging to groups has shown to result in lower levels of collective isolation (Hawkley et al., 2005) across both younger and older adults. It is important to note that this third dimension is largely understudied in younger people (i.e. adolescents) outside the school environment, but it has been found that in older populations, a strong sense of belonging to groups and communities can reduce experiences of loneliness (Barke, 2017; Goll et al., 2015; Heenan, 2011; Hemingway & Jack, 2013). Investigating this from the perspective of young people can further understanding of how the impact of 'collective connection' (i.e. a strong sense of belonging to the community) affects experiences of loneliness, whether it is similar or different for young people and offer explanations as to why that might be.

Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010) proposed an evolutionary model of loneliness. They suggested that loneliness makes an individual feel unsafe or threatened and suggests that physical pain has evolved to stimulate action to preserve the physical body, the emotional pain caused by loneliness stimulates hypervigilance to preserve the social body from social threats (Cacioppo et al., 2015). In some lonely individuals, there are increased expectations to see more negative social interactions and impressions of others around them. This in turn elicits negative behaviours from others, or the young person withdraws from social situations, thus confirming the lonely person's expectations (Cacioppo et al., 2014) and creating a self-perpetuating cycle. During adolescence, the complex and changing nature of social connections, that is, the desire to have both close, intimate friends whilst simultaneously being liked by the peer group, make young people particularly vulnerable to loneliness (Qualter et al., 2015).

Qualter et al. (2015) developed Hawkley and Cacioppo's model further through consideration of how the reaffiliation motive can change throughout the life span, including during the period of adolescence. The importance of acceptance from the peer group and the quality rather than quantity of relationships are seen as predictors of loneliness in adolescence. Combined with major physical and psychological developmental shifts which occur during this time, the risk of experiencing loneliness can be particularly high (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1999; Vanhast et al., 2014). When an individual is in a state of heightened vigilance, uncertainty and feelings of being unsafe occur, highlighting the significance of trust in order to reconnect with others. Low trust is associated with loneliness in the younger age groups in this model, from young childhood to late adolescence. Trust is also a key factor in Sense of Community and belonging measures (Chipuer, 2001). Examining young people's experiences of loneliness alongside their perceptions of their communities may provide understanding of how these concepts are related. Identifying ways to develop opportunities to build relationships and connections within communities to strengthen feelings of trust may be a route to loneliness prevention or interventions for young people. It is observed that developing opportunities for social reconnection are important to prevent prolonged experiences of loneliness (Jobe-Shields et al., 2011) and one's communities can provide an alternative source to the school environment, of which there has been more research conducted. For some young people, school can sometimes present a challenging social context, for example, due to social hierarchies/cliques and academic pressures. The community, however, provides a different context for young people to practice social skills and interact with other young people from different backgrounds and age groups in a non-academic environment.

Rönkä et al. (2018) suggest a framework of five central dimensions of loneliness, including Personal, Relational, Physical context, Life event and Sociocultural. The Personal dimension refers to inner, personal, self-related, physical and mental wellbeing matter. The Relational dimension concerns the role of social relationships. The physical context dimension considers the relationship of physical and geographical contexts to loneliness. The Life event dimension encompasses different situational circumstances, such as relocation school transitions or ending relationships.

Finally, the sociocultural dimension refers to the cultural ethos of the communities which one is connected to, for example, religion, socio-economic status, cultural traditions. This model demonstrated the multidimensionality of loneliness in young adults, further building on the work of Weiss (1973) and addressing the role of negative social relations in inducing loneliness. As Rönkä et al. note, many of the participants in their study spoke of their involvement in different social environments that they did not necessarily choose as a young person (for example school). This was found to be central in determining young people's experiences of loneliness and should be examined in relation to other non-school environments. Additionally, the two dimensions not described by Weiss, that of Physical context and Sociocultural present key areas to further examine in relation to loneliness in young people. The geography of where one lives, in the case of this study, Northern Finland, was shown to be linked to a lack of peers, activities and opportunities which was associated with loneliness. The Sociocultural dimension of loneliness posits that social norms may influence perception of an individual's social network, causing them to feel inadequate or lacking in some way, thus inducing a feeling of loneliness. In the study, this was examined in particular relation to views on heteronormativity where girls and boys reported that they felt as though they did not portray the socially expected femininities or masculinities of their genders, which resulted in feelings of non-belongingness, of being an outsider and loneliness. These fourth and fifth dimensions of Physical and Sociocultural context arguably add important further key measures and elements to consider that should be included in loneliness research in order to build a richer, more nuanced picture.

4.4 Consequences of Loneliness

It is known that loneliness can contribute to a substantial range of physical and mental health problems. There is a considerable body of research involving older adults which shows that loneliness is a risk factor for early mortality that is comparable to impacts from smoking, obesity, high cholesterol and air pollution (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2007; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Pantell et al., 2013). Loneliness can result in unhealthy behaviours, such as increased alcohol consumption and overeating which in turn can cause stress, sleep deprivation and negatively impact the immune and cardiovascular systems (Cacioppo et al., 2002; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008), increasing the likelihood of mortality by 26% (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Other research has found associations with depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006), increased blood pressure (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) and cognitive decline and dementia (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009b) in adults.

Although there is a strong evidence base for the consequences of experiencing loneliness on mental and physical health, the body of evidence about impacts in young people, although growing, is still smaller. It is known that when loneliness is experienced in childhood, it is associated with poorer health outcomes in adulthood (Caspi et al., 2006; Goosby et al., 2013). Other studies examining health impacts in young people have associated loneliness with depression (Qualter et al., 2013), sleep problems (Harris et al., 2013), BMI increases in girls (Qualter et al., 2013), anxiety (Fontaine et al., 2009; Løhre, 2012), low self-esteem (Cacioppo et al., 2006; McWhirter et al., 2002), self-harm (Lasgaard et al., 2011), suicidal tendencies (Hall-Lande et al., 2007) and an increased risk of substance abuse (Stickleby et al., 2014). Thus, existing evidence indicates similar health impacts of loneliness experienced in young people as found in adult populations.

The concept of loneliness is complex and multifaceted. Not only is the experience of loneliness a negative and unpleasant one, it has significant associated mental and physical health risks. In the literature reviewed, there has largely been a greater emphasis on the individual experience of loneliness in young people, rather than using a collective approach. Although there is a larger body of evidence which examines

loneliness in older populations through a community or place-based lens, there is less extensive research on younger people which uses this approach. This is important to address to find out if and how young people's experiences of loneliness, and in particular collective loneliness, can be impacted by their connections to their place-based communities.

4.5 Why Young People can Experience Loneliness

Although there has been a recent increase in the studies examining young people's experiences of loneliness, it lags behind literature about other cohorts, for example, elderly populations. Loneliness tends to be prevalent in young people for several reasons. For example, during adolescence, young people experience a shift in socialisation from the family towards the peer group (Laursen & Hartl, 2013). Yet this is a process of transition and young people, particularly those who are in early adolescence who can desire greater autonomy from their parents, may experience loneliness as a consequence of not being able to firmly establish qualitative friendships (Qualter et al., 2015). Other transitions, such as starting secondary school, university or college (Benner et al., 2017), or beginning work or moving to a new place also can increase loneliness (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021). When these changes in the social environment simultaneously occur alongside the physical and psychological changes experienced during adolescence, increased feelings of loneliness have been reported (Qualter et al., 2015), and especially when young people, perceive a lack of support (Goodfellow et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022).

Sources of loneliness can differ throughout the life course, and can be related to belonging needs (Qualter et al., 2015). In a recent study by Verity et al. (2022) which examined secondary data from online support conversations with young people and Childline Support Workers featuring loneliness identified difficulties in peer relationships, a perceived lack of social connections and challenging familial circumstances as sources of loneliness. When young people feel left out or do not feel as though they are part of something, loneliness can occur (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Rönkä et al., 2014). A loneliness cycle can then form, keeping oneself disconnected

from other people becoming a self-protective measure, thus further exacerbating the loneliness experience (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Storer et al., 2020). Furthermore, even though loneliness can be linked to not having close friendships (Qualter et al., 2015; Rönkä et al., 2014), it is also known that even when young people have friends, including a best friend, they can still feel lonely (Nowland et al., 2019). Research has found that the quality of relationships, rather than the frequency of contact, is more important for personal wellbeing and being less likely to feel lonely (Goodfellow et al., 2022). When there are perceived difficulties within peer groups, loneliness can increase and this can be further detrimental when there are also problems at home (Verity et al., 2022).

Much of the existing literature about loneliness and young people has been examining consequences of loneliness, measuring loneliness quantitatively and associated health and wellbeing factors. These studies use various scales which have been developed to capture the multifaceted nature of the concept. The most commonly used scales include the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). This scale includes statements such as ‘How often do you feel that you lack companionship?’, ‘How often do you feel isolated from others?’ and ‘How often do you feel that there are people you can talk to?’. Although this has been predominately used with adults, scales have been developed to use with children, such as the Children’s Loneliness Scale (Asher et al., 1984) and with adolescents, such as the Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents (Marcoen et al., 1987). As self-report questionnaires, these are generally completed by individuals, but some studies have cross referenced responses from others in relation to the child or young person, such as a teacher or family member, in order to build a more complete picture of participants’ social connections (Deckers et al., 2017; Qualter et al., 2010).

However, there are far fewer empirical studies which utilise qualitative methodologies to examine the experience of loneliness in young people. Qualitative approaches are important because they can complement and build upon the existing knowledge base by developing a more detailed understanding of loneliness from a youth perspective (Cole et al., 2021). The need to address this gap is essential; as discussed above, loneliness is a subjective and multidimensional experience. The importance of

examining young people's lived experiences of the phenomenon of loneliness could broaden perspectives and knowledge on the subject.

While there have been several reviews of qualitative research in adulthood, including conceptualisations of loneliness across the adult life course (Mansfield et al., 2019), there is only one review of qualitative literature examining young people's experiences of loneliness. This was a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies that focussed specifically on loneliness for young people with depression (Achterbergh et al., 2020). Key findings from this review were that young people with poor mental health are more likely to withdraw from others and present a fear of being judged as a result, therefore potentially damaging existing social networks and friendships. Young people also expressed that they felt other people did not or could not understand their personal situations and so were less likely to feel as though they could open up to others which exacerbated their loneliness.

An important example of a recent research project which adopted a creative, qualitative approach to understanding young people's conceptualisations and experiences of loneliness can be seen in the co-produced research project 'Loneliness Connects Us' (Batsleer et al., 2018). Here, an 'open' mind-set was adopted towards the research process which allowed for a deeper understanding of the reasons for particular perspectives and different experiences of loneliness. An exploration of supportive interventions and measures, which were co-produced by the young people themselves was also conducted. The novel approach which was adopted in this research was based in youth and community work, and utilised a range of creative methods to develop knowledge of youth loneliness co-productively in order to share this knowledge with other young people and inform those who support them.

Some key findings in this research included detailed accounts of the 'social conditions' of loneliness for young people, such as the impact of poverty; the challenges of navigating change and transition as young people, and the fear of being a disappointment to others in educational or career terms. Significantly the impact of living in 'uncared for' towns on young people's experiences of loneliness was also

identified, suggesting that young people can feel ashamed of where they are from due to the stigmatising labels which were often attributed to their hometowns; this is an important finding which this research particularly builds on. In terms of what young people thought was important for navigating loneliness, the research found that outside, open spaces had value for young people could provide important opportunities for young people to connect with each other and that the development of other common spaces should be encouraged in communities. This was also true of other policy-focused ideas such as youth clubs and different types of activities for young people.

Other examples of existing qualitative research about young people's conceptualisations and experiences of loneliness has been summarised in Table 4.1. These studies predominantly used interview-based methods which have generated detailed accounts of young people's lived experiences of loneliness. Several patterns can be identified across these studies which are important. Firstly, a common theme in young people's accounts of loneliness is of feeling different, therefore not understood by others (Garnow et al., 2022; Korkiamäki, 2014; Madsen et al., 2021). Not being able to confide in other people because of fear of rejection exacerbates this disconnection from other people further (Garnow et al., 2022). This is linked to the second key theme which resonates in most of the studies, that genuine, close friendships are central to young people feeling connected to others (Martin et al., 2014; Rönkä et al., 2018; Verity et al., 2021), therefore are able to navigate experiences of loneliness so that they are transient (Madsen et al., 2021). An important final theme related to this research concerns external factors affecting loneliness. In several of the studies included in Table 4.1, aspects such as the physical context (Rönkä et al., 2018), whether school or home (Verity et al., 2022) and the wider societal context (Hemberg et al., 2022) were identified as important influencers on young people's experiences of loneliness. How collective factors outside of the individual young person's mental health have been highlighted as significant in the curation of loneliness – as discussed in relation to the 'Loneliness Connects Us' project (Batsleer et al., 2018). This highlights the impact that adopting qualitative methodologies can have on our understanding of young people's conceptualisations and experiences of loneliness.

Table 4.1: A summary of studies which examine young people's conceptualisations and/or experiences of loneliness using a qualitative approach

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
Korkiamäki, R.	2014	Rethinking Loneliness – A Qualitative Study about Adolescents' Experiences of Being an Outsider in a Peer Group	126	11-12 (n=73) 15-16 (n=53)	Biographical narratives based on a mapping exercise Non-structured interviews Essays	Qualitative content analysis	Four categories of 'outsiderness' were found which were associated with emotional stress and loneliness (being rejected; being victimised; being ignored; outsider by choice). No significant variation in experiences of 'outsiderness' in terms of age. Loneliness should be examined in the context of young people's own perspectives.
Martin et al.	2014	'I don't have the best life': A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescent Loneliness	33	10-15	Semi-structured interviews	Conventional content analysis	Loneliness was conceptualised around two main factors: 1) connectedness with friendship; 2) perception of aloneness.

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
							Insights from young people showed that they positioned themselves on continuums within these two factors.
Rönkä et al.	2018	Multidimensional and fluctuating experiences of loneliness from childhood to young adulthood in Northern Finland	35	27-28 Reflections on experiences of loneliness when aged 15-16 (as identified through previous survey responses)	Semi-structured interviews	Qualitative content analysis	Identified five central dimension of loneliness: Personal, Relational, Physical context, Life event and Sociocultural. The more intense the experience of loneliness, the more dimensions included in young people's accounts.
Hemberg et al.	2021	Loneliness – two side to the story: adolescents' lived experiences	15	17-30	Semi-structured interviews	Hermeneutic content analysis	When loneliness is involuntary, other negative experiences, such as stress, anxiety, shame and meaninglessness can also be experienced. Self-chosen solitude can conversely create other positive experiences, such

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
							as freedom, creativity and reflection.
Madsen et al.	2021	Lonely, but Not Alone: Qualitative Study among Immigrant and Native-Born Adolescents	15	14-15	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	<p>Key findings to describe characteristics of loneliness: an adverse state varying in intensity and duration; an invisible social stigma as it is difficult to talk about.</p> <p>Key findings to describe perceived causes of loneliness: lack of connection; not being accepted; not feeling understood; feeling alone with problems; feeling neglected.</p>
Matthews et al.	2022	This is what loneliness looks like: A mixed-methods study of loneliness in adolescence and young adulthood	108	18	Mixed methods Self-reported loneliness using the UCLA Loneliness Scale; three informant ratings of loneliness (interviewer,	Regression analyses Thematic analysis	The experiences of the loneliest individuals were categorised into three main themes: feeling uncomfortable in their own skin; clustering of risk (describing multiple adversaries faced) and

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
					sibling and parent) using three item Informant Rated Loneliness Scale Field notes taken by interviewers		difficulties accessing social resources.
Hemberg et al.	2022	Loneliness as experienced by adolescents and young adults: an explorative qualitative study	15	17-30	Semi-structured interviews	Content analysis	Four main themes identified, including: early negative experiences (lack of parental attachment; trauma; low self-esteem; bullying); mental illness/physical disorders; self-centredness of society, social norms and social media; different types of loneliness (social; emotional; existential).
Garnow et al.	2022	Deeply lonely in the borderland between childhood and adulthood – Experiences of existential loneliness as	16	15-21	Narrative interviews	Qualitative content analysis	Four main categories identified to represent experiences of existential loneliness: Experiencing social exclusion (not feeling understood; feeling

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
		narrated by adolescents					<p>different and not involved; left alone).</p> <p>Experiencing in-betweenness (low sense of belonging; transitions of growing up; overthinking).</p> <p>Choosing to share one's inner life or not (fear of being left; feeling vulnerable; will share with those who are trusted).</p> <p>Avoiding difficult thoughts/feelings (try to be with others and do enjoyable things; try to focus on the future).</p>
Verity et al.	2021	Tell Me about Loneliness: Interviews with Young People about What Loneliness Is and How to Cope with It	12	8-14	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic framework analysis	<p>Loneliness was associated with the school environment and peer relationships predominantly.</p> <p>Some age related differences were</p>

Authors	Date	Title	No. of participants	Age of participants	Data collection	Data Analysis	Key findings
							identified, for example younger participants aged 8-11 were more likely to attribute loneliness to a lack of friends to play with, whereas those aged 12-14 were more likely to attribute loneliness to having no one to share secrets with.
Verity et al.	2022	Loneliness From the Adolescent Perspective: A Qualitative Analysis of Conversations About Loneliness Between Adolescents and Childline Counselors	67	12-18	Transcripts of conversations between young people and Childline counselors	Thematic framework analysis	Key themes generated include: loneliness as a dark and extreme experience; loneliness as exhausting but unable to sleep well; difficulties with peer relationships and conflict at home; school can be difficult when experiencing loneliness and believing that coping strategies do not work to alleviate loneliness.

However, there are some important gaps in the evidence about young people's experience of loneliness. There is limited research which adopts a collective approach to understanding young people's experiences of loneliness within the place-based context which is used in this research. Although the qualitative research discussed in this chapter has identified the significance of external factors, such as environment and culture in relation to loneliness (Rönkä et al., 2018), there is an important research gap about the impact the place where you live has on loneliness. To current knowledge, the only research which examines the significance of place to any extent is within the 'Loneliness Connects Us' project (Batsleer et al., 2018).

Additionally, the majority of the studies use interview methods; a highly valuable method because of the depth in responses which can be elicited. But what is largely lacking is the use of more innovative and creative qualitative approaches to produce rich accounts which can open up different ways of understanding (Kara, 2015); Batsleer et al.'s (2018) research is only one example of this. Although further discussion of participatory methods and a more detailed rationale for the chosen methodology for this thesis features in Chapter Five, it is important to highlight here how rich, nuanced findings can be generated by such methods, as well as engaging with young people in a way that previous research has not.

The richness of the findings from Batsleer et al.'s (2018) research exemplifies how adopting not just qualitative methods, but a creative and co-productive approach can garner a more holistic picture of young people's conceptualisations and experiences of loneliness.

Technology and loneliness

Although this research does not solely focus on how young people utilise technology for social connection, it is important to highlight some research findings in the examination of loneliness because of the sheer growth of the everyday use social media platforms. It has been suggested that there can be benefits to time spent online, even for those who have experienced cyberbullying, through engagement with

supportive communities (Davis et al., 2015). Social media can be used positively to help connect those who feel lonely, by enhancing existing friendships and/or creating new ones (Nowland et al., 2018; O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Batsleer and Duggan (2021) identify key benefits for young people who regularly connect with others online, especially for young people who are marginalised, for example, young people who are LGBTQ+. For some young people, exclusively online relationships can provide support that is deemed to be not possible in particular physical communities, because they do not feel accepted for who they are (Craig, 2015; Nesi et al., 2018). It has also been shown that the increased interaction with existing connections can enhance the quality of those relationships, therefore decrease loneliness (Uhls et al., 2017).

Nowland et al. (2018) acknowledge the importance of examining online landscapes within the contexts of the offline landscapes in order to gain a more accurate view of social interaction. They argue that when social media platforms are used in ways which displace an individual’s offline interactions, loneliness can increase. However, when social media is used to enhance existing relationships and create new ones, there can be a reduction in loneliness, but only when there is an overlap of both online and offline communities (Nowland et al., 2018).

There is a gap in the literature which examines the relationship between loneliness and online connectivity in young people from a community perspective. Exploring if online platforms can be used positively by young people to engage with the local community and enhance the quality of existing relationships within the local setting could offer new understanding of how both the online and offline community can work in harmony to improve young people’s social connectedness and reduce feelings of loneliness.

4.6 Loneliness and Young people Through a Place-Based Lens

A recent government report has identified key gaps in research about loneliness, including the need to develop a more collective based approach to understand loneliness, as well as examine the impact of place and context and social stigma (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2022). Furthermore, other recent research about loneliness in young people specifically identifies the significance of social and

physical contexts and found that overall, wider socio-economic factors can influence young people's experiences of loneliness (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Lasgaard et al., 2016; Marquez et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2019). For example, for young people who live in poverty and deprived neighbourhoods, as well as the shame associated with being poor, practical issues such as not being able to afford to participate or access transport creates a limited social world for those who inhabit it (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021).

Furthermore, it has been found that in different geographical locations in the UK, loneliness in young people can differ and that when young people have strong bonds in the community and perceive a strong sense of belonging, this can be preventative measure for loneliness (Goodfellow, 2022; Marquez et al., 2022). However, research has also shown that some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK, significant numbers of people are prone to social and neighbourhood exclusion (Scharf et al., 2004). When a place or neighbourhood is stigmatised, the feelings of shame and social isolation which can be felt, can be similar to those of loneliness (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021).

Different physical aspects of place are also found to be associated with loneliness, although most of this research relates to older populations. For example, studies suggest that dense, urban environments can be associated with increased loneliness (Lai et al., 2021), as well as places which have significant deprivation (Victor & Pikhartova, 2020). Equally more rural places can also be associated with higher levels of loneliness because of factors such as physical isolation and poor transport networks (Drennan et al., 2008). However, regardless of the geography, having access to open green and blue spaces is suggested that the mental and physical benefits of these can result in lower levels of loneliness and overall improved wellbeing (Maas et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there is a lack of evidence of how young people's experiences of physical aspects of place affect loneliness. Additionally, places can have distinct and unique qualities – this is true of coastal places – and these should also be considered (Hsueh et al., 2022).

Some of the research conducted with young people is contextualised within the school environment, measuring levels of belonging or connection and are often linked to academic outcomes. For example, low connections to school or a low sense of belonging have been associated with low exam performance (Benner, 2011), low motivation (Goodenow, 1993), decreased attendance (Goodenow, 1993) and overall lower participation (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Several studies have examined the relationship between schools and young people's mental health, including experiences of loneliness (Allen & McKenzie, 2015; Arslan & Duru, 2017; Baumeister, 2012; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). However, much of the research about the relationships between academic experiences and loneliness in young people does not connect these experiences to young people's wider experiences of place and loneliness. For example, examining whether there is a relationship between young people's experiences of loneliness in the school environment and their lives outside of school. As the development of school-based interventions are suggested in some of the literature reviewed in the next section, an exploration of links between academic institutions and place and experiences of loneliness could help to develop this further, as well as young people's ideas for how places such as schools can provide potential support.

4.7 Interventions Tackling Young People's Loneliness

Most interventions to reduce and/or prevent loneliness relate to older populations, including using technology to increase social contact (Ballantyne et al., 2010), befriending schemes (Cattan et al., 2011) and community engagement (Khan & Bolina, 2020). A review undertaken by Masi et al. (2011) examined four types of loneliness interventions for older adults: improving social skills; greater social support; more opportunities for social contact and finally individual measures designed to address maladaptive social cognition (Masi et al., 2011). It was found that this final approach was the most impactful intervention; in fact, it was reported that increasing social contact was not a particularly effective measure to address loneliness in the general older population. However, a more recent review has conversely outlined the promising potential of wider place-based interventions (Hsueh et al., 2022). Evidence has suggested that social prescribing can reduce loneliness and this may also have potential in younger people too (Goodfellow, 2022; Marquez et al.,

2022). Overall, many interventions for young people have previously been delivered at a targeted, individual level, rather than from a collectivist standpoint, so little is known about the potential of community-based interventions for them.

In terms of interventions aimed at young people, there is less known about if and how similar interventions can have impact. Two recent reviews of interventions to tackle loneliness in young people (Eccles et al., 2021; Osborn et al., 2021) identified that current interventions aimed at young people tend to be targeted at specific groups or individuals. Therefore providing young people with the emotional and social skills to alleviate transient experiences of loneliness can be missed and can become prolonged, thus developing into chronic experiences (Eccles et al., 2021). The type of intervention seemed to not be a dominant factor in the effectiveness in loneliness alleviation; rather the context in which it is delivered affected the impact of the interventions. For example, structured settings, such as educational institutions appeared to be more effective (Osborn et al., 2021). Furthermore, the importance of wider structural factors in the promotion of loneliness for young people should be considered in the design of interventions, rather than focusing on more individual approaches (Osborn et al., 2021).

One suggested intervention which is regarded as potentially having impact is schools having a more active role (Lasgaard et al., 2016; Qualter et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2022). This has particular relevance in early adolescence where experiences of loneliness, including transient loneliness, for young people at this stage of development are more likely to manifest in mental health problems in later adulthood (Matthews et al., 2022).

What is clear, from the limited literature on this topic, is that interventions need to be (and should be) developed with young people. To work in collaboration with young people to explore their ideas and suggestions for loneliness interventions, appears to be lacking (Osborn et al., 2021), and this could be important to understand what young people themselves believe might actually help them; when it is perceived that existing coping strategies will not help to alleviate loneliness, this can have an adverse effect

(Verity et al., 2022). This is especially true when approaching the study of loneliness in young people from a place-based perspective, where the consideration of different social, environmental and economic factors which can influence loneliness can differ from place to place. How young people perceive what may help reduce and/or prevent loneliness may well be specific to ‘their’ place, therefore a participatory approach to explore this could prove to be fruitful.

4.8 Summary of Chapter Four

In summary, the research work in this thesis addresses two main gaps in the loneliness literature. Firstly, the work is guided by a recognition that although some general similarities can be found in the experiences of loneliness in younger people as older populations, there is still a scarcity of evidence which utilises a place-based lens. Some more recent research considers some wider environmental factors in the development of understanding loneliness in young people, and this encourages a more collectivist approach, rather than previous dominant individualistic approaches. Although some research is beginning to emerge that considers contextual factors which affect loneliness in young people, research which is framed by place and how it may impact young people’s experiences of loneliness is scarce. This is an important gap which this research will address because new perspectives can be generated through the examination of how distinctive aspects of where young people live are related to their experiences of loneliness.

Secondly, through the discussion of some of the various conceptualisations of loneliness, it is clear that an integration of approaches through qualitative methodologies is novel. There is a lack of work in this area using participatory or creative approaches. This can potentially offer valuable collaboration with young people in the shaping of the research to generate new understanding through providing a rich picture of young people’s perspectives and experiences of loneliness. Furthermore, the co-production of different intervention suggestions to support young people who experience loneliness could offer new and/or more detailed understanding about what young people think might have impact.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: DESIGN, INCLUDE, CREATE, COLLABORATE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach used in the study; firstly, situating the research in a social constructionist epistemology. Variable definitions of what is meant by ‘young people’ and the rights of children and young people are then presented. Then, the research setting of the coastal town of Morecambe is introduced with a justification of its suitability as a case study. The overall research design as qualitative and participatory is discussed as the best way of exploring the concepts of loneliness, place, and community with young people. Here, the first feasibility phase of the research is presented, with an explanation of how this was used to shape the second case study phase of data collection with young people. Next, the different qualitative methods used to explore the main concepts with young people are outlined, with explanation about their relevance and appropriateness to answer the research questions. Following this, the approach taken to data analysis including the involvement of young people in generating themes from the data is described. The final two sections of this chapter include reflections on the ethical considerations taken into account and the principles underpinning the research, as well as researcher reflexivity and positionality.

5.2 Theoretical Context

This research is situated within a relativist-social constructionist philosophy which recognises reality as a product of human actions and interactions. Social constructionism acknowledges the diversity of the social world, moving away from a singular objective reality to an understanding that knowledge is a product of human practices which are contextualised within particular historical and cultural contexts (Burr, 2015). In addition to physiological developments, young people’s experiences are also shaped by many different multi-layered social, historical and cultural elements, a conceptualisation of childhood related to the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (James & Prout, 1997). The understanding that childhood is socially constructed

propelled a shift in research methodologies in the 1990s, recognising that children and young people are competent social actors and experts in their own lives (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; James & Prout, 1997).

This makes social constructionism the ideal epistemological approach for this qualitative research because it sets out to focus on young people's experiences in a particular setting (in this case the coastal town of Morecambe) in recognition of how their own experiences contribute to knowledge construction (Burr, 2015).

Furthermore, the participatory design described in this chapter is a suitable approach alongside social constructionism because it is collectivist in nature, which is aligned with the constructionist account of knowledge formation (Gergen & Gergen, 2015). Participants are empowered to not only share their lived experiences in the research process, but also create actions and impact (Burr, 2015).

Defining what is meant by 'young people'

The term 'young people' or 'young person' is predominantly used to describe the participants in this research, as well as the term 'youth' in reference to the particular stage of life they are living. The term 'young people' can helpfully encapsulate a fluid conceptualisation of the participants, rather than being defined by specific and limiting numerical labels. There are various definitions of who 'young people' are and the term is often used interchangeably with 'teenager' and 'adolescent', demonstrative of its variability. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016) describes young people as being aged between 15-24 years old, but recognises that this is 'fluid'. The World Health Organisation (WHO, n.d.) defines young people as being aged 10-24 years old and the European Union states that the term can be applied to anyone aged from 15 to 29 (Eurostat, 2015). In contrast, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) recognises anyone under the age of 18 as a child. Young people are often associated with a transitional period between being dependent and becoming independent and can also be regarded as a relational concept because of the power dynamics experienced as young people (Wyn & White, 1997).

Considering these definitions alone, it is evident that there is no consensus of definition of ‘young people.’ Indeed, the term can vary depending on the lens through which it is viewed, whether social, biological or cultural, adding weight to the argument of it being a fluid concept (Wyn & White, 1997). In the following discussions of the rights of children and young people and also of participatory research with young people, some of the literature referred to operates within a more restricted definition of who young people are, as well as sometimes using the term ‘children’ instead, referring to anyone under the age of 18 years. However, because of the lack of consensus in describing who young people are, this literature can hold relevance in the context of the young people in this research.

The period of ‘youth’, the life stage which young people experience, can be characterised by particular experiences, such as transitions related to education or embarking on a first romantic relationship (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021); physical developments during puberty; as well as cognitive changes, for example, an increased tendency towards risk-taking behaviours (Somerville et al., 2010) and heightened self-consciousness (Rankin et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is important to reflect that the life stage of youth is also contextualised within particular periods or eras. Therefore ‘youth’ may differ in the present day when compared to how older generations might understand this life stage and the challenges and experiences faced by young people. This reinforces the fundamental need to listen to and work with young people in order to try to understand their lives in more meaningful ways.

In the both the context of the different definitions of young people included above, as well as the criteria of the youth organisations themselves where this research was situated with young people ranging in age from 12-25 years old, then anyone who wished to participate from these groups was welcome to do so.

A rights based approach

Since the mid-1990s, research with children and young people has evolved significantly from more traditional research methods, where they tended to be treated

more as research objects (Mason & Hood, 2010; McMellon & Tisdall, 2020). As previously mentioned, James and Prout's (1997) 'new sociology of childhood' heralded a change in the social sciences to the understanding of childhood as being socially constructed, and a recognition of youth as competent social actors and experts in their own lives who can therefore influence knowledge production (Cahill, 2007; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Social constructionism, therefore, provides a suitable epistemological approach for this research, as it recognises that knowledge is not universal and that it is socially and culturally situated (Burr, 2015). Because this research focuses on the lived everyday experiences of young people who live in Morecambe, the social constructionist approach values the relationships and interactions between people as knowledge (Burr, 2015).

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1990) is often quoted as the main principle in relation to children and young people's participation. Here, 'childhood' is recognised as the period between birth and eighteen years of age. It states:

- 1) Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- 2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (p. 5)

In other words, the young person has the right to express a view and they have the right to that view being given due weight (Lundy, 2007). Concerns about the challenges of going beyond 'tokenistic' participation are central in the actualisation of these rights; for example the issue of not progressing beyond consultation with young people; a lack of real impact and the sustainability of participation activities (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020). For young people's participation to be meaningful, it needs to be a rolling process, rather than a one-off event and meet UN standards

(Sinclair, 2004) and have opportunities to identify issues, take action, influence and promote change (Wyness, 2013). As Lundy (2007) states, not only can tokenistic approaches fail to observe the instruction of Article 12, but they can be damaging when young people witness the limited power of their endeavours. It can be argued that the relations between adults and young people in participatory projects can sometimes be either deliberately or accidentally manipulative, covertly strengthening existing social structures rather than benefitting the young people involved, due to various adult based agendas (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). This can be challenging within any participatory endeavour (and especially within the boundaries of doctoral research) with young people and the importance of being critically aware and reflexive in the approach to circumnavigate this difficulty is fundamental.

In the UN General Comment 12, requirements for children and young people's participation are identified in greater detail and emphasise the need to go beyond listening, to genuine action and impact (Crowley et al., 2020). In summary, participation should be:

- 1) Transparent and informative: provide appropriate and accessible information about how their participation will take place, and its purpose and impact.
- 2) Voluntary: participation is the choice of the young person and can withdraw at any time.
- 3) Respectful: young people's views will be listened to and respected.
- 4) Relevant: issues with real life relevance to young people will be addressed and they will have opportunities to instigate discussions.
- 5) Youth-friendly environments and methods: environments and resources will be appropriate to the young people who are participating, with a range of support where required.
- 6) Inclusive: participation will be inclusive; all young people and their voices and views are all equal.

- 7) Safe and sensitive to risk: adults have a responsibility in safeguarding all young people.
- 8) Accountable: ensure that proposals from young people are followed up so that they can see and evaluate their participation and influence.
- 9) Supported by training: relevant provision to support young people's developing skills which evolved through the participatory process.

(United Nations, 2009, pp. 29-30)

These recommendations should be held up in participatory research with young people; however, within the constraints of the PhD enterprise, this was not always be easy (Bourke, 2009; Khobzi & Flicker, 2010; Southby, 2017). For example, as a doctoral student, a significant amount of planning had already been done, in terms of research questions and methods, meaning young people were not able to identify research topics for themselves. Furthermore, the key issue of *accountability*, that proposals from young people are followed up and evaluated, is difficult to achieve within the timeframe of the PhD. Whilst making every effort to uphold the principles of the General Comment 12, through reflexivity, the limitations of the PhD structure and ways to navigate it are considered.

5.3 Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was qualitative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and participatory (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). There are several reasons for this. As outlined in the literature review chapters, in the extant literature concerning loneliness in young people, there is a predominance of quantitative based studies which have provided knowledge about some of the reasons young people might experience loneliness (for example, Laursen & Hartl, 2013) and what the physical and mental health consequences can be (for example, Qualter et al., 2013). However, studies which focus on the qualitative experiences of young people are more limited. Therefore, through the qualitative approach adopted in this study, an important gap in the generation of nuanced data is addressed which offers detailed insights of the lived experiences of young people. Through a participatory paradigm, the rights of young

people and the recognition of those rights are embedded throughout the research process. It is a collaborative process, done *with* them rather than *to* them.

Participatory research

Pain (2004) described participatory research as ‘a collaborative and non-hierarchical approach’ where ownership of the research is ‘shared with participants, who negotiate processes with the academic researcher’ (p. 652), highlighting the equality of power in the research process. Kesby (2000) stated that ‘the agency of participants is recognised and encouraged...and researchers and participants enter into a reciprocal relationship in the research process’ (p. 425), advocating and developing agency. Stalker (1998) outlines three central tenets of participatory research. Firstly, the traditional research relationships between the ‘expert’ researcher and the ‘object’ participant is undemocratic; secondly, people have the right to be involved in research about their lives and thirdly, the quality of the research can be greater when this is the case. Beyond these central principles of participatory research, there are many different approaches. Different terms include ‘participatory action research’, ‘community-based action research’, ‘co-operative enquiry’ and ‘co-production’, demonstrating a flexible methodology which can be difficult to define.

However, a well-established international body of work in childhood studies accounts for the suitability of a participatory research approach for working with young people to prompt change on matters which affect them. There are various participatory frameworks which address young people’s participation. Models, such as Arnstein’s participation ladder (1969) and Hart’s version (1992) describe a linear gradient scale of participation ranging from ‘manipulation’ to full citizen power and have been used to optimise how to maintain the greatest level of participation as much as possible. Arnstein acknowledged that in reality there are many more nuanced levels of participation within the basic eight rung ladder format that is described. However, it has been argued that this representation of participation is problematic in its hierarchical nature and that unless participation occurs at the highest ‘ladder rungs’ then it is categorised as tokenistic participation (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020). In reality, there are many factors that need to be accounted for in participatory research

with young people, such as social, economic or cultural factors, in addition to varying power relations, both between and within young people and adult groups (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020). Therefore, a less linear model of participation is desirable in this research in order to avoid falling into a ‘tokenism trap’.

Shier’s model (2001) goes some way to addressing these critiques, through his five levels of participation model he posited that:

- 1) children are listened to;
- 2) children are supported in the expression of their views;
- 3) children’s views are taken into account;
- 4) children are involved in decision making;
- 5) children share power and responsibility in decision making.

(p. 110)

Within these five levels, Shier argued that there are three stages of commitment: openings, opportunity and obligation. This more nuanced and variable approach holds greater appeal because it is flexible and recognises that participation is fluid throughout the research process. However, a key criticism of Shier’s model is the lack of clarity regarding how the products of participation have sustainability, or in Lundy’s (2007) term, ‘influence’. This is a central focus of current research in children and young people’s participation and an aspect of this research with young people that is important: how young people’s voices are not only heard, but can also have impact. Lundy’s model (2007) draws on Article 12 of UNCRC and is formed of four key factors:

- 1) Space – children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.
- 2) Voice – children must be facilitated to express their view.
- 3) Audience – the view must be listened to.
- 4) Influence – The view must be acted upon as appropriate.

(Lundy, 2007, p. 933)

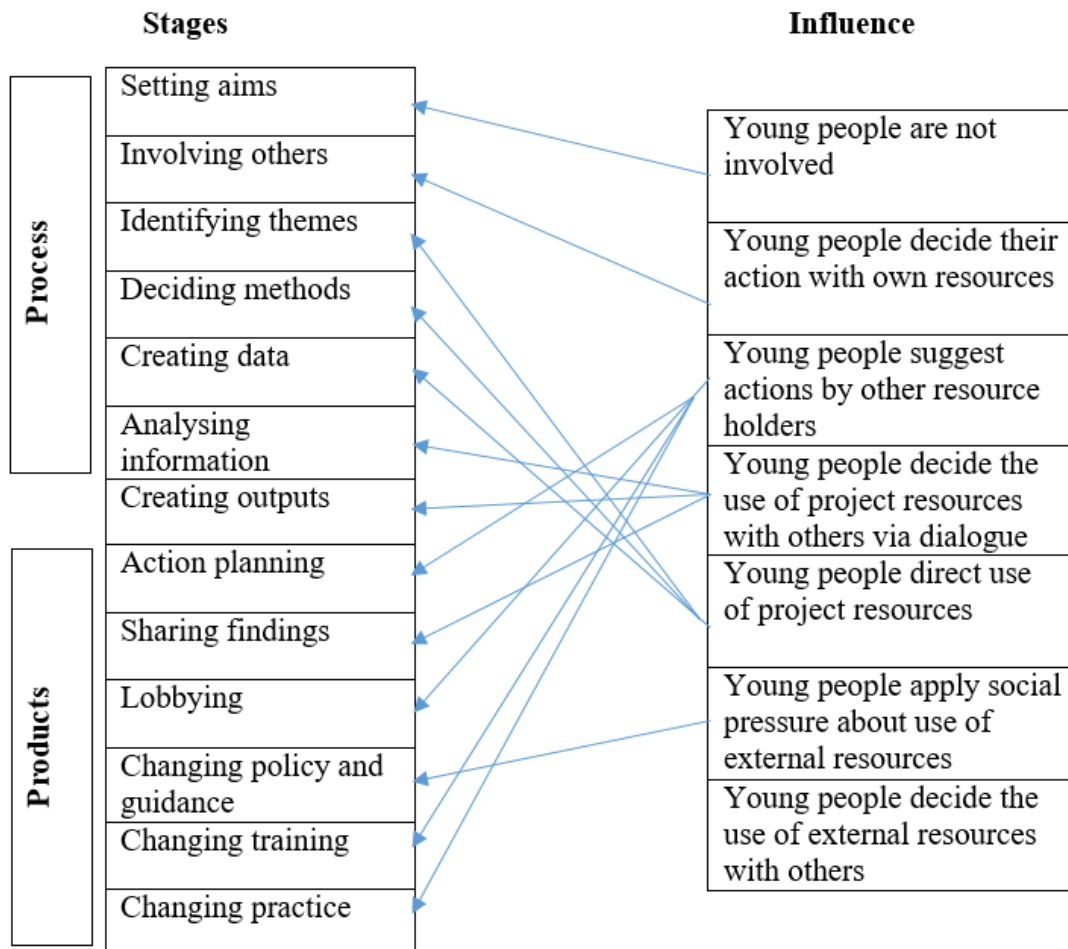
This model has been widely recognised for the development of children and young people's voices in particular, but it has also been argued that the 'influence' aspect is still lacking in authentic ways to move towards real solutions and sustainable impact. This appears to be one of the greatest challenges in children and young people's participation (Crowley, 2015; McMellon & Tisdall, 2020).

In order to understand how young people's influence can be better supported in this research, a dynamic approach presented by Larkins et al. (2014) is outlined. This model holds particular appeal for this study because it presents participation as a lattice which conceptualises young people's participation as collective engagement which varies in different stages of the participatory process. It presents participation in an authentic way, acknowledging that it is 'messy' and 'fraught' at times (Gallagher, 2008, p. 404), and the flexibility of the lattice model allows for the dynamic and relational nature of participation throughout the research process. There is also a recognition that in participatory research with young people, the participation of the adults involved is also important and that an *intergenerational approach* to understand the varying levels of participation is needed.

Young people's influence (or power) through participation is defined in terms of how different actors (young people) mobilise resources (for example, space, time, money, equipment, knowledge of young people's experiences, facilitators' attitudes) through dynamic processes. In other words, the level of participation and influence young people have depends on their relationship to different resources at different points in the research process. In comparison with the other models of participation described previously, the lattice approach offers an authentic path to influence through the acknowledgement that it is a varied and dynamic process. There is no requirement to be consistently on the 'top rung' of a participative ladder in order to have influence. An example of how the model was adopted in this research is shown in Figure 5.1 below. It is also important to acknowledge the challenges of achieving a fully 'authentic' and transformative participatory experience within the context of a doctoral project. The lattice model can be utilised in a practical and dynamic way in order to

address some of the constraints that exist within the PhD enterprise, for example, where certain aspects of the research project have been pre-planned.

Figure 5.1: Lattice of participation model (Larkins et al., 2014)



The lattice model offers a flexible approach to participation which through the recognition of the differing levels of influence via resources, levels or ‘degrees of participation’ which can be choices, context dependent, negotiated or participation (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; McCarry, 2012). Adopting this model in the research with young people attempted to avoid the trappings of tokenism with a genuine commitment to authentic participation in a realistic context. For example, young people had no influence on setting the aims of the research as this was already planned as part of the requirements conducting doctoral research. However, they were able to have greater influence in the creation of data and data analysis. This was also true of action planning and sharing the findings from the research with stakeholders.

Reflecting on the lattice model enabled more effective planning because it could be identified where there could be genuine opportunities for young people to be more empowered in the research, whilst acknowledging that this would not be realistic throughout the entire process.

However, there is a tension which exists in the criticism of participatory approaches of being local-centric and despite engaging groups in transformations within their own local areas, it can prove challenging to develop this into further reaching social change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Others conversely argue that it is more important to concentrate on immediate local contexts (Gallagher, 2008) to influence local change; that ‘generalisability’ is not central to qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, the lattice participation model can arguably link the knowledge produced from local participatory research with a wider, more far-reaching context with broader connections to societal wide structures through the notion of transferability; that through the specific dataset, wider social understandings can be drawn (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The influence of Freire’s seminal work in the 1970s on participatory methodologies must be mentioned here. He developed research processes rooted in communities to engage people in the creation of new knowledge and subsequent social actions. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argued the transformative power of the perspectives and experiences of the people. His belief that learning should be a mutual and collaborative process and follow a cycle of reflexivity and action or ‘praxis’. Praxis opposes the idea of objective research, but is rather concerned with social justice. There is a recognition of the significance of the wider social, political and economic consequences of research (Burke & Lumb, 2018; Freire, 2000). It is the place where different conversations, actions and experiences come together (Stacey 2001); thinking does not separate itself from action (Freire, 2000). Praxis is essential to the process of Freire’s conscientisation; the self-realisation of political efficacy and the subsequent possibility of change. Freire believes that the world cannot just be studied, but in fact people also have a responsibility to act for social justice, and to do so together with others.

Adopting Freire's notion of conscientisation in the approach to participatory research with young people is important in this research. The aim to create an authentic opportunity for young people in Morecambe to give voice to their own experiences and views, as well as promote their own sense of self-efficacy is central to how participation is conceived in the study. As Crotty (2009) observes, applying Freire's approach in different countries, cultures and times, requires an identification of the different and often subtle forms that oppression can take. Thinking about how young people, who live in a community such as a coastal town with significant deprivation, are oppressed through political and media driven narratives which can often be concerned with poverty and crime means that a participatory research methodology is a suitable approach.

Recognition of young people

In conjunction with the participatory approach in this research, it is important to give young people recognition for who they are and what they can do. This is a matter of social justice and a universal 'right' (Fraser, 2003). This research adopts a philosophy of recognition to the participatory methodology, according to Honneth's (1995) three patterns of love, rights and solidarity in striving for social progress. *Love* refers to the strong relationships between young people, peers and adults which are embodied by different emotional attachments. According to Honneth, love is a 'symbiotically nourished bond, which emerges through mutually desired demarcation that produces the degree of basic individual self-confidence indispensable for autonomous participation in public life' (p. 107). The mutuality of affection, trust and attachment are the most predominant dimensions which characterise love. *Rights* describes the mutual respect and equality within relationships with others; Honneth argued that social respect and self-respect are closely connected to the 'rights' one has in a legal context (Thomas, 2012). Finally, *solidarity* relates to the esteem in which people are held in due to their contributions to a common good and makes them feel valued. However, Honneth also noted that 'relations of social esteem are subject to a permanent struggle, in which different groups attempt, by means of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities associated with

their way of life' (Honneth, 1995, p. 126). The challenge, then, for solidarity is achieving mutual recognition of each other's value in a wider society (Thomas, 2012).

In terms of this research, the recognition of young people – love, rights and solidarity – is regarded as the primary stance from which to conduct participatory research; Thomas (2012) viewed that all three are essential for the full participation of young people. This underlines the importance of relationships, especially between the researcher and young people, as an unknown person to them from an outside academic institution. Trust building was fundamental to developing these relationships and this required time and genuine investment in the young people beyond the researcher role. Reflections on how the recognition of the young people in this research affect the relationship with the research and their participation in the research were also made.

5.4 A Study in Two Phases

The research exploring young people's experiences and viewpoints of loneliness in the coastal town of Morecambe was designed in two phases. The first was a feasibility phase undertaken to explore the relevance of the research themes with young people, as well as trial some of the planned creative methods in order to assess their effectiveness for rich data collection. A conceptual model was developed from this phase which informed the approach to the second case study phase of the research, as well as extending the participatory data collection methods to a larger group of young people across four youth organisational sites in Morecambe. Due to Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns being in place, the feasibility study had to be conducted online, however, the second Morecambe case study phase was conducted face to face.

The creation of a Young Researchers Group involving the young research participants to collaborate on data analysis, as well as exploring of ideas and planning for the presentation of creative outputs was also an important element of the research design. A Young Researchers Day was held with the young people who wished to participate in this separate group. This is discussed further below.

Phase one feasibility study

A feasibility study was conducted from November 2020 – January 2021 in order to assess key aspects of the research *process* (Tickle-Degnen, 2013). The aims of the feasibility study were to: 1) gauge young people’s engagement with the research themes; 2) assess effectiveness of the creative data collection methods in producing rich data and 3) consult with young people about their views about the subsequent plans for the main phase of the research.

The recruitment of young people to the feasibility study was challenging due to the fact that this was during the period of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns, therefore it had to be done remotely. Two youth organisations, one of which was based in Morecambe and another in the wider Lancashire area, were contacted by email and the project introduced. Subsequently, I was invited to join these groups for their regular meetings which were being held online. In this way it was possible to meet the groups of young people and to explain what the research was about, and to invite them to participate. All information sheets and consent forms (Appendices 1-3) were sent to the youth worker who acted as gatekeeper and distributed information to young people. Consent forms were returned electronically via the youth worker from young people, as well as a parent or guardian if they were aged under 16 years of age. In total, six young people participated in this phase, ranging in age from 13-24 years old (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: A summary of participants in phase one

Group	Age	Place of residence	Number of participants
Group 1	13-16	Fleetwood, Blackpool, Morecambe	3
Group 2	19-24	Morecambe	3

Online data collection

The requirement to conduct the entire feasibility phase online due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that some of the methods had to be slightly adapted. For each session, I created a powerpoint presentation to share with the young people, which provided a visual representation of what we were doing and the relevant links they need when doing a particular task (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Example from the online powerpoint presentation (introduction, session two)



Each session would begin with a short ice breaker activity such as a quiz or game, followed by an introduction to the focus for the session, the trialling of a research method and then a 10 minute plenary session for reflection. This followed much the same structure as how an in person session would have been planned. A more detailed outline of the online sessions is displayed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Summary of online research sessions

Session focus	Ice breaker	Introduction	Main task	Reflection
Where do I belong? Trial Splot method.	Getting to know you questions.	What is belonging? Create a word cloud to show ideas.	Create and share a Splot to show where you feel happy/good	What did you like or not like about this activity?
What does place mean? Trial mapping method.	How has your week been? Blob tree activity.	What is place? Create a word cloud to show ideas.	Maps of where I live: discussion of different types of maps.	What did you like or not like about this activity?
What is loneliness? Trial photovoice method.	Loneliness true or false quiz.	Brief introduction to photovoice.	Discuss different images – what is their message? What makes them powerful?	Set photovoice activity for next time: how can loneliness in lockdown be represented in a photo?
Evaluation of methods.	When lockdown ends, I look forward to...	Young people to share and present their photos.	Evaluation of the three main methods.	Summary and thanks.

The predominant concern that I had was related to how effectively I could develop a rapport with the young people, having not met them in person previously. Trying to establish good relationships is vital for successful participatory research (Pain, 2004) and I was unsure how this could develop in a purely online context. Therefore, I created research boxes (Figure 5.3) to send out to each young person at home after our first session as a more personal way of connecting with the group. These boxes simply contained several items which we would have used if we had been collaborating in a face-to-face context. The box included pens, a notebook, stickers, post-it notes and some sweets. Furthermore, I handwrote a short note to each young person to thank them for their participation.

Figure 5.3: A research box sent to phase one participants



These research boxes provided a more personal link between myself and the young people and they could also use the resources in subsequent sessions.

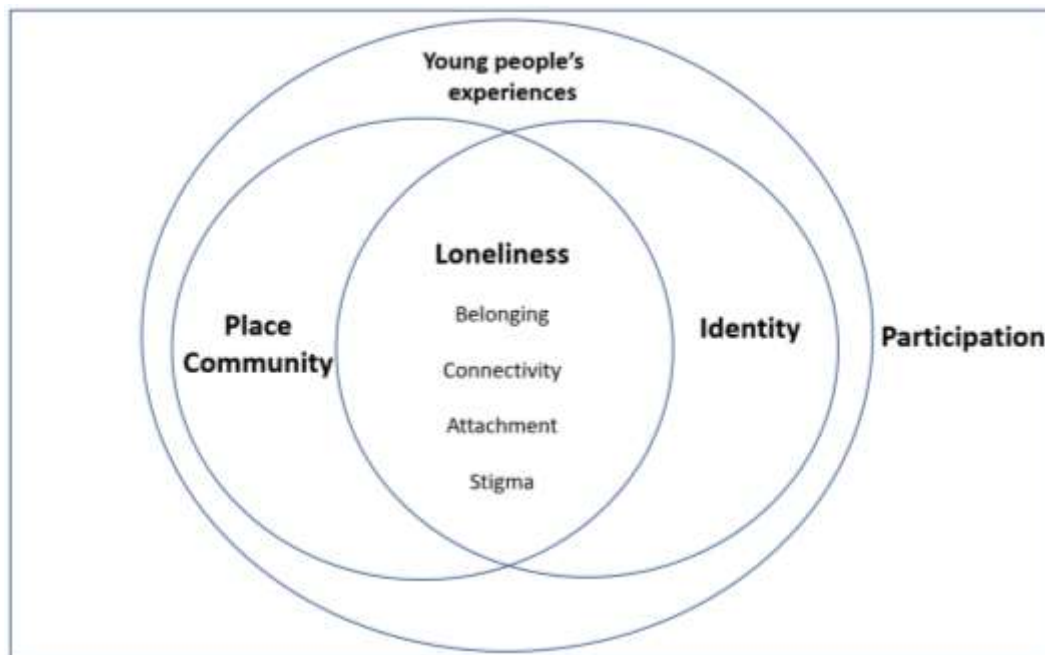
The youth workers scheduled online meetings which took place before their usual weekly group meeting. All four sessions in Table 5.2 were held with the 13-16 age group and the first two sessions with the 19-24 age group (each lasting approximately 45 minutes). Again, this disparity was due to the difficulties presented by the second UK lockdown and the availability of young people in the older age group. Three main creative methods were trialled with the 13-16 age group (the Splot method, maps and photovoice, which are described in phase two). The Splot method was also trialled with the 19-24 age group, and maps were used as a stimulus for discussion in their two sessions. The 13-16 age group also evaluated the methods used and advised on the plan outlined for the next phase of the study.

The feasibility phase served to reinforce some of what has been reported in the literature about place, community belonging and loneliness, but the findings also began to suggest novel elements which were used to develop the methods and lines of inquiry in the phase two case study of the research. Most importantly, through the feasibility phase, it was clear that young people engaged with the subject matter and

that the participatory methods held potential for gathering rich data on young people's perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon of loneliness in place.

The first implication related to how living in a coastal community can shape a young person's identity through different factors such as attachment, belonging and connectivity. Examining how loneliness is affected by the tension of feeling shaped by the place where you live, whilst also recognising that the place is stigmatised would address gaps in the current knowledge base. Secondly, how 'community' is understood by young people needed to be examined in further depth in order to establish a different way to frame 'community' with them; one which is authentic and relevant. Thirdly, through engagement with the participatory, creative methods, they also began to explore ideas and suggestions of how young people from coastal towns who experience loneliness can be supported. Drawing these various threads together thus shaped the conceptual framework adopted for the next phase of qualitative exploration of these concepts (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: A conceptual model based on the findings from the feasibility study



This conceptual framework illustrates how community and place were interlinked with young people's identities. It suggested a close relationship between their experiences

of loneliness and the overlapping concepts of belonging, attachment and social connectivity. Findings from the feasibility phase also suggested that the stigma associated with certain places and communities was related to young people's identity and experiences of loneliness. From the social constructionist position adopted in this study, young people's experiences were central to gaining new insights about the topics under investigation, and these would be explored and reflected upon through further participatory processes with other young people.

Phase two Morecambe case study

There were two main aims of phase two in the research. Firstly, building on the findings from the feasibility phase, the research themes were examined in greater depth, with a wider group of young people in order to generate detailed accounts of their experiences of place, community belonging and loneliness. Secondly, an essential aspect of this case study phase was that all of the young people who participated lived in the coastal town of Morecambe in the North West of England, which was identified as the place-based context for this study.

Morecambe as the research site

Also featured as one of the ten case studies in the Chief Medical Officer's report into health in coastal communities (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021), Morecambe (Figure 5.5) provided a relevant setting for the research. The town is known as a traditional seaside resort with outstanding natural assets which was hugely popular in the first half of the twentieth century, but suffered a steep decline in its fortunes in the latter half (Jarratt, 2015). Now it is fair to say that Morecambe has been better known for its numerous social-economic issues, as it has been identified as having areas of significant deprivation, child poverty, higher than average unemployment levels and children who are largely underachieving at secondary school (Promenade to Port Coastal Team, 2019). Morecambe has a population of approximately 37,500 with an ageing demographic, partly shaped by the lack of opportunities for young people, who can leave the area to seek opportunities elsewhere (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021).

Figure 5.5: Location of Morecambe (Morecambe Bay, n.d.)



What is presently absent from the different reports about coastal inequalities which have been referenced in this thesis, are the voices of young people about their experiences of living in a coastal town with significant deprivation; they have their own unique lived experiences of place, community belonging and loneliness which are critical to answering the research questions. Furthermore, by situating this research in Morecambe, young people were given the opportunity to share their views and experiences which could be disseminated both within and beyond their local area.

In-person data collection

Phase two consisted of five planned in-person research sessions with young people across four research sites; the formation of the Young Researchers Group for data analysis and their subsequent photography exhibition.

The five research sessions were held on the premises of the young people's youth organisations, from November 2021 to May 2022. The number of sessions varied from group to group due to how much time was available in particular weeks. However, the

table below (Table 5.3) offers a general summary of the research focus for each session, as well as the main research methods used.

Table 5.3: Summary of main research activities

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
<p>Perception of place</p> <p>Maps used to explore young people's perceptions of Morecambe</p>	<p>Meaning of community belonging</p> <p>Splot method to consider young people's sense of community and belonging in Morecambe</p>	<p>Explorations of loneliness</p> <p>Quiz to stimulate discussion; loneliness metaphor poems and flipchart notes</p> <p>Introduction to photovoice</p>	<p>Bringing together the research themes</p> <p>Photovoice walk around Morecambe as a group</p>	<p>Ideas and suggestions to create greater community belonging for young people in Morecambe and support for those who are lonely</p> <p>Create bunting and posters to present ideas</p>

Following the completion of the research sessions, all young people were invited to join a Young Researchers Group. The purpose of this group was twofold: firstly, young people would be invited to be part of a session to thematically analyse some of the data collaboratively with the researcher; and secondly, they would explore different suggestions and choose how they wanted to present their findings. In total, 13 young people, with representatives from across all four youth organisations involved at phase two formed the Young Researchers Group. A day event was organised to complete the data analysis and planning, taking place at a local community café in Morecambe (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7, pp. 111-112), alongside two youth workers from one of the organisations who supported the day.

5.5 Data Collection Methods

Creative methods have been suggested to build greater rapport between members of a research group, and also to highlight the nuances of lived experiences that are not as easily articulated verbally (Eisner, 2008; Mason 2006). Additionally, adopting a variety of creative methods can be seen as a more ‘expansive’ approach to qualitative research, where a range of diverse perspectives can emerge (Duggan, 2020). In this project, three main creative methods were used to explore, develop and extend the depth of the data generated. There was a focus on being ‘equalising’ amongst all group members (Tolstad et al., 2017), as well as universally accessible. Each session with young people followed a flexible structure with initial engagement activities, such as quizzes, drawing tasks, word association and metaphor creation tasks and picture stimuli related to the theme(s) of the session.

Three main creative methods were utilised for data production: 1) mapping; 2) plotting; and 3) photo elicitation or photovoice. The combination of these creative methods for data collection was complementary and designed to develop and build greater depth to the narratives of young people’s experiences and perceptions of the place, community belonging and loneliness themes. All three methods were flexible and accessible to a range of young people.

Creative Method 1: Mapping

Maps are used in many research fields, ranging from geography, psychology, sociology and anthropology as a way to document and analyse socio and psychogeographic understandings of place and relationships (Powell, 2010). There are a variety of maps that can be utilised, such as thematic, topological, social, cognitive and concept (see Kara, 2015 for a more detailed list). In the social sciences, maps are typically used as a pictorial entity which are then explored either verbally or textually.

The use of maps in research can be a useful method to examine relationships between places, emotions, perceptions and concepts (Newman, 2013). Seyer-Ochi’s (2006) notion of ‘lived landscapes’ is created from layers of both the natural and built

environment, as well as the historical, and how people's lives are made as a result of these conditions. Lived landscapes are maps which can be both individualistic as well as sharing commonalities across groups (Seyer-Ochi, 2006). This was the approach to using maps adopted in this project, where existing maps can be used to stimulate discussion about their own 'lived landscapes'. These can illustrate the places that are important to young people; where they feel safe and connected to their communities or to show places that they do not feel safe or disconnected or lonely. The natural environment that dominates Morecambe, as well as its history as a British seaside holiday destination with landmarks such as the Midland Hotel and the Winter Gardens, which can be contrasted with more modern aspects of the built environment. Maps were an appropriate research method to explore how young people perceived their lived landscapes and how they related to their experiences of community and loneliness in Morecambe.

Some criticisms the map method include a belief that visual data is prioritised in the process (Ingold, 2000). However, it can be argued that this is related to how the activity is framed to the young people. The content - the ideas and themes which promote discussion were important here too, rather than solely the map itself. This method also complemented the Splot method described below; the themes which emerged from the map method fed into the development of themes in the Splot drawings.

Creative Method 2: Splot

Researchers from Norway have investigated youth-driven innovation for social change using a method described as Splot (Tolstad et al., 2017). Young people were engaged in the development of urban spaces for belonging, co-producing knowledge to increase the wellbeing of young people and enhance their involvement and influence on policy making in cities (Tolstad et al., 2017). This process has been named the 'amplifier effect' where the collaboration from both non-academic and academic actors enhances the participation and influence of young people on policymaking. One of the methods designed for the workshops which focused on youth belonging and the importance of social, physical and virtual aspects of urban landscapes was the Splot method where a

simple drawing method was used to explore different ideas of place and where young people felt valued and felt good in themselves.

Central to the Splot method is the 'equaliser effect'. Through the simplicity of the drawing activity, it is seen as non-hierarchical and non-discriminatory in its approach. The method begins with participants drawing a heart in the middle of a piece of paper with a larger, uneven shape around it. They are then asked 'What places do you carry in your heart?' and 'Where do you feel good?', with an open view of what 'place' means to them. Their ideas and thoughts are then written inside the shape. This initial activity is then followed by a deeper discussion, where individuals are encouraged to explain their Splot. Tolstad et al. (2017) suggested that one of the main aims is to create a feeling of collaboration and sharing through the process.

Tolstad et al. (2017) argued that the Splot method feeds into a wider range of methods which can be developed collectively to increase young people's participation. This demonstrates that it can be used as a tool to engage with young people and then promote discussion and exploration through the activity. It has been shown to effectively facilitate the exploration of one's sense of belonging, and link this to more personal feelings and different structural aspects and challenges in society (Tolstad et al., 2017). It was the first time that this method has been used in the context of young people who live in the unique physical environment of a coastal town, to generate new knowledge about young people's relationships with place.

Creative Method 3: Photovoice

Wang and Burris (1997) described photo elicitation or photovoice as a method where people can 'identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique' (p. 369) with three main goals: to facilitate reflection, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge, and to reach policy makers. It is a form of participatory research and can be often used in community based projects (Budig et al., 2018). Typically, there are eight steps:

- 1.) Identification – people, place, purpose
- 2.) Invitation – to participants
- 3.) Education – what participation involves
- 4.) Documentation – response to prompts/questions through photography
- 5.) Narration – of the contents in a focus group
- 6.) Ideation – generation and analysis of themes
- 7.) Presentation – through various formats, for example, an exhibition to stakeholders
- 8.) Confirmation – an evaluative phase, including sustainability of project aims (Latz, 2017)

Using photographs was a suitable method to adopt with young people when examining their interpretations and meanings attributed to Morecambe as a community of place because it is an inclusive, enabling all young people to use photography to express their views. There have been criticisms of this method, primarily concerning its subjectivity and the photos being a distorted version of what they are trying to ‘illuminate’ (Prosser, 1996). However, it can be argued that the point of the photos are a participant’s response to a given prompt and that this facilitates subsequent deeper discussion. Photovoice has been said to both empower the participant and recognise them as experts in their own worlds (Tickle, 2019) which is central to the participatory aims of the study. Finally, the capturing of a visual image is a universally powerful way to express the narratives of young people which may be difficult to articulate in other ways.

5.5 Study Sample

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit young people for the research at both phases. Patton (2002) describes the power of purposive sampling as:

selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying

information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 273).

The emphasis on ‘information rich instances’ shows that purposive sampling was a suitable approach to recruit participants, given the adoption of a participatory methodology and creative methods to generate rich data. A comprehensive strategy was used (Farmer & Farmer, 2021), inviting participants to the research based on certain criteria. For both phases, young people were identified according to the definition of ‘young people’ articulated earlier in the chapter.

In phase two, a range of different youth organisations in the Morecambe community were contacted. The list of organisations was collated from my own existing knowledge of the local area and either phone calls or emails were sent about the research to gauge interest levels. Four different organisations responded and invited me to attend their weekly meetings in order to meet with young people and youth workers to provide information about the project and assess interest in participation. Pseudonyms have been attributed below to the different organisational sites approached during the phase two Morecambe case study in order to protect anonymity (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Summary of the different research sites

Organisation pseudonym	Services provided	Some features of young people who attend
Clock Tower	A range of community services for all ages, from exercise classes to mental health support.	LGBTQ+ young people Young people who need mental health support
Midland	Arts-based organisation open to whole community, providing various creative activities include music, performance, community events. Different types of group available for a range of ages.	LGBTQ+ young people Young people with social anxiety
Stone Jetty	A group for young people who find it difficult to socialise with others. A range of activities are on offer from crafting to games.	Young people with additional learning needs Young people with physical disabilities Young people with social anxiety
Winter Gardens	A safe space for young people to go where they can access support. Different creative activities are offered. Advice on employment and 'life skills' are also offered.	Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) Young people with social anxiety

The need to establish mutually trusting and respectful relationships between the researcher as an ‘outsider’ to these groups and the young people meant that approximately four weeks were invested visiting the sites and getting to know the young people before any data collection sessions took place. This involved spending time with and talking to the young people as well as taking part in the various activities they were doing as part of their group. Only then was the invitation to join the research project reissued where young people chose to either participate in the research sessions or not. The overall aim was to recruit up to 20 young people from across the four sites anticipating that this number of participants would allow for inclusion of a broad range of views whilst still being realistic to achieve within the research timeframe.

In total, 22 young people from Morecambe were recruited in phase two across the four different sites, and although participation sometimes varied at each session, most of the young people attended all of them. Every young person who participated has been assigned a representative letter as a pseudonym (Table 5.5); however some of the young people are not referred to specifically by their pseudonym in the data analysis. This might be due to the fact that they were predominantly involved in, for example, group ‘brainstorming’ activities where shared ideas were recorded on flipchart paper. Or it might be because some of the young people found verbalising themselves challenging, such as some of the young people who attended the Stone Jetty organisation. It should also be noted that in the presentation of the research findings (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) that all participants are referred to as they/them, partly as a matter of anonymity and partly for clarity, as there were several young Trans people in the sample.

Table 5.5: Summary of phase two Morecambe case study participants

Young participants	Age range	Youth/Community Group or Organisation	Number of participants
Participant A-I	13-17	Clock Tower	9
Participant J, K and R	13-24	Midland	3
Participant L-Q	13-17	Stone Jetty	6
Participant S-V	18-24	Winter Gardens	4

A distinction has been made in Table 5.5 between those who were under the age of 18 and those who were over the age of 18. This is mainly due to a particular section of the analysis in Chapter Eight which is especially related to ‘older’ young people. Specific demographic information, for example gender or specific ages, was not collected in order to protect the anonymity of the young people. This was important given that the research is situated in a particular place.

5.6 Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013, 2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) was a suitable method for analysing the data in this research because reflexivity involves ‘the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher and your research practice and process’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 5). This method aligns with the social constructionist perspective adopted in this research, where ‘reality is socially defined but this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life, how the world is understood rather than to the objective reality of the natural world’ (Andrews, 2012, p. 40). Both approaches are complementary in the principle that subjectivity and people’s perspectives and experiences are central to the production of knowledge.

Furthermore, Reflexive TA complemented the participatory methodology utilised as it supports the identification of patterns of meaning across the large and varied dataset which encompassed both text and images. The theoretical flexibility of Reflexive TA

also offered the possibility to generate themes inductively and deductively. Because an initial analysis of some of the data was conducted with the Young Researchers Group (Figure 5.7), broad themes were developed, creating a starting point for the researcher's in-depth analysis.

Involving the Young Researchers Group in data analysis

Firstly, because young people from across the different groups had been brought together for the first time and did not all necessarily know each other, the day began with two ice breaker activities. Following this, the 60 photovoice images taken by all of the young people, were presented on a large screen, taking approximately ten minutes. For this, the lights were dimmed in the room and young people were requested to refrain from talking or any distractions during the viewing, in order for the group to be able to fully immerse themselves in the imagery. Young people then engaged in a word association task based on what they had seen and the researcher noted the words and phrases on flipchart paper, sticking each sheet to the wall (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.6: Young Researchers Day



Figure 5.7: Young Researchers Day data analysis activity



This process lasted for about twenty minutes, until a ‘saturation’ point was reached, where no new information related to the research themes was evident in the data (Guetterman, 2015). The next step was to then begin to thematically group this data together. This process was repeated with extracts from the data from the research sessions about community belonging and loneliness, rather than photographs. Upon completion of these activities, the young people had generated an initial analytical framework (Table 5.6) that was utilised as a starting point to the researcher’s more in depth reflexive thematic analysis of the data.

Table 5.6: Themes co-created with Young Researchers

Co-created Initial Themes
Morecambe as a place of contrasts
The outside and nature is a positive feature
Scary places which can feel dangerous to us
Youth groups in Morecambe are good places
Family and friends are important
Supportive relationships make me feel I belong
Community is about acceptance and being included
Doing things together and being part of something is community
Everyone should be equal in a community

After lunch was provided for the group, the afternoon session was dedicated towards exploring ideas to present the research and identifying key stakeholders from the young people’s perspectives. Quite quickly, it was agreed that a photography exhibition was a powerful way to raise awareness about the research and engage the interest of many different people in the community. Young people searched for examples online of different photography exhibitions, and then began to plan what their exhibition might look like. This included which photographs were most suited to conveying their central themes and messages which were established in the data analysis session, so some discussion about which photographs could be used. Finally, young people considered where the exhibition could be presented and who they thought should know about it.

The flexibility of the Reflexive TA approach supported both the analysis of the three research themes of place, community belonging and loneliness as both separate entities, as well as making connections and comparisons across them. Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013, 2022) analytic method of a six step process was followed,

encompassing familiarisation with the data; coding; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes and finally writing up the findings.

The audio from each research session with the groups was transcribed by the researcher, to a play script format, and then anonymised. Other written data produced in the research sessions, such as flipcharts and post-it notes, were also typed up into word documents and any drawn data, such as the Splots and maps were photographed. All of the data was then uploaded to the software program NVivo 12 which was used to generate initial codes across the entire dataset.

Time was then spent immersed in the data through multiple readings and the creation of 'familiarisation notes', both across the dataset, as well as for the four different research sites in order to establish a deep knowledge of the data. As a researcher, prior experience and knowledge was brought into the analytic process, but full awareness of my own subjectivity, as a person local to the area, was maintained in order to minimise any bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, I also created notes about 'what I bring to the dataset' in order to establish my position as a researcher and to reflect upon my relationship with the data. My active engagement with the data aligns with 'the values of a qualitative paradigm, centring researcher subjectivity, organic and recursive coding processes, and the importance of deep reflection on, and engagement with the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 593). Further reflections on my positionality in relation to the data are presented on pages 124-128.

For the coding process, NVivo 12 software was used as this assisted efficient movement between the large amounts of data. The approach to coding was both deductive and inductive. Through the collaborative thematic analysis undertaken with the Young Researchers Group, the broad framework guided the in-depth analysis, connecting detailed data with their initial themes. To do this, I worked systematically through the data, identifying parts deemed significant and relevant to the research questions and assigned code labels. In order to ensure rigour, once the initial coding had been completed, the entire dataset was reread again, with reflection on the codes,

and in some cases, certain codes were evolved in order to capture greater nuance within parts of data. The data was deliberately read through in a different order to change the familiarity of what had been read the previous time, therefore ensuring a more ‘evenly’ coded dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

When the coding process was completed using NVivo 12, the analysis was continued manually. This involved printing out all of the code labels and grouping them into initial themes by hand. Several thematic maps of the themes and subthemes were created manually in order to view a ‘big picture’ of the patterns developed from the analysis. Following this, to develop and review the themes, the data was revisited in detail in order to check the validity of the themes in the dataset as a whole, within specific extracts of the data. This process was illustrative of Braun and Clarke’s assertion that Reflexive TA is recursive: going back and forth from the data and themes for further development and refinement was something that occurred repeatedly in order to ensure that the most meaningful data was captured in relation to the research questions.

Phase Five, refining, defining and naming themes was primarily achieved through a process of writing. Definitions of each theme were written in order to reflect whether the name of the theme was substantial enough to represent the central organising concept and how it related to the overall analysis and the ‘story’ that the research was telling. The final iteration of how the codes were grouped into themes and subthemes is presented in Figure 5.8. Phase Six, writing up, is presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Figure 5.8 Final table of codes and themes

	A	B	C
1	Codes	Main theme or subtheme	Overarching theme/chapter title
2	Natural beauty benefits of Morecambe are recognised	Critical comparisons of Morecambe	A place of contrasts
3	Unkempt to look at or not well maintained		
4	Things synonymous with Morecambe		
5	Unfulfilled potential in the town		
6	Morecambe is a place of creativity		
7	Some good activities in Morecambe for young people		
8	Community attempts to improve appearance of the town		
9	Negatively compared with other places in the local area	Negative comparisons with other places	
10	There is not enough to do for young people here		
11	Lack of opportunities in this area		
12	Impact of decision making on local residents		
13	People in power don't care enough		
14	Trying to boost tourism in area		
15	Good associations rooted in past glory days	Contrasts of the past with the present	
16	Generational differences can be evident		
17	A shared history of place		
18	Can't afford to take part in different types of activities	Exclusion through economic factors	
19	How deprivation affects young people		
20	Financial inequality amongst different young people		
21	Different challenges of seasonality		
22	Feeling unsafe or threatened in the community	Sense of threat is common in the community	
23	Where to avoid in Morecambe		
24	A range of experiences of discrimination		
25	Anti-social attitudes and behaviour of other people		
26	Feeling ashamed to live here	The impact of shame of place	
27	Feeling rooted to Morecambe		
28	My identity is partly shaped by where I am from		
29	Outside negative views of Morecambe	Outsider stigmatised views of Morecambe	
30	Insider stigmatisation of Morecambe and its people	Distinguishing between oneself and 'others'	

31	Being part of a community is a choice	Engagement with the concept of community	Inconsistent community (non)belonging
32	Being together and connecting		
33	Communities should have a purpose		
34	Doing things together		
35	Equality is essential to feel belonging		
36	Family as a community		
37	Feeling part of what everyone else does		
38	Having somewhere to go		
39	Having things in common with others		
40	Helping people is part of community belonging		
41	I wouldn't use the word community		
42	People I feel safe with		
43	Positive relationships make a community		
44	Spaces associated with memories	A variety of spaces can promote belonging	
45	Online communities to connect are sometimes useful		
46	School can be a community for students		
47	Any safe space feels secure and connected		
48	Some good outside spaces for autonomy		
49	Being known and knowing others creates sense of belonging	Supportive relationships with peers and professionals	
50	Importance of friendships for sense of belonging		
51	Supportive groups foster a sense of belonging		
52	I don't want to change myself to feel as though I belong	Authentic' belonging achieved through mutual respect	
53	Being different can make you feel like you don't belong		
54	Being laughed at by others feels disrespectful		
55	Acceptance by others for who I am		
56	School is not supportive	Let down by the school community	
57	Negative views of local schools		
58	Don't feel part of a school community		
59	Loneliness feels dark	Loneliness as a sense of nothingness	Internal and external forces of loneliness
60	Numbness and nothingness is loneliness		
61	Having a physical or mental barrier		
62	Physical ways that loneliness can be felt		

63	Not having the confidence to get to know others	<i>Making friends in your 20s is hard</i>	
64	Not being able to talk to anyone		
65	Not being with people I can connect with		
66	Finding it difficult to talk to other people		
67	Not knowing how to change being lonely		
68	Not knowing how to make friends		
69	Discriminatory attitudes of others	Exclusionary behaviour and attitudes of others	
70	Being bullied		
71	Being excluded from groups or events		
72	A breakdown or fragmenting of different relationships		
73	A lack of support		
74	Not feeling cared about by others		
75	It feels as though no one understands	<i>There's a lack of understanding and empathy</i>	
76	An inability to trust others		
77	Should be greater empathy in public spaces		
78	The transition to adulthood can feel sudden	Powerlessness in navigating challenging circumstances	
79	Traumatic or upsetting events		
80	Worrying about things can be a lonely experience		
81	Being physically apart like in lockdown		
82	Education to help young people understand loneliness	Learning social and emotional skills	
83	Learning both social and practical skills going into adulthood		
84	Developing local policies to be more inclusive for different needs	Improving accessibility to services and spaces	
85	How can I find out what is going on near me		
86	LGBTQ+ based events group and shops		
87	Mental health support needs to be more easily accessible		
88	More safe spaces for young people		
89	Need more choice for older young people		
90	Nothing to do beyond the groups and activities		
91	A wider range of activities for young people		
92	Have groups at certain days and times which are hardest		
93	Free groups and activities		

Young people chose to present the photovoice work at a central venue in the Arndale Shopping Centre in Morecambe. They decided that this would be an ideal place to display the work due to its high level of footfall and also because many of the shop units stood empty, therefore it seemed to be a good opportunity to utilise a window space. I contacted the Good Things Collective, a local arts-based charitable organisation, who assisted with the printing and hanging of the photographs (see Figure 5.9 below), as well as advertising (Appendix 7).

Figure 5.9: Photovoice exhibition at the Good Things Collective, Morecambe





A QR code was created and linked to an electronic feedback box, however, there were no responses submitted. Through communication with the staff at the Good Things Collective, it was evident that many people engaged with the photographs as they walked past, occasionally going in the building and asking for more information about the research. Following the photography exhibition, I produced a short summary report of the young people's views and specific suggestions about how young people could be supported in Morecambe. The Young Researchers Group identified stakeholders, including local council workers and youth centre managers who they wanted to know about their findings from the research. The summary report is included as Appendix 8.

5.7 Ethical Issues

As this research involved young people, formal safeguarding and ethical procedures were followed to ensure the welfare of them at all times. Ethical approval was gained for both phases from the University of Central Lancashire's Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit and the review panel for Business, Arts, Humanities and Social Science. Ethical issues were considered as an ongoing process throughout the research.

Risk of harm

The primary ethical concern was the health, safety and wellbeing of the young people participating in this research. Firstly, all of the necessary legal checks required to work with young people were obtained, including an 'Enhanced Disclosure' from the Criminal Records Bureau. I also familiarised myself with the University of Central Lancashire's Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults policy and undertook the university's online training module on Safeguarding Essentials. Also, as a secondary school teacher, I had Safeguarding and Prevent training as part of my previous role.

The decision to conduct the research sessions on the premises of young people's youth groups and organisations not only provided a safe, familiar and comfortable environment, but every session had a youth worker present who the young people knew well. The involvement of the youth workers provided essential support in the safeguarding of the young people because they were people they knew well and could talk to whenever they needed to. It was also important to have a responsible contact who could relate any important information that they needed to know before the research sessions and for them to communicate in kind after the sessions had taken place.

Creating an atmosphere of trust between the young people and the researcher was also an essential part of safeguarding. In addition to the aspects outlined above, a few weeks were spent building rapport and relationships with the young people before any of the research began, so they could get to know me better. This formed a trusting environment where young people understood that it was a safe space to be able to speak, whilst also knowing that they could freely decide to not be involved in a particular activity because of the potential sensitive nature of the topics. For example, through exploring the concepts of belonging and loneliness, difficult emotional responses could sometimes be elicited. On the few occasions this happened, they were asked if they would like to have a break and either speak to the youth worker privately or leave the data collection session and join in with the other young people in their group who were not part of the research. At the end of each research session, there was

always a 'debriefing' where young people could ask any questions and it also offered an opportunity to thank them for their participation. An information sheet was made available every session with details of support organisations which could also be contacted if required (Appendix 4).

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent to participate in the research was a key issue. The youth groups and organisations were visited in person so that I could introduce myself and give young people information about the research (Appendix 1), as well as information sheets for parents and guardians for those who were under the age of sixteen. The information included: who is invited to take part in the research; what young people will do in the research sessions; the Young Researchers Group; how to take part; who the research will help; staying safe; who the researchers are and how to find out further information. The opportunity to ask any questions was offered in person, as well as through email. Young people were then given consent forms (Appendix 2) which were also explained to them before they took them home to be either signed by themselves or a parent or guardian (Appendix 3). They were informed that if they wished to take part, that the researcher would return the following week to collect them, or they could be sent via email to the researcher's university email address.

Ethically and legally, it can be difficult to place a precise age for young people to give their own consent. The approach adopted in this case was that it was important to negotiate informed consent with young people themselves first, rather than obtaining it indirectly from parents or guardians (Gallagher, 2008). Those aged 16 or older could provide their own consent and those under the age of 16 needed to provide both their own consent as well as that of a parent or guardian. This decision was made in order to keep in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR). However, it is important to stress that consent with young people primarily was seen as an ongoing process and they were reminded every session that they if they did not wish to take part in a particular research session they did not have to without having to say why.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Young people's right to anonymity was maintained throughout the duration of the research and dissemination. All data was anonymised using randomised letters and any specific references which may have made a participant recognisable (for example, certain events or places) were removed from transcriptions or other written outputs.

The issue of whether to keep Morecambe itself anonymous or not was debated within the supervisory team. In one sense, anonymising where the fieldwork was conducted to a 'coastal town in the North West of England' seemed ethically wise in terms of confidentiality as well as trying to avoid personal concerns about further stigmatising an already stigmatised place. However, the reality of maintaining this in the research would be challenging (Brent, 2009). Furthermore, the importance of being able to contextualise the findings within Morecambe itself has implications for the impact the research can potentially have in the local community, therefore the decision was taken to identify Morecambe in the research.

Although confidentiality is closely linked to anonymity, it is taken to mean that specific information will not be identifiable to particular participants (Iphofen, 2011). Participants provided consent to be audio recorded during the research sessions which would be transcribed as part of the dataset. All audio was recorded on an encrypted dictaphone and saved on the University of Central Lancashire's password protected online secure server, along with other documents, such as creative outputs and consent forms, which contained any references to personal details. This was only accessible to myself and my PhD supervisors. Furthermore, the university's 'Data Protection Checklist' was completed which ensured that any data collected complied with data protection legislation and was safeguarded.

Use of incentives

The issue of using incentives in research with young people was also a key part of the ethical tensions in this study. There are differing views on how incentivising payments are used for young people involved in research, where it has been argued that financial remuneration can increase participation (Sime, 2008; Taplin et al., 2019), but generally there is no consensus to whether payments to young people who participate in research are appropriate or not (Kellett & Ding, 2004). In this research, the belief was that financial incentives were inappropriate, primarily because it was important that young people should not feel obligated to continue with the research if they no longer wished to. Even though specific socio-economic data about any young person was not recorded, the Morecambe area has significant levels of deprivation, felt even more keenly during Covid-19 lockdown.

Offering young people money to participate in the research was therefore deemed unethical. Instead, the building of good relationships with the young people and creating a positive atmosphere was prioritised, where the skills they would develop from participating were emphasised, and each young person was awarded a 'Certificate of Participation' and a bar of chocolate for their involvement, even if they did not participate in every session. Furthermore, food and drink were always provided to enjoy together at the beginning of each session, as part of building a sense of teamwork and creating an informal atmosphere. Young people who participated in the Young Researchers Group at a local community café, were also provided with lunch. As acknowledged by other researchers, showing respect and thanks to the young people who participated was of the utmost importance (Gibson, 2007).

5.8 Approach to Reflexivity

There is no single definition of what reflexivity is or how to do it in research. Berger (2015) suggests that there should be an increasing focus on how the researcher influences the production of knowledge, how different aspects of identity, biases and experience all shape research processes and outcomes. Luttrell (2019) also provides a useful overview:

Qualitative researchers work within and across social differences...and this requires them to navigate different layers of self-awareness...because researchers can be aware on one level but not on others, reflexivity is facilitated by using an eclectic and expansive toolkit for examining the role of the researcher, researcher-researched relationships, power, privilege, emotions, positionalities, and different ways of seeing. (p. 1)

In this research, I attempted to raise my 'self-awareness' throughout the different stages of the research. A reflexive approach was applied through critical reflection on the position of researcher, as well as considering how issues around power and representation impacted the research design, process and findings. A researcher's social, cultural, political and physical presence is very much embedded throughout the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In this project, I was keenly aware of how my own subjectivities would influence both the inquiry and its outcomes (Peshkin, 1988). Through questioning and reflecting on my identity and positionality throughout the process, I aimed to recognise my own role in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Healey, 2005; O'Boyle, 2018).

As a person who has grown up and lived near the Morecambe area, I brought strong, subjective local knowledge to the research. Furthermore, as a teacher at one of the local high schools for eight years, I was also aware of how my past experiences of working with young people who lived in Morecambe as an authority figure might shape the research. Prior to meeting with young people, they already had certain views about Morecambe as a place, based on their own experiences, as well as those of others. I also understood some of the issues affecting some young people who live in Morecambe through the professional relationships I had with the students I had taught. In this context, I considered myself to be somewhere between an insider and an outsider (O'Boyle, 2018) in the research process. Despite the knowledge brought to the research as an 'insider', as a former teacher, there was a clear imbalance of power between educator and student; however, in the context of the PhD research, I was also a student (albeit a mature student) engaged in participatory methods with young people, lessening my 'authority figure' presence. Additionally, as the recruitment

process was through youth groups and organisations, and the fact that the research sessions were conducted on their premises, I was very much a guest who was invited and welcomed by the young people who chose to participate. My presence was on their terms, therefore this created a different, more equalised power dynamic in a setting where I was the 'outsider'. This is further discussed in Chapter Nine.

One method frequently used to promote researcher reflexivity is diary writing. This was an approach I adopted to record thoughts post-research session with young people, reflecting on some of the practical challenges of the participatory approach. Although the legitimacy of using a reflexive diary is not without criticisms, for example, accusations of researcher self-indulgence (D'Cruz, 2007) and as a way of trying to add validity to certain qualitative research methods (Pillow, 2003), the process proved useful and notes were made judiciously to promote my own continuous self-appraisal. This was valuable because it could help to inform any changes to the plans for subsequent sessions. For example, in the first research session at the Clock Tower site, we were given a space in the corner of a large room to work in, where those who chose not to participate continued with their usual youth group activities. However, the noise levels were problematic.

I accidentally used my teacher voice when it got too loud (I was worried about the recording). Not good! I need to not do this. (Reflexive Diary, 25/11/21)

Recording my own awareness of assuming a teacher persona to try to control the noise levels was helpful because the consciousness of this moment was maintained in subsequent sessions. Also, in preparation for the following research session at this particular site, I was able to request a separate space to work in which improved not only the quality of the recording, but more importantly, everyone's focus in the session (including my own).

Another constructive use of diary keeping was that often it helped me to reflect on my emotional responses to conversations with the young participants. Due to the sensitive

nature of some of the research themes, some of the young people spoke very movingly about their experiences associated with loneliness.

I feel really privileged that R has begun to open up and speak so honestly about their experience of loneliness. Quite hard to be detached from what they're saying – the urge to say reassuring things, or try to help in some way is there but it is not my place. To hear them describe how hopeless they feel the situation is awful – to think someone so young feels so alone is difficult to hear.
(Reflexive Dairy, 25/4/22)

Both my position as an adult in the room, but also as a parent, often made me feel like I wanted to help. However, this was problematic because firstly, I am not trained in a relevant profession such as counselling, and secondly, because I was there in the role of a researcher and not a helping professional. From listening back to the recordings and transcribing the data, I sometimes struggled to maintain a neutral position and this tension between being the researcher and someone who has developed good relationships with the young people and organisations who have participated was experienced through every aspect of the process.

Occasionally, I was privy to other conversations before and after the research sessions with the youth workers – or unaccounted for social encounters (O'Boyle, 2018). This provided both important information regarding any particular incidents that I needed to be aware of, as well as an opportunity to debrief after the session with the youth worker. On one occasion, I was informed that a digital camera which had been lent to a young person as part of the photovoice task had been seized by the police in a house raid. After it was explained why this happened, I found myself dwelling on the incident for several days afterwards and becoming upset:

'How do I do this without becoming emotionally involved? Incident with the camera – upsetting. How can you be detached as a researcher? Is it possible? Two binary ideas – trust, relationships building, collaboration versus

detachment even in the circumstances of young people's traumatic experiences. How can this be managed?' (Reflexive Diary, 27/2/22)

Further thinking about this event led to a Saturday evening Teams call with my PhD supervisor to address two key issues: firstly, feeling helpless when listening to the difficulties some young people faced, and secondly, concerns about how my emotional engagement may impact the research. The supervisor provided the voice of reason, articulating that combining different perspectives and experiences is part of knowledge construction, and that the critical awareness of these emotional factors, can also actually promote deeper understanding (D'Cruz, 2007; Healey, 2005; Mills & Kleinman, 1988).

Power and representation

Issues concerning complex power relations are an important consideration in qualitative research with young people (Gallagher, 2008). As already outlined earlier in the chapter, the participatory methodology was adopted to place young people at the centre of the research, prioritising their views and experiences, as well as collaborating with them on data analysis and dissemination activities to preserve and promote their voices as much as possible. Garrett (2013) underlined the importance of researcher reflexivity in such endeavours “‘Speaking for/about’ an underrepresented tradition or group especially calls for self-reflexivity because of the insulating effects of good intentions’ (p. 248). Furthermore, the risk of speaking for an underrepresented group could actually reinforce the power imbalance, rather than act as empowering (Alcoff, 1991). Luttrell (2019) asks ‘who has the power as well as the right to tell another’s story, for whom, and with what consequences?’ (p. 5). This question has been an important way to keep critically aware of the responsibility to the young people and how they are represented, in trying to maintain focus on their views and experiences, rather than them becoming ‘the fixed object of inquiry for scholars, or the problem to be solved for policymakers’ (Hyndman & Giles, 2011, p. 367). Being reflexive throughout every stage of the research has meant that I have tried to navigate my ‘good intentions’ for young people in Morecambe in order to represent their experiences as authentically as possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

CHAPTER SIX FINDINGS: A PLACE OF CONTRASTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to young people's sense of place. The first theme explores young people's perceptions of place, described in terms of the different 'Critical comparisons of Morecambe' they made, whether between contrasting aspects of the physical environment; or as shown in the two subthemes '*Negative comparisons with other places*' and '*Contrasts of the past with the present*'. The next main theme presents 'Exclusion through economic factors' where young people articulated their different experiences related to economic exclusion, followed by another main theme, 'Sense of threat is common in the community' which describes where young people perceived to be unsafe, through feeling either threatened or because of crime related problems. As a result, young people's desire for safety was a significant aspect in order to feel connected to place.

In light of these preceding themes, 'The impact of shame of place' is presented, where young people explored the impact a detrimental sense of place can have on themselves. Following this, subthemes describing the consciousness of '*Outsider stigmatised views of Morecambe*' as well as '*Distinguishing between oneself and others*' represent how living in a stigmatised place shapes both the views of other people in addition to their own views. As Morecambe is the case study in this research, links are made to wider literature and theoretical positions which are developed further in the discussion of Chapter Nine.

6.2 Critical comparisons of Morecambe

One theme central to young people's experience of Morecambe as a place was demonstrated through making critical comparisons. This theme had three sub-themes; these included a comparison of natural, physical attributes with man-made features which have been poorly maintained; making negative comparisons of Morecambe with other places; and comparisons between a better past and a poorer present.

The physical place of Morecambe was considered by young people to be a place of competing contrasts: it was both a natural coastal landscape with many attractive and beneficial features, whilst simultaneously being a place which they felt was poorly maintained. Young people spoke about the physical landscape in Morecambe as a positive attribute of place. They perceived several advantages of living in a coastal area; not only was there visual beauty, but it was also a place where the outside space was conducive to different activities happening. This is exemplified by comments from young people about the beach:

The beach is beautiful and the prom is a very nice place. I can just go bike riding and roller-skating. And then walk along, and say if the tide's in, or if the tide's out sometimes, it kind of looks like it's just white. If you're riding past it, it just kind of looks like there's nothing there. Really beautiful. (Participant J)

The beach and the promenade are recognised by young people as central features of the Morecambe landscape and the young people acknowledged the physical beauty of the coastline, labelling it as one of Morecambe's 'nice' spaces. The landscape enables these young people to make the most of the outdoor space to partake in different types of activities in a beautiful setting. The description of the colour and the repeated use of the word 'beautiful' in the quotation above suggest a sense of pride in this unique aspect of Morecambe and enjoyment garnered from their engagement with the landscape. These affirming views resonate with the reported health benefits of the coastal landscape, such as increased physical activity and social interactions (Ashbullby et al., 2013) and higher perceived wellbeing (Ryan, 2012).

This sentiment was echoed by others, to whom the landscape is perceived as something of value to people who live there, although it may sometimes be taken for granted:

I don't think we appreciate it as much as we could and how much that it should be appreciated because we're lucky to actually have it, but sometimes we do appreciate it. (Participant B)

An acknowledgment of how fortunate the residents are to live in an area which has outstanding natural beauty is made here, yet the view that this is often taken for granted could arise from the tension involved in comparing its being both part of the valued everyday natural landscape for residents with, at the same time, it being at least in part, poorly maintained. Many of the photographs taken by young people when asked to capture what Morecambe means to them, commonly featured the coastal landscape (Figures 6.1 and 6.2) indicating their value to young people as significant aspects of Morecambe's identity.

The focus on the beach and the shoreline, often framed by the sun setting, features in 16 out of the 60 photographs taken by young people, highlighting the coastal environment as a perceived asset for them. It is an aspect that young people associate with Morecambe, suggesting both the importance of the coastline in their lives, as well as implying that it is something to be proud of.

Figure 6.1: View from the promenade

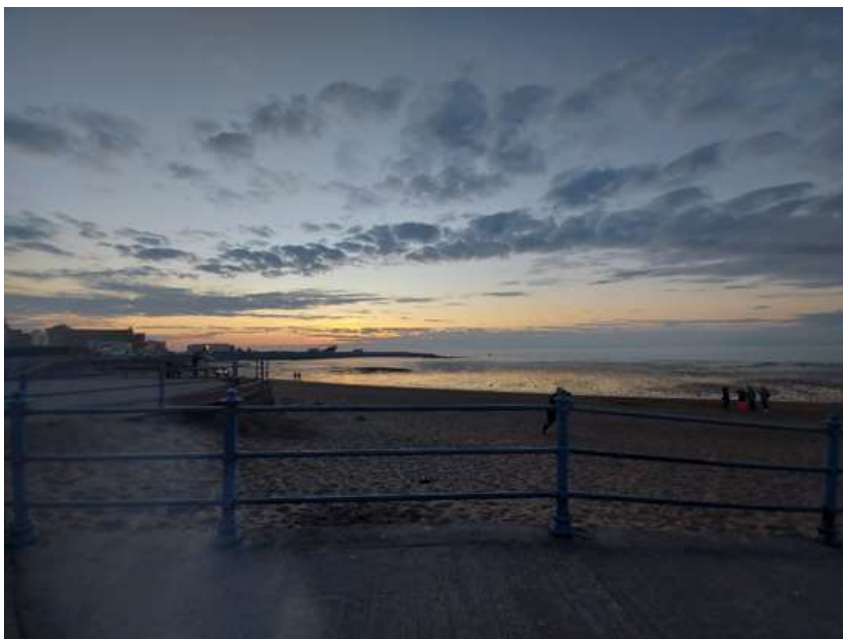


Figure 6.2: View from the Stone Jetty



Young people also discussed aspects of Morecambe's physical environment which they felt were distinctive, such as the different types of metal crafted seabirds which are displayed in various ways throughout the town. These featured in seven of their photographs (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Unique metal seabirds which feature around Morecambe





When choosing the photographs for the exhibition, young people identified that these pieces of artwork formed part of the character of Morecambe as a place; that they were unique and interesting. How 'place' is characterised by those who live there is an important aspect of how young people form their sense of place (Anholt, 2009); recognisable features such as these suggest young people's pride in their distinctiveness.

However, in contrast to the more positive aspects of the physical environment, young people had greater focus on the unkempt aspects of the town. This demonstrated that although there was a perception of Morecambe as 'beautiful,' to many of the young people, the majority of them also considered it a place which was not well maintained. The appearance of some of the man-made aspects of the Morecambe landscape tell a different story to the photographs and opinions of the natural landscape. In a discussion with young people about the photographs one young person remarked:

It's even like something like the Midland Hotel, which is probably like the highest class in Morecambe. Even that is getting run down. In those photos it's getting dirty. There's no maintenance of things. There's new ideas, but then once they get built or whatever, they just slowly fade away again. (Participant S)

In Figure 6.4 below the deterioration of the outside of the well-known Midland Hotel on Morecambe's seafront has been captured by one young person. The hotel is often seen as Morecambe's crowning glory from the perspective of the tourist board, having undergone significant renovation in 2006 in saving the building from dereliction.

Figure 6.4: Exterior of the Midland Hotel's Rotunda bar



Figure 6.4 visually encapsulates the once white exterior of the hotel appearing now dirty and uncared for. The comment that *'Even that is getting run down'* suggested a frustration that the lack of maintenance to different places and spaces within the town is not being addressed: local people know that the renovation of the hotel was an expensive project but it now seems to have been forgotten about. In the quotation above, participant S expresses a frustration that there is the will for the betterment of Morecambe, and yet it just does not come to fruition. This is further exemplified through several young people highlighting the fact that there are places boarded up, whether in the town centre (for example Figures 6.5-6.8), or shops near one young person's neighbourhood.

Figure 6.5: Morecambe town centre



Figure 6.6: Empty shopping unit in town centre



Figure 6.7: Boarded up windows in town



Figure 6.8: Morecambe town centre



Participant U gave a depressing image of the town centre in the evening.

I've been to the Burger King once and where it was, everywhere else was closed or boarded up again and so the Burger King was actually the main and like top quality [thing].

Here participant U presented a gloomy image of a closed up town centre at night where the lack of investment is evident in this physical representation. In addition to this, the visual message which is conveyed suggests a place which is not really cared for. Furthermore, the sense of Morecambe as place that is neglected was accentuated by young people drawing attention to the problem of litter and the general sense of 'dirtiness' they felt about the town. Two young people, who have previously lived elsewhere in the south of England, made unfavourable comparisons between these places and Morecambe:

Researcher: *Is it different to where you lived before?*

Participant K: *It's very different. This place when you look out the window it's all dark and gloomy, but during the day it's sometimes nice and bright. But where we used to live it was always nice. It was always clean and very beautiful.*

Participant J: *There was no litter, well, there would occasionally be a little bit of litter.*

Participant K: *But people would just pick it up. People around here just add to it.*

Participant J: *Yeah people back will where we used to live the people who just walk around if they saw a piece of litter on the floor, they would pick it up and they would put it in the bin. You do not see it here.*

Direct comparisons were made by the young people between the behaviours and attitudes of people living in the two contrasting places. In their previous area of residence, greater care from the public to maintain the physical appearance of the town was given, however, in Morecambe, they believe that '*people add to it*' implying they believed some people in Morecambe do not care enough, or perhaps think that other people lack pride in where they live. Seven other young people expressed their frustrations with Morecambe's litter problem through photographs (Figure 6.9) which capture different areas around the town centre and along the promenade and the beach.

Figure 6.9: Litter around Morecambe



6.9a



6.9b



6.9c



6.9d



6.9e

The images taken by the five young people provided a visual representation of the theme of ‘critical comparisons’. Through their photography, they showed powerful contrast between elements of Morecambe’s beautiful natural landscape on the coast (for example Figure 6.9a); Morecambe’s quirky art work around town (Figure 6.9b); the promenade (Figures 6.9c, 6.9d and 6.9e) and the careless discarding of dirty litter which sullies them. These deteriorations can be linked to place realisation (Seamon, 2013), an important dimension of place attachment. If young people view that the place where they live has deteriorated in some way, their bond to place can become resultantly damaged and negatively impact their sense of place.

However, in contrast to this, in a different discussion regarding an empty parcel of land where the theme park Frontierland was sited (prior to its closure in 1999), three young people spoke about how the Morecambe community came together to do something about the derelict spot:

I'd say [Morecambe is] vibrant 'cause of where the old Frontierland used to be, there's a bunch of paintings across the walls. (Participant A)

I don't know if it's still there but there's the ranch house used to be between that and all the animals that area...it had animals and stuff painted, like sea life painted on it. I don't know if it's still there or not. (Participant V)

I know they've got loads of artwork now put up along there. (Participant U)

Young people showed appreciation for the efforts which were made by members of the community to take action to do something with this large, unused space. The creation of vibrant artwork by people who live in the community to prettify and add colour to an area which has remained undeveloped for over 20 years suggests these residents have pride in Morecambe. This is an illustration of how positive, community driven action has resulted in small scale change which people around the community recognise. It exemplifies people feeling as though they have a 'stake in the future' of their community (Anthias, 2006, p. 21) and that they belong (Habib & Ward, 2019). Yet there is also a sense that this is felt as regrettable: the fact that the community was motivated to take action is also a recognition that no one else will.

Negative comparisons with other places

Frequent comparisons were made between Morecambe and other local places, including other coastal places and usually to the detriment of Morecambe. For example, Morecambe was described as a '*Bad Blackpool*,' (Young person U) and '*Even Blackpool puts it down*' (Young person A). This perception is interesting in several ways. Blackpool, which is approximately 40 miles to the south of Morecambe, has its own share of seaside town place-stigma, so the notion that Morecambe is 'worse' emphatically demonstrates the town's undesirability from the perspective of these young people. It simultaneously suggests also dual stigmatisation of place from both the inside and outside (this is further expanded upon later in the chapter), where there was the view that although Blackpool is not a 'good' seaside town, Morecambe still compares unfavourably to there.

Morecambe was described in relation to other local towns which surround it:

[It is a] false centrepiece because we've got Fleetwood, Blackpool, to the South, we've got Lancaster to the West, we got Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth,

Kendal. Also to the West we've got a bit of Cumbria which is already more attractive than Morecambe. (Participant B)

This geographical description suggests young people feel that Morecambe might share similarities with these surrounding towns. However, the young person's view that Morecambe is a '*false centrepiece*' in the Morecambe Bay area implied the town's inferiority through the comparisons with other areas. Instead of being the central attraction, which the reference to 'centrepiece' would suggest, it is viewed as a lesser place compared to the others and that the attribution 'centrepiece' is itself misplaced.

Moreover, Morecambe was frequently and unfavourably compared by some young people to the adjacent city of Lancaster, suggesting their outwards looking gaze to other places is due to how they perceived Morecambe as a place where there is less for young people to do, or that their view of these places is conditioned by their perception of their hometown. Two participants discussed this sense of the lack of activities in Morecambe for them:

Participant G: *Everything's like more Lancaster for all entertainment.*

Researcher: *So would you generally go to Lancaster then?*

Both: *Yeah, yeah.*

Participant G: *If you want entertainment, you go to Lancaster.*

Participant B: *You have to go to Lancaster. The only entertainment place [here] is the cinema and it's really naff...*

Participant G: *Then you've got bowling...I don't think I can name any more, the rest of them are in Lancaster. Like in Lancaster you've got escape rooms and all that.*

Participant B: *You've got the arcades underneath Soul Bowl.*

Participant G: *There's just a lot more to do.*

Participant B: *There is. You've got like shopping places, cafes. A better bigger cinema.*

Morecambe's main entertainment venues are articulated as the 'naff' cinema which is older than the larger, modern cinema in Lancaster; the bowling alley and the arcades, contrasted with Lancaster's escape rooms; shops and cafés. Young people adamantly expressed that there is a lack of provision for young people in their hometown, preferring to go elsewhere. Arguably, from the young people's list of activities, Morecambe seems to have a similar number to Lancaster. However, regardless of this, young people *perceived* that this is not the case. This is important because having access to a range of resources can have positive effects on wellbeing (Lenzi et al., 2013) and also increase sense of belonging to community (Estrella & Kelley, 2017; Morgan et al., 2019). Therefore the deficit in resources here has negatively impacted young people's sense of belonging to their community.

This viewpoint is echoed by participant M who spoke of how they saw Lancaster as being prioritised over Morecambe by the local council, as both areas are within Lancaster City Council.

It doesn't feel like progress [in Morecambe] is there naturally. You've got to work for it. It's sort of plateauing. The attention is always going to be for Lancaster. It's like no one important cares. It's a problem of the politics, not the place...Morecambe has this feeling of being a place that has everything it should need yet whatever reason, be that lack of investment, there will be that lack of interest. I think deep down it's not that different from Lancaster.
(Participant M)

This is a perceptive argument, demonstrating a keen awareness that Morecambe could be a place of entertainment and activities which caters for young people, but the orientation of council spending does not seem to meet the needs of the young people who live there and this is symptomatic of the feeling that 'no one important cares'. Additionally, participant M's view that Morecambe is actually not all that different to Lancaster suggests the power of perception. Young people perceived that Morecambe is not a good place for them to be because of the lack of provision; but this perception is likely to be shaped by multiple factors rather than just the reality of what facilities

and activities are actually in the town. A sense of powerlessness is encapsulated through participant M's words, that regardless of Morecambe having *'everything it should need'* it feels lacking. Feeling that Morecambe is treated unfairly by local powers who seem to prioritise Lancaster appears to suggest that they perceived a lack of care for Morecambe, therefore a lack of care for themselves. Participant K articulated their experience of feeling overlooked: *'What's the point of being here if no one is going to appreciate you?'*. This is an effective illustration of how young people feel the injustice of being 'kept in their place' by those who wield power (Tyler, 2020).

Contrasts of the past with the present

The majority of young people spoke about Morecambe's heritage and the landmarks for which it is well known. Multiple mentions in all four of the groups were made about the Eric Morecambe statue (Figure 6.10) and the associations of the bygone comedy duo, Morecambe and Wise.

Figure 6.10: Eric Morecambe statue



In their discussions young people reminisced about Morecambe's past, even though this was from a time before they were born, demonstrating the power of the 'passed down' narratives of what Morecambe used to be like. Morecambe was described as '*an echo of time*' (flipchart notes, Clock Tower site) providing an apt metaphor to illustrate how Morecambe is beholden to its past, often to the detriment of its young people in the present. This idea is further expanded in the discussion with the group:

Researcher: *Do you think visitors appreciate [Morecambe] more than residents?*

Participant F: *Most of the time, yeah, 'cause that's what they mainly come for. They mainly come for the views and attractions.*

Participant I: *Yeah, but Morecambe used to be like the most visited place ever.*

Participant F: *Er, second most. 'Cause it had Bubbles outside, the outdoor pool. They had the beauty pageant at the swimming pool. If the Polo Tower was still there, I would have actually took a picture of that, but it's been pulled down.*

Researcher: *So when you hear about people talking about how Morecambe used to be years and years ago...oh, lots of people came on holiday, Frontierland and Bubbles and everyone thought it was great.*

Participant F: *Yeah, but most people can't come to here now because there's barely any hotels round. I actually only know in Morecambe about the Midland Hotel. I don't know about any others.*

Many of the young people displayed a confidence that they understood what Morecambe used to be like and they knew that it was formerly a popular tourist destination in the mid to late half of the twentieth century. A sense of pride was evident; they knew about old attractions that were significant both locally and for tourism, such as the outdoor swimming pool, Frontierland and the Polo Tower. This demonstrated how nostalgic conversations about Morecambe's past occur between different generations, as these landmarks were all gone before any of the young people

were born. On one hand, this suggests that these intergenerational conversations are important to learning about Morecambe's heritage and to instilling pride of place through the sharing of social memories (Stockdale et al., 2018) which can increase connection to place. On the other hand, the impact these conversations can simultaneously have on young people has also promoted a focus on how Morecambe is a worse place now and it has less than it used to, exacerbating a sense of limited opportunities in the present. This can be illustrated when participant F stated that if the Polo Tower had still been there, they would *'have actually took a picture of that,'* the implication being that there are less things worth photographing now, to the extent that they think about what is *not* there to photograph. This sense of Morecambe being a 'depleted' place could be linked to the lack of care young people feel is given to Morecambe.

In terms of the different generations who live in Morecambe, participant T made a comparison between older residents in Morecambe and the young people who live there. They had several generations of their family living in Morecambe and they reflected on whether people felt proud to live there.

Researcher: *T, what do you think? Family, friends, neighbours, people that live in the area. Do you think people like living in Morecambe and they are proud to be from here?*

Participant T: *I think maybe older people are, but I think lots of younger people, probably don't like it because there's like not a lot for younger people...like there's some stuff, but there's not like lots of different stuff.*

Researcher: *And so you think that can make people not feel proud to be from there? Or do you think they just wish it was sort of a bit better?*

Participant T: *Yeah, like if there's like not much going on, then it's not a very good place.*

Participant T's point suggests that Morecambe appears to be a place for older people rather than the younger generation because there is *'not a lot for younger people,'*

therefore young people might not feel proud to be from Morecambe. It also reinforces the previous point made that from the perspective of young people, Morecambe was a better place in the past, a time associated with older generations who have the memories of what it used to be like. This supports the comparisons made by several other young people, that perceptions of the past and the older generations who talk about the past can reinforce how the present is poorer. The tension experienced between the pride of heritage and the desire to seek out better opportunities in another place because Morecambe has been allowed to fade from its former glory days was evident. This dichotomy of being rooted whilst simultaneously desiring to leave (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Frost & Catney, 2020) was evident, creating a bond to place which was variable.

6.4 Exclusion through economic factors

Permeating the discussion of place, was the topic of financial hardship which was a key factor which impacted how young people felt excluded, overlooked and uncared for. Participant M described these challenges as being a *'problem of the politics'*. While there was some suggestion from the data that the young people demonstrated an understanding of the different forms that inequality can take, there was, in their responses, a strong indication also that the inequality faced by the town was general in its character, that is Morecambe (simply) does not get its 'fair share', for example, *'there are not enough jobs'* (flipchart notes, Clock Tower site). The impact that the financial hardship has on families' daily lives was clearly articulated by young people.

In the feasibility phase of the research, one young person articulated the visibility of economic hardship within the town:

There's so much poverty in Morecambe, food poverty, healthcare poverty, education poverty, fuel poverty it's just so insane because part of the reason it continues is because you have that divide between people who are better off and people who aren't and when you do an average across all households it looks okay but it's not. (Group 2, feasibility phase)

The repetition of the word 'poverty' emphasises how strongly this young person felt about the sharp inequalities which exist in the town. Their awareness that poverty infiltrates every aspect of many people's daily lives demonstrates how evident it is in the community. This is further exacerbated through the contrast with others who are wealthier in the area; highlighting clear inequalities within the community. As another participant summarised:

There are very visible divides between the working class and the middle class in the sense that when you're walking through Morecambe you can tell what area you're in by looking around you...I think that divide is more noticeable in coastal towns and cities. (Group 2, feasibility phase)

By describing the divides in the town as being very 'visible', it is evident that the participant felt that there is a visual inescapability about how poor some areas of the town are. This suggests that it may serve as a perpetual reminder to the people who live there that it is a place divided.

When discussing activities available in Morecambe for young people, affordability was also a key concern with others:

Participant B: Somethings like Jump Rush are for young people but not too pricey 'cause some people struggle with money...

Participant A: Well there's the cinema and then there's Jump Rush which is like seven pounds a person.

Participant I: Really pricey.

Money is a dominant concern here; the two activities in Morecambe mentioned for young people are regarded as too expensive. Unaffordability excludes them from being able to participate. This was further supported by two other young people:

Participant J: *Most of the time and in most places that we go to have fun, it's like, way way expensive.*

Participant K: *Like that new Eden Project, they say it'll be somewhere to go, then you realise you'll have to pay to get in.*

The idea that most places these young people can go to 'have fun' are 'way way expensive' demonstrates how exclusionary many of the available activities are for the young people who live there. Not only does unaffordability prevent young people from joining in (Wilson & Milne, 2016), but it is a clear (and possibly sometimes public) reminder that they do not have enough money. Even the Eden Project North, a £100 million proposed eco-tourist attraction, (which was notably rarely mentioned by any of the young people in any of the research sessions), a significant investment in Morecambe, was seen as being something that will not be 'for' local young people, as the entrance fees will exclude many of them. The knowledge of the financial investment in their town, albeit from the 'outside', which should create optimism and excitement, appears to be another example of exclusion and can actually make people feel displaced from where they live (Butcher & Dickens, 2016).

Participants also discussed the shops in the town centre, which was widely recognised as having few good shops, especially as many of the retail units in the Arndale shopping centre currently stand empty. Aside from the fact that this furthers the visual depiction of an uncared for town, the lack of affordability of amenities available was of concern to young people:

Participant V: *The Arndale is on sale.*

Participant T: *I don't know if anybody been in the Arndale recently, but there's less shops opened than there is closed.*

Participant V: *There's this one little shop that kept changing. I remember one time it was this little clothes shop. The clothes in there were expensive which is why it probably didn't do so well. It had all these like fancy dresses; I actually went in there one time to get something for a little party. It was pretty much*

like a last minute thing – needed to find something to wear. I suppose it was okay, but it does feel like...I think most shops seem to be quite expensive and seem to see Morecambe as...we can't seem to afford much.'

Participant V's experience of buying a dress for a social event exemplifies the disconnection between what local young people want and need, and the actual provision. Their experience of going to the clothes shop to find something to wear subtly expresses the challenges they faced with not only having a restricted choice of shops, but also the fact that the shops they do have are just too expensive. Their use of the collective pronoun 'we' is interesting; participant V, perhaps inadvertently, spoke on behalf of the collective in this example, symbolising that this form of exclusion is the source of common or shared experience. Their illustration suggests the need for investment into the Morecambe retail sector so young people have greater *choice*, thereby preventing there being no alternative to seeking provision elsewhere in another place and feel the shame of financial exclusion.

Two other young people expressed similar views as they focused on the problem with local shops which had minimum spends:

Participant I: *Small shops can be pretty expensive...*

Participant A: *There is one thing I don't like about like corner shops around here. There's a limit, you can spend like...there's a corner shop next door right around the corner from my house and you've got to spend four pound minimum on your card.*

Participant I: *Yeah, that's a bit ridiculous, like mainly when it's only food...it's a bit much to spend on like food.*

When households are functioning on a very limited budget, this minimum spend requirement can be a problem. The anger felt that a family may be unable to buy food items from the shop 'around the corner from my house' because they cannot spend the minimum four pounds needed is felt to be unfair as well as a source of embarrassment.

Young people are keenly aware of the existing poverty in Morecambe (whether in their own families or in the town in general) and understand the powerlessness this instils.

6.5 Sense of threat is common in the community

In all the group discussions with young people, concerns about safety in the community were dominant. This was a combination of both physical aspects of certain areas in Morecambe, as well as the experiences of threatening behaviour from other people. There were seven examples of which some of the young people had direct, recent experiences of this. Participant A described their experience of being under attack:

Participant A: *On the way to school and on the way back.*

Researcher: *Who do you tell about that? Is there someone who you can report that to?*

Participant B: *No. 'Cause some people don't listen to you. They don't believe you at all.*

Participant A: *I keep getting jumped. I've got places where I can't go because there's people waiting around the corner.*

Researcher: *So what places on the map that you don't feel safe where you get jumped?*

Participant A: *It's near my house.*

Researcher: *Where else do you feel like that? That's really important.*

Participant B: *It happens in the West End a lot.*

The fact that this can happen on the typical journey to and from school, shows that this experience is not out of the ordinary. They believed that there was no longer any point in reporting such incidents, exemplified through participant B's comment that no one would listen or believe them, therefore they would not even try. The lethargy implied

with the regularity of being 'jumped' and feeling unsafe – on the way to school, near their home and 'in the West End a lot' suggests a certain level of acceptance that 'this is just how it is' and that there is not anything that they feel they can do about it.

Similarly, participant J described feeling threatened in the local park:

Participant J: *I was at the park the other day and I was defending this girl who didn't speak English and they were just being rude to her. They were trying to ask her if they could go on the swing, but she didn't know what they were saying and they were being rude to her because just because she didn't know what they were saying and then I went over and said just leave the girl alone and then they just started being rude to me. I didn't know what I was meant to say back to it, so I told the girl to go, and then I when I was walking off, they started following me. I walked outside the park, just around the park, like I took four right turns and they were still following me. I started to walk the opposite way to my house, 'cause obviously I don't want to go home and they just kept following me.*

Participant K: *Should have gone to a friend's house.*

Participant J: *I did.*

Researcher: *How were you feeling when you realised they were still following you?*

Participant J: *I turned around because I dropped something. I looked up and they were just like 10 metres away and I felt scared. So I started running. I ran as fast as I could and then they just started running after me. I was running for about five minutes and then they just got bored and walked away. But I did not feel safe at all. There was people K's age with an adult.*

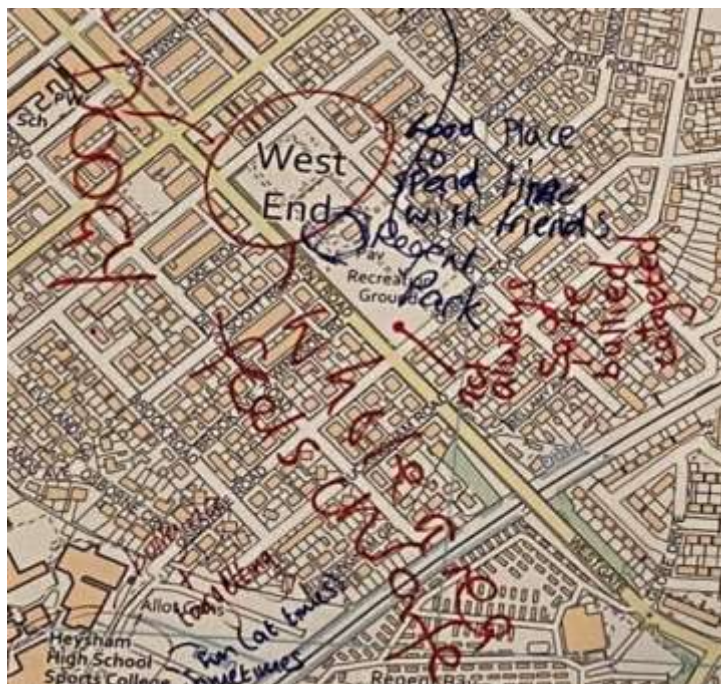
Researcher: *Are you likely to go back there do you think?*

Participant K: *I might with friends. I'm not going on my own.*

Being followed by a group of people following a well-meaning intervention to help the young girl was intimidating. The hostile behaviour of the group, experienced in the local park during the day, created a sense of fear in participant J when they realised they were being followed. The fact that they made a deliberate change in direction to avoid being followed home suggested their genuine concern to prevent anyone knowing where they live. The act of running is an instinctive, physical response to the experience of fear, showing participant J's perception of the threat posed in this situation. The fact that they are unlikely to go back to the park on their own shows the power that this intimidating event has had on their attitude to risk in the town's public sphere. For a young person to feel too afraid to be able to go to a public space in their hometown even during the day has excluded them from this space (Thomas et al., 2012). It was evident that fear had a damaging impact on attachment to place through these negative place interactions with others in the community (Seamon, 2013).

This sense of threat, when out in certain parts of Morecambe, increased at night time. Young people identified particular areas on maps of the town to illustrate where they did not feel safe (Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11: Areas where young people feel unsafe



6.11a

The West End area was a particular concern where the *'whole area feels unsafe'* and *'dodgy'* (Figures 6.11a and 6.11b). Young people also identified the promenade (Figure 6.11c), a place which dominates the landscape during the day, as a place to *'avoid'* at night time, partly because of *'no lighting.'* One young person expressed their views which were reinforced by the youth worker present at the discussion:

Participant T: *Well, it's mainly anywhere at night, but that's like more than my mum she doesn't like me going places at night.*

Youth worker: *I think that's understandable though, because you've got to be careful, haven't you? At night on your own as well, anyway.*

Participant T: *Yeah, and the prom has like almost no light in on this bit, it's mainly on the roads, so it's quite dark. Even when it's like just getting dark.*

For such a large key space in Morecambe to feel inaccessible when darkness falls due to poor lighting, is exclusionary for many young people, especially in the autumn and winter months. Being able to access safe spaces, where young people do not experience a sense of threat is important for young people's sense of autonomy in their own communities. This is especially true when they already perceive that there is a lack of resources for them.

Concerns were also expressed by the groups about the threat associated with local crime. These ranged from drug use to violent acts both experienced by young people and through passed on narratives from peers and/or family. Two young people discussed the visibility of drugs in the West End area in particular:

Participant K: *That's a very druggy street.*

Participant J: *There's drugs everywhere.*

Participant K: *It's just on that corner you see everyone smoking weed, literally on [name of street]. It's disgusting...*

Participant J: *Just the West End in general isn't a great place, is it?*

Participant K: *The whole of Morecambe, you go anywhere and you can smell some sort of weed or drugs.*

Participant J: *Yeah, like everywhere around is very drug heavy, alcohol.*

The discussion indicated that the young people were very aware of the problem of substance misuse in particularly deprived areas. Their perceptions were expressed in a 'matter of fact' tone, suggesting their lack of shock; it did not seem to be an uncommon occurrence to see or smell illegal drugs use. There was an element of resignation that that this is typical in certain areas of the community. This general awareness of substance misuse was supported further by participant L:

Participant L: *It's like cocaine and things, like quite dangerous...especially if a packet's lying out you can actually...a kid can pick that up and think 'Ooo it's a sweet'.*

Researcher: *Have you actually seen that in Morecambe?*

Participant L: *No but I've heard it. Just generally.*

Participant L's perceptions of the community suggest that reputation and hearsay have power. Whether this event has ever really happened or not was almost immaterial to them. It suggests that, regardless of truth, it is believable for participant L in the context of certain areas in the town. For young people who live in Morecambe, this can shape their perceptions of place and how threatened they feel within a community which they perceive as having a 'drug problem'.

During the discussions about safety in the town, several young people spoke about violent acts which had happened recently:

Researcher: *You think of a young person from Morecambe, what springs to mind?*

Participant E: *Street robbery. That's what comes to mind. I can't spell!*

Participant B: *I put violence.*

Participant D: *Why is everything I've put negative?*

Participant B: *Everything I've put is negative...that's how it is though generally.*

Participant D: *Well two minutes away from my house someone was shot in the head.*

Participant A: *That was [omitted].*

Participant B: *There's also knife crime with a couple of lads a while ago.*

Citing 'Street robbery' and 'violence' as initial responses is a telling indicator of their perception of place which is detrimental. This was further exemplified by references to someone being shot in the head near the house of participant D and the recent knife crime 'with a couple of lads'. Young people's knowledge of these occurrences and the fact that they have generally characterised young people from Morecambe, suggest a powerful awareness of some of the social problems their community faces. However, similarly to the responses in relation to the presence of drug problems in parts the community, a certain desensitisation could be interpreted from the way that young people spoke about such matters. For example, when participant D observed that everything they had recorded was negative, the response of participant B was 'That's how it is though generally'. This suggests that there is a sense of powerlessness in the face of such threatening incidents because these types of events are woven securely into parts of the community fabric, therefore for some of the young people, there was an acceptance of this as normal or typical in the community. It also exemplifies place realisation (Seamon, 2013); that the sense of place is damaged because of anti-social and criminal activity, therefore there is further deterioration in the bond to place.

A further example of desensitisation can be seen in a young person's account of walking home with their five year old brother from school:

Participant A: *I know my little five year old brother got battered, got his nose broken and everything from walking back from school with me.*

Researcher: *Where were you walking back from?*

Participant A: *[Name omitted] Primary School. He walked back and he got battered. Five year old.*

Researcher: *Where's that on the map?*

Participant A: *It's near my house. It's there. So where's my house? So it'll be on...it's here where says school.*

The image participant A invoked is highly emotive. As they suggested, walking home from primary school with a five year old child should be a safe and secure everyday journey. Yet their use of the word '*battered*' to describe what happened to their brother is very vivid and also appears to speak to a personal anger that something like this could happen. Similarly to the other accounts relating to young people's concerns about crime, participant A portrayed a certain acceptance for what had happened because in certain parts of town, even when it is close to home. Again the powerlessness in the face of threatening events expressed through their account succinctly describes many of the young people's feelings in the context of the 'darker' side of the community.

As a response to some of the discussions relating to the sense of threat many of the young people expressed, the desire for safety emerged as something of importance for them. Through discussions about where young people could go for sanctuary, it was evident that belonging to their youth organisations plays a vital role because '*There's only a few places we feel safe really*' (Participant B). Young people identified several areas on the maps of Morecambe where they felt safe (Figure 6.12).

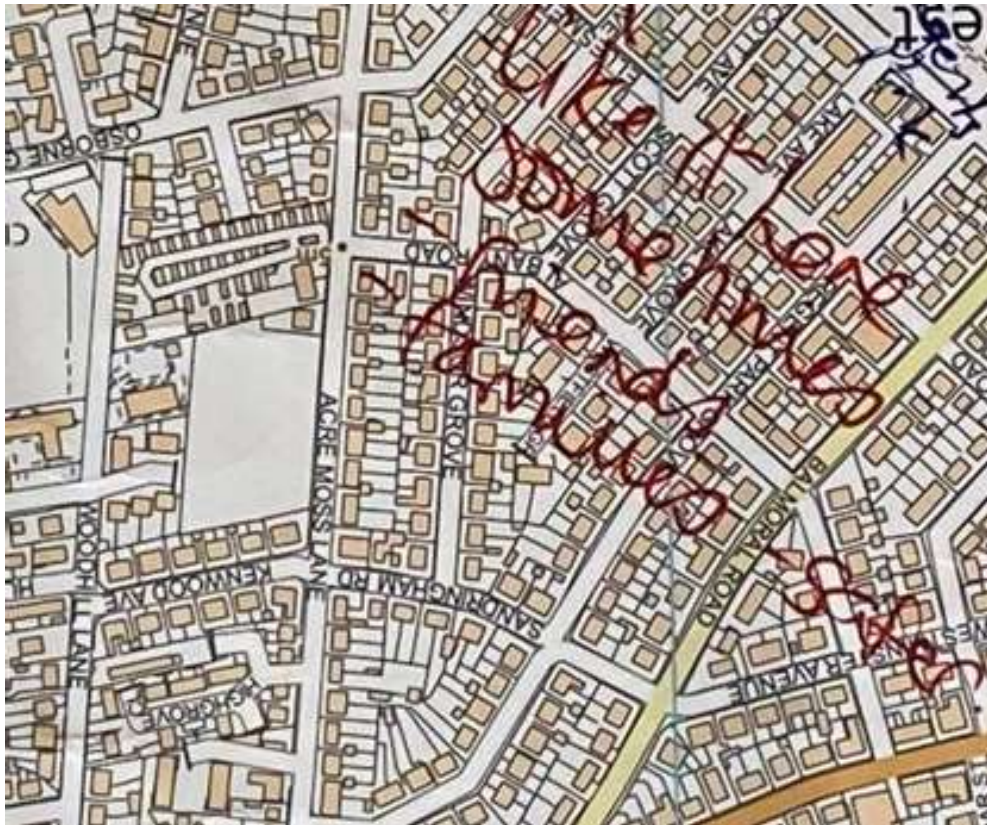
Figure 6.12: Where young people feel safe in Morecambe



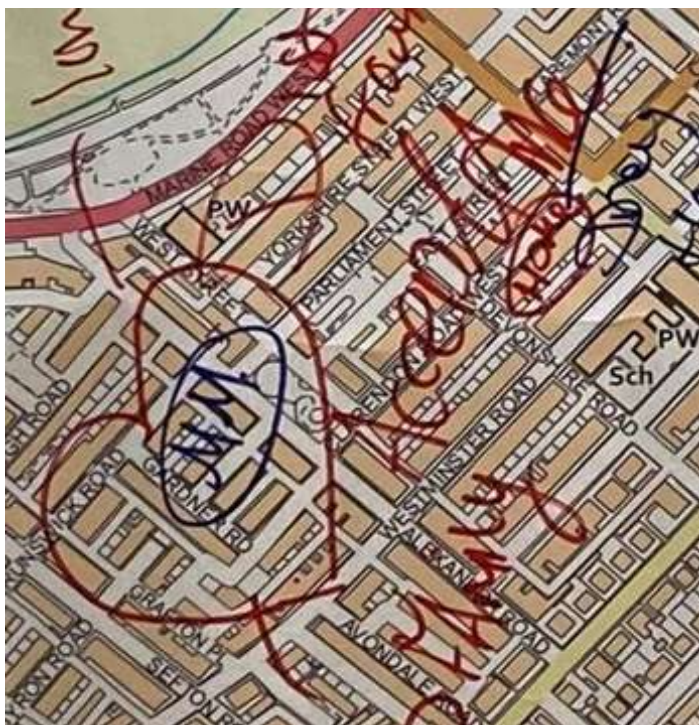
6.12a



6.12b



6.12c



6.12d

These predominately consisted of different youth groups and organisations (highlighted on Figures 6.12a, 6.12b and 6.12d), although there were also several public spaces included, such as the Old Pier Bookshop and Regent Park (Figures 6.12b and 6.12c). These spaces dominated any discussions about feeling safe and secure as were viewed as real assets in the community for young people.

Being able to go to a place where the relationships are accepting and supportive and the spaces feel safe was also a common refrain:

Participant T: *It's run by [name of organisation] and it's a place where people who have mental health issues or are like long term unemployed and we do arts and crafts stuff. And then they sell them there as well.*

This particular group offers both activities and mental health support and the fact that young people can also go on to sell the artefacts they make when they are there is an interesting concept, giving the members a sense of real purpose and ownership to what they do in the group. Acceptance by others was also perceived to be a key aspect of feeling safe:

Participant E: *Mine is [name of group], it's my group.*

Researcher: *So what's good about that?*

Participant E: *It's friendly and it's fun.*

Participant B: *No one judges you.*

Researcher: *Sounds good, perfect.*

Young person E: *'Cause it's my autism group.*

The fundamental need for relationships to be non-judgmental and *'friendly'* in order to promote safety and security is evident here. The general positivity emanating from participant E suggested that for them, their autism group provided an essential

supportive space that they do not necessarily find in many other spaces. As another participant said:

[We need] places where we can go without paying like so we can hang around without like, I don't know what you call it, free places so young people can actually go without getting targeted. That's what we need. (Participant A)

In Morecambe, there are several groups where young people can go that are organised by some invested adults who are clearly passionate about supporting young people in the community. The way the young people spoke about those groups demonstrated the real-life impact that they have, in a place where many young people identified a lack of facilities and opportunities for them and prevalent safety issues. One young person stated they feel secure at *'[Name of group]. I feel generally safe here. I can trust people, same with [name of organisation] in terms of the young people'* (Participant L). Others expressed similar views, *'I've just added [name of group] as a safe space, 'cause it is a safe space for people. I know that's how the majority of us feel here'* (Participant B). Being able to trust other people in the group was important for feeling safe for young people. In spite of the many different ways young people do not feel safe in the community, the significance of the groups and supportive relationships within the groups provided a safe sanctuary for them. These can be viewed as vital community assets which can promote wellbeing (Lenzi et al., 2013) and confidence and self-esteem (Nowell et al., 2006).

6.6 The impact of shame of place

Overall, there were variations in how young people felt about being a Morecambe resident. Some expressed shame in being from Morecambe, although there were differences in how much this affected them. Some young people did not feel very concerned about it; whereas for others, they felt ashamed of living in the town because they linked their place of residence to who they were, affecting their confidence and self-esteem.

When asked if they felt proud to live in Morecambe, the negative answers of some of the young people was decisive:

Researcher: *Do you feel proud to come from Morecambe?*

Participant: *No.*

Researcher: *If you're in a group of people that weren't from Morecambe, would you be proud to say you're from here?*

Participant A: *Would you say, oh I lived in Morecambe or would you say you lived somewhere else? I would say I lived somewhere else. I know I said this last time, my sister is scared to bring her kids up here 'cause of all the crimes...*

Participant D: *I'd prefer to live in Africa than here.*

The responses given by the young people were instant and firmly stated. The insistence that in a group of people they would pretend to be from somewhere else (and extremely far away!) rather than say they were from Morecambe is indicative of feeling shame of place. When young person A said that their family did not want to visit because they thought it was not a safe place to stay with their children, also seemed to be hurtful to them because the opportunity to connect with family is rejected by their sister.

Although some young people thought that being ashamed about where you live affected how you felt about yourself, although this did not seem to be the case for everyone:

Participant B: *It just makes you feel ashamed of who you really are.*

Participant D: *It doesn't bother me 'cause I can just block them.*

Participant A: *I know I get bullied, I get bullied for living in Morecambe. Even though they don't live in Morecambe, they live in [name of place]. It's my ex*

and she goes oh imagine living in a stropo town like you do, I was like it's not my fault what town I live in. If I could move, I would move.

As young people from Morecambe, experiencing the negative perceptions of others can for some clearly be distressing. For participant B, they evidently associated Morecambe closely with their identity and this has influenced how they think about themselves (Prince, 2014). Because they experienced shame of place, they also experienced shame of self. Similarly, for participant A, the shame they associated with place has resulted in experiences of bullying behaviour from other people. Therefore the desire to live somewhere else was strong because they think they will feel less shame. Although the impact of stigmatised views from those who live outside the community is explored in the next section, this powerful statement demonstrates the impact of shame of place on this young person's self-perception and self-worth. However, it is also important to observe participant D's more flippant response because they state that it does not bother them. Their seemingly robust view could, on one hand, suggest that young people internalise how they experience place differently and that some have a stronger association of place with 'who they are' than do others. On the other hand, this 'flippant' response could also be interpreted as a mechanism for coping with shame.

This point is further exemplified through a discussion about young people's views of how the place where you live can shape you as a person:

Participant A: *Do you think the way you act now is because you live in Morecambe? I think it is.*

Youth worker: *Do you think you'd be the same if you lived anywhere?*

Participant A: *Knowing D probably!*

Youth worker: *D is D anywhere!*

Researcher: *So you said that it's like a big part of like who you are and your identity.*

Participant A: *Yeah, because I know if I lived somewhere else I wouldn't be as bad as I am.*

Participant A suggested that their perceived 'difficult' characteristics were partly a problem of place. The direct apportioning of blame for their behaviour to living in Morecambe is clear, further emphasised by '*if I lived somewhere else I wouldn't be as bad.*' To participant A, it was a straightforward relationship: because I think where I live is not a good place, this detrimentally impacts my behaviour. Once again, an underlying frustration is implied here, the belief that if they lived in a 'better' place, they would be 'better'. This resonates with Low and Altman's (1992) view of the importance of place on the shaping of identity; the negative sense of place and attachment to place has consequently formed an identity low in confidence and self-worth.

Outsider stigmatised views of Morecambe

The shame of place experienced by some of the young people is suggestive of both outsider and insider place-stigma. In other words, the young people participating had a keen sense that outsiders also perceived the place they were from in a negative way, supporting their internal detrimental feelings towards Morecambe. Knowledge of how other people, from outside the local community, perceived Morecambe affected young people's perceptions of place. One young person, originally from another city, described their views of Morecambe:

The general impression I get of Morecambe is, like I obviously grew up on the Wirral, a rougher part of the Wirral. So I had an impression that it was quite rough and scary. But then, whenever I've been, it's not been like that. And so I don't know why that impression has come around...so the friends I've got, they live in Lancaster, but it's just they literally just avoid Morecambe.' (Participant U)

This young person's initial impressions were based on hearsay and led them to categorise Morecambe as a place which is '*rough and scary*', yet they were unaware

of how this impression had come about. However, the influence of second hand accounts of other people who 'avoid' Morecambe clearly have sway when forming a perception of place. They recognised that their own experience of the town itself, which had been largely positive, differed from the stigmatised view of their friends who did not live there. The influence that outsider place-stigma had on the young people who live there can be keenly felt by them, as illustrated in the following point from other young people, when discussing their views about how outsiders might view young people from Morecambe:

Researcher: *Do you think outsiders have a particular view of young people?*

Participant D: *They say they hate people from Morecambe.*

Researcher: *Why?*

Participant D: *'Cause of the way that they are, they're all actual knobheads.*

Participant A: *Because most teenagers drink.*

Participant D: *They drink, they smoke weed, they go round bullying, going round grassing random people, people get jumped, people get shot, people get stabbed.*

Participant A: *They probably think we are all animals.*

Participant B: *And think that we're all the same.*

Participant A: *'Cause if you search up Morecambe news it comes up with all the bad stuff, so they probably think we're all animals and that we're not trained properly to be a human.*

The certainty with which these views were expressed is striking. The use of the animal metaphor is particularly visceral in its image but underlying that is a powerful sense of hurt being portrayed by the speakers here. Participant D believed outsiders 'hate' people from Morecambe for 'the way that they are', which was described in a list of negative attributes and behaviours, such as drinking, smoking and violent actions. A consciousness of the impact of media reporting is referenced by participant A who believed that the news only presents the 'bad stuff' which taints people's views of the

community. A virtual social identity (Wacquant, 2014) has been created where young people know their powerlessness to be able to change outsider stigmatisations of Morecambe; these are out of their control. Therefore, young people may adopt their own stigmatised views in order to demarcate themselves from the outsider perceptions.

Distinguishing between oneself and 'others'

Young people's experiences of Morecambe as a place highlighted a clear distinction between themselves and other people who lived in less desirable areas of the town. For example, participant F spoke of two particular areas in the town where they believed there are some people who have undesirable reputations:

Researcher: *What do people think about the different areas in Morecambe?*

Participant F: *Sometimes people don't like them. Like some kids don't like going down to Poulton or West End because of the people that actually live there.*

Researcher: *Why would they avoid it?*

Participant F: *Probably one of their friends used to live there and something bad happened to them. It's mainly just sometimes good, sometimes bad.*

The specification of these two areas within the town suggests that a disreputable reputation exists from which these young people wished to distinguish themselves. The perception of the West End or Poulton areas as being those to avoid because '*of the people that actually live there*' separates the speakers from the other residents. When asked why these areas would be avoided, the response that it would probably be because '*something bad happened to them*' or one of their friends was a vague statement, but it reinforces the power of second hand narratives and hearsay in developing stigmatised views of place. Other similar views were expressed about these two areas, where participant F said '*It's just Poulton. There's a lot of drugs. It's very violent and drug heavy*' and '*Just the West End in general isn't a great place, is it?*' The keen distinguishing of these particular areas within Morecambe as being the 'bad'

areas positioned the young people as being different to other people who live there. The tension which exists between the outsider stigmatisation of Morecambe and the knowledge of its existence by the young people who live there, appeared to fuel their own insider prejudiced views, perhaps acting as an 'identity defence' mechanism, dissociating themselves from others.

This is further evident in the different ways in which the young people characterise the distinction between the 'types' of people. Across both age groups, there was a suggestion that Morecambe is a place for '*older people*' that is '*slow paced*' and '*boring*,' (flipchart notes, Clock Tower and Winter Gardens sites) relating to the perception of it as a place that is an outmoded, faded version of the traditional seaside destination discussed earlier in the chapter. In contrast, others focused on differences with their peers:

Participant L: *The chavs. Like the really annoying loud teenagers that wear orange make up.*

Participant C: *[Young people are] a bit of a chav.*

The term '*chav*' was used generally and in a derogatory manner in order to differentiate between 'us' and 'them', with unlikeable and anti-social qualities used to characterise them. This differentiation was also made in participant K's description of other young people from Morecambe:

People who have grown up here tend to be one of the bullies and tend to have the parents who do drugs and they're brought up...and they're all brought up to thinking that's OK.

The delineation of young people who have been brought up in Morecambe as '*bullies*' because their parents '*do drugs*' suggested that participant K also, quite forcefully, wished to make a clear distinction between themselves and these other people, disidentifying with people from particular neighbourhoods or 'types' (Savage et al., 2010; Skeggs, 1997). The stereotyping used here reinforces the insider stigmatisation

of certain groups of people in the community, promoting a distinction between the young people speaking and others.

Further elaboration on perceptions of some of the people in the local community was offered, through the description of their friend who lives on an undesirable street:

Participant K: *I know someone in high school that I'm good friends with but they are ashamed to live in Morecambe.*

Researcher: *Okay, why do you think that is?*

Participant K: *Because they live on a street that has loads of druggies on the other side.*

Participant J: *Really disgusting.*

Participant K: *And most of the time they can't go to sleep but it was their choice of what town they moved to. So when they moved here they liked it at first, but when they actually got to know some of the people, they're really not that nice.*

This particular street which had been characterised as undesirable due to its reputation for the use of drugs there, perpetuated their friend's shame of place. The idea that a young person can feel ashamed of where they live because of the other people who live there, exemplifies the powerlessness that young people may experience when living in a stigmatised place. Describing how they liked it at first but once getting to know people '*they're really not that nice*' inverts an arguably more typical scenario where you like people more once you get to know them. Participant K conveyed a sense of their friend feeling trapped within this environment, not being able to sleep; a distressing physical consequence of the dislike of the people and shame of where they live. Their own personal views of certain parts of Morecambe as a result were shaped by their friend's experience, driving forward the derogatory narrative of place.

6.7 Conclusion

There are many contrasts from the perspectives of young people about living in Morecambe. The beneficial aspects of the natural beauty, unique history and vitally important and supportive youth organisations are in tension with the physically derelict and fading areas, lack of present opportunities for young people and exclusionary economic and social circumstances. Young people clearly experienced genuine fears for their safety, both through direct, distressing experiences as well as from the negative impacts of the second hand narratives of others. Alongside this, the acute awareness of the stigmatisations of people from outside their community, fuelled their own stigmatisations of place, adding further stress to their relationship with their hometown. How all of this impacts their sense of belonging to the community, and consequently their experiences of loneliness, is discussed in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN FINDINGS: INCONSISTENT COMMUNITY (NON)BELONGING

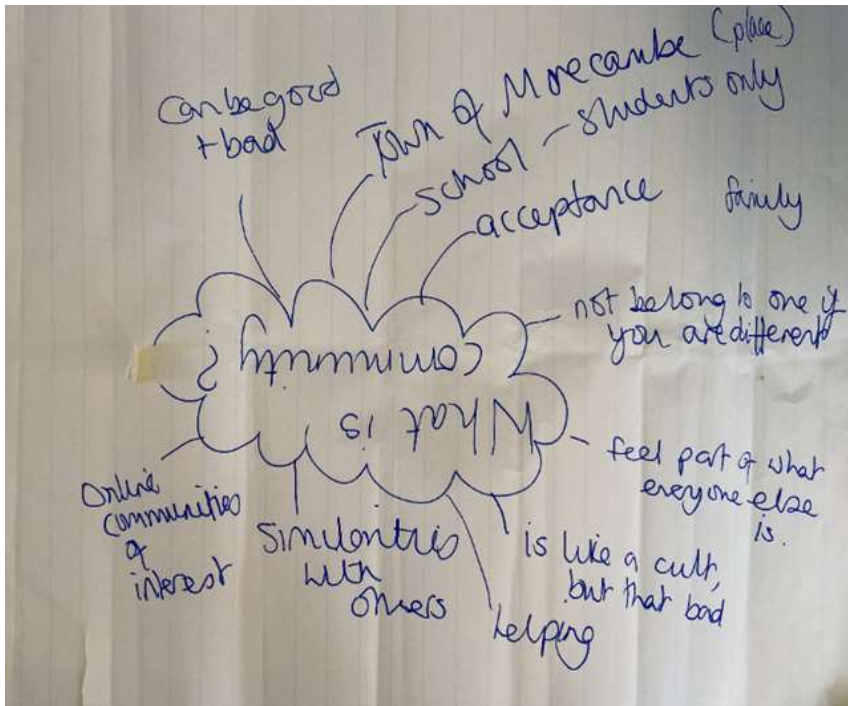
7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on young people's understanding and experiences of community belonging, both in general and localised context. The first theme, 'Engagement with the concept of community', presents young people's views about what 'community' means to them and also further builds on from the feasibility phase how they relate to the concept. Next, the theme 'A variety of spaces can promote belonging' describes the wide range of spaces young people access in order to feel belonging. These include inside and outside spaces in the local area, as well as the importance of online spaces for a sense of community belonging. Young people's accounts of how the different relationships they have foster a sense of belonging is then examined, under the theme 'Supportive relationships with peers and professionals'. Furthermore, the subtheme '*Authentic belonging achieved through mutual respect*' presents how young people specifically identified that mutual respect underpins belonging and they consider what it means when this is low or absent in a community. The final theme, 'Let down by the school community', illustrates young people's experiences of their school communities, raising important issues about belonging in educational environments.

7.2 Engagement with the concept of community

The majority of young people stated that the term community itself does not typically form part of their everyday language use. Although many of the aspects they associated with the term community reflected existing conceptualisations, framing questions utilising the word 'community' appeared to many to be disengaging. For example, when asked about what the term 'community' meant to them, young people recurrently spoke about togetherness and being involved. During initial discussions, it was suggested community means '*to feel part of what everyone else is,*' having '*similarities with others*' and '*online communities of interest*' (Figure 7.1a); '*everyone is involved,*' '*everyone is equal,*' (Figure 7.1b) and '*it means to be part of something that is bigger than the individual*' (Participant M).

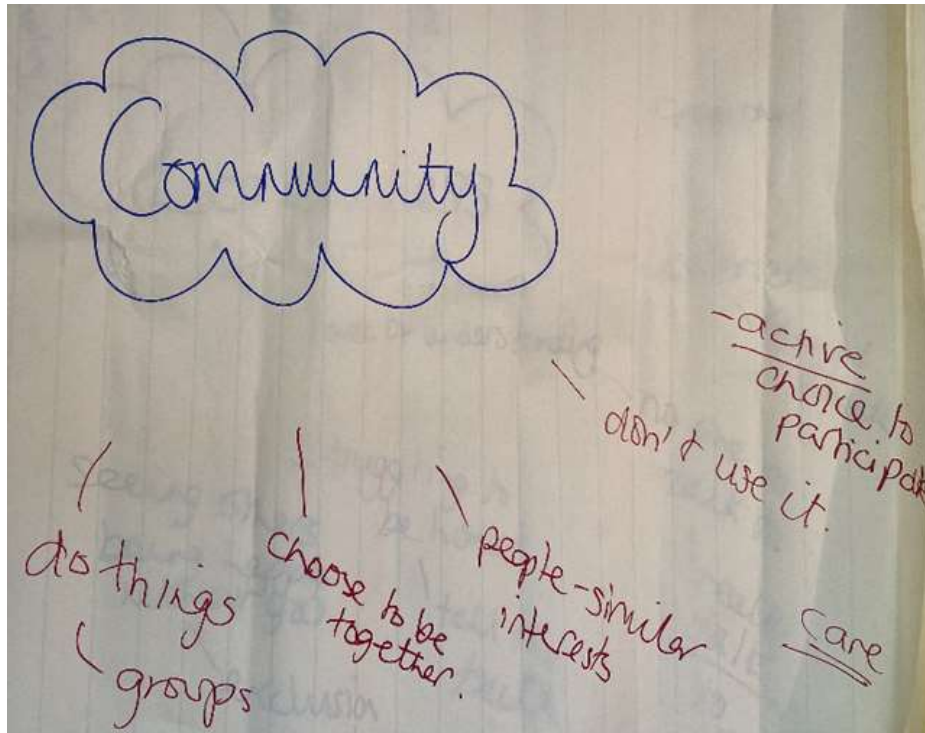
Figure 7.1: Young people's understandings of 'community'



7.1a



7.1b



7.1c

These descriptions of how they related to the concept of community demonstrated young people's understanding of it as being a positive and inclusive entity. Social connection, common interests and equality were suggested in these initial ideas generated by young people, suggesting the relational nature of the way they understand the concept.

Furthermore, being able to make the choice for yourself to be part of a community (Figure 7.1c) was seen as particularly important by 'older' young people at the Winter Gardens site. This was further supported by participant U who believed that when it is an involuntary grouping, for example, when '*forced together like in school, like some schools try to create a community but it doesn't feel genuine*', the community is not authentically connected, therefore it is not a genuine community. Autonomy in community membership seemed to be important through others' references to equality too; young people identified that being able to control which communities they were part of could arguably be important for many reasons, but when you have little power

over other contextual factors related to where you live, the freedom of choice has even greater significance.

Despite young people's positive engagement with the concept of community itself, as discussions progressed, it was clear that most of the young people were disinclined to actually use the term in their everyday language. For example, participant U stated:

I don't really use the word to be honest, but when I would have to think about it, I would say a community of people with similar interests that have chosen to be together.

Here, participant U can offer a relevant definition of what community means to them, referencing the importance of shared similarities and personal autonomy in membership. However, in spite of the impressively succinct summary, they evidently do not feel connection to the word itself.

The disuse of 'community' was also evident in other young people too, with the term being seen as being old fashioned and not relevant to them:

Researcher: *Would you use the word in your everyday language?*

Participant K: *No.*

Researcher: *So what would you say instead of community?*

Participant K: *Family and friends. People who I do not, not like. People I do like.*

Researcher: *Why wouldn't you use the word community? You can be honest, so you say whatever you really feel about it.*

Participant J: *It doesn't sound like a proper word. Because nowadays people like say slang words for most things...*

Participant K: *Community just doesn't sound like a word anyone would use.*

Researcher: *What sort of people do you think might use the word community?*

Participant K: *Therapists. Or older people.*

The observation that community '*doesn't sound like a proper word*' is interesting – it evidences that for these young people, the word community appears to be archaic, formal and is associated with professionals and older generations. The notion that nowadays many people would naturally use more '*slang*' shows that the word is outmoded in their view. The alternative suggestions offered of '*family and friends*' and '*people I do like*' also emphasise the importance of relationships in the conceptualisation of community here.

Another participant was unclear how they would utilise the term in everyday speech:

Researcher: *Have you ever heard it being used before the word community?*

Participant L: *A lot. It's just not...*

Researcher: *It's not a word that you would use?*

Participant L: *Well, I know the word, I just can't think of many things.*

The fact that participant L hears the word '*a lot*,' yet struggled to think of many examples of where and how community is used further supports a conclusion that it generally has a lack of relevance amongst young people. Another participant used humour to demonstrate their lack of connection to the word:

Community...it's like that idyllic little England town where everyone knows Bertha and Beryl that live down the street and Andy does his yoga in the morning and you walk past him at eight ...you know what I mean it's like coming from a small town, that's what it is. (Group 2, feasibility phase)

Here, the notion of 'community' is associated with a stereotypical representation of Little England village life, where they suggest connotations with wealthier places as

'community' where everyone knows each other. A strong connection to place is implied here, perhaps because they think that community is associated more with 'good' and 'idyllic' places to live, where a connection to the local network of people is desirable. The names they use to exemplify this ('Bertha' and 'Beryl') also suggest that there is an association with older generations.

Participant U believed community was '*a nice word*' with '*good intentions*,' but they would '*just say group, I'm part of this group*,' rather than say 'community'. Participant T concurred with this:

Researcher: *What about you, T? Would you use the word community?*

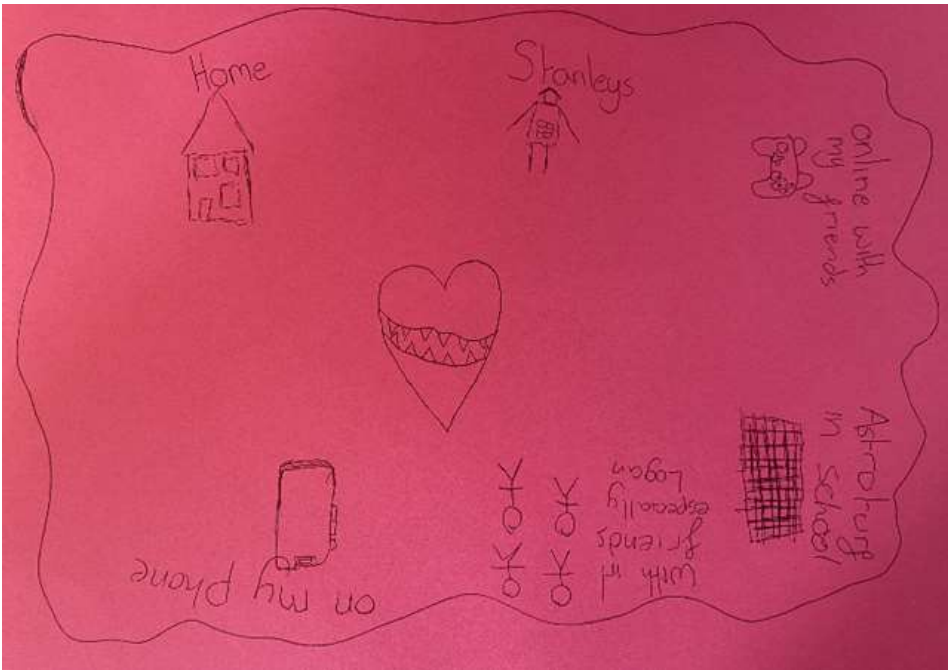
Participant T: *No, I would probably use group because it's just a lot easier to just describe a lot of things. I see community as like groups of people just coming together for different reasons.*

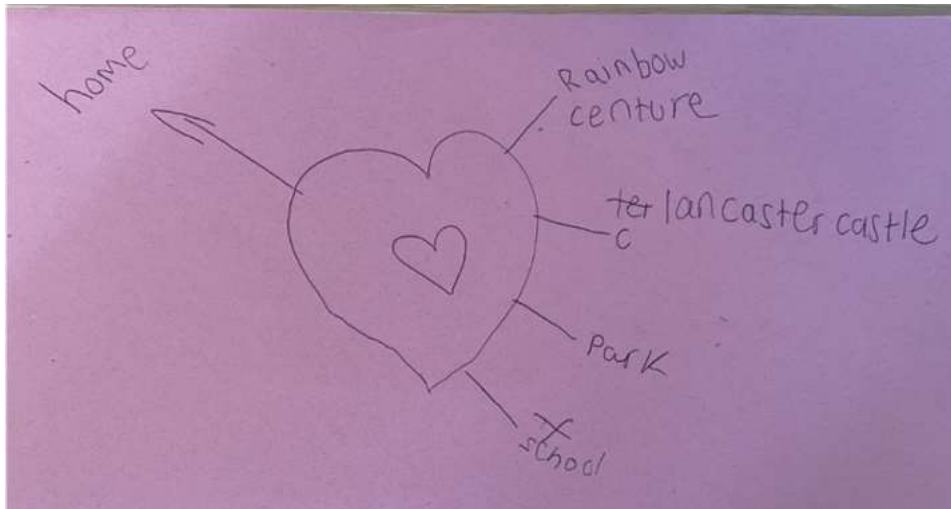
Using a term like community with its connotations of being outdated, old fashioned and related to an older generation might well be alienating for young people. Using the vocabulary of 'groups' perhaps has a more appealing, modern simplicity to engage young people, or maybe it is a more open and flexible word and therefore inclusive to all. This knowledge shaped the discussions with the research groups about belonging as the word 'community' tended to be replaced with 'groups' by the researcher where possible (and remembered) in order to promote inclusivity.

7.3 A variety of spaces can promote belonging

Young people produced simple Splot drawings to express what was important for their sense of belonging in Morecambe. A range of responses emerged with several important commonalities, as well as a few examples which were more surprising. Young people shared the vital importance of their youth groups as safe, welcoming and supportive spaces they could go which were central to their experiences of belonging (see Figure 7.2 below for some examples).

Figure 7.2: Examples of three Splots showing the importance of youth groups for young people's sense of belonging





The importance of the youth groups as central to their sense of belonging was further elaborated by one young person:

Participant B: *This group actually gets me out the house. 'Cause I remember that I never used to get out the house...*

Researcher: *Is it important for you, as a young person that's in Morecambe, to feel like you belong to different places, is a sense of belonging important?*

Participant B: *It does, 'cause then it makes me feel like I've got more than one place to go when I need it most.*

Clearly, participant B having previously experienced a restriction in relation to where they used to spend time, predominantly remains at home. However, it is implied that this was not necessarily where they wanted to be because belonging to their youth group has given them the freedom of having somewhere else to go and belong 'when I need it most'. This is a powerful example of how being part of this group fostered a sense of belonging that instigated positive changes in their life. Having a free youth group/organisation such as this in Morecambe, provides an inclusive space with the purpose for young people, and especially marginalised young people, of connecting with others.

In addition to the youth groups and organisations, many other young people included other key outside spaces in Morecambe to belong, such as the beach or one of the parks. This emphasised the importance of having other free public spaces where young people can go with the purpose of making and connecting with friends and experience belonging. Despite some of the earlier criticisms they expressed about safety in certain parts of Morecambe, they also recognised that access to free outside spaces can foster sense of belonging to a place through providing opportunities to connect with friends and take part in activities:

Participant H: *Regent. Regent is a good place to hang out with friends.*

Researcher: *What's good about it?*

Participant H: *You can go out [and play] and there's a big field for football...there's two big trees.'*

There is something very simple about the way participant H describes why the park is important to them; whether it is to 'hang out' with peers or do activities such as sport. This in itself makes a significant point about belonging here: that being able to autonomously access a space when required is very powerful. For participant H, they are enabled to feel connected with their friends through this simple activity and feel the benefits of belonging in a place which at times can be threatening for some young people.

Some young people who could be considered to be members of groups which are often marginalised, spoke of the importance of commonalities with others in order to experience sense of belonging. For example, participant E referred to 'My ASD group [for belonging] because of my autism stuff.' The need to connect with other young people who share certain similarities can be fulfilled through these inclusive groups. This was also exemplified by participant K:

Researcher: *Are there communities for young people in Morecambe that can belong to?*

Participant K: *Well, you said one is like the LGBTQ plus. Loads of people are a part of that community. Nobody knew that they were like that until people started expressing it.*

Participant K suggested that having spaces for particular groups could be important for young people's sense of belonging because it creates opportunities to be their true selves in a non-judgmental space. The need for different groups and spaces which recognise the heterogeneity of young people seems to be fundamental to sense of belonging according to many of the young people here. Young people can have the self-confidence to express themselves, which they identified as important for belonging.

In terms of inclusive spaces where young people felt belonging, some participants referred to less obvious choices (Figure 7.3). For example, participant J included the 'Venus and Cupid' statue (a local landmark on the promenade on the outskirts of the town) as a space which made them feel liked they belonged because of the childhood memories associated with it.

Figure 7.3: *Spot showing the Venus and Cupid statue*



Furthermore, participant T spoke about how they use outside spaces in the local area which make them feel connected to place:

I've got the beach because I like walking my dogs on the beach. I've also got just like the promenade, 'cause I like walking along there as well. I've got the there's a car park in front of the Golf Club near where Happy Mount Park is. When I was little when it was raining my nana and grandad used to just take me there and we just sit and watch rain.

The car park outside the golf club is strongly associated with their grandparents taking them there as a child. This sense of history was important for their sense of belonging in what could be considered to be an innocuous location: fond associations from past experiences have created belonging. This illustration of belonging provides an interesting contrast to the previous examples from other young people. Where connecting with friends at youth groups and doing activities together enhances belonging for some, for others, feeling in touch with memory and rootedness to a particular space can also fulfil belonging needs in a less tangible way.

As well as the range of inclusive physical spaces for belonging, young people also discussed the importance of using online spaces for the purpose of connecting with others who share common interests as a way to foster a sense of community belonging. The majority of young people in the groups used various online forums, which included playing online games, watching specific YouTube channels or messaging friends through social media channels. The capacity of technology to promote belonging is well evidenced, as these connections can enable young people to access 'what they need' at any time. In the following examples, it should be noted that the young people who use the term 'community' are responding to the researcher who used the word 'community'. Participant K spoke about a friend who liked a particular musician, so has created an online group based around them:

Participant K: A music community like if you like the same person like, my best friend loves Billie Eilish. I don't so much but she makes YouTube out of TikTok

videos about Billie Eilish and she's made a community of her own about Billie Eilish.

Researcher: *Is that mainly online?*

Participant K: *Yeah, but that's still connected in a way.*

The purpose of accessing the music and videos about Billie Eilish is that people like her and her music and through accessing the material, a sense of belonging to this online community is felt as a by-product of the common interest. Furthermore, the creation of such online spaces demonstrates the importance for young people to be able to have control over what the space is about; it is *their* space, unlike the actual physical environment. This can also be seen in the playing of video games:

Researcher: *Tell us a bit about belonging in Morecambe.*

Participant D: *You've got online with my friends, this is like when I'm playing Rock Night and Apex and Arctic survival with my friends [name omitted] and [name omitted]. And then you've got [name of youth group].*

The response to being asked about belonging in Morecambe initially focused on online gaming, before referencing the in-person youth group. For this speaker, the access to virtual space for gaming together can foster belonging equally well as face-to-face connection. This is similarly suggested by participant N where their friend connects with them by *'Playing on Roblox with me. I always stay on FaceTime and then I fall asleep'* and also by participant V who said *'Social media means you can speak to anybody anywhere online rather than having to go out into the community, like into your local church or whatever, you can just do it online.'* This is summarised effectively through the short quotation *'You can have communities online: there's not a lot of difference to it'* (Group 1, feasibility phase). Whether the purpose is to connect with other people such as friends, or whether the purpose is for entertainment such as playing a game, the inclusivity and easy accessibility of online spaces can foster sense of belonging for some young people and as participant V stated, make them feel *'energised, happier'*, a claim for the superiority of the virtual over the in-person

context. They suggest that in Morecambe, which many of the young people did not consider to be inclusive in the wider context, they can reap greater belonging from virtual spaces where there can be more choice about where to interact and who to interact with.

However, as one young person stated, greater belonging is not always a result of connecting in online communities. For instance, participant U spoke of how sometimes their social media connections have inadvertently caused greater disconnection from others and feelings of loneliness by feeling excluded by others:

Participant U: So there's a few times at university when I think I felt lonely and I would be in a group chat with my flatmates but they would be doing something that I wasn't doing didn't want to do or haven't been asked to go with them. And even though I was in the group chat and people were messaging, it still felt lonely. I think if you don't see people face-to-face, you can still feel lonely even if you've chatted to them online. But I might just be me because I know some people benefit from online chats.

Researcher: So the idea that maybe they were together doing something that you weren't part of it.

Participant U: Yeah, it's a horrible feeling.

As the conversation or activity was not something they were particularly engaged with, their sense of disconnect to the group was exacerbated, even though they were still included in the virtual space. Arguably in this instance, their superficial involvement (as a member of the WhatsApp group) weakened their sense of belonging because of their disengagement from the online space, whether due to the need to socialise in-person or the type of activity taking place.

The range of spaces young people wrote and spoke about suggests three key things overall: firstly, spaces need to be inclusive in order for young people to experience belonging; secondly, they should be easily accessible (free) and thirdly, most

importantly, that where and what these spaces are will not necessarily conform to what is expected.

7.4 Supportive relationships with peers and professionals

Central to young people's experiences of belonging to community were strong and supportive relationships with both peers and adults:

Participant B: *I just put like three people I feel safe with and then [name of youth group].*

Researcher: *Is it important to feel that sense of belonging with these people? How does that make you feel?*

Participant B: *I need that encouragement or like that 'you're wanted here'. I get really down at night times, like it hits most at night times because I overthink everything. So I end up like punching walls or self-harming or something like that. But I have stopped trying to - I've tried to stop self-harming since I've come here because I know it doesn't help and I ended up in hospital for just under a month because of it a couple months ago and then since my cousin told me about [youth group]. I was like, alright, I'll try it and see how it goes and if I like it, I'll stay if I don't, I won't come back. I haven't missed a day since.*

The statement from this young person that they need to hear 'you are wanted here' exemplifies how feeling wanted and having a place to go with people who make you feel safe and accepted is essential for the development of a strong sense of belonging to a group. Even though they have faced challenges with their mental health, the willingness to give the youth group a try and to keep returning shows the positive impact that the support has had on their life.

A similar sentiment was expressed by other young people. One young person, who suffered from social anxiety, spoke of how going to their youth group and the relationships they have developed there can provide some respite from their anxiety:

Participant L: *Here [my anxiety] just drops.*

Researcher: *What makes you a lot less anxious about being here than school then?*

Participant L: *I don't know...I think it's 'cause I've made a lot of new friends. And I've got a special bond with a certain somebody.*

They can feel the physical difference of belonging to this group where their anxiety 'just drops', demonstrating again the impact on personal difficulties that these supportive new relationships can have. They further expanded on the special qualities of one of their friendships, which is contextualised by the adult youth worker:

Researcher: *What do you mean by [your] special references?*

Participant L: *Well, usually when I'm here, I like to reference different movies. A certain somebody notices...*

Youth worker: *I think what you're saying, what you're talking about is that idea that people get you and they understand you and you can do a reference like film reference and someone else understand what that means, and I actually feel like you belong 'cause they get you, where you're coming from.*

Participant L: *Me and [name] do special references that come from Harry Potter.*

Participant P: *Do we have a special reference?*

Participant L: *No.*

Participant P: *I'm pretty sure we do. We'll come back to that later.*

Researcher: *What's the Harry Potter reference?*

Participant L: *You're a wizard Harry!*

Youth worker: *Well you did it – do you remember when we went for walk on the prom? And you and [name] were doing it right? You had like almost like your own little secret language going, little things that you two like knew you would say and then she would respond. I started to pick it up.*

Participant L's description of the special references which they have with their friend is demonstrative of the strong bond they have in their friendship that creates belonging when they are together at the group. It connects them and feels unique to them, creating a high value relationship. The youth worker, who knew the group well, expanded on what they noticed about their special references, providing an explanation of what it is like to hear and see them in action. Watching both young people use a personal 'secret language' through which they could anticipate what each other was going to say, suggests firmly established rapport and familiarity between them. The interjection from participant P was also interesting to witness because it subtly demonstrated the dynamics of the group; the young people were comfortable with each other and this can only come from strong and mutually supportive relationships. It was clear that the cohesion in the group of people meant that they felt they belonged there with one another.

During the photovoice activity, participant F took a photograph of the outside of one of the research sites buildings, as a visual example of the importance of the relationships they have with the different people who go there:

Researcher: *Tell me about this last picture. Why did you take it?*

Participant F: *Just to show that there's places out there that will stop you feeling lonely and that's a place you can go and feel safe.*

Researcher: *What is it about [name of group] in particular that's good for helping young people who might feel lonely?*

Participant F: *You've got people to talk to; you've got things to do; you've got fitness; you've got one to one and stuff like that...you've got a place you can be with your friends without people being there, or people that you don't like, and if they are there, you've got someone that's in between actually, so they won't do anything.*

The youth group was a place where they could connect with others and feel a sense of belonging. To them, this group could reduce their feelings of loneliness through its

offer of safety and friendship. The reference to being able to go there without ‘*people that you don’t like*’ or that there is always someone there who can act as a buffer ‘*in between*’ implied that they can spend time with their friends without fear.

However, an interesting contrast to these accounts is provided when discussing friendships with young people who found it challenging to form relationships with others who attended their group/organisation:

Participant S: *It’s like I said before, you get all the awkward anxious people together and you just they just sort of awkwardly anxiously navigate around each other.*

Not having strong relationships with peers or adults in this group seems to limit belonging to the group as a whole. Participant S elaborated how this can often make them feel ‘*out of place.*’

Wherever I’m going, I’m going on my own because I moved to the area two years ago, I just was not very good at making friends I guess. Talking to people and all that sort of stuff. So it’s just I’ve been going on...I’m always gonna feel, not out of place, but just you know, a bit awkward. It’s like when I’ve actually got my mind set on going somewhere, I’m going to feel awkward about being quiet, whether there’s no one there or whether it’s full.

Participant S’s lack of friendships was difficult for them and they found it challenging to establish relationships. They admitted ‘*I think the friends thing...I don’t even know where you start with something like that.*’ For some young people, establishing relationships can be challenging. Participant T agreed.

Researcher: *What do you think T about friendships?*

Participant T: *I did think about stuff like, like confidence building groups. Because I just struggle to speak in general, sometimes even when I want to talk, I just feel like I can't.*

Experiencing anxiety or low confidence could be eased with the support of strong relationships as illustrated by participants B, L and F. However, for these young people, anxiety and low confidence prevented them from being able to develop these relationships in the first place, therefore they could not experience a strong sense of belonging. The challenges of making friends and its impact on loneliness is further examined in the next chapter.

'Authentic' belonging achieved through mutual respect

Many of the young people discussed the need to be respected by others for who they are as an essential aspect of a sense of belonging to a community. Without the respect of other people and being accepted for themselves, young people were excluded and some experienced loneliness. From some initial discussions about belonging, young people formulated that they needed to be *'supported no matter the disorder you have'* (flipchart notes, Clock Tower site) and that *'everybody is equal no matter who you are'*, including *'what your religion is and what your colour is'* (flipchart notes, Stone Jetty site). This is supported by other discussions in which young people stated that to experience belonging, it is important to *'feel comfortable'* and be *'safe, happy and can truly be yourself'* (flipchart notes, Winter Gardens site). The significance of being respected without having to change to fit in underlines how some young people experienced discrimination, whether related to sexuality, mental health, or other factors and that the groups they attended offered the acceptance they needed to feel belonging. One young person who moved to the area when they were younger, shared their experience of having to change their accent to fit in:

Researcher: *Do you feel part of the Morecambe community?*

Participant J: *Me not so much.*

Participant K: *Sometimes.*

Participant J: *I've kept the traits that I would have from back where I used to live. Like I speak differently, and I act differently. Although K, on the other hand, they are more like the people here.*

Participant K: *'Cause I put on accents and everything.*

Participant J: *I do that as well, but if I slip up at all, I get made fun of.*

Researcher: *Do you feel that you need to put on an accent to fit in and to belong to the local community here then?*

Participant K: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *Does it make you feel like you belong more?*

Participant K: *It just saves my energy. It's like there's no point being made fun of for something I know it's not right.*

Participant J's statement that they do not particularly feel part of the local community can be related to their self-proclaimed difference, having maintained traits from where they used to live. Staying true to themselves seemed to impede their sense of belonging, whereas participant K was '*more like the people here*'. By this, it meant they changed their accent to sound more like the local people, in order to not be noticeably different, therefore increasing their sense of belonging through similarity. However, this could be viewed as a superficial belonging because through disguising their accent, they were not being their true selves. However, participant K's acknowledgment that they deliberately changed part of themselves to fit in just '*saves my energy*'. The acknowledgement by participant K that their efforts to fit in through changing aspects of themselves were a result of simply wishing to make life easier, indicates that they acted more from what they felt was necessary than from what they felt a commitment to doing. It would be better to be respected for who they are, but they recognised that '*there's no point being made fun of*'. This perhaps explains why participant K felt belonging only sometimes; belonging is experienced on a superficial level because they are not being their true selves and therefore, authentic belonging, in which there is full acceptance of their true selves by others, cannot be really experienced.

Other young people had a similar discussion about the importance of respect for each other to promote belonging. Participant P said *'I think to feel belonging, you have to feel important, but also feel special around other people as well and that those other people respect you'*. Here, feeling important or special around other people is regarded as part of being respected, suggesting acceptance for who you are without having to change. Participant P elaborated on this further:

Participant P: *I think with Morecambe it's a lovely place, I will admit that, but we're [Morecambe residents] not a strong community, we're not a strong community. We don't respect each other, people, which is what I've noticed. I think it's young people, older people have a lot to give I would say. Like young people definitely need to - like teenagers wise - not like 20 or 25 [years old] people, teenagers mainly, you don't respect each other each other. 'Cause you know you've only got one life and just respect it.*

I've noticed about the teenagers in this world today do not respect each other. They don't. They have to take the mick out of someone, that has, I don't know, our special needs or someone that has anxiety. And that's the problem. There's no respect in this world. Older people, yeah they have respect, because they've probably either had that experience or they know what it feels like, so I think with teenagers mainly and young people, definitely. I think community means getting them together and just teaching them respect and just giving them that positivity that this is not what they should be doing. And that would make Morecambe a really strong community.

Participant P believed that in Morecambe there is not a strong wider community for young people to belong to (note: the researcher had been using this term in the discussion). This was related to the lack of respect for one another that they perceived in the community. They located this problem especially within the experience of young people and teenagers in particular, rather than within that of older generations. This point was exemplified through the experiences of teasing or bullying that young people may have. Being different in some way can be seen as a target for other young people, whose lack of respect excludes them and makes them feel like they do not

belong. Participant P believed that there is something which can be learned from older generations who have had that experience, suggesting that this could be a source of education for young people in relation to how to treat people with respect. Participant P suggested developing intergenerational relationships to create *'positivity'* and a *'really strong community'* by bringing people together.

What participant P has spoken about here in many ways summarises what is an underlying issue for young people in the *wider* Morecambe community. The existence of accessible community groups, whether in person or online, and enjoying strong relationships are necessary conditions for a developed sense of belonging. However, their sense of belonging did not translate beyond their groups to the wider community of Morecambe. Participant P's perception that respect, fundamental in any good relationship, is inconsistent between different individuals and groups in the community, can perhaps offer some insight as to why young people feel disconnected from the community.

7.5 Let down by the school community

Recurring through several of the different discussions with many of the young people was a dissatisfaction with their experiences of some of the local schools. Where school is often considered to be a place where young people should feel a sense of belonging, a sense of frustration was evident in some young people who felt that their school does not fulfil its purpose in supporting the young people who attend and making them feel safe and listened to when they are bullied. This strongly felt dissatisfaction resulted, for some, in an overall disconnection from the school community:

Participant R: *[They] don't know how to deal with ADHD and bullying.*

Researcher: *Is that all the schools?*

Participant R: *Just schools.*

Researcher: *OK, so you think it's not dealt with properly? Why do you think that is?*

Participant R: *They just can't be arsed...with my own experience, I felt like shit to be honest....so whilst I was in high school, it took them two years to sort out one incident. It's horrendous.*

Considering that one of the fundamental purposes of a school is to make the young people who attend feel safe and supported, to feel that it took a long time to 'sort out' this particular incident of bullying is felt in the eyes of the victim to be a failure. They had left the school several years previously, and to still feel the anger and distress so keenly indicates a powerful experience of feeling let down. A further example from a group discussion with other young people suggested similar frustrations with schools responses to bullying and violent behaviour:

Participant D: *School's disgraceful, right? You get hit and they say to you all don't hit 'em back, walk away. Five of them on you, hitting you what do you do? You can't walk away when they're surrounding you. And then nothing happens to them, and if you get in trouble, it's happened to me multiple times in school.*

Participant A: *Most schools...more people are getting targeted because of who they are, like LGBT wise? I know my cousin goes to [name of school] and he got beaten up because he was gay. He got battered because of it.*

These responses demonstrate the young people's sense of vulnerability in an environment in which they believe not doing enough is being done to protect them. Participant A showed agreement with regards to the lack of action to keep students safe in the school community, suggesting they felt they had been failed. Describing their cousin who was physically attacked for their sexuality demonstrated the anger they felt in the knowledge that that such things could happen to the point where they are not uncommon. Young people struggled to feel belonging to the school community in these circumstances.

The influence of second hand narratives, explored in relation to outsider stigma of place in the previous chapter, was also evident in relation to schools. Two of the

young people from Morecambe attended a non-local school, partly due to the stories they heard from other young people who go to one of the local schools:

Apparently the schools near here, from what I've heard, I've never actually been there so I don't really know the full experience, but like apparently like people get bullied just for like small stuff things. If you like have a rip in your trouser leg, they'll probably make fun of you for that, for the rest of your life. Whereas at [name of school], we're practically like a family. (Participant J)

From an outsider perspective, they could compare the differences in their school communities with that of their friends who attended the local schools. The recognition that school should be *'like a family'* and that is what it is like at their current school, suggested a strong sense of school community belonging. The narratives of bullying for *'small stuff'* like *'having a rip in your trouser leg'* suggested that their school community is not like this and so they are glad that they do not attend the local school. In a similar discussion, participant M succinctly stated *'It kind of tells you that school isn't doing its job.'*

However, in contrast to these negative experiences, three young people who attended a non-mainstream school expressed a strong sense of belonging, in this case to a school which offers provision for young people with additional learning needs. Several of the young people spoke of the importance of school because they could be with their friends, as well as feeling safe in this environment:

When I'm at school when I'm feeling a bit down or and I'm a bit sad, they help me because I have a trusted adult who I can talk to and then then that's when they go and help my teacher and they tell them to do something about it. (Participant N)

A different perspective of a local school is offered here, in which participant N not only feels safe but also sees the school as a place where they are made to feel better

when they are *'a bit down.'* Here, the young person's experience shows that important needs are being met because of the supportive relationships with trusted adults.

7.6 Conclusion

In summary, young people described their lack of connection with the word 'community', viewing it generally as outmoded and non-relatable. Yet this seemed to be mainly an issue related to vocabulary rather than the concept itself. Young people's understanding of what community means resonated with existing conceptualisations. For example, having purposeful groups and activities to partake in; developing supportive relationships with others and experiencing mutual respect were identified by young people as positive indicators of community belonging. Young people also thought that relationships were key to sense of belonging; however who the relationship is with (peer or professional) and the quality of the relationship (extent of mutual respect) relates to how *authentic* or *superficial* belonging is. Finally, an important finding about community belonging can be related to young people's educational institutions. If young people feel let down in some way by their school, sense of belonging to the school community is weak. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

CHAPTER EIGHT FINDINGS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES OF LONELINESS

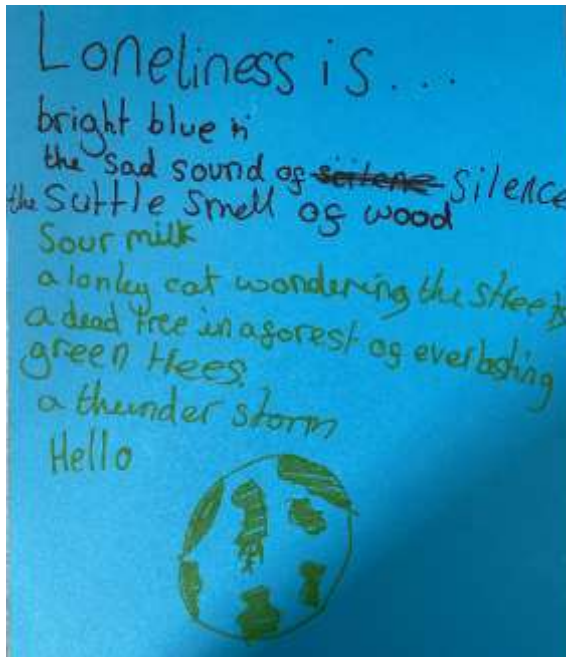
8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, young people's views and experiences of loneliness are presented. The first theme, 'Loneliness as a sense of nothingness', presents young people's experiences of what loneliness can feel like. A subtheme, '*Making friends in your twenties is hard*', explores how older young people can experience an absence of friendships as they navigate the adult world. The next main theme, 'Exclusionary attitudes and behaviours of others' summarises how other people can promote loneliness in others. This is further explored in the subtheme, '*There's a lack of empathy and understanding*'. How loneliness can be experienced when 'Navigating difficult personal circumstances', such as living in foster care or facing mental health challenges is then described. The last two themes concern young people's ideas and suggestions for how those who experience loneliness could be supported; 'Learning social and emotional skills' and 'Improving accessibility to services and spaces'.

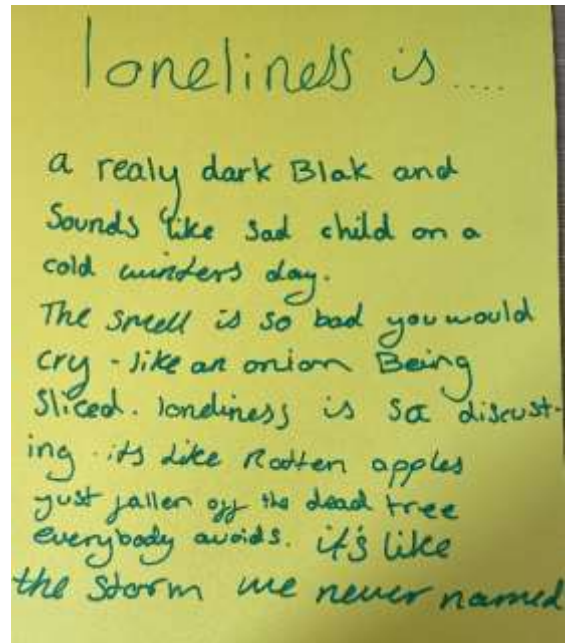
8.2 Loneliness as a sense of nothingness

Young people were asked what the word loneliness meant to them, in an initial creative activity where they had to form metaphors and word associations (Figure 8.1). The notion that loneliness is a sense of numbness or nothingness was evident through their expressions. For example, young people described loneliness as '*the sad sound of silence,*' (Figure 8.1a, participant J) '*really dark black,*' (Figure 8.1b, participant K) '*white noise,*' (Figure 8.1c, participant V) '*black,*' (Figure 8.1d, participant U), as well as '*isolation*' and '*whispering*' (flipchart notes, Stone Jetty site). Participant T suggested loneliness is like a '*fog 'cause sometimes fog can just appear*'.

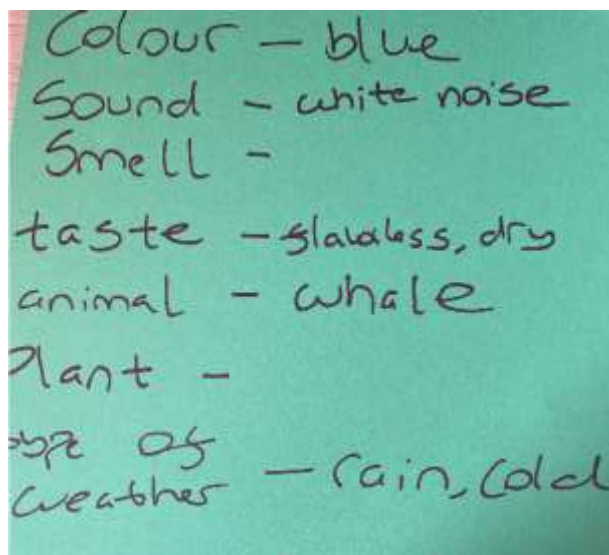
Figure 8.1: Loneliness metaphors



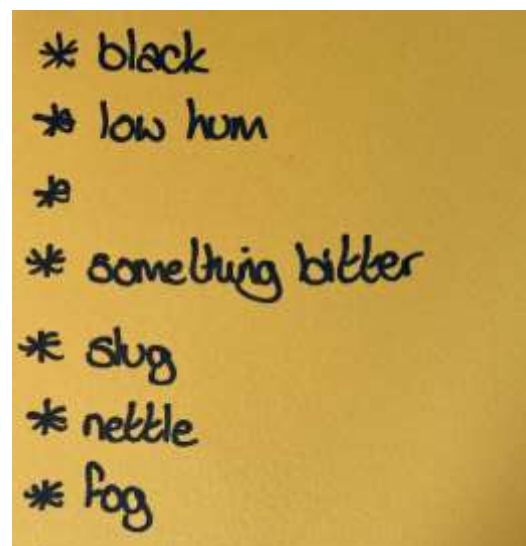
8.1a



8.1b



8.1c



8.1d

The image of a fog suddenly descending encapsulated the numbness that can sometimes unpredictably overwhelm someone experiencing loneliness. A similar

description is related by participant F, who suggested that loneliness is like *'being in the darkness, being alone and only a little bit of light. It's like when you're in a tunnel, you're finding the light to the good, the better times in your life'*. The 'tunnel' also suggested an experience of utter isolation and inescapability when lonely. A detailed explanation of participant S's experience of loneliness illustrated this:

Participant S: *I think I'm just numb to it at this point.*

Youth worker: *Maybe that's something in itself, isn't it that you feel lonely for so long that it just becomes a normal thing and you don't think about it?*

Participant S: *Yeah, yeah. It's just, it's not a colour, it's just a fog, it's just an absence of anything.*

Researcher: *Why have you picked that idea of a fog? That's a really interesting choice of words.*

Participant S: *It might just be specific to me, I don't know, it's just it's like I can't even see what I'm reaching for anymore. It's distant...but I know it's missing.*

Participant S experienced deep, persistent loneliness to the point where they were almost unconscious of the loneliness itself. This desensitisation to loneliness was acknowledged; their expression of it as *'an absence of anything'* is powerful and implies the persistence of loneliness can lead to a more permanent state of numbness because it becomes typical. This was further elaborated through participant S's depiction of not even being able to *'see what I'm reaching for anymore'*, the sense of permanence in their loneliness has resulted in a loss of purpose and helplessness. Loneliness is an *'absence'* of something, but at this point for participant S, what it is that is absent has become obscured as if they have forgotten what they have lost.

Making friends in your 20s is hard

In the young people who were aged 18 (so no longer attending school or college), a key factor in the promotion of loneliness was the challenge of making new friends in your 20s:

Participant S: *I've got something that's more specific to me, which is just that I've been living here 2-3 years ish. And I just...you know I have these groups I go to, but beyond that I just don't go anywhere 'cause...*

Researcher: *Is there a specific reason? Is it because you don't want to or do you feel that there's maybe nothing specific that you want to do?*

Participant S: *I mean part of it's anxiety, that sort of stuff, but there's also that generally, the stuff that gets me out doing things is being around other people and I just don't really know anyone around here.*

Participant V: *It's also like how to make friends, like where to start.*

Researcher: *Do you think it can be hard?*

Participant S: *I mean it does vary, but yeah, it's just you know people, like when you're at school or you know, just going to get to know people because you're around them every day, that's unavoidable, and...I'm just not thrown in situations with other people.*

Participant S suggested that when as a young adult, getting to know new people and making friends can be more difficult because they are less *'thrown together'* with other people like when they were at school. They acknowledged that the group they attend was somewhere to go, but that there was not much beyond the group itself. Although anxiety played a part in feeling able to be around other people, the desire for connection was still there and so participant S found themselves caught in a challenging cycle which perpetuated feelings of loneliness. Participant V concurred that it can be difficult making friends and they were unsure *'where to start'*. For them, an additional difficulty in forming relationships involved knowing how to talk to other people as they are not often in that situation:

I think it's also like knowing like when to talk 'cause I know...I think with conversation, it's all like back and forth and stuff, and people seem to know when to listen and when to talk and stuff, but I don't seem to. Anytime I might try and talk, I'm interrupting. I think I've seen times before and hear sometimes and the problem is I have something in my head and then I might forget it, so I'm like I need to get it out.

Experiencing difficulties in instigating, joining and promoting conversation is suggested here and this can become even more challenging because the opportunities to engage in conversation may be less frequent other than with 'my family' (participant V). It is another example of a self-perpetuating loneliness cycle: participant V would like to make friends but they do not have the confidence in their conversation skills, therefore it is much harder to do so. Loneliness can further exacerbate issues of self-confidence, and so the cycle continues.

Participant V partly blamed themselves for what they perceived as their poor conversation skills:

I have a problem like not being able to talk to everyone, so I'm kind of creating the problem as well...I always like blame myself for things though because like I know I'm not really a good talker.

They viewed their difficulties in talking with others as being the source of the problem of making friends and that their self-blame could further strengthen the cycle they are stuck in because of the impact this has on their confidence. Participant T encapsulated this effectively:

I think sometimes you can spiral into loneliness or even when you realise that you are lonely you might not know like how to stop being lonely, you just don't know. You don't know how to get out of it so it just gets worse.

The visual use of *'spiral'* to describe the experience of loneliness implies that regardless of whether loneliness is a sudden realisation or whether it is something you are constantly aware of, it is very difficult to know how to change it yourself. This idea of being 'stuck' resonated with the other young people aged 18 and over because they did not particularly know what to do about it. What has been particularly clear through the discussions with the older young people is that they often (although not always) placed a greater emphasis on themselves as being responsible for their loneliness. This sometimes contrasts with the views of the younger groups who tended to place blame on external factors such as how other people acted towards them. The next section illustrates this as the views presented are from young people who were under the age of 18.

8.3 Exclusionary behaviour and attitudes of others

Often the way young people felt treated by other people, and especially other young people, significantly contributed to their experience of loneliness. In an initial discussion about what loneliness is, words and phrases were recorded on flipchart paper, such as *'when you are alone and people around you are either being rude to you or not including you'* and *'don't feel like you should be there'* (Midland site); *'feeling unwanted'* and *'don't fit in'* (Clock Tower site); *'being left out by a group of people; them pretending you don't exist'* (Stone Jetty site); *'lack of understanding'* (Winter Gardens site); *'no safe place'* and *'having nobody'* (Group 1, feasibility phase).

In particular, experiences of bullying, being laughed at and not fitting in were dominant with the young people who were still of secondary education age in inciting experiences of loneliness. For example, participant P described their experience of bullying and the impact that loneliness had on their wellbeing:

I've been in that situation before where I went to a Scouts group a couple of years ago and obviously, yeah, I will admit I have autism and I think those people at Scouts didn't want to accept me for who I was, and they kept saying nasty things behind, well in little groups, behind my back, not wanting to say it

to my face, so that that broke me. That broke me, and I stopped eating for quite a while. I went on like this, this eating disorder and that was at the time as well when I was diagnosed with arthritis so I had a lot going on then, but yeah, I do find it hard to talk about sometimes because it's not a nice part of my life to talk about. But yeah, it's just a horrible situation when people don't respect you for who you are. It's horrible. It's a horrible emotion to be lonely and not have that or connect with a support group or with a friendship group that you know don't want you.

As referenced in the previous chapter, the importance of being respected for who you are was clear for this young person's sense of belonging. Furthermore, this lack of respect shown to participant P by their peers resulted in a very painful experience of loneliness. Participant P's perception that having autism makes them different to other young people in the group perhaps gave them a heightened awareness of the '*nasty things*' being said about them in '*little groups*'. The experience of being talked about in a detrimental way was distressing, and the fact that it happened collectively in groups had a destructive impact on their mental and physical wellbeing; it '*broke*' them. Participant P described their mental and physical challenges in response to this exclusionary behaviour of their peers, that of developing an eating disorder, a difficult time for them to think and talk about, suggesting the lingering effects that acute experiences of loneliness can have on young people, even when they are in a '*better*' place. They said it was a '*horrible situation*', '*it's horrible*' and '*it's a horrible emotion*' to be lonely, the repetition conveying the depth of trauma the experience has had on them. The lack of a supportive '*cushioning*' friendship group, discussed in the previous chapter as being so important for sense of belonging, did not exist for participant P during this distressing time, therefore the impact of the experience was felt deeply then and still is now.

Similarly, this was also exemplified in participant L's experience of loneliness in school, excluded by others because of their physical disability:

When I was at my old school, I used to get really picked on because of my cerebral palsy. And people used to like just leave me out every time.

The pain experienced of being left out by other people because they think you are different to them is evident. Previously, the discussion about the importance of respect for sense of belonging explored how this included the need *to be accepted for who you are*. When peers reject a young person for either having autism or cerebral palsy, this could be seen as a rejection of what makes them different, therefore they are defining that young person by their particular disability. These rejections of young people who feel different created distressing experiences of loneliness.

Participant J also experienced loneliness because of exclusionary behaviours at their dance class and as a result, they discontinued attending:

Participant J: I went to this place called [name of group]. It's a dance place, and all the people there were rude. Always making fun of everyone else and when I joined, I thought that's not very nice, but I like dance so I wanted to carry on doing it. But then it got to such a point where they started doing it to me and I just said no.

Researcher: So why do you think they were behaving like that?

Participant J: This was like two years ago. I was very different to how I am now and they were just being rude of how I dressed and how I spoke. And in general, how I was, because I wasn't like them.

When the attentions of the other young people turned on participant J, they made the decision to stop going to the group even though they liked to dance, demonstrating the exclusionary impact of their behaviour. Participant J's response to when they were asked about why they believed the young people behaved like that suggests that it was partly because of how they dressed and spoke and because they were 'different' to them. Similarly to the views of other young people, there is an element of personal responsibility given for the way they were treated by peers that it is something about *them* that incites the exclusionary behaviours and attitudes of their peers were justified. This is further evidenced by participant K when they spoke about what they thought loneliness meant.

Participant K: *If someone's being mean to you, and you haven't got anyone there to support you, you feel really down and like don't feel like you should be there.*

Researcher: *What does that mean? Don't feel like you should be there?*

Participant K: *You feel like you don't fit in and you need to go back to where you came from.*

Again, the feeling of being different to the majority is a key factor in how young people conceptualise loneliness and the exclusionary behaviour of others (i.e. 'being mean') clearly impacts this. Phrases such as '*you feel like you shouldn't be there*' and '*you need to go back where you came from*' also implies the detrimental and exclusionary impact of what they believe other people think of them. For example, participant K reflected on a time they were teased about the way they were dressed:

Once I was wearing this outfit and I was just walking down the street. I was with J and her friends and they were commenting on why did I wear tights and shorts? And then my head was like because it's cold, but also because I can dress how I want to. So I feel like we shouldn't have to change who we are to make other people like us.

The pressure felt by participant K to dress a particular way in order to be liked is apparent; they did not believe that this was right. Their view that '*I can dress how I want to*' presented a more confident assertion of being comfortable as who they are which is less evident in the other young people's experiences. Here, participant K's self-confidence and embracing of being different seems to partly counteract the effects exclusionary behaviours and attitudes of other people. However, as illustrated through others' experiences, when a young person does not inhabit this self-confidence, exclusion is felt more deeply and experiences of loneliness can occur.

There's a lack of understanding and empathy

The belief that greater understanding and empathy from other people is important for those who experience loneliness was articulated by the majority of young people. In discussions about what loneliness meant to them, it was described as a '*lack of understanding*', '*struggling to be honest*' and '*shame to admit loneliness*' (flipchart notes, Winter Gardens site); '*not being able to get help*', '*not being able to tell*', '*people don't really get what you're going through*' (flipchart notes, Clock Tower site). These are expressions of not being able to reach out to others because of a fear that they just do not understand. What became clear as the discussions progressed, is that young people's experiences of loneliness felt stigmatised because of a widely held view that young people do not feel lonely. For example, participant T said:

I think like more understanding just in general. Like people, I think there's still a stigma, sometimes about all young people, you know they can't be lonely because like they've got school and they're surrounded all the time.

This quotation shows two main problems related to a lack of understanding and empathy in other people. Firstly, there is a stereotype that young people cannot be lonely, especially if they are surrounded by other people; this was also expressed in Group 1 (feasibility phase) where one participant associated loneliness with '*old people*' (from word cloud activity). The use of the word '*stigma*' to describe loneliness in young people suggested an awareness that young people who are lonely can feel vulnerable to judgment from others. Secondly, a perceived lack of understanding and empathy from other people can therefore encourage young people to further retreat into themselves as a protective measure. Participant U also suggested the importance of empathy:

It's hard for most people to experience things when they haven't been in their shoes.

The acknowledgment that if people do not experience loneliness themselves, then it is difficult for them to truly understand what it is really like, therefore there is an absence of empathy. This suggested that young people can experience fear of being stigmatised and judged by others when they are lonely which could potentially promote further inwardness, thus strengthening the loneliness cycle.

Participant S also described how they thought that the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic may have altered people's perceptions of loneliness and garnered greater understanding:

So I thought that there would be sort of more awareness after all these lockdowns and during the pandemic, but I'm just seeing like titles for articles and things it's just like...just getting your mental health, just takes flipping the switch now that everything is back to normal. It's just like, well people's perspective is just right apparently, no lockdown now, just back to normal.

The notion that people's perspectives have not changed significantly and that there has not been increased empathy, was frustrating for them. Arguably if any event was ever going to develop greater awareness of the effects of loneliness, it would be placing society into lockdown. Even if there are some people who have greater understanding of the physical and mental consequences of loneliness, the fact that participant S personally felt that this was not the case, must feel hopeless to them.

Other young people described experiencing a lack of empathy from organisations which are meant to offer help and support. Some young people spoke about the anger they felt when they did seek help and were not listened to. This was evident in a conversation with participant R:

Participant R: *The mental health services are awful around here.*

Researcher: *In what way? Is it just like it takes ages or do you...*

Participant R: *The waiting times. And they just brush you off.*

Researcher: *How does that feel when you feel like you're getting brushed off by the people that are meant to...*

Participant R: *It's awful, I'll be honest because I have been there myself.*

The description of feeling 'brushed off' when they were actively seeking help was distressing to participant R; perceiving a lack of empathy in a professional capacity had a detrimental impact this has on this young person. Asserting that the mental health services are 'awful' and that the waiting times are too long shows that their experience has detrimentally affected the support they perceived as being available to them. This ineffective experience is concerning in terms of both the lack of required help for this particular time, but also the impact that this experience has on shaping any future need for support.

Some young people who had social anxiety discussed the difficulties experienced when going to a public venue alone, such as a café. The desire to leave the house and proactively seek an environment where there are other people, whilst simultaneously feeling anxious about speaking to others is a stressful experience. The possibility of having a system using coloured cards to indicate to staff and other customers when a person did not want to be spoken to and when they were happy to be approached, therefore promoting awareness and understanding, was explored. Young people considered whether this could be adopted into local public venues as a way to open up the possibility of social connection for anxious people:

I would run away. Basically, you can't win with me. If you give me the option, suddenly, then I'm nervous about making that choice. It's not...there's no...it just becomes so many layers deep...it's an awkward situation. If you're in a café saying could you just give me some space to eat my lunch or whatever, [turning the card over] is like saying go away. (Participant S)

Participant S illustrated the challenges for them with this practical suggestion; by being given the choice of whether to turn the card or not to invite or discourage communication creates an added anxiety. Their description of it 'becoming so many

layers deep' highlighted how these very practical ideas will not always work for everyone. They already have social anxiety, but they want to try to alleviate their loneliness by getting out of the house. However, the tension between wanting to connect with other people whilst feeling anxious was worsened through the idea of being given the cards. Participant T agreed, stating *'I think I would be worried about changing it [to make] anyone to feel offended.'* These views shaped some of the young people's thought processes; that it is greater empathy from people in general which is needed and that although some practical tools may work in certain situations for certain people, it is primarily greater awareness about young people and mental health in the public that is needed.

8.4 Powerlessness in navigating challenging circumstances

For young people, difficult personal circumstances in which they feel powerless, can create experiences of loneliness. A distressing time was recounted by two participants where they spoke about their experiences with mental health support following self-harming:

Participant A: *I got referred to [organisation] and they went 'Oh you're not bad enough' but I slit all my arms all my legs and all that, and they still said I wasn't bad enough. And I went to them, I went, what are you gonna do when it's too late? My mate, she hung herself. She got referred to [organisation] like that. They didn't do nothing until it was too late to actually do something about it.*

Participant B: *[Organisation] isn't really all that good, I've been through it, it's not really all that good. They'll give you help and support but it's like it's not really all that.*

Participant A: *They said to me, my dad they went sorry, but they're not too bad enough to come to [organisation]. And my dad went is this not bad enough? I had slits all up my arms, all down my legs, all up my thighs and they went, no it's not. I went, what are they gonna do if she ends up killing herself? Can't do nothing about that.*

The contrast between participant A's strong visual image of how they had cut their arms and legs in an act of self-harm and the response they received of not '*being bad enough*' is striking. Participant A's disbelief is apparent that their deliberate and visible act of self-harm, was not deemed serious enough by a professional adult to warrant significant intervention. This was evident in other young people's views, for example, in the group discussions, participant B also felt that the organisation '*isn't really that good*' and participant A further elaborated that their father shared this experience. He asked if the self-harming '*wasn't bad enough?*' which elicited a negative response. Participant A's disbelief and anger was enforced by the references made to their friend who was not taken seriously enough until they tragically took their own life. The need to be listened to, to be taken seriously and to display real empathy to young people who are struggling with their mental health is seen as vital in order to instate hope for them. In contrast, participant B described their recent, more constructive experience with a different organisation:

I wanted to go to [organisation] because of what happened to me a while ago. I tried to end my life by overdosing, so they then gave me a referral to [name] for immediate action and I had an assessment last night and then I'm going to get help and support in February, hopefully with the one to one.

The professional understanding demonstrated through the '*immediate action*' taken, followed by an assessment and one to one support means that this experience strikes a more hopeful tone. Feeling empathy, in particular from organisations which are meant to provide support for young people, provided participant B with encouragement that they are not alone, that they are understood and that they can have optimism for their future.

Of course, difficult personal events are not just defined as mental or physical health challenges. Participant N spoke about the loneliness experienced as a result of being in care:

Participant N: *My thing is where you go into foster care, and there's nobody, like somebody, who you do know and somebody you don't know, and that's a bit lonely because you don't get to see your mum or dad often. 'Cause my dad lives in [place] and my mum lives in Morecambe and my gran lives in [place].*

Youth worker: *OK, so sometimes families not being able to be together.*

Participant N: *Yeah, and my stepmum and Dad and just split up and then when that happened I was upset.*

Being in foster care was a challenging circumstance for participant N because they did not know the people well; they did not have established relationships and were not able to see family members as often added to their experience of loneliness.

Furthermore, the fact that their parents' relationship had broken down made regular visits even more challenging because they reside in different places. Although these are different challenging personal circumstances to the previous example, a similar powerlessness to control events in their own lives was expressed from both speakers that was linked to their experience of loneliness.

The importance of supportive familial relationships was articulated by participant V, when describing the loneliness of the challenges of the transition to adulthood:

Participant V: *It's like because we've grown up, like parents sort of expect us to pretty much fend for ourselves, or start to...but there's also this sudden change of like being in the family household, then not being in the house...like I don't know what to do with this.*

Researcher: *What do you think would help with that?*

Participant V: *There's one thing that I tried to...my mum had to go and see some family in [name of place] and I told her that I might stay home, see if it's like too much to kind of like run the house I suppose. I actually kind of struggled on day one and I think Mum had some friends to help me out.*

Moving out of the family home is a significant transition, and participant V described this as feeling like a *'sudden change'*, not knowing how to navigate it. The *'trial run'* when their mother went away to visit family was a struggle because the transition of responsibility did not feel like a gradual process. Feeling ill-equipped to handle these adult tasks resulted in participant V feeling lonely. The expectation that they should be able to manage the transition, yet feeling incapable to do so, resulted in lowered confidence in their own abilities.

8.5 Learning social and emotional skills

Young people considered different ideas that might help young people who experience loneliness in both a general context and specifically in Morecambe. Predominantly, the need for more understanding across different populations was an overriding belief, whether is their peers, the professional adults in their lives or people who have power to make decisions that affect them. Young people thought that through education – and this could take different forms – greater empathy and understanding can be realised, which will help to ease the challenges presented to young people who are lonely.

It was recognised that there could be more explicit education about loneliness and more open conversations around the subject, including with older generations. Some of the suggestions for how young people who are lonely could be supported included *'better understanding and empathy'* (flipchart notes, Winter Gardens site), *'more education about emotions'*, *'teaching [about loneliness] at school'* (flipchart notes, Clock Tower site) and *'more education about loneliness and mental health'* (Stone Jetty site). Explicit teaching in schools about loneliness was seen as a constructive way to both support young people who experience loneliness themselves, as well as educating other young people about the mental health impact that this may be having on some of their peers. This was exemplified by one participant who described what it can be like for some of their peers at school:

You can tell that they were lonely, looking around to someone to talk to them. And it's not hard to reach out to them and ask 'how are you?' and make

conversation with them. I think that will make a massive difference for a lot of people. (Group 1, feasibility phase)

For young people who are not necessarily experiencing loneliness themselves, having the social awareness to recognise that other people might be, reaching out and offering connection was identified as important, even through the small and simple act of asking someone how they are.

Across all four of the research sites in the case study phase, young people suggested that teaching social skills (either in school/college settings or in the community) could support lonely young people, alongside better access to mental health provision. Difficulties around confidence were identified as a barrier to social connection in those who are lonely; for example, participant P said *'seeing someone that doesn't have the confidence to get to know someone and obviously they leave them out and that's lonely'*. Across the groups, low confidence was seen as a preventer to connection. Participant V shared the challenges they have making conversation with other people:

Participant V: *I always like blame myself for things though because like I know I'm not really a good talker.*

Researcher: *What do you think would help with that? What would help you?*

Participant V: *I would say, like you know these like talking games, they seem to help me, I wish I could just do that at home with people.*

Youth worker: *So having prompts helps?*

Participant V: *Yeah, and some nice times when we get some like family together and we all have a good talk.*

Being given some concrete tools, such as conversation prompts or games to practise conversation, helped participant V build their confidence, especially when they can then utilise this in a real world situation (talking with their family). However, participant S, whilst recognising that these types of tools can be useful, when you have a limited opportunity to use them, the result is limited in success:

Participant S: *[Name of organisation] does do that is sort of practising being in social situations in a way. But it's like, it doesn't suddenly mean that you're gonna be in those situations. I mean, it's just from my perspective, I suppose in a way, it does help get me out to like, go to a cafe on my own or something.*

Youth worker: *But then you don't then practice it, because you're not going anywhere else?*

Participant S: *I don't go out with friends because I don't have friends. So I'm not socialising outside of these groups.*

Participant S suggested they understood the benefit of learning and practising these social skills as it can provide a certain confidence when you feel like you know how to manage certain social environments. However, the difficulty is when a young person does not socialise outside the groups themselves and again the self-perpetuating cycle resumes. For participant S, they summarised *'all these different elements, I can't see how you deliver that,'* suggesting that it is difficult to imagine how someone could teach this, and that for them, learning particular social skills will have limited value if there is not regular, real-life application.

8.6 Improving accessibility to services and spaces

Young people's frustration was evident when exploring both access to particular services and physical spaces in the community. Whatever the type of access, exclusion incurred when young people could not get to what they needed. Concerns about both local and national waiting times for mental health services were evident for some young people:

Researcher: *What might help you with that or support you then?*

Participant N: *[Indistinguishable] I think more things on the NHS might help with mental health, if you don't get help and then end up dying of it. Like that [person] on Friday, they had like proper mental health and the school didn't help at all.*

Participant M: *It's nationwide...I think you shouldn't have to wait forever.*

The anxiety of these young people over the lack of provision they perceived was in Morecambe was evident. Participants expressed a fear that the help and support for mental health they need cannot be made available quickly enough. Some other young people similarly agreed that mental health support needed to be more accessible and on a drop-in basis for young people:

Participant A: *[We need] places to go 'cause I know there's nowhere to go and say I need help...but there's none.*

Participant C: *There is a couple in the [medical centre] but you have to have an appointment now, which is the only bad thing.*

The ability to access help was a priority, however participant A believed that *'there's none'* and participant C suggested that what was available was limited and that appointments mean the support was not easily accessible. Some young people also suggested that *'drop in'* places for mental health support which were accessible everyday could provide essential services for those who need them.

Being able to easily access information about services, groups and events which are of interest to young people was identified as a key factor in Morecambe. Participant S spoke about when they feel most lonely, *'I think really in the second half of the week. I only go to two groups'*. Later on in the week and at weekends, participant S believed there were less opportunities in the area to help them connect with others, although they admitted *'it's kind of hard to know what is and isn't there'*. Making information accessible was deemed a useful resource to develop, *'just a central hub for information [because] I can't know what I don't know'*. Developing a centralised information centre aimed specifically at young people which contains details of all the service, groups, activities and events is a practical resource that could help young people in Morecambe access what they need.

Suggestions of support were made for those who have problems with accessibility, in the context of physical needs. For example, participant L described the challenge of having anxiety when going out:

Researcher: *Is having anxiety quite lonely?*

Participant L: *Yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah.*

Researcher: *Why?*

Participant L: *Because when...I want to go out my anxiety stops me.*

As a young person, they have the desire to go out and meet friends and do activities together. However the anxiety was a barrier to being able to do this. When discussing how some local public spaces feel inaccessible, participant L, who has social anxiety, highlighted the cinema as an example of how this could be a problem:

Participant L: *Cinema is a massive huge thing that I hate. It's absolutely horrid in the cinema because literally I can't see...*

Researcher: *So what could they do to make the cinema more accessible to people that have social anxiety*

Participant L: *Less crowded. Anything that's crowded I instantly...take some of the people out. Sometimes the loud noises...*

Researcher: *They are so loud at the cinema aren't they? But I find it quite loud as well.*

Participant P: *But the best one, though, is Lancaster, because obviously I've been so many times and also they have like special seats for people with special needs if they want to go and sit at the front 'cause my brother works there obviously so he just tells me the updates. Whereas Morecambe totally, agree with you, you know it's really loud and it goes dark and you know, it's very crowded, so I can understand your point on that.*

Participant N: *In Lancaster they have an autism friendly cinema at the weekend.*

Researcher: *So as far as you know that doesn't exist in Morecambe?*

Participant P: *That doesn't exist Morecambe, no.*

For young people to feel as though they cannot join in their friends at the cinema because of their social anxiety can be a lonely experience. The comparisons made with the local cinema in Lancaster which has, for example, autism friendly viewings and accessible seats for those who have physical disabilities, was favourable to what exists in Morecambe. The crowds, darkness and loud noises were identified as key aspects to address in order to make it more accessible and inclusive to all young people. From a more general point of view, what some of the young people discussed demonstrated the importance of making every day, local spaces and venues accessible for the non-visible needs of young people to enable inclusion and connection.

8.7 Conclusion

Loneliness in young people can be a numbing, dark experience. Exclusionary behaviours and attitudes from others and dealing with challenging personal events can promote loneliness. The intensity of the experience of loneliness is fuelled by a lack of understanding of the experience by other people and stigma associated with being lonely. Especially for the older young people, a vicious cycle of self-blame can make the prospect of reducing loneliness even more difficult, leading to a sense of helplessness. Participants suggested that creating educative opportunities to learn about loneliness and development of social skills could help to support young people who are lonely, as well as better access to mental health services which are responsive to their different needs, and more inclusive public spaces.

CHAPTER NINE: KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Introduction

In the literature review chapters, current knowledge about place, community belonging and loneliness in relation to young people was presented with key gaps identified. In terms of place, this research explored how young people who live in a disadvantaged coastal community perceive where they live and how this influences their lives. With regards to community belonging, how young people understand and relate to their communities as an entity for belonging and social connection was examined. In terms of loneliness, accounts of how young people from disadvantaged coastal communities experience loneliness were generated, and their ideas for how they think young people who are lonely might be supported in their community were explored.

This research has aimed to draw these themes together in order to develop understanding of how the place and communities in which young people reside can relate to experiences of loneliness, and within the context of the unique coastal setting. Through the participatory approach and creative methods adopted, the research is rooted in young people's perspectives in order to generate rich accounts of their experiences which is a relatively novel approach to examining loneliness.

How young people in a coastal setting perceive place, what influences these perceptions and how they relate to place attachment and community belonging is discussed. Next, how young people conceptualise community and the language that they use to describe it is explored in relation to the literature. How young people conceptualise loneliness is then considered. A proposed theoretical model of how place-based stigma is related to young people's sense of community belonging and consequently, experiences of loneliness is presented, suggesting a new approach to examine loneliness in young people from a collective, place-based perspective. Young people's ideas for interventions to support other young people who experience loneliness are discussed, generating new ideas which should be explored in future research. A methodological contribution is presented in relation to how the

emotionality of the relationship between the researcher and research participants can be a positive, galvanising force both for the dissemination of the current research and for investing in future research with the same community.

In this final chapter it remains to highlight the key themes from the study in relation to place, community belonging and young people's experiences of loneliness; to highlight key implications for policy and practice on tackling loneliness, and to identify the lessons for future research in the field. Finally, the limitations of the study are acknowledged.

9.2 Main Themes

Using a place-based lens, this research has explored young people's experience of loneliness in the coastal town of Morecambe. Several key findings emerged relating to young people's relationship with Morecambe as a place, their sense of it as a community and their experiences and understanding of loneliness.

A spectrum of opinion about Morecambe

If place is a way to see, know and understand the world (Cresswell, 2004), the understanding of young people in Morecambe draws on a sense of the town characterised by economic inequality against a backdrop of environmental beauty. The many contrasts given by young people in their accounts of what it is like for them living in Morecambe, reflect a complex relationship between Morecambe as their place of residence and the town as a stigmatised place. On one hand, strong attachment to Morecambe was evident through valued social relationships and/or rootedness arising from multi-generational links to the town. On the other, a general feeling that Morecambe was an 'uncared for' place with limited opportunities for young people was a frequent refrain. These dualisms regarding young people's relationship with the town in which they live, are considered in relation to the different meanings attached to Morecambe as a place; the resulting variability in attachment to Morecambe; and

finally, the place-based stigma associated with living in Morecambe for young people and how this impacts on their identity.

Morecambe means different things to different people

Young people defined Morecambe almost equally by its physical characteristics (natural beauty) and by the social interactions they experienced there (Cresswell, 2014; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2011). However, that their sense of place was importantly shaped also by the town's historical and cultural context illustrates the extent to which place is a multi-dimensional concept (Ardoi et al., 2012; Campelo et al., 2014). These different dimensions were full of contradictions, leading to a sense of Morecambe from young people's perspective as 'a place in tension'. This dualism reverberated throughout and was also reflected in comparisons made between Morecambe and other places. Having a positive sense of place has been shown to be an important motivational driver for protecting communities and promoting the wellbeing of its citizens (Lewicka, 2011), which suggests that negative perceptions may have implications both for young people's sense of community belonging and their wellbeing. Young people's perceptions resonate with other studies of advantage and disadvantage in coastal areas (Ashbullby et al., 2013; Ryan, 2012).

The different descriptions of Morecambe's natural beauty with its position on the coast, and the associated wellbeing benefits experienced were starkly contrasted with the poor maintenance of its manmade attributes. This suggests that the physicality of place was significant for young people in shaping their sense of place, aligning with Jorgensen and Stedman's conceptualisation. Distinctive aspects associated with Morecambe's place character (Anholt, 2009), such as historical buildings (for example the Midland Hotel) and famous landmarks (for example the Eric Morecambe statue), were also suggestive of young people's pride in its heritage; features such as these were perceived to be integral to Morecambe's place character. Unlike more generic aspects of place, such as the town centre, shops and housing, these distinctive features were very much positive attributes of place. This is at odds with Relph's (1976) earlier notion of placelessness; Morecambe seemed to have retained a strong sense of individual character and it is other more generic areas of the town which have suffered

deterioration. This can be partly seen as a consequence of declining tourism over previous decades which has contributed to shaping the place Morecambe has become (Massey, 1995); young people's narratives about what Morecambe used to be like demonstrated this. For them, Morecambe had become a place that is overlooked in the context of a more interconnected world, something that can be seen as having been disadvantageous for Morecambe in many ways and especially for the young people who live there. Furthermore, young people's frustrations that the Morecambe of 'now' was often compared with the Morecambe of 'then' with the present seemingly far inferior, demonstrated their awareness that the town has been allowed to decline, going from a popular tourist destination to an area of deep social and economic inequalities (Jarratt, 2015). These comparisons implicitly demonstrated young people's awareness of the external factors against which Morecambe was evolving in a negative way (Massey, 1995) and emphasised their sense of powerlessness.

In addition, the power of negative place reputation through handed down narratives can mean that young people feel excluded simply by being from a certain place (Clayton, 2012; Frost & Catney, 2020; Kelly, 2013). Negative repercussions borne out of stories about a place based on the past, affect the present attitudes of today's young people's to where they currently live (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2011). In this sense, older generations exert an influence in shaping young people's views of place; an aspect of influence which is relatively unexplored. Young people's frustrations with how Morecambe had suffered such significant decline shaped how they felt about the place. Although this was not exclusively attributed to the intergenerational discussions comparing the 'then' and 'now', it was partly the cause of their negatives feelings towards the town. The influence of older generations, therefore, provides another important dimension in the understanding of young people's sense of place.

As suggested by Cresswell (2014) outside spaces used by young people can become key 'places' for young people because of the activities associated with them. For example, parks, the beach and the promenade were meaningful spaces where young people could connect with their peers and are important for belonging (Mathers et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2019; Nissen et al., 2020; Thomas, 2016), as well as partaking in activities whose wellbeing benefits were recognised (Birch et al., 2020; Britton et al.,

2020; Hignett et al., 2018). However, at times the value of being able to regularly access said meaningful spaces was also in tension with anxieties expressed about safety, whether through direct negative experiences or narratives of danger which can have an exclusionary impact on young people (Thomas et al., 2018). For some, this affected how often and at what times they felt they could access these activities, creating a concurrent experience of inclusion and exclusion. When young people felt unable to be in a particular space because of other groups of people who were there at the same time, ‘anachroism’ (Cresswell, 2014) or a feeling of being ‘out of place’ was experienced. This was felt particularly by young people who were LGBTQ+ in Morecambe. Feeling fortunate to have access to the physical characteristics that a place such as Morecambe has and the enjoyment of spending time there to connect with friends, whilst at other times experiencing exclusion because of how other people’s discriminatory behaviour and attitudes, is a duality that runs through young people’s sense of place. Later in this chapter, the relationship of power structures to place-based stigma is considered. It is however important to note how power wielded in the community itself acts as a way to exclude certain groups of young people because of who they are (Cresswell, 2014) with damaging implications for how young people experienced their belonging to the wider community.

What was a particularly interesting finding in relation to this issue of exclusion from certain areas, were instances where the very same young people perpetrated exclusion through the deliberate dissociation of themselves from particular neighbourhoods and the people who lived there. Young people were often motivated to distance themselves from areas within Morecambe itself which they regarded as dubious, in particular the West End. This disidentification from the ‘other’ was mobilised in order to show that they were different to those whom they were stigmatising (MacDonald et al., 2014; Skeggs, 1997). Young people in Morecambe frequently denounced other areas of the town, designating these as ‘other’ to where they lived. Where they are powerless in relation to how people from outside their community might perceive young people from Morecambe detrimentally, power *can* be asserted through their own ‘insider’ stigmatisations of place. By highlighting these differences, belonging to the wider community was negatively impacted (Keene & Padilla, 2014). This is important not only in the context of how young people experience living in places which are

stigmatised, but it also highlights deep division in the community when linked to the previous example of exclusion. Different groups of young people across the community exclude each other for different reasons. Whether a young LGBTQ+ person experiences exclusion in their community through the threatening behaviour of others when spending time in an outside meaningful space, or whether that same young person excludes others who live in the West End area and categorises them living on a 'druggy street', it is illustrative of just how disconnected young people could be from each other and the community as a whole.

Many of the young people felt that there were limited opportunities for them in the area, suggesting a consciousness that there were few employment prospects, linking to the notion that those who live in coastal places can feel restricted in their outlook (Reid & Westergaard, 2017). This was associated with the economic difficulties young people highlighted, whether not being able to afford to join in activities, or the cost of shopping locally, young people's assertion of significant economic challenges for them was clear. Existing youth groups offered vital support and meaningful spaces and activities for young people where they could connect and 'do something' and a sense of belonging was evident (Estrella & Kelley, 2017; Scannell et al., 2016). Their complaint that there was not enough to do that was affordable is important to consider given the relationship of the resources of a place and its impact for the promotion of wellbeing (Lenzi et al., 2013).

In Morecambe, the proposed Eden Project North, is widely regarded locally as a great opportunity in relation to the regeneration of the town, as well as creating greater local employment. However, in general, young people clearly felt that there had been limited consultation with them regarding the importance of young people's inputs to the planning and designing of both outside and inside spaces. They were acutely aware of social and economic issues shaping Morecambe and this impacted how they perceived their own opportunities. As a consequence, the development of the proposed project was rarely mentioned by young people, and when it was, it was seen as something which they would not be able to afford to participate in, leading to the question 'who is it for?' to be asked. This supports assertions made in other studies, which suggest that regeneration should be done in consultation with young people in

the community to make regeneration go beyond just visual change (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014; Tolstad et al., 2017), and also to give local young people the opportunity to influence the decisions which affect their lives.

A damaged bond with Morecambe

Young people's attachment to place, an important dimension which forms sense of place (Low & Altman, 1992) was flexible in relation to Morecambe. A combination of physical and social features (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981) were highlighted suggestive of both negative and positive attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) and this was often expressed emotively (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1975). When young people expressed their sense of being an 'insider' or of rootedness to Morecambe, this was predominantly in terms of positive ties to peers, friends, and/or family (Kyle & Chick, 2007).

Furthermore, degree of attachment was also associated with whether they felt safe and secure in particular areas of the town (Fullilove, 1996). Such variability implies that many of the young participants had a fluctuating relationship with this place (Giuliani, 2003; Milligan, 1998; Scannell et al., 2016); that it was relationally determined depending on where they were and who they were with.

Young people's contrasting experiences meant that Morecambe could be simultaneously associated and dissociated with young people's identity, leading to unsecure attachment to place (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Framing this using Seamon's (2013) processes of place attachment can further highlight the nature of this bond. For example, in young people's accounts about 'place interactions' in the findings of this research study, positive social interactions experienced through regular attendance in their youth groups and spending time with friends in preferred locations such as a local park were evident. However, the contrast of these interactions with occurrences which disrupted sense of place, such as unfriendly encounters in the wider community, negatively impacted the attachment bond because they did not feel safe or secure. In the 'place release' process, the environmental encounters and events could be evidenced in predominantly negative and disruptive experiences, such as acts of intimidation in the community on the walk home from school, or when 'hanging out' with friends, creating an 'unsettled' feeling in place. Related to the process of 'place

realisation’, young people expressed a range of contrasting narratives which have been outlined in the previous section, that is through the descriptions of Morecambe’s physical setting, as well as heritage buildings and spaces, young people’s sense of pride of place could be perceived. However, further undermining of place realisation occurred when recent violent acts that had happened in the town or more general observations about the decline of the town were recounted. This was another instance where bond to place was ‘damaged’ for young people.

Given place attachment can have a significant influence on both individual and collective self-esteem, self-worth and self-pride (Low & Altman, 1992), clearly low attachment can negatively impact on identity which can potentially be harmful. This was corroborated through many of the young people’s accounts of their struggles in relation to mental health issues and loneliness. Of course, many other factors influence wellbeing, but the strength of attachment to the place where they lived affected how young people felt about themselves, both individually and collectively.

It’s stigmatising coming from Morecambe

How others’ perceptions can influence how young people from Morecambe feel about where they live, and how wider structural factors exert power in communities such as Morecambe to maintain a class ‘status quo’ are significant factors in how a place is perceived (Tyler, 2020). What other people from outside the community think about Morecambe mattered greatly to young participants. They were keenly aware of how others from outside the town might perceive the place, and by implication, ‘blemish’ the people who live there in some way (Wacquant, 2007, 2008). This led to a sense of shame at being from Morecambe; negatively impacting their sense of place and consequently some were at pains to hide where they were from; this resonates with other findings where young people experienced shame from living in particular neighbourhoods (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021). It is important to consider the impact of different media representations of places on young people as this can ‘feed the narrative’, deepening divisions and creating a sense of powerlessness in these communities (Tyler, 2020). Many of the young participants were well aware of the

negative portrayals of coastal towns such as Morecambe in the media and had first-hand experiences of outsiders saying negative things about the place to them.

The recent focus on the influence of place on youth loneliness (Hsueh et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2021; Marquez et al., 2022) is corroborated by these research findings, which show that the challenges of poverty and lack of opportunities and environmental factors impact on how young people connect with where they live and therefore on their experiences of loneliness. This of course can be true of many areas which have significant deprivation, but it can be said that coastal towns have unique and specific social challenges which exacerbate these conditions, such as limited or seasonality of employment, ageing populations, and high numbers of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021). As discussed previously, Morecambe is an example of a coastal place shaped by external, global factors (Massey, 1995) but in many ways this has been to its detriment. This resonated with what young people said about Morecambe as a place. Their understanding of Morecambe's 'decline' demonstrates an understanding of how outside factors have shaped Morecambe as a place, as well as the stigmatisation they experience from community outsiders as a result. Their sense of powerlessness in their own environment was evident.

Young people's narratives about the everyday inequalities they see and experience accorded with Tyler's (2020) argument that shame is promoted in the populations of places such as Morecambe, firmly supressing those people to the bottom of the class structure. The sense that 'no one important cared' about them was apparent in the anger and shame expressed by young participants. Tyler's (2020) view of stigma as a form of power frames how places such as Morecambe can be perceived by the general public, places which have been referred to as 'let down and left behind' (House of Lords, 2019, p. 3), with populations 'long neglected and overlooked' (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021, p. 3). Similar to other areas, young participants highlighted problems in Morecambe including significant deprivation and high unemployment (Beatty et al., 2008), drug and alcohol misuse (ONS, 2018) and underperforming educational institutions (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

Furthermore, the topic of ‘regeneration’ as frequently applied to declining coastal towns (House of Lords, 2019), can be related to Tyler’s (2020) concept of ‘stigmcraft’, a strategy which uses stigma to powerfully shape perceptions. How young participants frequently compared the Morecambe of the past to the Morecambe of the present, echoes representations of decline which feature in the referenced reports, as well as in media portrayals. The past and present comparisons feed regeneration narratives, but rather than inspiring optimism in young people who lived there, a sense of their own low value emerged (Paton, 2018) through the ‘taint’ of place (Wacquant, 2007, 2008). As mentioned earlier, in relation to the Eden Project North, young participants generally felt irrelevant to regeneration plans.

This exemplifies the exclusionary effects that regeneration or ‘gentrification’ projects can sometimes have upon existing residents (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Paton, 2018). When young people feel excluded from plans related to the development of their place of home, there is arguably further disenfranchisement of them. This cements them ‘in their place’, thus maintaining existing capitalist power structures (Tyler, 2020). It should also be observed that some of the young people in Morecambe also expressed a desire to leave and live elsewhere if possible to seek other opportunities – a so-called ‘brain drain’ from the local area (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021, p. 97). Retaining young people in place is fundamental to the sustainability of regeneration, yet there was no tangible evidence of strategies or policies directed at this.

9.3 Young People’s Views of Community Are Nuanced

While there is a strong policy focus on community, for example, the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021), the notion of community and young people’s connections and feelings about their community were shown by this study to be complex. The language of ‘community’ was not something that young people easily related to. The perceptions of whether it was appropriate to regard Morecambe as ‘a community’ were varied, much of what was said about this overlapping with the sense of place generally as explored above. Significantly, communities of interest such as online groups were key communities for

young people. This notion of community belonging therefore was found to be complex.

The language of 'community' can be a barrier to engagement of young people

An important contribution from this research relates to the concept of 'community' itself; there are several key points for consideration. Firstly, the use of language; the word 'community' itself can potentially be a barrier to young people's engagement with the concept. Even though the way in which young participants conceptualised community resonated with much of the extant literature, such as being able to identify with others (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), the fulfilment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and support and activities (Pretty & Chipuer, 1997; Riley, 2019), the term itself was found to be off-putting and was not a word in their everyday vernacular. They were more likely to relate to the term 'groups' in speaking about their experience of 'community belonging'. To be clear: adapting language for engagement is not *simplifying* it for young people; rather the findings from this research suggest that it is important to establish a common language with them so as not to exclude nor disengage anyone. This contribution was a starting point; further inquiry could seek to develop a more relevant, modern, language of community *with* young people.

School as community of belonging

Despite the focus on Morecambe as a community of place, young people's attention often turned to the significance of their educational establishments for community belonging. Much of the previous literature has suggested that young people who experience strong belonging at school are more likely to experience a stronger belonging to their neighbourhoods (Prati & Cicognani, 2019; Pretty et al., 1996). In this research, findings were mixed; young people were either very disconnected from their school communities or had a strong sense of belonging to school (although these young people did not attend the main local schools). Regardless of this, young people still felt a poor sense of belonging to the Morecambe community overall and this could be in relation to two main factors. Firstly, as recognised in other literature, in deprived coastal areas there can be limited educational opportunities, and secondly, a higher

number of young people who have free school meals as a consequence of poverty is also linked to increased levels of loneliness amongst young people (ONS, 2018; Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

Young people in Morecambe emphasised the importance of feeling connected to and supported by school for their wellbeing. Some of the young people related accounts that could be described as being 'let down', where incidents such as physical and verbal bullying had occurred or where, from their perspectives, these had not been satisfactorily dealt with. When belonging needs are unmet, the outcomes can be painful and unpleasant (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Another argument, in relation to young people who attended schools outside the central local area, relates to the stigmatisation of local schools through the power of passed on narratives from other people. Reputations can be created from the stories which are shared by other people and this can become what amounts to a further 'blemish of place' (Wacquant, 2007, 2008) inside a place. It is also important to consider the longer-term impact of negative school experiences in terms of young people's desire to stay in the same place. A key aim for coastal towns is to retain younger people who can bring their skills to the local area (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021); they themselves are an important part of 'regeneration'. However, if young people's experience of education is poor, this could potentially drive them away when they are old enough to leave and seek more promising opportunities elsewhere.

Morecambe as a community

It was evident that to young people the meaning of 'community' was dynamic in that certain dimensions may be prioritised as being more important than others. For example, for young participants, above all else, respect and equality in relationships were identified as being the most important for sense of belonging to a community. A strong sense of belonging and connection was experienced through membership of youth groups and organisations in Morecambe, aligning with the importance of participation or 'taking part' in meaningful activities to foster belonging (Hoffman, 2021; Montague, 2018; Riley, 2019). Furthermore, the importance of identifying as similar to others, of feeling part of a collective, and the fulfilment of different needs,

of course resonates with the early work of McMillan and Chavis (1986) in defining a 'sense of community'. Additionally, young people identified aspects that reflect McMillan's (1986) definition of 'spirit of community', such as feeling secure in the context of their youth group communities; their communities of identity.

There was a general view that Morecambe was not a wider community or territory to which they felt they belonged (Wilmott, 1986). Cuervo and Wyn (2017) refer to the *multiple layers of belonging* to community, which describes the experience of belonging to one's community of place due to the length of time living there, whilst simultaneously desiring to leave to pursue better opportunities elsewhere. This disconnect with Morecambe as community was felt by young participants who expressed a desire to actively dissociate themselves on account of certain aspects of the place to be opposed to emphasising shared qualities (Wilmott, 1986). There was a powerful sense of belonging to smaller sub-communities (i.e. to youth groups and organisations), suggesting high levels of 'inward looking' bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). These inward-looking connections provided instantaneous wellbeing benefits through the acceptance, support and care that young people experienced. Subsequently, in line with Putnam's theory of social capital, the young participants demonstrated limited connections and social networks beyond these groups. Few spoke of relationships outside of these specialist groups that offered opportunities for social inclusion and this correlated with a general sense of pessimism about their future prospects.

Previous research has found that that young people who are from low socio-economic backgrounds can have a low sense of community. It has been suggested that this is related to a lower quality of life as in for example, when limited finances can make it more difficult to connect with others (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Chipuer, 2003). In Morecambe, economic factors acted as a major barrier to belonging for many young people, whether on an individual level (not being able to afford things) or on a wider community level (Morecambe as a 'deprived' town). Furthermore, places which have higher levels of deprivation and poorer health outcomes compared with the national average exemplify factors which are associated with increased levels of loneliness

amongst young people (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Lasgaard et al., 2016; Marquez et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022).

Social capital has a ‘protective’ function for young people, especially those who are vulnerable in some way, thus, these individuals have the most to gain if social capital is increased (Putnam, 2000). From the perspectives of young people in Morecambe, their social capital was variable but overall, generally low. Social networks, trust and reciprocity within their existing youth groups and organisations (bonding capital) were high. However, in relation to connections within the wider local community, these were low. The significance social capital has in the psychological wellbeing of young people is well known (Ngai et al., 2013; Tuominen & Haanpää, 2022). This includes high social capital positively impacting loneliness across age groups (Nyqvist et al., 2016). Equally, its variability can likewise imply negative impacts. Young participants expressed their desire to increase their social capital: what is currently missing are the *opportunities* for them to do so.

Furthermore, the importance of reciprocity in relationships (Putnam, 2000), the idea that, for example, a favour to a friend creates the expectation that it will be returned - was evidenced in the experiences of supportive youth group relationships. Yet, a more generalised reciprocity - that helping someone without the expectation that the favour will be returned but knowing that people will help when it is needed, was not evident. This can be related to the different types of *trust* that young people suggested were important. For example, ‘thicker’ trust, that is, trust between strong relationships and regular interaction with, for example, others from their youth groups, was evident. However, a lack of trust was felt in relation to the wider population of Morecambe. Young people felt a lack of safety in the local community, as well as feelings of being judged or unaccepted for who they are outside of their friendship groups, this accounting for the lack of trust. This is an important factor to consider given that low levels of interpersonal trust are associated with loneliness amongst young people (Matthews et al., 2022).

In line with previous studies, for the young participants to have a sense of belonging to community, relationships are central, whether with peers or adults, as are feeling safe and having access to relevant activities (Chipuer, 2001). Positive relationships were fundamental to their sense of community belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017) because in these relationships, they could feel accepted and respected for who they were without being judged. Studies have suggested that young people can experience social exclusion when discriminated against, for example, because of their sexuality or being disabled, or they may self-exclude through fear or negative experiences (Robinson, 2020; Toft, 2020). Some young participants who were LGBTQ+ spoke about their experiences of homophobia, both verbal and in physical attacks, which made them wary of the different areas in the town where they felt targeted and which also created an expectation that they would be judged for who they were generally. This was also evident in some of the accounts shared by young people who were physically disabled.

Although other studies have suggested that having specific 'safe space' communities where young people who are marginalised can connect and belong (Coleman-Fountain, 2017; Toft, 2020), this did not address the problems young people faced in the wider community. Because the young participants mainly experienced belonging as 'pockets' (of belonging), that is their separation into groups in which they felt safe and connected with others, in effect, this amounted to a temporary, short-term sense of belonging. It may be argued that the quality of belonging when in these separate groups outweighs the need for more general belonging in community. However, it does not address the wider challenges to young people of receiving the respect and acceptance necessary to increasing their belonging to Morecambe as a community of place.

It should also be considered that different groups of young people may prioritise other dimensions as being more important in what the concept of community means to them, such as having similarities with others or sharing experiences. This emphasises the argument that in research with young people, establishing what their dynamic conceptualisation of community is should be established from the outset because this may vary in different settings with different young people.

Online community belonging and loneliness

Young participants both enjoyed using social media platforms to connect with friends while recognising that negative experiences can result in exacerbated feelings of loneliness. This concurs with previous literature reporting the importance of online based communities for young people to connect and belong (O’Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Uhls et al., 2017), as well as the potentially negative and damaging aspects to engaging with others online (Caplan et al., 2005; Harman et al., 2005). Some young participants spoke of the importance of connecting online through different social media platforms, and of this enhancing the quality of their relationships (Nowland et al., 2018), not least because these connections were being made in the setting of a safe space (Craig, 2015).

This research suggests that for some lonely young people, creating new friendships exclusively online, such as through a community of interest group like music or gaming, can foster a sense of belonging. While this contradicts what some other studies have concluded (O’Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), it aligns with other studies’ findings (Caplan, 2005; Harman et al., 2005; Kraut et al., 1998). There was no explicit suggestion from young participants about how online platforms might enhance connections to the wider Morecambe community. While it is known that certain marginalised groups of young people benefit from the safety and autonomy of exclusively online relationships (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Craig, 2015; Nesi et al., 2018), there is little which examines this in the context of young people who live in stigmatised places. This research suggests that for some young people who experience disconnection to their community of place, actively seeking friendships online become vital spaces offering greater autonomy.

Authentic or superficial belonging?

It also became clear that some young participants had experience of adapting or changing aspects of themselves, such as their appearance or accent, to try to belong. Previous literature has examined this in other populations such as young migrants who try to adopt hyphenated identities to diminish their ‘otherness’ (Clayton, 2012; Sime,

2020). Where young people could fully be themselves and felt accepted for who they were by others, as prioritised in their conceptualisation of community, ‘authentic’ belonging could be experienced, thereby enabling the positive impact to their mental wellbeing to be felt, by for example, their experience of a reduced anxiety or loneliness (Baskin et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2007; Pretty et al., 1996). However, in some circumstances, young people adapted who they were in order to fit in and feel accepted. It can be argued that in these instances, only a ‘superficial’ belonging was experienced because they were not truly being accepted by others.

According to some young participants, attaining superficial belonging felt easier than dealing with the potential consequences of outright rejection. However, doing so resulted in a sense of belonging that was experienced as not being genuine and which therefore could not offer the same wellbeing benefits. Young participants identified that wider acceptance and respect both between different generations as well as young people themselves, is fundamental to experience authentic belonging within the wider community. However, it was acknowledged that this often posed a significant challenge. There are subtleties in the nature of belonging to consider here. For example, if someone can gain some of the immediate benefits from experiencing belonging to a group but they have to change an aspect of their true selves in order to experience this; what is the longer term impact? Whether repeated experience of this creates a sense of authentic belonging in the long term because relationships are forged over time, or whether it can actually perpetuate the superficiality of connection, is not yet fully clear.

9.4 Young People’s Experience of Loneliness

Young people were able to relate to the concept of loneliness through a range of personal experiences. Three key findings illustrate this: firstly, what loneliness feels like; secondly, the attributions of loneliness and thirdly, difficulties in making friends as an ‘older’ young person.

Young people’s highly visual depictions of loneliness as a darkness or numbness align with other recent descriptions from young people (Verity et al., 2022). By articulating

the experience of loneliness in these terms, young people have offered an insight into how emotionally challenging loneliness can feel. Other studies link loneliness to mental health problems, such as depression and suicide ideation (Lasgaard et al., 2011; Vanhalst et al., 2012) which have both also been associated with the idea of ‘darkness’ and ‘numbness’ (Hussain, 2020). It is suggested that lonely young people are less likely to be motivated to accept invitations to socialising events and that this can prolong the experience of loneliness (Vanhalst et al., 2012). However, the vivid and emotive descriptions of how loneliness is felt by young people are relatively unexplored outside the context of other mental health problems. The visual nature of the descriptions which young people provided can also potentially articulate more clearly to different practitioners what a young person’s experience of loneliness feels like and therefore could have implications for how they are supported and/or treated.

A further key finding about how young people understand loneliness concerns the potential differences in what they attributed loneliness to. Other studies have found that young people who experience low levels of social engagement and have low trust and low self-worth are more likely to result in loneliness that persists from childhood to adolescence (Hemberg et al., 2022; Qualter et al., 2013). Experiencing social exclusion as a result of feeling different or not understood also resonated with other studies about youth loneliness (Garnow et al., 2022; Madsen et al., 2021). Moreover, loneliness has been associated with having low expectations of friendships and therefore being more accepting of any friendship transgressions (Nowland et al., 2019) which can link to the attributions of low self-worth and trust highlighted in Qualter et al.’s (2013) study. Young people who were aged 18 and under (so still of school or college age) tended to apportion more blame towards how they felt other people behaved towards them, which will be termed *externalised blame*. However, in contrast, young people who were aged over 18 generally saw their loneliness partly as a result of their own behaviours, termed *internalised blame*. Both experiences seemed to establish a self-perpetuating cycle of loneliness which is in line with other studies (Storer et al., 2019). Younger people had certain expectations that they would be met with negative behaviours and attitudes which impacted their loneliness and this aligns with the theory that lonely young people experience hypervigilance to social threat (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010). This makes them feel unsafe and

the emotional pain caused by loneliness results in their social withdrawal. This creates a loneliness cycle in which as a result, subsequent impressions of social interactions can appear increasingly negative. For the 'older' young people in this research, the perceived social threat was arguably themselves, feeling unable to, or not knowing how to interact with others in social situations. Of course, many factors other than age may have influenced this, including, for example mental health or gender. However it is a finding which warrants further examination in a more nuanced way, as the question of whether they experience social threats as externalised or internalised may have implications for which interventions are utilised to support young people who experience loneliness,

Thirdly, the other contribution this study makes to the understanding of loneliness in young people relates to making friends. It is known that young people can still experience loneliness even when they have friends, for example through fear of rejection if they open up about problems, such as depression (McCann et al., 2012). Nevertheless, developing new friendships is important in youth to be able to navigate loneliness (Qualter et al., 2015). This research highlighted some potentially age-dependent factors influencing the formation of new friendships when feeling loneliness; it is suggested that it can be more difficult to make new friends as an 'older' young person – this was the case of young people in Morecambe who were no longer in secondary or further education. Difficulties in making new friends can be found in literature which typically focuses on undergraduate students (Benner et al., 2017) who are experiencing a significant life transition, such as living away from home for the first time. However, findings from this research suggest that in addition to life transitions, loneliness can be exacerbated in 'later' youth when young people feel that they have weak belonging to their community of place because they find it challenging to make new friends. It may also be true that the friends or groups which they previously belonged to at school had acted as a buffer to loneliness making their loneliness more keenly felt when this loss of social connection was subsequently lost. Another hypothesis could be that young people who simultaneously experience both the transition of leaving secondary and/or further education and need to adapt to the adult world whilst also remaining rooted to a place where they do not have a strong sense of belonging, could result in a kind of *stasis* (or feeling 'stuck' as some of the

young people in Morecambe described it). This may well make any personal changes, such as developing new relationships, even more difficult. Future research should examine the different factors which exacerbate the challenges that older young people face in trying to make new friends, especially when they have a low sense of belonging to the place where they live. This may well also have implications for how these young people might be supported upon leaving or when they have left school, such as community-based 'transition groups' where school leavers can still socially connect with each other in a face-to-face setting.

A place-based stigma model of loneliness

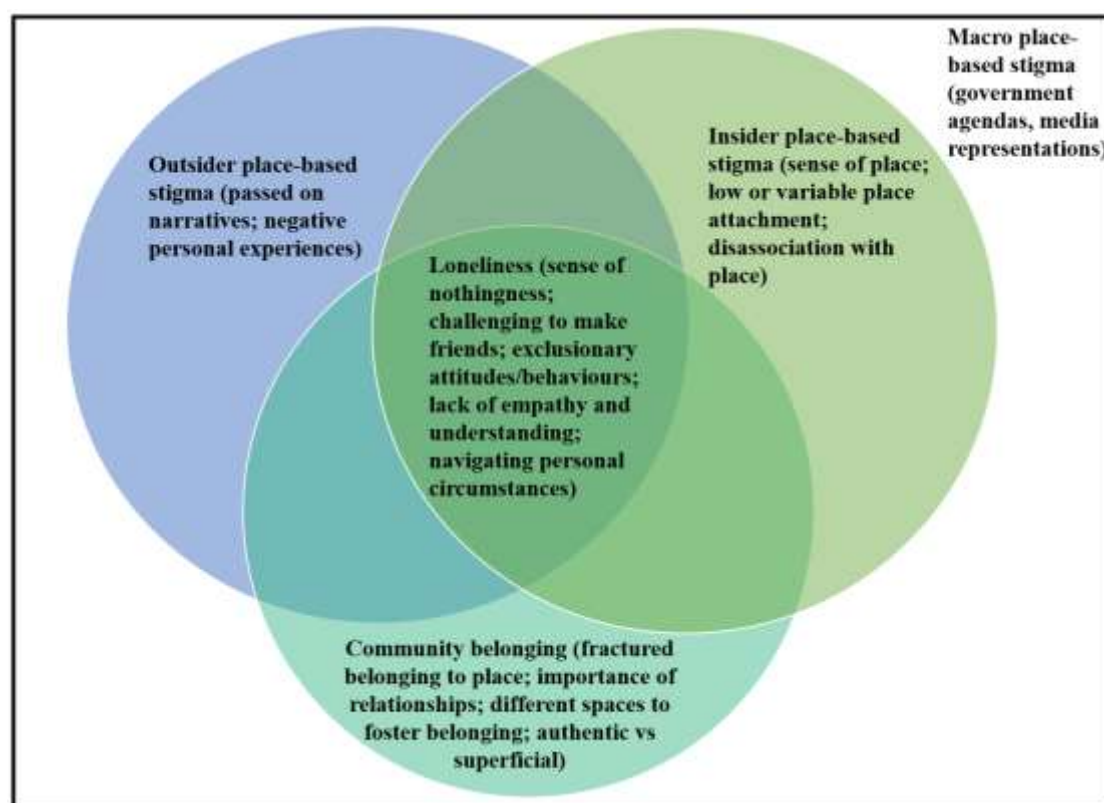
The research findings about loneliness and young people considered in the context of place and theories of community belonging, are viewed through the lens of stigma (Tyler, 2020; Wacquant, 2007, 2008) and a place-based stigma model of loneliness proposed. This model builds on recent research which have begun to identify the importance of place factors in determining whether young people feel lonely (Goodfellow, 2022; Marquez et al., 2022). Because there are limited studies on this research topic, this model offers a starting point in the examination of young people's experience of loneliness as related not only to place, but also as a structural problem.

In drawing together the research findings about how young people living in a coastal setting perceive the place where they live, with their experiences of belonging to community, the proposed place-based stigma loneliness model as described below fulfils two main purposes:

- 1) a framework to synthesise the findings from research exploring the interrelationship between key concepts of loneliness, place and belonging;
- 2) a constituents model through which to frame and develop future research about young people's loneliness, acknowledging broader societal determinants beyond individual characteristics or personality traits.

Young people’s experience of, or feelings of loneliness are viewed through the lens of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008) and stigma power (Tyler, 2020). This considers how place and sense of community belonging can influence and affect young people’s experiences of loneliness. (Figure 9.1). The model considers the findings about young people’s loneliness (discussed in Chapter Eight); findings about community belonging as defined by young people (discussed in Chapter Seven); and place-based stigma including insider and outsider place-based stigma (discussed in Chapter Six). Each of these is described below.

Figure 9.1: A place-based stigma loneliness model



How outside forces or ‘macro’ factors can affect perceptions of place and invoke place-based stigma is considered in this model. The representation of many coastal towns and communities in the UK from both a government and media perspective can shape how these communities are perceived and understood by the general population. For example, in the reports referenced in this thesis, such as the House of Lords ‘The Future of Seaside Towns’ (2019); the Chief Medical Officer’s annual report ‘Health in

Coastal Communities’ (2021); the Government Office for Science ‘Foresight Future of the Sea’ (2017) and education reports ‘Educational Isolation: A Challenge for Schools’ (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019), concerns about the health and wellbeing of populations, as well as social and economic conditions, are clearly documented. Additionally, when media narratives which can tend to sensationalise UK ‘problem towns’ accompany such official reports (see Footnotes, page 37), there is greater negative emphasis created in the public sphere. As Tyler (2020) asserts, these macro structures can encourage shame in the populations who reside in such places. This expression of ‘stigma power’ from the top of society creates a legitimisation of the narratives which are woven about coastal towns, thus further entrenching a class based status quo. Young people in Morecambe demonstrated understanding of this in several ways: through their awareness of negative news reporting about Morecambe; having sensitivity to both how other people might perceive them, and the issues around the lack of opportunities, poor experiences of education and deep poverty in certain parts of the community. Most of all, their sense of powerlessness in being able to do anything about these issues was evident. Tyler’s (2020) stigma machine is pressing down upon young people in Morecambe to ‘keep them in their place’.

Macro stigmatisations of place can feed into both outsider and insider place-based stigmas. Wacquant’s (2007, 2008) assertion that territorial stigmatisation can create an identity that is ‘blemished’ can lead to a range of negative consequences, including rejection by others. This was evident in several of the young people’s accounts of living in Morecambe, where relatives who lived further away expressed their disinclination to visit, or other young people who lived just outside the town in neighbouring communities expressed their negative views about the area and its schools. The sense that people from outside their community viewed Morecambe residents as being tainted (Wacquant, 2008) by place compounded young people’s own insider stigmatisation of place.

Young people’s insider stigmatisations of the place in which they live can be affected by other factors: their sense of place; place attachment and deliberate disassociation of themselves from place. The particular views articulated by the young people who live in Morecambe concerning the physical aspects of place, were evidenced in the

contrasts they made between the beauty of the natural environment and the attraction of some of the town's heritage sites on the one hand, and the rundown and poorly maintained aspects of the town on the other. According to Jorgensen and Stedman (2011), these physical characteristics may be reflected in the way in which social interactions that happen in place can be similarly contrasting. Young people highlighted valued interactions they had at a micro level with community members from certain groups and organisations, while from the wider community of Morecambe they experienced negative interactions with others which could be frightening or discriminatory. Furthermore, when low or variable attachment to place is experienced due to different types of 'undermining' experiences (Seamon, 2013), young people are less likely to express feeling safe and secure (Fullilove, 1996) and more likely to associate them with their own identities (Low & Altman, 1992). The young people in Morecambe spoke extensively about both these aspects; firstly, their sense of feeling threatened in Morecambe generally and in areas which felt unsafe for them, and secondly, their desire to make clear distinctions between themselves and others who were from what they perceived as less desirable neighbourhoods of Morecambe with negative reputations (Skeggs, 1997). The variability of these different factors in shaping how young people feel about the place in which they live, in addition to the macro factors and outsider perceptions, can further their own stigmatisation of place.

In the context of these first three dimensions relating to place-based stigma, there is therefore an impact on how young people experience their sense of belonging to the Morecambe community. As in the dimension that relates to young people's own stigmatisations of the place in which they live, there was a variability in their sense of belonging. Although young people experienced a belonging to particular groups, in terms of the wider sense of belonging to Morecambe as a community, their sense of belonging was fractured. This could be explained with reference to Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital and particularly bonding capital. Young people expressed the importance of feeling safe both in the physical spaces of their youth groups and also felt the importance of their supportive relationships with peers and adults. Exhibiting strong bonding capital provided positive impacts for their overall wellbeing from the sense of the 'authentic' belonging experienced in these groups. Yet for the majority of

young people, this did not extend further than the group, partly because of the different issues identified in relation to the place-based dimensions already discussed but also partly because of the lack of supportive relationships outside the confines of their groups. Experienced anti-social behaviours and discriminatory attitudes could lead to either feeling a ‘superficial’ belonging to the place or to feeling no connection with it at all. And yet for many of the young people in this research, high levels of bonding capital were actually limiting in the context of a stigmatised place because the opportunities to build more extensive social networks, developing bridging and linking capital (Leonard, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2005), were absent. In other words, although feeling part of and having a sense of belonging to certain groups, these did not facilitate a more holistic sense of belonging to Morecambe.

Because young people characterise their experiences of the place where they live in ways which may be full of contrasts and conflict with fractured community bonds, loneliness and feelings of isolation can result. For the young people in Morecambe, this was because of the perceived physical dangers in this place; social dangers, such as negative behaviours and attitudes of others (including at school) and other people’s general lack of understanding and empathy. As a result, individuals can become ‘distanced’ in order to protect themselves from social threat and emotional pain, and consequently socially withdraw to feel safer because they do not know who to trust (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021). In spite of the strong yet highly insular bonding capital exhibited, many of the young people in Morecambe still experienced loneliness. The deficit in sense of belonging to a community served to limit their social worlds and opportunities for wider networking beyond their groups of affiliation within which they felt ‘safe’. Young people could recognise feeling trapped in a place-based loneliness cycle but due to circumstances outside of their control, could not break free to develop richer experiences of community connection.

9.5 Implications for Addressing Youth Loneliness

Most recent research suggests that loneliness interventions for young people should be developed with them in a collaborative way (Osborn et al., 2021). In agreement with this principle, this section discusses the different ideas, which range from specific

place-based interventions and support measures in Morecambe - and which could have relevance in other communities - to wider, less tangible ideas put forward by young people in Morecambe. These contributions to the existing literature are starting points for community measures specifically created by young people themselves.

Educational settings should support young people who are lonely

The role which educational institutions could play in supporting young people who are lonely is well established (Lasgaard et al., 2016; Qualter, 2003; Yang et al., 2022). Despite growing recognition of youth loneliness generally, young people in Morecambe believed there to be a lack of understanding about the loneliness that young people experience and that this can further intensify mental health difficulties. This could suggest that greater understanding of and empathy towards loneliness amongst young people needs more attention within the general population. Schools were suggested as a good place to learn about loneliness, firstly, as a preventative measure for those who experience it and secondly, for those who do not consider themselves to be lonely but who could be more empathetic to peers who are. Therefore, explicit learning opportunities about what loneliness is, how it might feel and how young people can get support in educational institutions may help to destigmatise loneliness in young people, as well as foster greater empathy in others.

Other, more specific learning opportunities suggested by young people in Morecambe such as developing confidence building and conversation skills can perhaps be considered as practical measures to help to navigate social situations. A range of approaches to acquiring these skills is already offered in some schools and community groups, with variable impact on how they help young people (Osborn et al., 2021). However, a better joined-up approach between local schools and colleges and community organisations could offer more holistic support and this should be examined in future research.

Timely mental health support

Challenges related to the accessibility of mental health support is well documented nationally (Longfield, 2021) and young participants reflected their frustrations at a local level. Discussions about easier, quicker access to support when required reflected this wider conversation. Two main ideas were suggested in relation to accessibility: firstly, the importance of clear and consistent communication between a range of stakeholders and young people about the different types of support which are available, and secondly, the need to increase the instances when these different types of support are available. In Morecambe specifically, the development of a *young people-specific central hub* of information which is regularly maintained was identified as a potentially powerful resource which could promote the autonomy of young people who experience loneliness, as well as benefit young people in the community generally.

Support needs to be available 7 days a week

Furthermore, an interesting finding concerning the temporal qualities of loneliness also emerged. It is that for some young people, loneliness was felt more keenly at certain days or times of day than at others. For example, at weekends, it was highlighted that the experience of loneliness could be intensified because generally groups and/or activities stopped. So even though at points during the week there could be some, albeit temporary alleviation of feelings of loneliness through connecting with others at these various organisations, this was not possible on, for example, a Saturday or Sunday. Of course, how different localities plan their provision of groups and activities will vary, but certainly from the perspective of young people in Morecambe, the desire for a seven day rolling provision was evident.

Safe and inclusive spaces for young people in the community

Place-based measures have been identified as potential strategies to support lonely young people (Hsueh et al., 2022) and certainly some of the suggestions from young people highlight the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces for them in their

communities. From their perspective, these ranged from very practical solutions such as improved lighting in key areas, to codes of conduct in public spaces, (developed together with young people) to the physical improvement of existing but depreciated resources (such as the deteriorating skate park). Furthermore, it became evident that young people in Morecambe felt that as a place it lacked resources in the form of both inside and outside safe spaces in which to connect with others. Since in disadvantaged communities particularly such resources are regarded as important to protect the wellbeing of young people (Lenzi et al., 2013), it was clear that this protection is not felt by all young people in Morecambe. Some spaces, such as one of the local parks, as well as certain areas on the promenade, were identified as being good spaces to ‘hang out’ and socialise, but equally young people did not always feel safe there. This meant that they did not always feel as though they could utilise these spaces.

Involving young people in decision making about their communities

Local planners need to work together with young people in the design and upkeep of public spaces to create the inclusive spaces that young people desire for the connection that they feel is lacking in their communities. Interventions which go beyond the existing, individualistic approaches which have often been designed with older adults in mind (Ballantyne et al., 2010; Cattan et al., 2010; Khan & Bolina 2020) are important. What was clear was that there is a lack of opportunities for young people to be able to communicate with decision-makers about what they need in terms of safe, outside social spaces. Involving young people in decision-making about their communities and demonstrating the value of their voices in the shaping of where they live may well result not only in effective place-based loneliness preventative or reductive suggestions, but in an increased sense of place attachment and community belonging through the process itself (Estrella & Kelley, 2017; Scannell et al., 2016).

9.6 Methodological Implications

A further important implication from the research is concerned with the role of the researcher and the emotional labour which can be associated with qualitative social research (Hochschild, 1983), in particular with young people. My personal and

emotional experience of sometimes sensitive research with the young participants in this study, some of who were vulnerable young people, resonated with various findings from other studies on this phenomenon in which the importance of clarity about researcher positionality and subjectivity in the research process is emphasised (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). My connection with the Morecambe community through both living in the wider local area as well as teaching in one of the local high schools for eight years previously, meant that I was positioned somewhere more closely to the inside of the 'inside and outside' continuum (O'Boyle, 2018). Because of this, arguably the recognition (Honneth, 1995) afforded to the young people felt more personal. Certainly, I felt particularly invested due to these prior connections to the community. Furthermore, the conscious application of recognition in the development of relationships with young people added to the creation of positive, mutually respectful and equal partnerships with them. This was primarily through building trust and this took time; getting to know one another outside the research, through attending and 'helping out' at the young people's usual youth group sessions. Although this took more time overall, the importance of really investing in these relationships was clear. Accounting for this added time for development of relationships and building trust, both of which are fundamental to participatory approaches and especially when exploring potentially sensitive topics together, is important in the planning of the application of similar research methodologies.

As a way to actively reflect on the research sessions and researcher positionality and subjectivity, as well as manage the occasional emotionality of the research, the use of field notes was adopted. However, one unanticipated aspect was the emotional responses which I experienced after some of the research sessions. Of course, it has been suggested that the emotional position of the researcher is a strength of qualitative research and that the researcher should not try to separate these emotions from the research itself; that this is data (Ellis & Bochner, 1999; Harris & Huntington, 2001) which can create 'emotionally-sensed knowledge' (Hubbard et al., 2000). What was surprising from my perspective, however, was that strong emotional responses were not predicted nor planned for (Hubbard et al., 2000). Although support was anticipated and planned for any young participant becoming distressed at any point due to the

potential sensitive nature of discussions of loneliness for instance, there had not been any explicit planning for the emotional impact on the researcher.

At several points across the period of fieldwork, I experienced some emotional distress, due to young people's accounts, but also as a result of some of the pre and post session discussions with the youth workers. Furthermore, my own relationships to the community and young people made the intensity of the emotional response arguably stronger than it would have been as a true 'outsider' (O'Boyle, 2018) to the community. I was supported by the supervisory team, which was important for reflection (Hubbard et al., 2000) as well as emotional support. However, this could be addressed more formally through consideration and planning of risk assessments and ethical planning in research (Fenge et al., 2019).

It should also be noted that these experiences, although at times challenging, are an important part of the research process (Harris & Huntington, 2001). Arguably, my position as more of an 'insider' than an 'outsider' and the emotional connection can create an additional facet of motivation in the research; the researcher is an invested person beyond the research itself. Long after this research study has been completed, I will remain connected to the community and the young people and stakeholders who reside there. How these different connections between the invested researcher and the researched community shape impact, as well as the likelihood of developing future research projects within the same community, are matters that are worthy of reflection by 'invested' researchers.

9.7 Implications for Future Research

In summary, this research provides several contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, it provides insight into how young people's perceptions of place can relate to their sense of belonging to the local community and subsequently, experiences of loneliness. There is limited existing academic literature which considers the importance of place in relation to youth loneliness. Even though this relationship has been identified as important in recent studies (Batsleer & Duggan, 2021; Hsueh et al., 2022), there needs to be more understanding about why this may be. This research

begins to provide some explanation as to why place matters for loneliness. This could be justifiably developed further future research.

Living in a stigmatised place can shape young people's experience of loneliness

The impact that living in a place which is stigmatised (Tyler, 2020; Wacquant, 2007, 2008) from both outside and inside the community can shape how young people feel about how the place in which they live should be viewed. The subsequent impact on their sense of belonging to the local community and also on their experiences of disconnection and loneliness are evident from the perspectives of young people who live in Morecambe and are illustrated in the place-based stigma, community belonging and loneliness model. In future research, it is important to consider how demographically different groups of young people are affected by place-stigmatisation. This research did not collect *specific* demographic data related to the young people, although the particular youth groups that were engaged in the research included several young people who were LGBTQ+, had social anxiety or physical or learning disabilities (see Chapter Five, p. 108). Beginning to examine how different factors which can make young people feel 'different' or marginalised in some way could provide an increasingly subtle and detailed picture of the diverse ways place-stigma impacts belonging and loneliness. This may well have repercussions for determining how these young people might be supported.

Research should start with young people's conceptualisations

Those who engage in research about communities with young people should consider how they frame the concept of community. This can begin with the language they use to describe it, as overall the word itself did not resonate with young people. Actively involving young people in deciding what vocabulary they use to describe something in an everyday context, can serve to create a more inclusive language which young people can comfortably relate to. Furthermore, even though some of the aspects young people spoke about align with the many existing conceptualisations of community, such as togetherness, similarities, relationships, it can be argued that the notion of community may vary depending on who the research is being conducted with. For

example, with young people from Morecambe, above all other aspects of community, respect and equality were the most important features.

This may well be different with different groups, and how young people weight certain aspects in relation to others can be telling as to what their experiences of their local community have been (in the case of the young people from Morecambe, feeling judged and not accepted were dominant experiences). Therefore, when engaging in community research with young people, their involvement in the framing and use of language can be an important process to initially engage in. This can also include the wider conceptualisation of community as one that is inclusive of online as well as physical spaces. For many of the young people in the research, there was not consistently a clear differentiation between the online world and the physical world as initially articulated by the older researcher. However, many of the young people did not particularly consider them as different social spaces, rather they were just spaces to connect. Again, through developing dynamic conceptualisations of community with young people, this may be further explored.

Research should explore young people's ideas about loneliness and support

The research findings provide proposals directly from young people themselves about addressing loneliness which is relatively novel in the extant academic literature (Osborn et al., 2022). A wide range of suggestions made by young people should be implemented and examined from their own perspectives for impact. Examples include young people community information hubs to improve communication and accessibility to community resources specifically for young people and *explicit* loneliness education in school and college, as well as community groups. This second intervention strategy relates to the most significant suggestion made by young people in the research: to create greater empathy in people towards young people who are lonely (as well as those who face other not unrelated challenges, such as mental health problems or disability).

When trying to establish how a more empathetic society can be created, young people repeatedly returned to the importance of education. This builds on previous research

which identifies the importance of school to collectively bring young people together to discuss preventative approaches to their loneliness (Qualter et al., 2015). A general approach in schools was suggested by young people, as a way of both providing young people with strategies to support them through experiences of loneliness, but also, importantly, to also increase understanding and empathy about loneliness more generally. Future research studies could work more collaboratively with young people and schools to explore what loneliness education might look like in the curriculum and its scope for impact.

Research into the intergenerational factors influencing loneliness is needed

It should be acknowledged that this intervention measure will not necessarily support greater empathy towards young people from others of more advanced age. This research has suggested that intergenerational relationships can also affect young people's experiences of loneliness. This is both directly, namely through a lack of empathy from older people towards them, and indirectly, through the way older people's narratives can shape young people's perceptions of place. By making negative comparisons between the past and the present, older generations can inadvertently shape how young people feel about where they live, which can create a disconnect to the wider community and impact experiences of loneliness. To current knowledge, the effect of intergenerational relationships on young people's experience of loneliness is relatively under studied, especially in the context of place-based stigma. Further research which includes examining perspectives from both young and older people could provide better insight into the dynamics of these relationships and how potential loneliness interventions may be developed from this insight.

Research needs to recognise and value young people's voices

This research also makes an important contribution in terms of its location. The coastal town of Morecambe is an area which has been identified as having poor health outcomes due to levels of deprivation (Department for Health and Social Care, 2021), yet to date there has been no academic participatory research conducted there with young people, particularly that which relates to community belonging and loneliness.

This is significant because it demonstrates the *absence* of engaging with young people in this way in order to understand nuanced accounts of their lived experiences of place, demonstrating recognition that their voices matter and that they are listened to, valued and loved (Honneth, 1995). This research has established an argument for the involvement of the young people of communities such as Morecambe in how they would like the evolution of their towns to develop in ways which will support them in the present and provide a hopeful future.

Governmental reports such as the House of Lords ‘The Future of Seaside Towns’ (2019) highlight places like Morecambe as needing investment, support and the often stated ‘regeneration’, but this research has found little in the way of young community voices being listened to in shaping regeneration practices. Rather than being told ‘from the top’ about where they live and what sort of people they are, engaging local voices is fundamentally important to hear the actual lived experiences of residents. This is especially true of young people. To make somewhere such as Morecambe a more attractive prospect for young people in which they might stay and build their lives is vitally important for the long term future of the place (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). This can surely only be realised through the active involvement of young people who live there. Their regular and systematic participation of young people in decision-making processes needs to go beyond traditional ‘youth council’ formats. The young people who were involved in this research were generally not engaged in youth councils; arguably they were ‘harder to reach’, and therefore disengaged from such organisations. Adopting a more joined up approach where community groups and organisations are recognised and connected to decision-making bodies seems to be more likely to engage young people.

9.8 Research Limitations

The most significant challenge which has undoubtedly shaped this research is that the planned field work (both the feasibility and case study research phases) had been scheduled for Spring 2020 until winter 2020/2021. Due to the impact of restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic, significant revisions had to be made. Firstly, the overall timeline was delayed by approximately six months. Furthermore, the feasibility phase

for the research had to be conducted remotely because at that time no in-person research was allowed to take place. As a result, there were significant challenges for recruitment as this had to be done remotely. Therefore, the young people who participated in the feasibility phase were from a range of coastal locations in Lancashire, rather than only from Morecambe because so few youth groups were running regular online meetings. Additionally, meeting these young people online for the first time made it more challenging to develop rapport with them. This experience informed the importance of allowing time for relationships development in the case research.

Although all of the research sessions in the case study were able to be conducted in person (during Autumn and Winter 2021 to Spring 2022), this was still during a period of Covid-19 restrictions. For example, in some of the sessions during 2021, the wearing of face masks and social distancing measures were still in place. This did pose certain challenges for conducting research sessions which were meant to be creative and collaborative.

Young people's attendance to research sessions was also, inevitably, variable at times. Again, this in part can be attributed to Covid-19, firstly in terms of young people who had to self-isolate, and secondly in terms of general attendance to the youth groups. Youth workers spoke of how their groups were less well attended once lockdown restrictions had relaxed which impacted the sample because young people's attendance could be sporadic. Of course, this can often be a challenge anyway in participatory research with young people (O'Brien & Dadswell, 2020). However, the added impact of the pandemic seemed to exacerbate the issue. Although young people's attendance could vary from session to session, overall over twenty young people from Morecambe contributed to the different research sessions, which offered a range of perspectives and experiences.

A final point relates to the stakeholder report (Appendix 8). Ideally, following on from the Young Researchers Day, this report would have been written with young people as co-authors as a collaborative entity. However, due to the impact that the various

pandemic related challenges had on the PhD timeline, it has been authored by the researcher alone, which may have limited the *authentic* amplified voice of young people, even though efforts were made to ensure their opinions and ideas were represented as faithfully as possible.

9.9 Dissemination

The dissemination of the research was approached in three main ways. Firstly, the photography exhibition, which was planned by the Young Researchers Group and presented in Morecambe's town centre, provided for young people to share their perceptions of Morecambe within the community (described in further detail on pages 119-120). Secondly, an Executive Report was written for local stakeholders (Appendix 8). Here, young people's ideas for change and support in Morecambe were shared with a range of stakeholders, including those with responsibility for community engagement at Lancaster City Council, a member of the local constabulary, local high schools and other community groups and organisations including the four research sites. It was also shared with a contact within the Children Young People Multi-Agency Forum (CYPMAF) which forms part of the local Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS), who shared the report with all members of the organisation. The research has subsequently also been used to support a funding bid for a project about young people's transition to Year Seven at one of the local high schools.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of this research process, my own warmth towards Morecambe as a place is unchanged; I still feel the same attachment and affection towards the town that I always have. Throughout my experiences of meeting young people in the centre of Morecambe every week; whether ‘just talking’, going on a photography walk or listening to them debate with one another where their youth club was located on the town map, I enjoyed spending the time there ‘in place’ with them. However, throughout the months of the research fieldwork, my actual perceptions of the place - my own sense of place - has definitely changed shape. This can be attributed to viewing the place through the lens of young people’s words and experiences. For example, how the pleasure of socialising with friends in one of the local parks can suddenly become an unfriendly and threatening space, or how popping to the local corner shop for a loaf of bread can result in embarrassment when you realise you cannot afford the minimum card payment to buy it. Or how outside of the brilliant, regular support of your weekly youth group, it feels like there is not anywhere else to go and that is painfully lonely. The many different experiences which oscillate between friendship and hostility, connection and avoidance, pride and shame and belonging and loneliness characterises young people’s sense of Morecambe and it now also characterises mine too.

It is also important to reflect on the fact that although overall, the relationship that young people had with Morecambe was negatively articulated; as one shaped largely by social, cultural and economic inequalities, pockets of optimism and beauty were evident. Whether through the fantastic youth organisations and the supportive relationships that the young people had developed there, or through the proud descriptions of heritage and natural resources which are abundant in Morecambe, or whether through the ‘glimmers’ of young people’s sense of community mindedness – exemplified through the references to endeavours such as the community artwork where the Frontierland theme park used to be – optimism is definitely there. But these glimmers of optimism need to be harnessed and grown.

Through researching with young people in the community, I believe that this growth can only be truly possible with their committed involvement of in the discussions, the designing, planning and execution of the place and the community-based decisions which affect them. It is clear just how much we do not know about the personal, lived experiences of young people in coastal communities from an academic research perspective and filling this knowledge gap is vital for the evolvement of seaside towns such as Morecambe. As one of the young people stated during a research session, 'it's a problem of the politics, not the place'. The opportunity for the inclusion of young people in structural processes needs to be explicitly *there*.

REFERENCES

- Achterbergh, L., Pitman, A., Birken, M., Pearce, E., Sno, H., & Johnson, S. (2020). The experience of loneliness among young people with depression: a qualitative meta-synthesis of the literature. *BMC Psychiatry*, *20*, 415.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02818-3>
- Agnew, J. (1987). *Place and politics: The geographical mediation of state and society*. Allen and Unwin. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315756585>
- Ahn, M.Y., & Davis, H.H. (2020). Sense of belonging as an indicator of social capital, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *40*(7/8), 627-642.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-12-2019-0258>
- Alcoff, L. (1991). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, *20*, 5–32.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1354221>
- Allen, K. A., & McKenzie, V. L. (2015). Adolescent mental health in an Australian context and future interventions. *International Journal of Mental Health*, *44*(1-2), 80-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2015.1009780>
- Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism? *The Grounded Theory Review*, *11*(1), 39-46.
- Anholt, S. (2009). Should place brands be simple? *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *5*(2), 91-96. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2009.6>

- Anthias, F. (2006). Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: Rethinking translocations. In N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabiran & U. Vieten (Eds.), *The Situated Politics of Belonging* (pp. 17-31). Sage.
- Antonsich, M. (2010). Searching for belonging—an analytical framework. *Geography Compass*, 4(6), 644-659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x>
- Ardoin, N. M., Schuh, J. S., & Gould, R. K. (2012). Exploring the dimensions of place: A confirmatory factor analysis of data from three ecoregional sites. *Environmental Education Research*, 18(5), 583-607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.640930>
- Arnot, M., & Swartz, S. (2012). Youth citizenship and the politics of belonging: introducing contexts, voices, imaginaries. *Comparative Education*, 48(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.637759>
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Null*, 35(4), 216-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Arslan, G., & Duru, E. (2017). Initial development and validation of the school belongingness scale. *Child Indicators Research*, 10, 1043–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-016-9414-y>
- Arslan, G. (2021). School belongingness, well-being, and mental health among adolescents: exploring the role of loneliness. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 7(1), 70-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1904499>
- Ashbullby, K. J., Pahl, S., Webley, P., & White, M. P. (2013). The beach as a setting for families' health promotion: A qualitative study with parents and children

living in coastal regions in Southwest England. *Health & Place*, 23, 138-147.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.06.005>

Asher, S. R., Hymel, S., & Renshaw, P. D. (1984). Loneliness in Children. *Child Development*, 55(4), 1456–1464. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130015>

Asher, S. R., & Wheeler, V. A. (1985). Children's loneliness: A comparison of rejected and neglected peer status. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 53(4), 500. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.53.4.500>

Ayman-Nolley, S., & Taira, L. L. (2000). Obsession with the dark side of adolescence: A decade of psychological studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(1), 35-48.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/136762600113022>

Ballantyne, A., Trenwith, L., Zubrinich, S., & Corlis, M. (2010). 'I feel less lonely': what older people say about participating in a social networking website. *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*, 11(3), 25-35.
<https://doi.org/10.5042/qiaoa.2010.0526>

Bannister, J., & Kearns, A. (2013). Overcoming intolerance to young people's conduct: Implications from the unintended consequences of policy in the UK. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 13(4), 380–397.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895812458296>

Barke, J. (2017). Community-based research and approaches to loneliness prevention. *Working with Older People*, 21(2), 115-123. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WWOP-10-2016-0032>

Baskin, T. W., Wampold, B. E., Quintana, S. M., & Enright, R. D. (2010). Belongingness as a protective factor against loneliness and potential depression in

a multicultural middle school. *Counselling Psychologist*, 38(5), 626-651.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000009358459>

Batsleer, J., & Duggan, J. (2021). *Young and lonely: The social conditions of loneliness*. Policy Press.

Bauer, J. J. (2008). How the ego quiets as it grows: Ego development, growth stories, and eudaimonic personality development. In H. A. Wayment & J. J. Bauer (Eds.), *Transcending self-interest: Psychological explorations of the quiet ego* (pp. 199–210). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11771-018>

Baumeister, R. F. (2012). Need-to-belong theory. *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 2, 121-140. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n32>

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://content.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>

BBC Loneliness Experiment. (2018). *The anatomy of loneliness: Who feels lonely? The results of the world's largest loneliness study*.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2yzhfv4DvqVp5nZyxBD8G23/who-feels-lonely-the-results-of-the-world-s-largest-loneliness-study>

Beatty, C., Fothergill, S., & Wilson, I. (2008). *England's Seaside Towns: A 'benchmarking' study*. Department for Communities and Local Government.
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/26339/1/english-seaside-towns.pdf>

Beech, R., & Murray, M. (2013). Social engagement and healthy ageing in disadvantaged communities. *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*, 14(1), 12-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/14717791311311076>

- Bell, V. (1999). Performativity and belonging: An introduction. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632769922050511>
- Bellair, P. E. (1997). Social interaction and community crime: Examining the importance of neighbor networks. *Criminology*, 35(4), 677-704. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1997.tb01235.x>
- Benner, A.D. (2011). Latino adolescents' loneliness, academic performance and the Buffering Nature of Friendships. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 40, 556–567. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9561-2>
- Benner, A. D., Boyle, A. E., & Bakhtiari, F. (2017). Understanding students' transition to high school: Demographic variation and the role of supportive relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46(10), 2129-2142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0716-2>
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Bhandari, H., & Yasobu, K. (2009). What is social capital? A comprehensive review of the concept. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 37(3), 480-510. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853109X436847>
- Birch, J., Rishbeth, C., & Payne, S. R. (2020). Nature doesn't judge you – how urban nature supports young people's mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city. *Health & Place*, 62, 102296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102296>
- Blackshaw, T. (2010). *Key concepts in community studies*. Sage.

- Boal, A., McBride, C.A., & McBride, M.O.L. (1979). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Pluto Press.
- Boomsma, D. I., Cacioppo, J. T., Muthén, B., Asparouhov, T., & Clark, S. (2007). Longitudinal genetic analysis for loneliness in Dutch twins. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, *10*(2), 267-273. <https://doi.org/10.1375/twin.10.2.267>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–58). Greenwood.
<https://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/sites/socialcapitalgateway.org/files/data/paper/2016/10/18/rbasicsbourdieu1986-theformsofcapital.pdf>
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourke, L. (2009) Reflections on doing participatory research in health: participation, method and power. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *12*(5), 457-474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570802373676>
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory*. Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589-597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021) One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Brent, J. (2009). *Searching for community: Representation, power and action on an urban estate*. Policy Press.
- Britton, E., Kindermann, G., Domegan, C., & Carlin, C. (2020). Blue care: a systematic review of blue space interventions for health and wellbeing. *Health Promotion International*, 35(1), 50–69. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day103>
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why Action Research? *Action Research*, 1(1), 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14767503030011002>
- Budig, K., Diez, J., Conde, P., Sastre, M., Hernan, M., & Franco, M. (2018). Photovoice and empowerment: evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5335-7>
- Burke, P. J., & Lumb, M. (2018). Researching and evaluating equity and widening participation: Praxis-based frameworks. In P.J. Burke, A. Hayton, A. & J. Stevenson (Eds.), *Evaluating Equity and Widening Participation in Higher Education* (pp. 11-32). Trentham Books.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.
- Butcher, M., & Dickens, L. (2016). Spatial dislocation and affective displacement: Youth perspectives on gentrification in London. *International Journal Urban and Regional Research*, 40, 800-816. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12432>

- Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. C., Crawford, L. E., Ernst, J. M., Burleson, M., Kowalewski, R. B., Malarkey, W. B., Van Cauter, E., & Berntson, G. G. (2002). Loneliness and health: Potential mechanisms. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *64*(3), 407-417. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006842-200205000-00005>
- Cacioppo, J. T., Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Hawkley, L. C., & Thisted, R. A. (2006). Loneliness as a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms: Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Psychology and Aging*, *21*(1), 140–151. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.21.1.140>
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human nature and the need for social connection*. WW Norton & Company.
- Cacioppo, J. T., Fowler, J. H., & Christakis, N. A. (2009a). Alone in the crowd: The structure and spread of loneliness in a large social network. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *97*(6), 977. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016076>
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2009b). Perceived social isolation and cognition. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, *13*(10), 447-454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2009.06.005>
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Cacioppo, S. (2013). Social neuroscience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *8*(6), 667-669. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691613507456>
- Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., & Boomsma, D. I. (2014). Evolutionary mechanisms for loneliness. *Null*, *28*(1), 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2013.837379>
- Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Cole, S. W., Capitanio, J. P., Goossens, L., & Boomsma, D. I. (2015). Loneliness across phylogeny and a call for comparative

- studies and animal models. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 202–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614564876>
- Cahill, C. (2007). Doing research with young people: Participatory research and the rituals of collective work. *Children's Geographies*, 5(3), 297-312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280701445895>
- Campbell, E., & Lassiter, L. E. (2015). *Doing ethnography today: theories, methods, exercises*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Campelo, A., Aitken, R., Thyne, M., & Gnoth, J. (2014). Sense of place: The importance for destination branding. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(2), 154-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513496474>
- Caplan, S. E. (2005). A social skill account of problematic internet use. *Journal of Communication*, 55(4), 721-736. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb03019.x>
- Caspi, A., Harrington, H., Moffitt, T. E., Milne, B. J., & Poulton, R. (2006). Socially isolated children 20 years later: Risk of cardiovascular disease. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 160(8), 805-811. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.160.8.805>
- Cattan, M., Kime, N., & Bagnall, A. M. (2011). The use of telephone befriending in low level support for socially isolated older people – an evaluation. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 19, 198-206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2010.00967.x>

- Cheruvalli-Contractor S., Halford A., & Phiri M. B. (2021). The salience of Islam to Muslim heritage children's experiences of identity, family, and well-being in foster care. *Religions*, *12*(6), 381. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060381>
- Chester, K. L., Magnusson, J., Klemnera, E., Spencer, N. H., & Brooks, F. (2019). The mitigating role of ecological health assets in adolescent cyberbullying victimization. *Youth & Society*, *51*(3), 291–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X16673281>
- Chiessi, M., Cicognani, E., & Sonn, C. (2010). Assessing sense of community on adolescents: Validating the brief scale of sense of community in adolescents (SOC-A). *Journal of Community Psychology*, *38*(3), 276-292. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20364>
- Chipuer, H. M. (2001). Dyadic attachments and community connectedness: Links with youths' loneliness experiences. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *29*(4), 429-446. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1027>
- Chipuer, H. M., Bramston, P., & Pretty, G. (2003). Determinants of subjective quality of life among rural adolescents: A developmental perspective. *Social Indicators Research*, *61*(1), 79-95. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021271831731>
- Cicognani, E., Klimstra, T., & Goossens, L. (2014). Sense of community, identity statuses, and loneliness in adolescence: A cross-national study on Italian and Belgian youth. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *42*(4), 414-432. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.102710.1002/jcop.21618>

- Clayton, J. (2012). Living the multicultural city: acceptance, belonging and young identities in the city of Leicester, England. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(9), 1673-1693. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.102710.1080/01419870.2011.605457>
- Cohen, A. P. (1987). *Whalsay: Symbol, segment and boundary in a Shetland Island community*. Manchester University Press.
- Cohen, A. P. (2001). *The symbolic construction of community*. Routledge.
- Cole, A., Bond, C., Qualter, P., & Maes, M. (2021). A systematic review of the development and psychometric properties of loneliness measures for children and adolescents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6), 3285. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18063285>
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. <https://doi.org/10.1086/228943>
- Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Harvard University Press.
- Coleman-Fountain, E. (2017). Youthful Stories of Normality and Difference. *Sociology*, 51(4), 766–782. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515618602>
- Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). The case for participation as tyranny. In B. Cooke & U. Kothari (Eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (pp. 1-15). Zed Books.
- Craig, S.L., McInroy, L.B., McCready, L.T., Di Cesare, D. M., & Pettaway, L. D. (2015). Connecting Without Fear: Clinical Implications of the Consumption of Information and Communication Technologies by Sexual Minority Youth and Young Adults. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 43, 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-014-0505-2>

- Cresswell, T. (2015). *Place : an introduction* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Crotty, M. (2009). *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- Crow, G. (2018). *What are community studies?* Bloomsbury.
- Crowley, A. (2015). Is anyone listening? The impact of children's participation on public policy. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 23(3), 602-621.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02303005>
- Crowley, A., Larkins, C., & Pinto, L. M. (2020). *Listen – Act – Change - Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation*. Council of Europe.
<https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/9288-listen-act-change-council-of-europe-handbook-on-childrens-participation.html>
- Cuervo, H., & Wyn, J. (2014). Reflections on the use of spatial and relational metaphors in youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(7), 901-915.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.878796>
- Cuervo, H., & Wyn, J. (2017). A longitudinal analysis of belonging: Temporal, performative and relational practices by young people in rural Australia. *Young*, 25(3), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1103308816669463>
- Davis, K., Randall, D. P., Ambrose, A., & Orand, M. (2015). 'I was bullied too': Stories of bullying and coping in an online community. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(4), 357-375.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.952657>

D’Cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bc1001>

Deckers, A., Muris, P., & Roelofs, J. (2017). Being on your own or feeling lonely? Loneliness and other social variables in youths with autism spectrum disorders. *Child Psychiatry Human Development*, 48, 828–839. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-016-0707-7>

DeJong-Gierveld, J. (1987). Developing and testing a model of loneliness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(1), 119. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.53.1.119>

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (2022). *Tackling loneliness evidence review: main report*. UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-loneliness-evidence-review/tackling-loneliness-evidence-review-full-report>

Department of Health and Social Care. (2021). *Chief Medical Officer’s annual report 2021: Health in coastal communities*. UK Government. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005216/cmo-annual_report-2021-health-in-coastal-communities-accessible.pdf

Deters, F. G., & Mehl, M. R. (2013). Does posting facebook status updates increase or decrease loneliness? An online social networking experiment. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(5), 579-586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550612469233>

- Drennan, J., Treacy, M., Butler, M., Byrne, A., Fealy, G., Frazer, K., & Irving, K. (2008). The experience of social and emotional loneliness among older people in Ireland. *Ageing & Society*, 28(8), 1113-1132.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X08007526>
- Duggan, J. (2020). The co-productive imagination: A creative, speculative and eventful approach to co-producing research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 355-367.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1799638>
- Eccles, A.M., & Qualter, P. (2021). Review: Alleviating loneliness in young people – a meta-analysis of interventions. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 26, 17-33.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12389>
- Eisner, E. (2008). Art and knowledge. In J. G. Knowles, & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 3-13). Sage.
<https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545.n1>
- Estrella, M. L., & Kelley, M. A. (2017). Exploring the meanings of place attachment among civically engaged Puerto Rican youth. *Journal of Community Practice*, 25(3), 408-431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2017.1347844>
- Eurostat. (2015). *What it means to be young in the European Union today*. Eurostat Press Office.
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet_file_entry/2995521/1-16042015-AP-EN.pdf/5d120b02-c8df-4181-9b27-2fe9ca3c9b6b

- Fabiansson, C. (2018). Belonging and social identity among young people in western Sydney, Australia. *Journal of International Migration & Integration*, 19(2), 351-366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0540-x>
- Farmer, A., & Farmer, G. (2021). *Research methods for social work*. Sage.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781071878873>
- Ferguson, K.M. (2006). Social capital and children's wellbeing: a critical synthesis of the international social capital literature. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 15, 2-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2006.00575.x>
- Fontaine, R. G., Yang, C., Burks, V. S., Dodge, K. A., Price, J. M., Pettit, G. S., & Bates, J. E. (2009). Loneliness as a partial mediator of the relation between low social preference in childhood and anxious/depressed symptoms in adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology*, 21(2), 479.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579409000261>
- Foresight, Government Office for Science. (2017). *Foresight – Future of the Sea Evidence Review*. UK Government.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/706956/foresight-future-of-the-sea-report.pdf
- Francis, Y. J., Rowland, L., Humrich, S., & Taylor, S. (2021). Are you listening? Echoing the voices of looked after children about their transition to secondary school. *Adoption & Fostering*, 45(1), 37–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575921989826>
- Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in an age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth, A. (Eds.),

Redistribution or Recognition? A Political Philosophical Exchange (pp.7-109).

Verso.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Frost, D., & Catney, G. (2020). Belonging and the intergenerational transmission of place identity: Reflections on a British inner-city neighbourhood. *Urban Studies*, 57(14), 2833–2849. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019887922>

Fullilove, M. T. (1996). Psychiatric implications of displacement: Contributions from the psychology of place. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153(12), 1516-1523. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.153.12.1516>

Gale, T. (2005). Modernism, post-modernism and the decline of British seaside resorts as long holiday destinations: A case study of Rhyl, North Wales. *Tourism Geographies*, 7(1), 86-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461668042000324076>

Gallacher, L. A., & Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through participatory methods. *Childhood*, 15(4), 499-516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568208091672>

Gallagher, M. (2008). Foucault, power and participation. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16(3), 395-406. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181808X311222>

Garnow, T., Garmy, P., Edberg, A. K., & Einberg, E. L. (2022). Deeply lonely in the borderland between childhood and adulthood - Experiences of existential loneliness as narrated by adolescents. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2022.2132653>

- Garrett, M. (2013). Tied to a tree: culture and self-reflexivity. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43(3), 243-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792693>
- Gembus, M. P. (2018). The safe spaces 'in-between' – plays, performance and identity among young 'second generation' Somalis in London. *Children's Geographies*, 16(4), 432-443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1362498>
- Gergen, K., & Gergen, M. (2015). Social construction and research as action. In H. Bradbury (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of action research* (pp. 401-408). Sage. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473921290>
- Gibson, F. (2007). Conducting focus groups with children and young people: strategies for success. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 12(5), 473-483. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987107079791>
- Giuliano, M. V. (2003). Theory of attachment and place attachment. In M. Bonnes, Lee, T. & M. Bonaiuto (Eds.), *Psychological theories for environmental issues* (pp.137-170). Routledge.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the management of a spoiled identity*. Simon & Schuster.
- Goll J.C., Charlesworth G., Scior K., & Stott J. (2018). Barriers to Social Participation among Lonely Older Adults: The Influence of Social Fears and Identity. *PLoS One*, 13(7): e0201510. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201510>
- Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30(1), 79-90. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(199301\)30:1<79::AID-PITS2310300113>3.0.CO;2-X](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199301)30:1<79::AID-PITS2310300113>3.0.CO;2-X)

- Goodfellow, C., Hardoon, D., Inchley, J., Leyland, A. H., Qualter, P., Simpson, S. A., & Long, E. (2022). Loneliness and personal well-being in young people: Moderating effects of individual, interpersonal, and community factors. *Journal of Adolescence*, *94*, 554– 568. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12046>
- Goosby, B.J., Bellatorre, A., Walsemann, K.M., & Cheadle, J.E. (2013). Adolescent loneliness and health in early adulthood. *Sociological Inquiry*, *83*, 505-536. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12018>
- Gowing, A. (2019). Peer-peer relationships: A key factor in enhancing school connectedness and belonging. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *36*(2), 64-77.
- Graham, A., & Fitzgerald, R. (2010). Progressing children’s participation: Exploring the potential of a dialogical turn. *Childhood*, *17*(3), 343-359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210369219>
- Groundwater-Smith, S., Dockett, S. & Bottrell, D. (2015). *Participatory Research with Children and Young People*. Sage.
- Guetterman, T. C. (2015). Descriptions of sampling practices within five approaches to qualitative research in education and the health sciences. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *16*(2). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-16.2.2290>
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and ‘ethically important moments’ in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *10*(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>
- Habib, S., & Ward, M. R. M. (2019). Introduction: investigating youth and belonging. In S. Habib and Ward, M. R. M. (Eds.), *Identities, Youth and Belonging: International Perspectives* (pp.1-11). Routledge.

- Hall-Lande, J. A., Eisenberg, M. E., Christenson, S. L., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2007). Social isolation, psychological health, and protective factors in adolescence. *Adolescence*, *42*(166), 265-286.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10366950>
- Hargie, O., O'Donnell, A., & McMullan, C. (2011). Constructions of social exclusion among young people from interface areas of Northern Ireland. *Youth & Society*, *43*(3), 873–899. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10366950>
- Harman, J. P., Hansen, C. E., Cochran, M. E., & Lindsey, C. R. (2005). Liar, liar: Internet faking but not frequency of use affects social skills, self-esteem, social anxiety, and aggression. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, *8*(1), 1-6.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2005.8.1>
- Harris, R. A., Qualter, P., & Robinson, S. J. (2013). Loneliness trajectories from middle childhood to pre-adolescence: Impact on perceived health and sleep disturbance. *Journal of Adolescence*, *36*(6), 1295-1304.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.12.009>
- Hart, Roger A. (1992). Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship, *Innocenti Essay, No. 4*.
<https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:ucf:inness:inness92/6>.
- Hawkey, L. C., Browne, M. W., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2005). How can I connect with thee? Let me count the ways. *Psychological Science*, *16*(10), 798-804.
<https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9280.2005.01617.x>

- Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2007). Aging and loneliness: downhill quickly? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(4), 187–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00501.x>
- Hawkey, L., & Cacioppo, J. (2010). Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 40(2), 218-227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8>
- Healy, K. (2014). *Social work theories in context: creating frameworks for practice* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heenan, D. (2011). How local interventions can build capacity to address social isolation in dispersed rural communities: A case study from Northern Ireland. *Ageing International*, 36(4), 475-491. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-010-9095-7>
- Heinrich, L. M., & Gullone, E. (2006). The clinical significance of loneliness: A literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26(6), 695-718.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.04.002>
- Hemberg, J., Korzhina, Y., Groundstroem, H., Östman, L., Nyström, L., & Nyman-Kurkiala, P. (2021). Loneliness – two sides to the story: adolescents’ lived experiences, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 26(1), 41-56.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2021.1883075>
- Hemberg, J., Östman, L., Korzhina, Y., Groundstroem, H., Nyström, L., & Nyman-Kurkiala, P. (2022). Loneliness as experienced by adolescents and young adults: an explorative qualitative study. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 27(1), 362-384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2022.2109422>

- Hemingway, A., & Jack, E. (2013). Reducing social isolation and promoting wellbeing in older people. *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults, 14*(1), pp. 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14717791311311085>
- Hignett, A., White, M. P., Pahl, S., Jenkin, R., & Le Froy, M. (2018). Evaluation of a surfing programme designed to increase personal well-being and connectedness to the natural environment among ‘at risk’ young people. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 18*(1), 53-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2017.1326829>
- Hoffman, A. J., McGuire, L., Rutland, A., Hartstone-Rose, A., Irvin, M. J., Winterbottom, M., Balkwill, F., Fields, G., & Mulvey, K. L. (2021). The relations and role of social competencies and belonging with math and science interest and efficacy for adolescents in informal STEM programs. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 50*(2), 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01302-1>
- Holland, J., Reynolds, T., & Weller, S. (2007). Transitions, networks and communities: The significance of social capital in the lives of children and young people. *Journal of Youth Studies, 10*(1), 97-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260600881474>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(2), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
- Hombrados-Mendieta, I., García-Martín, M. A., & Gómez-Jacinto, L. (2013). The relationship between social support, loneliness, and subjective well-being in a

Spanish sample from a multidimensional perspective. *Social Indicators Research*, 114(3), 1013-1034. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0187-5>

Honneth, A. (1995). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. MIT Press.

House of Commons. (2007). *Coastal Towns: the Government's Second Response*. UK Government.
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmcomloc/69/69.pdf>

House of Lords. (2019). *The Future of Seaside Towns*. UK Parliament.
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/320.pdf>

Hsueh, Y.-C., Batchelor, R., Liebmann, M., Dhanani, A., Vaughan, L., Fett, A.-K., Mann, F., & Pitman, A. (2022). A systematic review of studies describing the effectiveness, acceptability and potential harms of place-based interventions to address loneliness and mental health problems. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(8), 4766.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19084766>

Hussain, S. A. (2020). Is this what depression looks like? Visual narratives of depression on social media. *Visual Studies*, 35(2-3), 245-259.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2020.1779611>

Hyndman, J., & Giles, W. (2011). Waiting for what? The feminization of asylum in protracted situations. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 18(3), 361-379.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2011.566347>

Ingold T. (2000). *The perception of the environment*. Routledge.

- Iphofen, R. (2011). Ethical decision making in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 11*(4), 443–446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111404330>
- James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems. In A. James and A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 7-32). Falmer Press.
- Jarratt, D. (2015). Sense of place at a British coastal resort: Exploring ‘seaside-ness’ in Morecambe. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 63*(3), 351-363.
- Jobe-Shields, L., Cohen, R., & Parra, G. R. (2011). Patterns of Change in Children’s Loneliness: Trajectories from Third Through Fifth Grades. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 57*(1), 25–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23098054>
- Jones, L., Dean, C., Dunhill, A., Hope, M. A., & Shaw, P. A. (2020). ‘We are the same as everyone else just with a different and unique backstory’: Identity, belonging and ‘othering’ within education for young people who are ‘looked after’. *Children and Society, 34*, 492– 506. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12382>
- Jones, A., Goodman, A., Roberts, H., Steinbach, R., & Green, J. (2013). Entitlement to concessionary public transport and wellbeing: A qualitative study of young people and older citizens in London, UK. *Social Science & Medicine, 91*, 202-209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.11.040>
- Jorgensen, B. S., & Stedman, R. C. (2011). Measuring the spatial component of sense of place: a methodology for research on the spatial dynamics of psychological

experiences of places. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 38(5), 795-813. <https://doi.org/10.1068/b37054>

Kara, H. (2015). *Creative research methods in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Policy Press.

Kearns, A., Whitley, E., Tannahill, C., & Ellaway, A. (2015). 'Lonesome town?' Is loneliness associated with the residential environment, including housing and neighborhood factors? *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(7), 849-867. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21711>

Keene, D. E., & Padilla, M. B. (2014). Spatial stigma and health inequality. *Critical Public Health*, 24(4), 392-404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2013.873532>

Kellett, M., & Ding, S. (2004). Middle childhood. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, pp. 161–174. Sage.

Kelly, L. (2013). Sports-Based Interventions and the Local Governance of Youth Crime and Antisocial Behavior. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 37, 261-283. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0193723512467193>

Kesby, M. (2000). Participatory diagramming: deploying qualitative methods through an action research epistemology. *Area*, 32, 423-435. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2000.tb00158.x>

Khan, A., & Bolina, A. (2020). Can walking groups help with social isolation: A qualitative study. *Education for Primary Care*, 31(4), 257–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2020.1772120>

- Khobzi, N., & Flicker, S. (2010). Lessons learned from undertaking community-based participatory research dissertations: The trials and triumphs of two junior health scholars. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*, 4(4), 347-356. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/406091>.
- Kintrea, K., St Clair, R., & Houston, M. (2015). Shaped by place? Young people's aspirations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(5), 666-684. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.992315>
- Klemera, E., Brooks, F.M., Chester, K.L., Magnusson, J., & Spencer, N. (2017). Self-harm in adolescence: protective health assets in the family, school and community. *International Journal of Public Health*, 62, 631–638. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-016-0900-2>
- Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukophadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53(9), 1017-1031. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.53.9.1017>
- Kyle, G., & Chick, G. (2007). The social construction of a sense of place. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(3), 209-225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400701257922>
- Lai, K. Y., Sarkar, C., Kumari, S., Ni, M. Y., Gallacher, J., & Webster, C. (2021). Calculating a national Anomie Density Ratio: Measuring the patterns of loneliness and social isolation across the UK's residential density gradient using results from the UK Biobank study. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 215, 104194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104194>

- Larkins, C., Kiili, J., & Palsanen, K. (2014). A lattice of participation: Reflecting on examples of children's and young people's collective engagement in influencing social welfare policies and practices. *European Journal of Social Work, 17*(5), 718-736. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2014.928269>
- Larson, R. W., Richards, M. H., Moneta, G., Holmbeck, G., & Duckett, E. (1996). Changes in adolescents' daily interactions with their families from ages 10 to 18: Disengagement and transformation. *Developmental Psychology, 32*(4), 744-754. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0012-1649.32.4.744>
- Lasgaard, M., Friis, K., & Shevlin, M. (2016). “Where are all the lonely people?” A population-based study of high-risk groups across the life span. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 51*, 1373–1384. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-016-1279-3>
- Lasgaard, M., Goossens, L., & Elklit, A. (2011). Loneliness, depressive symptomatology, and suicide ideation in adolescence: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 39*(1), 137–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-010-9442-x>
- Latz, A.O. (2017). *Photovoice research in education and beyond: A practical guide from theory to exhibition* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315724089>
- Laurence J. (2019). Community disadvantage, inequalities in adolescent subjective well-being, and local social relations: The role of positive and negative social interactions. *Social Science & Medicine, 237*, 112442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112442>

- Laursen, B., & Hartl, A. C. (2013). Understanding loneliness during adolescence: Developmental changes that increase the risk of perceived social isolation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(6), 1261-1268.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.06.003>
- Lee, D., & Newby, H. (1983). *The problem of sociology: An introduction to the discipline*. Routledge.
- Lenzi, M., Vieno, A., Pastore, M., & Santinello, M. (2013). Neighborhood social connectedness and adolescent civic engagement: An integrative model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 34, 45-54.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2012.12.003>
- Leonard, M. (2004). Bonding and bridging social capital: Reflections from Belfast. *Sociology*, 38(5), 927-944. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038504047176>
- Lewicka, M. (2011). On the varieties of people's relationships with places: Hummon's typology revisited. *Environment and Behavior*, 43(5), 676-709.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916510364917>
- Lilley, C., Ball, R., & Vernon, H. (2014). *The experiences of 11-16 year olds on social networking sites*. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/1724_11-16-social-networking-report_wdfl01574_original.pdf
- Lin, N. (1999). Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections*, 22(1), 28-51.
<https://bebr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Building%20a%20Network%20Theory%20of%20Social%20Capital.pdf>

- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1989). Ethics: The Failure of Positivist Science. *The Review of Higher Education*, 12(3), 221-240.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1989.0017>.
- Long, D. A., & Perkins, D. D. (2007). Community social and place predictors of sense of community: A multilevel and longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(5), 563-581. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20165>
- Longfield, A. (2021). *The state of children's mental health services, 2020/2021*. Children's Commissioner for England. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-state-of-childrens-mental-health-services-202021>
- Low, S. M., & Altman, I. (1992). Place attachment: A conceptual inquiry. *Human Behavior & Environment: Advances in Theory & Research*, 12, 1–12.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-8753-4_1
- Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising article 12 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>
- Luttrell, W. (2019). *Reflexive qualitative research*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. <https://data.the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/luttrell-reflexive-qualitative-research.pdf>
- Maas, J., van Dillen, S. M. E., Verheij, R. A., & Groenewegen, P. P. (2009). Social contacts as a possible mechanism behind the relation between green space and health. *Health & Place*, 15(2), 586-595.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2008.09.006>

- MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T., & Furlong, A. (2014). 'Benefits Street' and the myth of workless communities. *Sociological Research Online*, 19(3), 263–268.
<https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3438>
- MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T., Webster, C., & Simpson, D. (2005). Growing up in poor neighbourhoods: The significance of class and place in the extended transitions of 'socially excluded' young adults. *Sociology*, 39(5), 873–891.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/003803850505058370>
- Macdonald, S. J., Nixon, J., & Deacon, L. (2018). 'Loneliness in the city': Examining socio-economics, loneliness and poor health in the North East of England. *Public Health*, 165, 88-94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.09.003>
- Madsen, K. R., Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, T., Signe, S. J., Qualter, P., & Holstein, B. E. (2021). Lonely, but not alone: Qualitative study among immigrant and native-born adolescents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(21), 11425. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111425>
- Maes, M., Vanhalst, J., Van den Noortgate, W., & Goossens, L. (2017). Intimate and relational loneliness in adolescence. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26(8), 2059-2069. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0722-8>
- Manzo, L. C., & Perkins, D. D. (2006). Finding common ground: The importance of place attachment to community participation and planning. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20(4), 335-350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412205286160>
- Marcoen, A., Goossens, L., & Caes, P. (1987). Loneliness in pre-through late adolescence: Exploring the contributions of a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 16(6), 561-577. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02138821>

- Marcoen, A., & Goossens, L. (1993). Loneliness, attitude towards aloneness, and solitude: Age differences and developmental significance during adolescence. In S. Jackson & H. Rodriguez-Tomé (Eds.), *Adolescence and its social worlds* (pp. 197–227). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Marquez, J., Goodfellow, C., Hardoon, D., Inchley, J., Leyland, A. H., Qualter, P., Simpson, S. A., & Long, E. (2022). Loneliness in young people: A multilevel exploration of social ecological influences and geographic variation. *Journal of Public Health*, (Oxford, England), fdab402. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab402>
- Masi, C. M., Chen, H.-Y., Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2011). A meta-analysis of interventions to reduce loneliness. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15(3), 219–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868310377394>
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. Harper and Row.
- Mason, J. (2006). Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 9-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794106058866>
- Mason, J., & Hood, S. (2011). Exploring issues of children as actors in social research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(4), 490-495. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.011>
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gender*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mathers, A., Dempsey, N., & Molin, J. F. (2015). Place-keeping in action: Evaluating the capacity of green space partnerships in England. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 139, 126-136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2015.03.004>

- Matthews, T., Danese, A., Caspi, A., Fisher, H. L., Goldman-Mellor, S., Kopa, A., Moffitt, T. E., Odgers, C. L., & Arseneault, L. (2019). Lonely young adults in modern Britain: findings from an epidemiological cohort study. *Psychological Medicine, 49*(2), 268–277. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291718000788>
- Matthews, T., Fisher, H. L., Bryan, B. T., Danese, A., Moffitt, T. E., Qualter, P., Verity, L., & Arseneault, L. (2022). This is what loneliness looks like: A mixed-methods study of loneliness in adolescence and young adulthood. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 46*(1), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025420979357>
- McCann, T.V., Lubman, D.I., & Cark, E. (2012). The experience of young people with depression: a qualitative study. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 19*, 334-340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2850.2011.01783.x>
- McCarry, M. (2012). Who benefits? A critical reflection of children and young people's participation in sensitive research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 15*(1), 55-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2011.568196>
- McDowell L., Rootham, E., & Hardgrove, A. (2014). Precarious work, protest masculinity and communal regulation: South Asian young men in Luton, UK. *Work, Employment and Society, 28*(6), 847-864. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017013510757>
- McMellon, C., & Tisdall, E. K. M. (2020). Children and young people's participation rights: Looking backwards and moving forwards. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 28*(1), 157-182. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02801002>

- McMillan, D. W. (1996). Sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology, 24*(4), 315-325. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199610\)24:4%3C315::AID-JCOP2%3E3.0.CO;2-T](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199610)24:4%3C315::AID-JCOP2%3E3.0.CO;2-T)
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1%3C6::AID-JCOP2290140103%3E3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1%3C6::AID-JCOP2290140103%3E3.0.CO;2-I)
- McWhirter, B. T., Besett-Alesch, T. M., Horibata, J., & Gat, I. (2002). Loneliness in High Risk Adolescents: The Role of Coping, Self-Esteem, and Empathy. *Journal of Youth Studies, 5*(1), 69-84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260120111779>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Michalski, C. A., Diemert, L. M., Helliwell, J. F., Goel, V., & Rosella, L. C. (2020). Relationship between sense of community belonging and self-rated health across life stages. *SSM - Population Health, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2020.100676>
- Milligan, M. J. (1998). Interactional past and potential: The social construction of place attachment. *Symbolic Interaction, 21*(1), 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1998.21.1.1>
- Mills, T., & Kleinman, S. (1988). Emotions, reflexivity and action: An interactionist analysis. *Social Forces, 66*(4), 1009–1027. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/66.4.1009>
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. (2021). *National Planning Policy Framework*. UK Government.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf

Montague, A.C., & Eiroa-Orosa, F.J. (2018). In it together: Exploring how belonging to a youth activist group enhances well-being. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 46, 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21914>

Morecambe Bay. (n.d.). *Guide for Groups*. https://exploremorecambebay.org.uk/wp-content/files_mf/1582278853LCCMorecambeGroups2020LowRes1.pdf

Morgan, H., Parker, A., & Roberts, W. (2019). Community sport programmes and social inclusion: what role for positive psychological capital? *Sport in Society*, 22(6), 1100-1114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1565397>

Nelson, J., Ahn, J. J., & Corley, E. A. (2020). Sense of place: trends from the literature. *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability*, 13(2), 236-261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2020.1726799>

Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M.J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 1—A theoretical framework and application to dyadic peer relationships. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21, 267–294. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x>

Newman, W. (2013). Mapping as applied research. *The Visibility of Research*, 228–36. <https://www.arcc-repository.org/index.php/repository/article/view/148/116>

Ngai, S. S., Cheung, C., To, S., Liu, Y., & Song, H. (2013). Parent–child relationships, friendship networks, and developmental outcomes of economically disadvantaged

youth in Hong Kong. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(1), 91-101.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.09.025>

Nissen, S., Prendergast, K., Aoyagi, M., Burningham, K., Mehedi Hasan, M., Hayward, B., Jackson, T., Jha, V., Mattar, M., Schudel, I., Venn, S., & Yoshida, A. (2020). Young people and environmental affordances in urban sustainable development: insights into transport and green and public space in seven cities. *Sustain Earth*, 3, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42055-020-00039-w>

Nowell, B. L., Berkowitz, S. L., Deacon, Z., & Foster-Fishman, P. (2006). Revealing the cues within community places: Stories of identity, history, and possibility. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(1-2), 29-46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-005-9006-3>

Nowland, R. A., Balmer, D., & Qualter, P. (2019). When friends behave badly: Loneliness and children's expectations of friends and responses to transgressions. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 37, 551-570. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12296>

Nowland, R., Necka, E. A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2018). Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 70-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1745691617713052>

Nyqvist, F., Victor, C. R., Forsman, A. K., & Cattan, M. (2016). The association between social capital and loneliness in different age groups: A population-based study in western Finland. *BMC Public Health*, 16, 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3248-x>

- O'Boyle, A. (2018). Encounters with identity: reflexivity and positioning in an interdisciplinary research project. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 41(3), 353-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1310835>
- Office for National Statistics. (2018). *Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness, 2018*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018>
- O'Keeffe, G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). Council on communications and media; The impact of social media on children, adolescents and families. *Pediatrics*, 127(4): 800–804. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0054>
- Osborn, T., Weatherburn, P., & French, R. S. (2021). Interventions to address loneliness and social isolation in young people: A systematic review of the evidence on acceptability and effectiveness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 93, 53-79.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.09.007>
- Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2019). *Educational Isolation: A challenge for schools in England*. <https://www.marjon.ac.uk/educational-isolation/Education-Isolation-Report.pdf>
- Pain, R. (2004). Social geography: participatory research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(5), 652–663. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132504ph511pr>
- Pantell, M., Rehkopf, D., Jutte, D., Leonard Syme, S., Balmes, J., & Adler, N. (2013). Social isolation: A predictor of mortality comparable to traditional clinical risk

factors. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(11), 2056-2062.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301261>

Parkhurst J.T., & Hopmeyer A. (1999). Developmental change in the source of loneliness in childhood and adolescence: Constructing a theoretical model. In Rotenberg K.J. and Hymel S. (Eds.), *Loneliness in childhood and adolescence* (pp.56–79). Cambridge University Press.

Parsfield, M., Morris, D., Bola, M., Knapp, M., Park, A., Yoshioka, M., & Marcus, G. (2015). *Community capital: The value of connected communities*. Social Research Association. https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsaj3718-connected-communities-report_web.pdf

Paton, K. (2018). Beyond legacy: Backstage stigmatisation and ‘trickle-up’ politics of urban regeneration. *The Sociological Review*, 66(4), 919–934.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118777449>

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Perkins, D. D., Florin, P., Rich, R. C., Wandersman, A., & Chavis, D. M. (1990). Participation and the social and physical environment of residential blocks: Crime and community context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 83-115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00922690>

Perkins, D. D., & Long, D. A. (2002). Neighborhood sense of community and social capital: A multi-level analysis. In A. T. Fisher, C. C. Sonn & B. J. Bishop (Eds.), *Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications* (pp. 291–318). Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-0719-2_15

- Perlman, D., & Peplau, L. A. (1981). Toward a Social Psychology of Loneliness. In R. Gilmour & S. Duck (Eds.), *Personal Relationships* (pp. 31-56). Academic Press.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In Search of Subjectivity—One's Own. *Educational Researcher*, *17*(7), 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X017007017>
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(2), 175-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000060635>
- Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2007). Academic and psychological functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *75*(4), 270-290. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.4.270-292>
- Polson, E. C., Kim, Y., Jang, S. J., Johnson, B. R., & Smith, B. (2013). Being prepared and staying connected: Scouting's influence on social capital and community involvement. *Social Science Quarterly*, *94*(3), 758-776. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12002>
- Powell, K. (2010). Making sense of place: Mapping as a multisensory research method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(7), 539-555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410372600>
- Prati, G., & Cicognani, E. (2019). A cross-lagged panel analysis of the relationship between neighborhood sense of community and school sense of community. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, *15*(4), 689-699. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v15i4.1682>

- Pretty, G. H., Chipuer, H. M., & Bramston, P. (2003). Sense of place amongst adolescents and adults in two rural Australian towns: The discriminating features of place attachment, sense of community and place dependence in relation to place identity. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 23*(3), 273–287. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(02\)00079-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(02)00079-8)
- Prezza, M., Amici, M., Roberti, T., & Tedeschi, G. (2001). Sense of community referred to the whole town: Its relations with neighboring, loneliness, life satisfaction, and area of residence. *Journal of Community Psychology, 29*(1), 29-52. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(200101\)29:1<29::AID-JCOP3>3.0.CO;2-C](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(200101)29:1<29::AID-JCOP3>3.0.CO;2-C)
- Prezza, M., & Pacilli, M. G. (2007). Current fear of crime, sense of community, and loneliness in Italian adolescents: The role of autonomous mobility and play during childhood. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(2), 151-170. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20140>
- Prince, D. (2014). What about place? Considering the role of physical environment on youth imagining of future possible selves. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(6), 697-716, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.836591>
- Promenade to Port Coastal Team. (2019). *Economic Plan 2018-2021*. Coastal Communities Alliance. <https://www.coastalcommunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ptp-morecambe-cct-ep-appendices-v1-1.pdf>
- Prosser, J. (1996). What constitutes an image-based qualitative methodology? *Visual Sociology, 11*(2), 25-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725869608583763>

- Putnam, R. (1993). The prosperous community: Social capital and public life. *The American Prospect*, 13, 35-42.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone*. Simon and Schuster.
- Qualter, P., Brown, S.L., Munn, P., & Rotenberg, K. J. (2010). Childhood loneliness as a predictor of adolescent depressive symptoms: an 8-year longitudinal study. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 19, 493–501.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-009-0059-y>
- Qualter, P., Brown, S. L., Rotenberg, K. J., Vanhalst, J., Harris, R. A., Goossens, L., & Munn, P. (2013). Trajectories of loneliness during childhood and adolescence: Predictors and health outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(6), 1283-1293.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.01.005>
- Qualter, P., Vanhalst, J., Harris, R., Van Roekel, E., Lodder, G., Bangee, M., Maes, M. & Verhagen, M. (2015). Loneliness Across the Life Span. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 250–264.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615568999>
- Rankin, J. L., Lane, D. J., Gibbons, F. X., & Gerrard, M. (2004). Adolescent self-consciousness: Longitudinal age changes and gender differences in two cohorts. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 14(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2004.01401001.x>
- Reich, S. M. (2010). Adolescents' sense of community on myspace and facebook: A mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(6), 688-705.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20389>

- Reid, H., & Westergaard, J. (2017). 'Oh I do like to be beside the seaside': Opportunity structures for four un/underemployed young people living in English coastal towns. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 45(3), 341-355.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1283005>
- Relph, E. C. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. Pion.
- Ridley, J., & Morris, D. (2018). *Preston connected communities project: A study of the social and community networks of residents of Broadgate and Hartington*. University of Central Lancashire.
<https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/26146/7/26146%20PCC%20Broadgate%20Final%20Report%20%28002%29.pdf>
- Riger, S., & Lavrakas, P. J. (1981). Community ties: Patterns of attachment and social interaction in urban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 9(1), 55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00896360>
- Riley, K. (2019). Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? *Educational & Child Psychology*, 36(4), 91-103. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10103208>
- Robinson, S., Hill, M., Fisher, K. R., & Graham, A. (2020). Belonging and exclusion in the lives of young people with intellectual disability in small town communities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 24(1), 50–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629518765830>
- Rönkä, A. R., Rautio, A., Koironen, M., Sunnari, V., & Taanila, A. (2014). Experience of loneliness among adolescent girls and boys: Northern Finland birth cohort

1986 study. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(2), 183-203.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.805876>

Rönkä, A. R., Taanila, A., Rautio, A., & Sunnari, V. (2018). Multidimensional and fluctuating experiences of loneliness from childhood to young adulthood in Northern Finland. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 35, 87-102.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2018.01.003>

Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA loneliness scale (version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66(1), 20-40.

https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa6601_2

Ryan, A. (2012). *Where land meets sea: coastal explorations of landscape, representation and spatial experience*. Routledge.

Savage, M., Silva, E., & Warde, A. (2010). Dis-identification and class identity. In A. Silva & A. Warde (Eds.). *Cultural analysis and Bourdieu's legacy: Settling accounts and developing alternatives. Culture, economy and the social* (pp. 60-74). Routledge.

Scannell, L., Cox, R. S., Fletcher, S., & Heykoop, C. (2016). 'That was the last time I saw my house': The importance of place attachment among children and youth in disaster contexts. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 58(1-2), 158-173.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12069>

Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(1), 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.09.006>

- Scharf, T., Phillipson, C., & Smith A. E. (2004). Poverty and social exclusion: Growing older in deprived urban neighbourhoods. In A. Walker & C. Hagan Hennessy (Eds.), *Growing Old* (pp. 107-126). Open University Press.
- Seamon, D. (2013). Place attachment and phenomenology: The synergistic dynamism of place. In L. C. Manzo & P. Devine-Wright (Eds.), *Place attachment: advances in theory, methods and applications* (pp. 11-22). Routledge.
- Seamon, D., & Sowers, J. (2008). 'Place and placelessness, Edward Relph.' In P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, & G. Vallentine (Eds.), *Key Texts in Human Geography* (pp.43-51). Sage.
- Seyer-Ochi, I. (2006). Lived Landscapes of the Fillmore. In G. Spindler & L. A. Hammond, (Eds.). *Innovations in Educational Ethnography: Theory, Methods, and Results* (pp. 169-234). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Shields, M. (2008). Community belonging and self-perceived health. *Health Reports*, 19(2), 51-60.
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15, 107-117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.617>
- Sime, D. (2008). Ethical and methodological issues in engaging young people living in poverty with participatory research methods. *Children's Geographies*, 6(1), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280701791926>
- Sime, D. (2020). New Scots? Eastern European young people's feelings of belonging and national identity in Scotland post-Brexit. *Scottish Affairs*, 29(3), 336-353. <https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2020.0327>

- Sinclair, R. (2004), Participation in practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children & Society, 18*, 106-118. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.817>
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class & gender: Becoming respectable*. Sage.
- Smith, D. P. (2012). The social and economic consequences of housing in multiple occupation (HMO) in UK coastal towns: Geographies of segregation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 37*(3), 461-476. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00487.x>
- Smith, M.K. (2004). Seeing a new side to seashores: culturally regenerating the English seaside town. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 6*, 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.467>
- Somerville, L. H., Jones, R. M., & Casey, B. J. (2010). A time of change: behavioral and neural correlates of adolescent sensitivity to appetitive and aversive environmental cues. *Brain and Cognition, 72*(1), 124-133.
- Southby, K. (2017). Reflecting on (the challenge of) conducting participatory research as a research-degree student. *Research for All, 1*(1), 128–42. <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.01.1.10>.
- Southby, K., Freeman, C., Bagnall, A. M., Pennington, A., Corcoran, R., & South, J. (2021). *Community Wellbeing Case Study Synthesis*. What Works Centre for Wellbeing. <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/8005/1/CommunityWellbeingCaseStudySynthesisPV-SOUTHBY.pdf>

- Spears, B. A., Kofoed, J., Bartolo, M. G., Palermiti, A. L., & Costabile, A. (2012). Positive uses of social networking sites: Youth voice perspectives. In A. Costabile & B. Spears (Eds.), *The impact of technology on relationships in educational settings* (pp. 7-21). Routledge.
- Spyrou, S. (2013). How single parent children speak about poverty and social exclusion: Policy implications from a comparative, qualitative, cross-national project. *Child & Youth Services, 34*(1), 64-84.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2013.766068>
- Stacey, K. (2001). Achieving praxis in youth partnership accountability. *Journal of Youth Studies, 4*(2), 209-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260120056997>
- Stacey, M. (1969). The myth of community studies. *The British Journal of Sociology, 20*(2), 134-147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/588525>
- Stalker, K. (1998). Some ethical and methodological issues in research with people with learning difficulties. *Disability & Society, 13*(1), 5-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599826885>
- Steinberg, L., & Morris, A. S. (2001). Adolescent development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 83-110.
- Stickley, A., Koyanagi, A., Kuposov, R., Schwab-Stone, M., & Ruchkin, V. (2014). Loneliness and health risk behaviours among Russian and U.S. adolescents: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health, 14*, 366. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-366>

- Stockdale, A., Theunissen, N., & Haartsen, T. (2018). Staying in a state of flux: A life course perspective on the diverse staying processes of rural young adults. *Population Space and Place*, 24(8), [e2139]. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2139>
- Storer, H. L., McCleary, J. S., Pepin, E., & Stallings, A. (2020). 'That's why I stay to myself': Marginalized youth's meaning making processes of social disconnectedness. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 48(1), 25-34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-019-00740-0>
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. Norton.
- Taplin, S., Chalmers, J., Hoban, B., McArthur, M., Moore, T., & Graham, A. (2019). Children in social research: Do higher payments encourage participation in riskier studies? *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 14(2), 126-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264619826796>
- Thomas, G. M. (2016). 'It's not that bad': Stigma, health, and place in a post-industrial community. *Health & Place*, 38, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.12.001>
- Thomas, G. M., Elliott, E., Exley, E., Ivinson, G., & Renold, E. (2018). Light, connectivity and place: young people living in a post-industrial town. *Cultural Geographies*, 25(4), 537–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474018762811>
- Thomas, N. (2012). Love, rights and solidarity: Studying children's participation using Honneth's theory of recognition. *Childhood*, 19(4), 453–466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568211434604>
- Thompson, C., Lewis, D. J., Greenhalgh, P., Smith, N. R., Fahy, A. E., & Cummins, S. (2014). OP40 the Olympics as respite: A qualitative study of the health and

wellbeing impacts of London 2012 on residents of Newham, East London. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 68, A22.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2014-204726.43>

Tickle, S. (2020). Engaging young people through photovoice in coastal resorts. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 20(1), 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-06-2019-0051>

Tickle-Degnen L. (2013). Nuts and bolts of conducting feasibility studies. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy: Official Publication of the American Occupational Therapy Association*, 67(2), 171–176.
<https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2013.006270>

Toft, A. (2020). Identity Management and Community Belonging: The Coming Out Careers of Young Disabled LGBT+ Persons. *Sexuality & Culture*, 24, 1893–1912.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09726-4>

Tolstad, I. M., Landsverk Hagen, A., & Andersen, B. (2017). The amplifier effect: Oslo youth co-creating urban spaces of (be)longing. In Bastien, S., Holmarsdottir, H. B. (Eds.). *Youth as architects of social change* (pp. 215-242). Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66275-6_9

Tuan, Y. (1975). Place: An experiential perspective. *Geographical Review*, 65(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.2307/213970>

Tuominen, M. & Haanpää, L. (2021). Young People's well-being and the association with social capital, i.e. social networks, trust and reciprocity. *Social Indicators Research*, 159, 617–645. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02762-z>

- Tyler, I. (2013). *Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain: Revolting subjects*. Zed Books.
- Tyler, I. (2020). *Stigma: The machinery of inequality*. Bloomsbury.
- Tyrrell, N., Sime, D., Kelly, C., & McMellon, C. (2019). Belonging in Brexit Britain: Central and Eastern European 1.5 generation young people's experiences. *Population, Space and Place*, 25, e2205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2205>
- Uhs, Y. T., Ellison, N. B., & Subrahmanyam, K. (2017). Benefits and costs of social media in adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 140, 2, S67-S70.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758E>
- UNESCO. (2016). *Youth*.
<https://unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=TVETipedia+Glossary+A-Z&id=9>
- UNICEF. (n.d.). *Child Friendly Cities and Communities*.
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/child-friendly-cities/about-child-friendly-cities-communities/>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Definition of Youth*.
<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>
- United Nations. (1990). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.177447845.1601925369.1578655310-1509480653.1578655310

- United Nations. (2009). *Conventions on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 12, The right of the child to be heard*.
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/general-comment-no-12-2009-right-child-be-heard/>
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2007). Online communication and adolescent well-being: Testing the stimulation versus the displacement hypothesis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1169–1182.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00368.x>
- Vanhalst, J., Luyckx, K., Teppers, E., & Goossens, L. (2012). Disentangling the longitudinal relation between loneliness and depressive symptoms: Prospective effects and the intervening role of coping. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 31(8), 810–834. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2012.31.8.810>
- Vanhalst, J., Luyckx, K., & Goossens, L. (2014). Experiencing loneliness in adolescence: A matter of individual characteristics, negative peer experiences, or both? *Social Development*, 23(1), 100-118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12019>
- Verity, L., Yang, K., Nowland, R., Shankar, A., Turnbull, M., & Qualter, P. (2022). Loneliness from the adolescent perspective: A qualitative analysis of conversations about loneliness between adolescents and Childline counselors. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221111121>
- Verity, L., Schellekens, T., Adam, T., Sillis, F., Majorano, M., Wigelsworth, M., Qualter, P., Peters, B., Stajniak, S., & Maes, M. (2021). Tell me about loneliness: Interviews with young people about what loneliness is and how to cope with it.

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(22), 11904. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182211904>

Victor, C. R., & Pikhartova, J. (2020). Lonely places or lonely people? Investigating the relationship between loneliness and place of residence. *BMC Public Health*, 20, 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08703-8>

Visser, K. (2020). ‘Because we’re all different’—Everyday experiences of belonging among young people from immigrant backgrounds in Tottenham. *Geoforum*, 116, 322-330.

Wacquant, L. (2007). Territorial stigmatization in the age of advanced marginality. *Thesis Eleven*, 91(1), 66-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0725513607082003>

Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Polity Press.

Wacquant, L., Slater, T., & Pereira, V. B. (2014). Territorial stigmatization in action. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 46(6), 1270–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a4606ge>

Walker, A., Taylor, M. F., Caltabiano, N., & Pooley, J. A. (2014). Creating friendship networks, establishing a social identity, developing a sense of belonging, meeting new people, and building connections with the community: The social capital support health benefits to be derived from skateboarding in skate-parks. *International Journal of Child Health and Human Development*, 7(2), 135.

- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.82>
- Wang C., & Burris M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309>
- Weiss, R. S. (1973). *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation*. The MIT Press.
- Wenham, A. (2020). Wish you were here? Geographies of exclusion: young people, coastal towns and marginality. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(1), 44-60,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1704408>
- Whitlock, J. (2007). The role of adults, public space, and power in adolescent community connectedness. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(4), 499-518.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20161>
- Willmott, P. (1987). Community and social structure. *Policy Studies*, 8(1), 52-63,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01442878708423485>
- Wilson, S., & Milne, E. (2016). Visual activism and social justice: Using visual methods to make young people's complex lives visible across 'public' and 'private' spaces. *Current Sociology*, 64(1), 140-156.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115592685>
- Witvliet, M., Brendgen, M., van Lier, P. A. C., Koot, H. M., & Vitaro, F. (2010). Early adolescent depressive symptoms: Prediction from clique isolation, loneliness, and

perceived social acceptance. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(8), 1045-1056. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10802-010-9426-x>

Woodward, J. (1988). *The solitude of loneliness*. Lexington Books.

World Health Organisation. (n.d.). *Adolescence: A period needing special attention*. <http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/section2/page1/recognizing-adolescence.html>

Worsley, J. D., Harrison, P., & Corcoran, R. (2021). The role of accommodation environments in student mental health and wellbeing. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10602-5>

Wyn, J. & White, R. (1997). *Rethinking Youth*. Sage.

Wyness, M. (2013). Global standards and deficit childhoods: the contested meaning of children's participation. *Children's Geographies*, 11(3), 340-353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.812280>

Yang, K., Petersen, K. J., & Qualter, P. (2022). Undesirable social relations as risk factors for loneliness among 14-year-olds in the UK: Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 46(1), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025420965737>

Young, J. E. (1982). Loneliness, depression and cognitive therapy: Theory and application. In L.A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy* (pp. 379-406). Wiley.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(3), 197-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Young people's information leaflet



University of
Central Lancashire
UCLan

Young people in
Morecambe

Have your
voices heard

Make a
difference

An *opportunity* to
participate in a
research project at
the University of
Central Lancashire.



Participant Information
Sheet 20/09/21

Who am I?

My name is Gillian and I am a researcher, inviting young people to participate in a project. Find out if you want to take part by reading this leaflet. I am happy to answer any questions and you can talk to other people about this if you want.

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is about inviting young people to participate in a research study. This will



explore how young people who live in Morecambe feel about their

communities and how this may (or may not) relate to feelings of connectedness and/or loneliness.

Who will be taking part in the research?

I am inviting small groups of young people from Morecambe to take part. A range of creative activities will be used to find out about how young people in Morecambe feel about their community, what places matter to them and how these things may impact feelings of connection and loneliness in different ways. A pilot study has already been conducted with a small group of young people who gave their views about what activities were fun and effective for finding out about community, place and loneliness in Morecambe.

What will I do?

Five sessions will be held alongside your group co-ordinator. The **first session** will involve a group conversation about the local community, different places which are important to you and the different meanings loneliness has for young people who live in Morecambe. A **second and third session**

will involve trying out some arty activities to explore the themes further. **Sessions four and five** will involve exploring the local area



together using photography to take pictures which say something about young people in Morecambe and their experiences of community, place and loneliness or connection.

Be a Young Researcher!

All young people will be invited to join a Young Researchers' Group, who will work alongside myself in analysing the information, as well as deciding who we need to tell about it and how we are going to present it. You don't have to take part in this group but if you would like to get experience of what it is like to be a researcher and be involved in decision making, then this could be for you! The group will meet separately five times to the other research sessions.

How can I take part?

Attached to this information sheet is a consent form. If you wish to take part, read through the consent form carefully and tick each box. Sign and date the form, and if you are aged under 16, a parent or guardian must also sign and date the parent/guardian consent form. It can then be emailed to me or I can collect it at your next session. Participation is voluntary and if you don't want to take part, it won't affect the usual activities you do in your group.

In recognition of your contributions to the project, a **Certificate of Participation** and a **choice of rewards** (such as food baskets, a group meal or a monetary contribution to your youth group) will be presented.

Who will the research help?

The main aim of the project is to hear the voices of young people who live in



Morecambe and discover what they think about their community and how differing views may be linked to feelings of connectedness or loneliness and how this

affects a young person's sense of well-being. This information will be communicated back to the local community.

Staying Safe

Although meeting in person cannot be risk free from exposure to Covid-19, measures are in place to ensure sessions are as Covid secure as possible. These include social distancing, hand sanitising, increased ventilation and the option of wearing a face covering.

Who is doing the research?

I am a PhD student at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston. I have worked in Morecambe with young people for many years and I am interested in working together with young people to support their voices being heard in the community.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or would like to know more, you can contact me (Gillian) or Julie, who is my supervisor. Our contact details are at the end of this sheet.



The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns about the way in which the study is conducted, you can contact the University Officer for Ethics (OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk).

All information in the sessions will remain anonymous and confidential and will be stored securely at UCLan until July 2023 then it will be destroyed. Further information about how personal information is protected in research can be found at:

https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

Contact information

Researcher contact details:

Gillian Holt
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
PR1 7QR

ghholt@uclan.ac.uk

Supervisor contact details:

Dr. Julie Ridley
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
PR1 7QR

Tel: 01772 893402

jridley1@uclan.ac.uk

Participant Consent Form

A participatory study of young people's experiences and perspectives of loneliness, community and place in coastal communities.

Please carefully read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate your consent and then sign below.

Please tick

- I have read and understood the information sheet
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had them answered
- I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified (except as might be required by law)
- I understand that any creative output (for example photographs or writing) which I produce, where it is not possible to identify me or any personal information about me, may be published.
- I understand that any creative output where it is possible to identify me or any personal information about me will not be published.
- I agree to the sessions being recorded and transcribed (written up) but that I will not be identified in anything written, maintaining anonymity
- I understand that both the researcher and supervisors at UCLan will have access to the securely stored work which I produced and that this will be confidential
- I agree that data gathered in this study may be stored anonymously and securely and may be used for future research
- I understand that sometimes we might talk about subjects which may make me feel upset during the session or afterwards but there is support available for me
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part at any time and can communicate this verbally or via email without giving a reason

- I understand that any work I produce will be kept by the researcher but I must say (either verbally or by email) whether it can be used or not when the project is being written up
- I understand that there will be a member of staff from the organisation present during the sessions to supervise but that they will not be involved in the collection of data, nor have access to it
- I agree to take part in this study

Participant's signature _____

Print name _____

Date _____

Appendix 3 Consent form (parent/guardian)



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

A participatory study of young people’s experiences and perspectives of loneliness, community and place in coastal communities.

Please tick box to indicate agreement

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 20/09 /21 for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my child/ward taking part in the will have their discussions in the sessions audio recorded and transcribed and will be producing creative work such as art or photographs of the local community and writing.
3. I understand that any of said creative work may be published but only if it is not possible to identify my child/ward or any of their personal information.
4. I understand that my child/ward’s participation is voluntary and that they are free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without their rights being affected. In addition, I understand that they are free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.
5. I understand that the topic of loneliness can have the potential to make my child/ward feel upset and that there are supportive measures in place if this happens.
6. I understand that if my child/ward withdraws from this study data collected prior to their withdrawal will be retained but no further data will be collected.
7. I understand that following a withdrawal from the study, the child/ward must inform the researcher either verbally or by email whether they wish their data to be used in the analysis or not.
8. I understand that I will not be able to access the information given by my child/ward in the study, unless they wish to share any of their creative work when the data collection is completed.
9. I understand that the information my child/ward provides will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire and access to the securely stored data will only be available to the lead researcher and her supervisors at UCLan.
10. I understand that a member of staff from the organisation will be present during the sessions but they are there in a supervisory capacity and will not have access to the

data that is collected

11. I understand that signed consent forms and original audio, transcripts and creative work will be retained in the researcher's secure office at UCLan and will be accessible by only the researcher and the supervisor for up to five years.
12. I agree to my child/ward taking part in the above study.

Child's/ward's name

Name of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature

Need to talk?

If there's anything at all that you'd like to talk to someone about, these are some great charities that will offer support and advice.

YOUNGMINDS

youngminds.org.uk

'We will make sure all young people get the best possible mental health support and have the resilience to overcome life's challenges.'

- Text the YoungMinds Crisis Messenger, for free 24/7 support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis.
- If you need urgent help text YM to 85258
- All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors
- Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.



childline.org.uk

'We're here for you, whatever's on your mind. We'll support you. Guide you. Help you make decisions that are right for you.'

- Calls are free

a.c.e. in Lancaster

a-c-e.org.uk

A local charity which supports the well-being of young people in the Lancaster and Morecambe area.

Telephone: 07717316883 or 07468600903

Appendix 5 Young Researchers Day invitation



You are invited to a Young Researchers Day!

What? We will look at the information collected throughout the project and work out what it tells us about *young people who live in Morecambe and their experiences of place and belonging and how it relates to loneliness.* We will also plan an event together (for example a photography exhibition) to share our findings with the community!



Where and when?

Date: Monday 30th May 2022

Time: 11am to 3pm

Location: Brew Me Sunshine, 12 Victoria Street, Morecambe, LA4 4AH. Telephone: (01524) 414846

N.B. A youth worker will also support the day and lunch will be provided

Why? Firstly, I hope the day will be fun and interesting, as well as give young people experience of what it is like to be a researcher. In addition, we will work together to promote the voices of young people in the community and aim to have impact on the issues that matter to them.



Please confirm your attendance by emailing me (Gillian) at gholt@uclan.ac.uk. If you can't make the whole session, you are more than welcome to stay for a shorter time!

Appendix 6 Young Researchers Day information sheet

A study of young people's perspectives and experiences of place, community belonging and loneliness in Morecambe.

This information sheet gives details of an upcoming 'Young Researchers' Day' where young people are invited to collaborate on the next phase of the research project which they have been participating in.

In the previous research sessions, we have used creative methods to explore the research themes of place, community belonging and loneliness in Morecambe. Now young people are invited to be co-researchers to discover *what* the data tells us, *who* we need to tell this to and *how* we are going to tell them about it.

A day is planned to do some of the data analysis together and then explore ideas for a local event (for example, an exhibition of the young people's photography of Morecambe) where our findings can be shared in the community.

The details for the day are as follows:

Date: Monday 30th May 2022

Time: 11am to 3pm

Location: Brew Me Sunshine, 12 Victoria Street, Morecambe, LA4 4AH.

Telephone: (01524) 414846

N.B. Lunch will be provided

Please provide contact details on the attached sheet, as well as any relevant medical information and dietary requirements.

Any information supplied will be kept confidential and is purely for the researcher (Gillian) to have on the day. It will be destroyed after the event.

I hope that the day will be fun and interesting, as well as giving young people real experience of what it is like to be a researcher. We will work together to promote the views and voices of young people in the community and aim to have impact on the issues that matter to them.

If you have any questions, please contact me (Gillian) on the email address below.

Thank you!

Researcher Contact Details:

Gillian Holt
School of Social Work, Care and Community
Community
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
PR1 7QR
Email: ghholt@uclan.ac.uk

Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Julie Ridley
School of Social Work, Care and
Community
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
PR1 7QR
Email: jridley1@uclan.ac.uk

UCLan Ethics Office Contact Details:

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns about the way in which the study is conducted, you can contact the University Officer for Ethics (OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk).

All information in the sessions will remain anonymous and confidential and will be stored securely at UCLan. Further information about how personal information is protected in research can be found at:

https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

Appendix 7 Photovoice exhibition poster



Appendix 8 Executive Report for stakeholders



Executive report

Young people in Morecambe: sense of place, community belonging and loneliness

This report summarises a PhD research project at the University of Central Lancashire with young people in Morecambe, which examined how their perception of place relates to community belonging and experiences of loneliness. The aims of the research were twofold: firstly to generate new knowledge about how place is related to loneliness in young people, and secondly, **to explore views from young people who live in Morecambe and identify suggestions for support for those who live there**. The purpose of this summary report is to inform stakeholders about the outcomes of this second aim.

Young people's main recommendations

Young people offered ideas and suggestions about how they thought those who experience loneliness or disconnection from the community might be supported in Morecambe. There is a variety of suggestions here, ranging from specific, very practical measures, to 'bigger' less tangible ideas which they hope can help to inform future decision-making in Morecambe.

- 1. Education about loneliness.** Young people offered several ideas relating to education, such as practical social skills, for example, knowing how to talk to others and confidence building strategies. It was also identified as very important to have open discussions about loneliness to destigmatise the notion that young people do not experience it. They felt that this should be explicitly addressed in schools, but also that local groups and organisations could do this in the community context.
- 2. The promotion of greater empathy for mental health challenges in young people.** Young people acknowledged that trying to encourage greater empathy in the wider community is difficult, but they felt it was so important. They believed that through open and honest conversations which address the issue of loneliness in young people, that greater awareness could be raised. This could happen within different community events, especially where different generations are involved.
- 3. Quicker, easier access to local mental health support.** A key concern related to how long it can take to receive support when someone is suffering with their mental health, although young people understood that this is not just the case in Morecambe. It was suggested that a centralised drop-in place where young people can go when they need support would be of benefit, particularly as this would be an 'in person' resource.
- 4. Community mentoring for young people who are socially disconnected.** Mentoring schemes have had success with older people who experience loneliness and young people spoke about how this measure can work well in school too. 'Buddying up' young people with volunteer mentors was viewed as a

potentially useful tool to support young people in building their social skills and general confidence.

5. **A centralised, regularly updated information hub** that specifically relates to young people in Morecambe, informing about different groups, clubs, events, support and contact details.
6. More **free activities and groups** for young people in **safe spaces**, based around different hobbies and interests, as well as general youth club type spaces. This especially includes at the **weekends**, when some young people can experience greater social disconnection.
7. **Making Morecambe feel safer for young people.** This includes having **better lighting on the prom** at night and in the autumn and winter to increase sense of safety for young people, as well as still being able to utilise this space in the darker months. Young people also suggested that **more visible Community Support Officers** would increase their feeling of safety in the community, although it was recognised that this may not be sustainable in the long term.
8. A **clear code of conduct for the beach.** This idea was suggested by several young people who have felt unable to walk their dogs on the beach because they have been confronted by others when they have asked them to keep their dogs under control. As this was a rather unpleasant experience, they felt excluded from this key outside space because they are now too nervous to go there alone. Having reminders about etiquette when walking dogs in this public space, presented clearly similarly to the existing 'Keep It Clean' signs, would be a useful reminder to the general public about being considerate to others.
9. **Action on litter** was also identified as a more general aspect young people would like to see in relation to feeling pride in, therefore greater connection to, their town and community.

Background to the study

In recent years, research about loneliness has shifted in focus towards young people, as there is growing evidence that loneliness peaks in adolescence. However, the evidence for health implications related to loneliness in young people is limited. Recent developments in research also suggest the significance of wider contextual aspects on loneliness, such as social, economic and environmental factors. Examining loneliness in young people from a place-based perspective therefore may offer new insights about how loneliness is experienced in young people. This is especially true in the context of the unique benefits and challenges of living a UK coastal town.

Research methods

In total, 22 young people participated from four different youth organisations and groups in Morecambe. The research adopted a participatory approach, using creative methods to explore the research themes, including drawing activities, mapping and photography. Adopting this creative, participatory methodology produced rich data

which young people also co-analysed with the researcher. They then chose to present some of their creative outputs from the research in the form of a local photography exhibition at the Good Things Studio in the Arndale Centre (figure 1), to both proudly share their work in the community and to also engage the public with the research.



Figure 1 Photography exhibition at the Good Things Studio in Morecambe, October 2022

Key findings

Young people spoke about the **benefits of Morecambe's unique landscape** and recognised and showed appreciation for the mental and physical health benefits of living on the coast. A **sense of pride in Morecambe's heritage** was also expressed, with young people knowledgeable about the history of the area, ranging from the RAF's headquarters in Morecambe and its military hospital in World War Two, to its desirability as a holiday destination in the earlier part of the twentieth century. However, sometimes these comparisons with the past brought up feelings of frustration because young people felt disadvantaged due to the depreciation the town has experienced in more recent decades. A recurring theme was making **detrimental comparisons with other places**, such as Lancaster, which young people perceived to be a better place to live with more opportunities. It was felt that Lancaster generally was prioritised over Morecambe locally. Furthermore, young people expressed that they could feel excluded at times because **they could not always afford to join in** with activities or not be able to afford the transport to do so.

A recurring concern centred on feeling safe. This was in two ways. Firstly, some young people felt **physically unsafe**, particularly at night and in certain areas of Morecambe, such as the West End. Young people spoke about their concerns related to violence and drug use in certain areas. Secondly, feeling **psychologically unsafe** due to being targeted by groups of other young people who exhibit discriminatory behaviours towards them because they are different in some way, for example, young people who are LGBTQ+ or have a disability.

There was a **mixed picture regarding whether young people felt proud to be from Morecambe**. Some expressed a strong rootedness to place because of family

connections to the area, whereas other young people said they wanted to leave to pursue better opportunities elsewhere. Many felt that there is a stigma associated with being a young person who lives in Morecambe and they felt angry that they might be perceived in a negative light by people from outside the community, and in some cases, also from people who live in other more affluent parts of the town.

This experience of **place-stigma relates to young people's inconsistent sense of belonging to the Morecambe community** as a whole. Young people in the study spoke about their connectedness to the groups and organisations from which the research was conducted. These 'hubs' of connection have huge importance as safe spaces; firstly because they feel safe from physical harm, and secondly because they feel accepted for who they are by both their peers and the adults who provide support. These youth networks in Morecambe are absolutely fundamental for young people to feel connected and can temporarily alleviate experiences of loneliness. However, these 'pockets' of connection further highlight how young people can feel disconnected to Morecambe as a wider community of place. Short lived bursts of belonging and connection can feel good at a particular time, but this does not address deeper issues around poverty, stigma and inequalities which seem to exacerbate loneliness in young people.

Conclusion

It is recognised that this report offers a snapshot of young people's experiences and that the points raised here can offer a starting point for further investigations into how young people in Morecambe perceive where they live and how this relates to belonging and loneliness. Many of the deep seated issues identified by young people are far from easy to address. It is hoped that the direct involvement of young people in not only research such as this, but also in decision-making and planning processes, will become a more regular feature in meetings of different stakeholders and not only through youth councils.

Thank you

Finally, a big thank you must be given to all of the fantastic young people who collaborated in this research. Their engagement, hard work and determination to see things through was an absolute credit to them. Also, thanks and appreciation to the staff at Stanley's Community Centre and More Music whose support has been invaluable. Finally, a special thank you to Keeley Wilkinson from Lancaster City Council whose support for this project has been so important to its success.

For further information about this research, please contact Gillian Holt at ghholt@uclan.ac.uk