“Time for a Comeback”: Young Workers’ Resistance Trajectories in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

Young workers live in challenging times, facing threats to both the quality and quantity of their employment globally (ILO, 2012). Youth experience extended periods of poor quality, precarious employment, and consistently high unemployment and underemployment (Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023; Wyn & Woodman, 2021). Despite this disadvantageous context, few employment relations studies have focused on young workers' resistance (for exceptions, see Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020). Indeed, studies suggest that young worker resistance faces significant barriers: youth are in difficult-to-organise workplaces (Aleks et al., 2020; Tailby & Pollert, 2011), to some extent normalise their experiences (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021), and hold a perception of reduced control over their work and lives (Chesters et al., 2019; Einboden et al., 2021; Ewertowska, 2020).

However, international and New Zealand studies also indicate potential for youth resistance (Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018). Some young workers are critically aware of the structures which shape their lives, and express disquiet over their exploitative work conditions (Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018). Moreover, studies have found evidence of informal student resistance, including larger-scale collective action (Yang et al., 2020), and individual workplace resistance (Lucas, 1997).

This doctoral research set out to respond to this tension and gap in understanding of whether young workers resist, and if so, how, and what shapes their resistance. The overarching research question was: How do young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience resistance across their working lives? The research was conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, where youth experience poor work conditions and labour market outcomes (Anderson, 2019; Ewertowska, 2020; Mooney, 2016) reflective of the international youth context (Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023).

The research was designed within a critical theory paradigm, with the understanding that research should produce knowledge which challenges power relations (Denzin et al., 2024). The arts-informed research methodology drew on principles of art to empower participants (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Data were collected online and in person during 2022 and 2023 with 21 young workers aged 20 to 30 across three urban areas on the North Island of New Zealand. Collage making in a group setting produced in-depth data on young workers' resistance and other responses (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Roberts & Woods, 2018). Collage making was followed by individual semi-structured follow-up interviews (Bryman, 2012; Mackworth-Young et al., 2022) and member checking through a town hall meeting (Schaefle et al., 2011; Zuckerman-Parker & Shank, 2008). Data analysis utilised Big Q thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

While workplace and labour market contexts could theoretically have led to normalisation (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021), the findings show how young workers' contexts both constrained and enabled resistance. Over time, repeated experiences of disposability and poor conditions during

extended transitions fostered young workers' resistance. Culture shock also prompted young workers' resistance: prior socialisation meant that youth perceived their negative work experiences as unexpected and unjust.

The thesis concludes that young workers' resistance develops over their working lives and is intertwined with other responses. Resistance and other responses interweave into a trajectory with two types of stages: active resistance and periods of retreat to grow and sustain long-term resistance. Young workers' resistance moved from early experiences such as raising concerns and quitting, to renewed forms of speaking up and resisting for others, and, for some, grassroots mobilisation. Interspersed with resistance were periods of stepping back for self-care and reflection, learning from others and through self-education, and building mutual support. The resistance trajectory shows how a range of responses to disadvantage are critical over time, offering a new perspective on debates about whether young workers resist or acquiesce.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Tanya Milly Ewertowska

May 2026

Artificial Intelligence Declaration (AUT Template)

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Chapter number(s):	○ Chapter 1 Introduction; Chapter 2 Literature Review; Chapter 3 Methodology; Chapter 6 Discussion; Chapter 7 Conclusion.
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Purpose of AI Use:	○ Seeking alternative explanations of aspects of theories or concepts, after carrying out prior academic research and reading. ○ Generating alternative options and feedback on chapter structures and some content. ○ Seeking additional perspectives on purpose of some aspects of a doctoral thesis. ○ Searching for relevant literature missed in prior searches of academic databases. ○ Audio summaries of some sources for refreshers of content already read, or initial familiarisation with new sources prior to reading.
Clearly state the AI tools used.	
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STUDENT DECLARATION

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Student Name: **Tanya Ewertowska** **Signature:** **Date:** **17.05.26**

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You, If No One Else

"Listen, you
who transformed your anguish
into healthy awareness,
put your voice
where your memory is. […]

Tell how you were able to come
to this point, to unbar
History's doors
to see your early years,
your people, the others.

Name the way
rebellion's calm spirit has served you,
and how you came
to unlearn the lessons
of that teacher" […]

(Tino Villanueva, 1994, selected excerpts)

Chapter 1 Introduction

Industrial relations is fundamentally concerned with the imbalance of power and conflict of interests between employers and employees (Heery et al., 2008; Kaufman, 2008). Yet, there is scant research related to how young workers challenge power dynamics in their employment relationships (for exceptions, see Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020), despite concern over young people's continued marginalised position in labour markets and workplaces (ILO, 2024a; Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023). This doctoral thesis addresses the lack of youth resistance research in employment relations by examining young workers' resistance across workplaces in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Employment relations is a multidisciplinary field (Heery et al., 2008), and this thesis draws on literature from multiple social science disciplines and theoretical traditions to explain young workers' context and their resistance. The following background section exemplifies this multi-disciplinary approach while outlining the context for young workers' resistance in Aotearoa. Subsequent sections of this chapter provide an overview of literature around young workers' resistance, the scope and aims of this thesis, definitions of resistance, and a map of the thesis chapters.

1.1 The Aotearoa New Zealand context

This section provides context for young workers' experiences in the Aotearoa New Zealand labour market, including institutional features such as union membership, employment agreement types and protections, and youth-targeted legislation. Historically, Aotearoa New Zealand's economy was highly regulated, shaped by social democratic policy. However, from the early 1980s, there were significant neoliberal reforms in policy and regulation (Ongley, 2013).

Neoliberal reforms included significant reductions in statutory union protections, alongside the promotion of individual employment contracts (Anderson, 1991; Rasmussen et al., 2006). Despite the reintroduction of some union protections in the 2000s, union density stagnated and, in 2025, was reported at 18.2 percent (New Zealand Companies Office, 2025). Union density disparities are apparent across wider age groups, with density lowest for paid employees aged 15 to 24 at 9 percent, followed by 20.1 percent for employees aged 25 to 44, and 25.8 percent for those aged 45 and over (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025e). Regarding collective agreement coverage, 14.1 percent of employees aged 15 to 34 had a collective employment agreement and 74.7 percent an individual agreement (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025d). In comparison, 21.8 percent of those aged 35 and over had a collective agreement and 70 percent an individual agreement. Within the union movement, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) promotes the establishment of 'Under 35' youth representatives (delegates) within affiliated unions (NZCTU Te Kauae Kaimahi, 2026). While NZCTU has also established Stand Up, a representative structure and

a two-yearly conference for Under 35 union members, limited information is available about Stand Up campaigns and membership (NZCTU Te Kauae Kaimahi, n.d.).

Neoliberalism has also been associated with growing labour market flexibility in Aotearoa, including through temporary employment (Rasmussen et al., 2006, 2016). According to the 2008 and 2018 Survey of Working Life, permanent employment grew more slowly over that period than fixed-term, temporary agency, and casual employment in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2008, 2019). The 2018 Survey showed that 20 percent of employed 15- to 24-year-olds were temporary employees, compared with 6.7 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and 5 percent of employees aged 35 and over (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). More recent public statistics on age and industry-based differences in temporary employment (casual, fixed-term, and temporary agency) appear to be unavailable. However, the OECD report in 2025 that Aotearoa New Zealand had the fifth-lowest temporary employment dismissal protections among OECD countries (OECD, 2025c).

Aotearoa New Zealand's core employment statute, the Employment Relations Act 2000, establishes the role of labour inspectors in enforcing several statutes (ss223-223A). The ILO (2024b) reported Aotearoa New Zealand's labour inspector rate as 0.3 inspectors per 10,000 employees, the 10th lowest from 47 countries reporting labour inspector rates in 2023 and 2024 and less than half the average of 0.78 inspectors per 10,000 employees. This indicates that Aotearoa New Zealand has below average resourcing for government-led enforcement of employment legislation. Recent research highlights young workers' greater need for enforcement support: 34 percent of young workers aged 18 to 29 reported that if they spoke up there would be employer retaliation, compared with 23 percent across all age groups (Verian & Hīkina Whakatutuki Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2025).

Shifting from protections to labour market outcomes, the Government's 2024 Employment Action Plan highlighted that youth, amongst other specific labour market groups, have experienced "persistent and serious gaps in labour market participation" (Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government, 2024, p. 2). The unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds in Aotearoa in September 2025 was 15.2 percent, nearly triple the average across all age groups of 5.3 percent (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025c). The NEET rate was 13.8 percent (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025c), above the ILO high-income-country average of 10.4 percent (O'Higgins, 2025). Moreover, a 2019 study of youth in Aotearoa found that 64 percent of NEET youth had applied for a job (Clark et al., 2022), suggesting that NEET status may follow, or be interwoven, with attempts to engage in the labour market.

Two key pieces of legislation were implemented in Aotearoa with an aim to reduce youth unemployment and NEET status: 90-day trial periods and minimum wage exemptions. The 90-day trial period legislation was introduced in 2009 and enables a fire-at-will period at the start of employment. Employers using a valid 90-day trial clause do not have to provide a reason for dismissal or follow other consultation requirements, and employees cannot bring a personal grievance for unjustified dismissal in a 90-day trial period (Employment

Relations Act 2000, ss67A-67B). Several years after the enactment of 90-day trials, Sin and Chappell (2016) reported that these had been ineffective in increasing company hiring of young workers, among other groups with high unemployment.

Minimum wage exemptions, reintroduced in 2013, include the starting-out and training wage rates, set as low as 80 percent of the adult minimum wage. The starting-out rate can be applied to young workers aged 16 to 19 for the first six months of employment with each new employer, or if they meet certain industry training requirements, and to 18- to 19-year-olds moving off a social security benefit (Minimum Wage Act 1983, ss4A-4B). The training wage may be applied to young workers aged 20 and over who meet industry training requirements. To implement lower wages for young workers in Aotearoa, an exclusion was inserted into the (Human Rights Act 1993, s30(2)). The explanatory note to the Minimum Wage (Starting-out Wage) Amendment Bill 2012 (69-1) outlined an aim to: "provide an incentive for employers" to hire young workers. Parliamentary debate revealed opposition questioning of Government rhetoric, suggesting that lowering youth wages was driven by reducing labour costs rather than a carefully planned effort to activate youth and create jobs (Little, 2012).

Despite youth wage legislation, in 2025 the minimum wage was $23.50, while median hourly earnings were $24 for 15- to 19-year-olds (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025b). Median hourly earnings were $27.8 for 20- to 24-year-olds, and $32 for 25- to 29-year-olds, while for 30- to 59-year-olds rates ranged from $36 to $39, though reduced to $34.1 to $35.6 for groups aged 60 and over. Median hourly earnings for 15- to 24-year-olds varied little across Aotearoa, including in the regions where participants in this doctoral research were located: Auckland, Waikato, and Manawatū-Whanganui. However, older age groups experience greater variation in median wages, including 25- to 29-year-olds, with median wages lower in Waikato at $30.21, followed by $31.11 in Manawatū-Whanganui, and $32.13 in Auckland (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025b). Overall, Aotearoa compares favourably with other OECD countries in minimum wage relativity to median wage, indicating wage compression at the lower end of our earnings distribution (OECD, 2025b).

Youth in employment in Aotearoa are concentrated primarily in retail trade and accommodation and food services industries. In June 2025, among 15- to 19-year-olds, 50 percent were concentrated in these two industries (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025a). For 20- to 24-year-olds, retail trade and accommodation and food services also had the largest share of jobs, at 28 percent, followed by manufacturing and construction at 17 percent. For 25- to 29-year-olds, key industries differed: 18 percent were in retail trade and accommodation and food services, 11 percent in health care and social assistance, and 10 percent in professional, scientific, and technical services. A recent government commissioned report highlighted several problematic outcomes for workers in tourism and hospitality, where youth are concentrated, including that 70 percent wanted more training, 57 percent earned below the living wage and

8 percent below the adult minimum wage, and 36 percent experienced pressure not to claim legal entitlements (Williamson et al., 2025).

Despite the high NEET rate noted earlier, in 2025, Aotearoa's rate of bachelor's degree as highest qualification for 25- to 34-year-olds was 36.2 percent (OECD, 2025a). This was significantly higher than the OECD average of 26.1 percent and placed Aotearoa fifth in the OECD. High levels of bachelor's degree attainment in Aotearoa New Zealand may link with heightened employer expectations when hiring for entry-level roles; however, no recent research investigating this relationship could be located. Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission (2011, p. 1) highlighted "a worrying level of employer bias about hiring young people" and Auckland Co-design Lab (2016) noted that entry-level roles were not open to inexperienced youth.

For youth in tertiary education, neoliberal policy also shifted Aotearoa toward a partial user-pays model, introducing fees and living cost loans (Roper, 2018), and, more recently, increasing caps on student fee increases (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga Ministry of Education, 2026). A recent government report highlights increases in the proportion of tertiary students in employment during teaching months during Covid-19 but attributes this to tight labour market conditions (Ali, 2026). Overall, between 2016 and 2024 the proportion of students in employment ranged from 46 to 60 percent during teaching months and 51 to 66 percent outside of teaching months (Ali, 2026).

In summary, young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand are positioned within a less protective context, with low youth union density (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025e), below average investment in employment law enforcement (ILO, 2024b), and legislation supporting numerical and cost flexibility for employers hiring youth. Labour market outcomes include high unemployment and NEET rates among young workers (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025c). For those in work, a significant proportion work within the retail trade and accommodation and food services industries (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025a), where problematic conditions have been reported (Williamson et al., 2025). Aotearoa has an above average proportion of young people completing bachelor's degrees (OECD, 2025a); however, policy has increased the cost burden placed on students, and many tertiary students work while studying (Ali, 2026; Roper, 2018). The following section moves into international research on young workers' labour market and workplace outcomes and highlights parallel experiences in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

1.2 Young workers' labour market and workplace experiences

This section explains patterns in why and how youth are disadvantaged in labour markets and workplaces both internationally and in New Zealand, providing context for later discussions about youth resistance in this thesis. The age of young workers covered in the literature below ranges from 15 to 35 years, taking into account, for instance, the availability of national statistics (Yates, 2023b), differences in national legislative definitions, and phases of youth transitions into work (ILO, 2024a). While experiences may differ between

age sub-groups, the contextual review below provides a broad overview of young workers' experiences across this age range.

Research shows that young workers occupy a marginalised position in labour markets and workplaces globally, struggling to secure stable employment and decent work conditions (Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023). Compared with older populations, higher proportions of youth are in precarious employment, including casual, fixed-term, and part-time jobs (Shin et al., 2023). Precarious work is characterised by insecure and flexible employment, often featuring temporary work, unstable hours and income, limited training and skill development, and low hourly pay rates (Dekker & van der Veen, 2017; Ongley, 2013; Shin et al., 2023).

Flexible forms of employment attract high proportions of young workers as labour market entrants because they offer lower barriers to entry, including in terms of qualifications, skills, and experience (Shin et al., 2023). Moreover, as overseas and New Zealand research highlights, under neoliberal education policies, youth are more likely to work in flexible jobs while studying because they bear more responsibility for the costs of post-secondary education (Beban & Trueman, 2018; O'Keeffe et al., 2022; Roper, 2018).

Importantly, research suggests that rather than a stepping stone to more stable employment, precarious work is often involuntary and trapping for youth (Barbieri et al., 2019; Green & Livanos, 2017), and persistent during workers' 20s (Wyn & Woodman, 2021). Although limited statistics are available, a New Zealand government report shows that for half of the years between ages 16 and 24, around 22 percent of youth are in 'limited employment', including benefit dependency, unemployment and underemployment, insecure and low wage work, and continual enrolment in tertiary foundation studies (Hīkina Whakatutuki Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment et al., 2023).

In addition to flexible employment, youth globally experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment (de Lange et al., 2014; Dhakal et al., 2018; Hipp et al., 2015). Moreover, youth employment rates are more affected by economic crises than older working-age groups (López, 2021; Yates, 2023b). These labour market trends are reflected in New Zealand, where between 2008 and 2025, unemployment and underutilisation of 15- to 24- and 25–34-year-olds have been consistently higher than other age groups (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2026). Through the GFC, between 2007 and 2012 unemployment increased by 3.2 percent for 25- to 34-year-olds and 7 percent for 15- to 24-year-olds, compared with increases between 0.7 percent and 2.4 percent for groups over 35 (Te Tai Ōhanga The Treasury, 2024). During COVID-19, while Government wage subsidies dampened unemployment for age groups over 34, with unemployment between 1.1 and 2.1 percent in 2022, unemployment was 9.4 percent for 15- to 24-year-olds, and 3.2 percent for 25- to 34-year-olds (Te Tai Ōhanga The Treasury, 2024). Regarding underutilisation, the gap is also greater for 15- to 24-year-olds, with underutilisation between 23.5 percent and 37.5 percent, compared with between 3.5 and 11.5 percent for age groups over 34 (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2026). Research suggests these worse youth labour market outcomes may be explained, at least in part, by government policy (Côté, 2014; Yates, 2023b).

Literature argues that government policy and employer practices enable deficits in youth labour market outcomes (Côté, 2014; Yates, 2023b). Without significant economic and political power, young workers are often targeted in regulations that favour business interests at the expense of quality jobs for youth (Côté, 2014; Yates, 2023b). For example, youth may be constructed by policy and practice as a 'reserve army of labour', moving in and out of employment and used by employers for relief during labour shortages or periods of high consumer demand (Burrows & O'Brien, 2016). Flexible employment regulations enable this use of youth labour, allowing employers to gain a competitive advantage by easily increasing and decreasing workforce size and cost in response to changing market conditions (Ongley, 2013). In New Zealand, regulations enable flexibility, such as fire-at-will 90-day workplace trials (Employment Relations Act 2000, s67A), reinforced by below-minimum training and starting-out wages (Minimum Wage Act 1983, s4A), which are time-limited and incentivise short-term employment.

Social stigma underpins some regulations which disadvantage young workers globally, such as youth minimum wages (Côté, 2014). Youth minimum wages are marketed by governments as creating jobs for youth, compensating for their presumed lower desirability and productivity (Blackham, 2019) – an argument reflected in New Zealand parliamentary debate (Fenton, 2013). In reality, a review of youth minimum wage rates in ILO member countries showed that youth minimum wages have an insignificant impact on youth unemployment rates (O'Higgins, 2017). Youth wage regulations seem to ignore the lack of outcomes, non-outcomes, and negative consequences that result from lower youth minimum wages.

Literature suggests that employers are disincentivised to provide quality work conditions not only by regulations, but also by the surplus of youth labour and competition for jobs (Yates, 2023b). Indeed, New Zealand studies highlight negative workplace conditions for youth, including interpersonal mistreatment and financial exploitation (Anderson, 2019; Ewertowska, 2020; Mooney, 2016). For example, young workers in non-standard employment in service industries have reported experiencing verbal abuse by managers and employers, including being screamed at (Ewertowska, 2020). Regarding exploitation, New Zealand and international studies also suggest employer wage theft from young workers may be pervasive (Anderson, 2019; Einboden et al., 2021; Ewertowska, 2020; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020).

Young workers' experiences of mistreatment have also been linked with perceptions of workplace status, with youth roles often viewed as lower status, being temporary and low-paid in nature (Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015; Einboden et al., 2021; Ewertowska, 2020). Young workers' workplace experiences may also be associated with stigma, with international literature revealing high levels of ageism towards young workers (Marchiondo et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2013). Young workers' experiences of ageism include "belittling comments and advice" (Raymer et al., 2017, p. 161) and being ignored or discouraged from sharing their ideas (Marchiondo et al., 2016; Meinich & Sang, 2018; O'Loughlin et al., 2017). In New Zealand, older workers in the hospitality industry have pointed out disparity in workplace treatment, including bullying, and negative attitudes towards young workers (Mooney, 2016).

In summary, young workers are significantly affected by factors such as government regulation, employer practices, and social stigma, resulting in worse labour market outcomes and work conditions. The following section discusses the implications of this context for young workers' resistance.

1.3 Are youth positioned to resist?

The negative experiences of youth in labour markets and workplaces raise an important question: why is empirical research on young workers' resistance limited? Understanding this research gap begins with arguments in the literature about whether young workers are positioned to resist the challenges they experience. Academic literature suggests that some youth accept the labour market and workplace disadvantages they experience as normal (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021). This normalisation perspective suggests that youth may view precarious work as unchangeable and instead adapt to, or cope with, precarious lives (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016). Indeed, young workers have experienced a consistent neoliberal regulatory context in recent decades and may be unable to envision alternative political and economic systems (Skilling, 2016). Appearing significantly disempowered, young workers in insecure and precarious work perceive reduced control over work conditions and their personal lives (Chesters et al., 2019; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021).

Previous research describes how neoliberal ideals may constrain youth responses to disadvantage (O'Keefe et al., 2021; Sofritti et al., 2020; Yates, 2023b). Young workers are affected by the ideal of individual responsibility for success, as newer entrants to the labour market (O'Keefe et al., 2021; Yates, 2023b). Young workers have been found to frame themselves as commodities to invest in and to sell, carrying the risks of their own choices and blame for any perceived failures (such as unemployment) (Sofritti et al., 2020). Some young workers respond to precarity by committing to developing their employability for employers' economic benefit, rather than becoming aware of the structures that shape the outcomes they experience (Mrozowicki, 2016). These findings imply that rather than resisting, youth may accept personal responsibility for their experiences of labour market and workplace disadvantage.

Research also highlights that young workers' difficulties in attaining secure employment impact their willingness and ability to challenge unfair conditions at work. For example, studies have found that young workers are unable to challenge their poor working conditions and abusive managers because they are vulnerable to being dismissed and financially reliant on their employment (Einboden et al., 2021; Starratt & Grandy, 2010). For youth who do attain more secure employment opportunities, this vulnerability may continue. The difficulty of attaining permanent employment may mean that young workers in permanent jobs accept continued mistreatment and poor work conditions (Asahina, 2021). In New Zealand, a government long-term insight briefing reported that youth avoid speaking up because of the "risk of retaliation" by employers (Hīkina Whakatutuki Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment et al., 2023, p. 49).

Barriers also limit youth access to knowledge and support to enforce their employment rights. In Australia and New Zealand, youth vulnerability to accepting exploitation has also been linked with deficits in public education about employment rights (Ewertowska, 2020; McDonald et al., 2013), and lack of knowledge about how to access information (MBIE et al., 2023). Literature also points to low youth union density as a constraint on their resistance (Berry & McDaniel, 2020). Lower youth union density is in part explained by young workers being disproportionately employed in hard-to-organise service sectors, such as retail and hospitality (Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Tapia & Turner, 2018). These sectors are dominated by precarious and temporary work, characterised by unpredictable work schedules, dispersed locations, and high turnover (Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Tapia & Turner, 2018). Further, given the decline of union prominence, youth may lack knowledge about unions (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

Despite these findings across various literatures which suggest that young workers are liable to normalise or struggle to challenge the disadvantages they experience, some international studies indicate that youth are critically aware of the structures which shape their lives, and rather are constrained to act (Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015; Einboden et al., 2021; Farthing, 2016; Mrozowicki et al., 2018). For example, research has found that youth interacting with the welfare system understood their challenging experiences as being part of broader social problems (Farthing, 2016). Similarly, studies highlight that apprentices link their exploitation by employers, such as long work hours, to being an accessible, low-wage workforce (Einboden et al., 2021; Dagsland et al., 2015). Turning to New Zealand, it became apparent during my master's research that young workers in non-standard employment questioned their poor work conditions and lack of power at work, showing "…disquiet about their working times, lack of control over them, and the effects of these on their personal lives – and do not simply accept them as normal." (Ewertowska, 2020, p. 105). The debate over whether young workers accept the status quo indicates a need to investigate whether, how, and why young workers resist the disadvantages they experience.

1.4 Signs of young worker resistance

Investigation of young workers' resistance in employment relations has largely been indirect, focusing on youth relationships with the traditional institution for worker activism: trade unions (Aleks et al., 2020; Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Recent literature on youth and unions has sought to combat previous academic and union assumptions that young people are disinterested in union activism – which could perpetuate underlying views of younger generations as lazy and entitled (Aleks et al., 2020; Raymer et al., 2017). For example, research emphasises external barriers to young workers' union membership, such as the casualised and temporary nature of work in youth-dominated sectors (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

Literature from the US and Europe also highlights young workers' strengths as activists and potential as a strategic tool for union revitalisation (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). For example, strong youth engagement with wider social movements can enable unions to borrow tactics from these movements and

lead the way in connecting unions with social movements for mutual gains (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Further, young worker groups appear less hierarchical, with more shared decision-making than traditional unions, and make intensive efforts to educate members and develop leadership capabilities (Boris et al., 2013).

From an academic perspective, the worsening context for unions may have shifted focus to how youth can support union revitalisation, at the expense of exploring young people's wider resistance at work. Indeed, few wider studies examine young workers' resistance in employment relations (see Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020; Tailby & Pollert, 2011). Two relevant labour process studies examined forms that youth resistance takes, focusing on students in hospitality, accommodation and retail workplaces (Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020). Lucas' UK research suggested that most "comply with, and adapt to, their low paid status" (1997, p. 609); however, some responded to strict workplace rules with sarcastic comments and pilfering stock. While Lucas' (1997) findings of youth resistance are akin to misbehaviour (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2003), Yang et al. (2020) more recently found larger-scale young worker resistance in Australia. In their case, youth resistance capitalised on social media, with an online post leading to large-scale mapping of businesses engaged in wage theft, and a national news campaign (Yang et al., 2020).

These studies suggest variety, and possibly evolution over time, in the forms and scale of youth resistance (Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020). One further study suggests that forms of resistance also differ between younger and older youth (Tailby & Pollert, 2011), signalling that resistance may evolve over early working lives or differ between cohorts. A survey of non-unionised UK young workers' responses to workplace problems found older youth, aged 22 to 29, were more likely to take action than youth under 22, and more often planned actions collectively (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

While there appears to be no prior research on young worker resistance in Aotearoa New Zealand, as noted above, there are indications that youth in New Zealand have not normalised their challenging work experiences (Ewertowska, 2020). Moreover, aligning with findings on young workers' strategic importance for unions (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018), there is an ongoing youth-led structure for young union members, Stand Up (NZCTU Te Kauae Kaimahi, n.d.), and a new union, ALWU, formed by junior lawyers responding to wage theft (Aotearoa Legal Workers' Union, 2019). New Zealand's wider youth union density for 15- to 34-year-olds also grew in the five years before this doctoral research began, from 11.6 percent to 13.2 percent between June 2016 and June 2021 (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2025e). This doctoral thesis responds to a gap in youth resistance research and potential for examining resistance experiences among young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.5 Research problem and aims, scope and questions

As outlined earlier in this chapter, young workers experience significant disadvantages in workplaces and labour markets (Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023). Some research suggests that for young workers, this context

also suppresses youth resistance, leading instead to responses such as normalisation (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021) and fear of challenging conditions (Asahina, 2021; Einboden et al., 2021). Perhaps because of this background, there is limited empirical research on young workers' resistance (with exceptions: Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020). However, a few studies suggest that youth are critically aware of (Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018), and resist disadvantages they experience at work (Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020), and moreover, may have a unique repertoire of tools for reshaping collective worker resistance (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Given these promising signs of youth resistance, this doctoral research aims to contribute to the debate over whether young workers resist and to enhance knowledge of their resistance experiences.

As this thesis seeks to contribute a more encompassing understanding of young worker resistance to the employment relations field, the research has a broad scope. Unlike previous research, the thesis is not bound to the union movement, or to a particular type of young worker, employment status, industry or organisation (Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020). This research focuses on the resistance experiences of young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. As discussed earlier, the New Zealand context exemplifies the challenging conditions that youth experience in labour markets and workplaces globally (Anderson, 2019; Ewertowska, 2020; Mooney, 2016; Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2026; Te Tai Ōhanga The Treasury, 2024). Moreover, there has been no investigation of young worker resistance in Aotearoa New Zealand, yet there are indications of potential youth resistance (Ewertowska, 2020; Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand, 2026). Consequently, an additional aim of this thesis is to develop knowledge that can support burgeoning resistance by young workers in New Zealand, by spotlighting their resistance experiences in relation to, and despite, their disadvantageous context.

The overarching research question is:

1. How do young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience resistance across their working lives?

The overarching question explores young workers' resistance from their perspectives. The question also asks about young workers' experiences of resistance over their working lives. While the research is not longitudinal due to time constraints, participants were prompted to reflect on past work experiences. During this stage of working life, youth are likely to experience multiple, potentially precarious, jobs (Wyn & Woodman, 2021), warranting exploration across work experiences.

The sub-questions are:

1. How do young workers perceive their contexts as shaping their responses?

The first sub-question is designed to explore the context for youth resistance, acknowledging that context is inextricably linked with resistance (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; A. Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). This includes what disadvantages youth experience in relation to work and employment, and how multiple levels of context shape their responses. For example, this aspect of the research may explore what youth perceive as shaping whether they resist or respond in other ways, or do not respond, and when and why they resist.

2. How do young workers experience resisting challenges in their work and employment?

The second sub-question focuses on young workers' resistance experiences, such as what they experience as resistance and how their resistance interacts with other responses. Moreover, the research will explore how they understand their resistance as varying across their working life or jobs, building on prior research findings that resistance may differ between youth subgroups (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

3. How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not?

The third sub-question seeks to understand whether, and how, young workers recognise their work and employment experiences and resistance as shared experiences for youth as a wider group in society. How young workers connect their experiences at a societal level is relevant to debates about young workers' normalisation of the systemic context (Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018).

1.6 Defining resistance

From the perspective of industrial relations and its concern with power and conflicting interests (Heery et al., 2008), resistance has been broadly described as workers' efforts to advance their interests and control, and mitigate employer and manager control (Hodson, 1995). Resistance has similarly been described in wider literature as "oppositional acts" (Juris & Sitrin, 2016, p. 32), which are part of struggles over power (Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Johansson & Lalander, 2012). Oppositional acts are usually defined by "active behaviour" that can take a range of forms, including cognitive or verbal (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 538). Opposition has been described using a range of related concepts, with a collection gathered by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) including: contradict, reject, challenge, damage, subvert, or disrupt. Opposition could therefore include a range of acts that refuse, contest, or challenge something or someone.

This thesis focuses on young workers' opposition to policies, practices, and actions that negatively affect their workplace conditions and position within labour markets. From an industrial relations perspective, resistance acts involve opposing managers' or employers' (or government) interests and control, or advancing workers' interests (Hodson, 1995). The context for acts of opposition is multi-level: workers may respond to macro-level pressures such as government policy or societal attitudes which shape power relations in employment (Archer, 2022) or to micro-level events in workplaces or personal lives (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2003).

As explained in further detail in the Literature Review chapter, some theories place resistance on a scale of responses from highly resistant (or highly oppositional) to non- or lower-resistance responses such as resilience (Katz, 2004), consent and accommodation (Burawoy, 1979; Thompson & Harley, 2008; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). This thesis, as highlighted in the discussion and conclusion chapters, views these non-resistance responses as formative and interrelated with resistance, but does not characterise them as acts of resistance themselves. Moreover, as will be discussed, the thesis does not focus exclusively on large- or small-scale, formal or informal resistance, taking a more exploratory approach than traditional industrial relations

resistance research, which "privileges open, overt, and organized opposition" (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, p. 302).

The literature on resistance, and its characteristics and defining properties, is diverse and contested (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Johansson & Lalander, 2012). Common themes include differences in whether resistance is always intentional and conscious, whether it must have successful outcomes, and the scale of its outcomes (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Juris & Sitrin, 2016; Raby, 2005; Williams, 2009). These differences may relate to whether resistance is conceptualised as a theory of how people create change (Tuck & Yang, 2014): if it is a theory of change, then awareness, intent and outcomes become particularly important. What *is* clear across theoretical approaches is that resistance cannot be decoupled from its context: what is recognised as resistance is shaped by the context and actors involved (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Raby, 2005). Moreover, multiple levels of context, including people's past experiences, shape the *ways* that people resist (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Contextually bound understandings and experiences of resistance may further explain conflicting views in theory and empirical research of what 'counts' as resistance (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016).

This thesis assumes that young workers' acts of resistance may or may not be carried out with conscious awareness, intent, or a formal strategy for creating change (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). While the thesis does not ignore young workers' intent and outcomes in exploring their resistance and other responses, it will not rely solely on intent and outcomes to define resistance. Those who argue against such broader understandings of resistance warn against seeing resistance everywhere (Katz, 2004). However, as noted elsewhere, investigating conscious intent can also be challenging (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). This agnostic approach to intent may better enable young workers to explore and recognise, including in retrospect, acts which were relevant to struggles over their interests.

1.7 Thesis map

Overall, the Introduction Chapter established the thesis rationale for examining young workers' resistance. The chapter showed that, amid considerable disadvantages in workplaces and labour markets (Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023), debates persist over how young workers respond to these disadvantages (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018). However, few studies have examined young workers' resistance (see Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020), establishing the research gap this thesis addresses.

The following chapter, the Literature Review, begins by highlighting research gaps in how and why young workers resist, noting that youth resistance is also under-theorised. The chapter then argues that drawing on several resistance theories and frameworks from IR and related disciplines enables stronger exploration of young workers' resistance, considering the strengths and weaknesses of each framework. The frameworks – from labour process theory (Thompson, 1990), mobilisation theory (Kelly, 1998), everyday resistance

(Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), and Katz three Rs (Katz, 2004) – provide pillars for exploring youth resistance, such as how resistance is conceptualised, the relationships between multiple levels of context and resistance, and how resistance and other responses may be interrelated.

Chapter Three, the Methodology, provides the research philosophy, questions and design. The research uses a critical paradigm and arts-informed methodology, with group collage-making and individual interview methods, to provide an exploratory and empowering approach to studying young workers' resistance.

The first Findings chapter explores how young workers experience their micro- and macro-level work and employment contexts, and how these contexts shape their responses. The context both constrains and prompts resistance – in other words, young workers resist both in response to, and despite, their challenging work and employment conditions.

The second Findings chapter focuses on how young workers resist and respond to their experiences, and how they experienced resistance across their working lives. This includes experiences of individual and collective resistance, and young workers' perspectives on future directions for youth resistance.

The Discussion, Chapter Six, responds to debates and gaps in understanding youth resistance by discussing three key implications of the findings. The first is how youth come to resist: early resistance was prompted by poor work conditions and wider social context. The second is what sustains youth resistance across working lives, including experiences of extended transitions, earlier resistance, and other responses interconnecting with resistance. The third discusses how young workers' shared contexts shaped shared forms of resistance.

Chapter Seven, the conclusion, begins with a summary of findings, research limitations and future research, and practical recommendations from the research. The chapter then discusses the thesis's methodological contributions, including how arts-informed research helps explore resistance retrospectively and in relation to context, and how young workers used the research as a form of resistance. The thesis concludes with theoretical contributions to the debates and research gap outlined in Chapter One, uncovering young workers' resistance as a trajectory over the course of their working lives.

Chapter 2 Framing Young Workers' Resistance

As the Introduction Chapter outlined, young workers are uniquely disadvantaged by the macro political economic context, including government regulations, social stigma, and employer practices (Yates, 2023b; Cote, 2014). This context creates a pattern of poor-quality work and employment for young workers, which is sustained across workplaces, and shapes the contours of early working lives(Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Wyn & Woodman, 2021). However, whether young workers are positioned to resist these disadvantages has been debated (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018).

This Literature Review Chapter explores what is currently known about young workers' resistance, highlighting a significant gap in knowledge and theorising. Drawing on what is known about young workers and the gaps in knowledge, this chapter also constructs an analytical framework to guide an in-depth exploration of young workers' resistance. The analytical framework is integral to fulfilling the overarching research aims: to address the gap in knowledge about young worker resistance and to contribute to the debate about whether and how youth might come to resist.

The empirical literature review in the first half of the chapter begins with young workers' resistance within industrial relations. Given that this literature is limited, the review then turns to adjacent literatures, including youth involvement in unions and other activist settings, to identify potentially relevant insights for exploring young worker resistance. The second part of the chapter, the analytical framework, includes four theories: Labour Process Theory (Hodson, 1995; Thompson & Newsome, 2004), Mobilisation Theory (Kelly, 1998, 2018), Everyday Resistance Framework (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), and the Three Rs Typology (Katz, 2004, 2022). Each theory is introduced and discussed in relation to its gaps and how it can contribute to an in-depth exploration of youth resistance. The theories are then brought together in a final summary section.

2.1 What is known about young workers' resistance?

Research on young worker resistance within industrial relations remains limited, though the Introduction Chapter identified exceptions that will be discussed in more depth here (Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020). Two studies identified forms of young student workers' resistance in the hospitality, accommodation and retail industry in the UK (Lucas, 1997) and Australia (Yang et al., 2020). A third study analysed a survey of non-unionised workers in the UK, showing young workers respond to workplace problems (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

Lucas' (1997) study offered mixed findings, but overall suggested little resistance to poor employment conditions. Lucas (1997) briefly noted that some students engaged in forms of what theoretically might now be called misbehaviour: counterproductive or non-compliant behaviours which may or may not be directly aimed at manager and employer practices (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999). Students' misbehaviours included

pilfering drinks when managers attempted to enforce rules, using sarcasm to criticise gendered rules, and being absent while at work by studying (Lucas, 1997). However, the findings did not reveal resistance to low wages and high flexibility; instead, they suggested that most students were compliant because they viewed their jobs as an opportunity to meet social needs without spending money.

Only recently has industrial relations research given further attention to student worker resistance. Yang et al. (2020) focused on one case in which young students uncovered widespread wage theft in their local fast-food industry. The event began when one young student posted on social media asking other students to share their experiences of underpayment, which led the student to map over 60 businesses committing wage theft. Notably, young workers underpinned the campaign, later enlisting the support of a union to pursue the employers, and news media to publicise the issue. Yang et al.'s (2020) case contrasts significantly with Lucas' (1997) findings of misbehaviour and compliance, instead highlighting an informal and yet large-scale campaign by young student workers.

While this review does not focus on why the two studies' findings differed so significantly, a few differences are worth noting. First, in Yang et al.'s (2020) study, employer behaviour was illegal and therefore potentially more obviously contentious. Second, with the development of digital technologies, students could use social media to scale their resistance early on. Third, in Lucas' (1997) study, students appeared to view the social benefits of their jobs as significant, and perhaps outweighing their poor compensation, suggesting possible cultural and financial differences. These differences suggest that the tools available for resistance, and the motivations for responding to poor conditions, matter for whether and how young workers resist.

Turning to Tailby and Pollert's (2011) survey analysis, this study offered a wider scope, not focusing on students, particular sectors, or events. Their research identified that different cohorts of young workers responded differently to workplace problems (Tailby & Pollert, 2011). Compared with younger youth, workers aged 22 to 29 identified more problems at work, and a significant proportion (90 percent) acted in response (Tailby & Pollert, 2011). Older young workers also more often took a collective approach to problems, which most often involved group discussions about what action to take. Younger youth relied more on personal networks such as family and friends for support and advice on how to respond individually to workplace problems. While limited by the available data, Tailby and Pollert (2011) offered explanations for the differences between youth cohorts, suggesting that young workers learned over time from prior experiences of taking action, changing how they approached workplace problems. These findings point to a need for further research on how and why youth resistance may differ over their working lives.

Given our limited understanding of how young workers resist, their resistance remains under-theorised, limiting our ability to explain it. Indeed, Lucas (1997), while positioning their research within labour process theory, advocated for further "theoretical and conceptual development about young labour in the labour process" (p. 609). However, few in-depth studies of young workers' resistance followed. The following sub-

sections therefore review literature on youth resistance in other relevant settings: their trade union involvement, and political and other activist movements

2.1.1 Youth resistance in unions and other activist organisations

Empirical research on youth involvement in activist spaces and movements may help explain young worker resistance. In recent decades, there has been vigorous debate over whether youth are becoming more disengaged than previous generations from traditional institutions for activism, such as unions (for example, see Aleks et al., 2020; Dufour-Poirier & Laroche, 2015) and political spaces (Bosi et al., 2022; Soler-i-Martí, 2015). However, studies have sought to counter this perspective by highlighting young people's willingness to engage in alternative forms of activism (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018; Pickard, 2022; Renström et al., 2021).

Literature on youth in trade unions has shown that barriers to unionisation are behind declining youth union membership (Aleks et al., 2020; Vandaele, 2012), contrasting with arguments about young people's negative attitudes towards unions (for reviews of these see Dufour-Poirier & Laroche, 2015; Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). A frequently cited barrier to youth unionisation is that young workers dominate sectors characterised by precarious, temporary work, which are harder to organise because of unpredictable schedules and high turnover (Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Tapia & Turner, 2018). Moreover, survey research has found that youth hold more favourable attitudes toward unions than older age groups (Fiorito et al., 2021; Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

As highlighted in the thesis Introduction Chapter, research on young worker participation in unions suggests that youth can contribute significantly to revitalising the union movement (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). These findings counter assumptions that young people are not only difficult to recruit, but are disengaged as members: "… trade union organizations have to make a significant effort to encourage them to get actively involved in internal union activities" (Laroche & Dufour-Poirier, 2017, p. 100). In contrast, youth-run structures within the union movement are highly active in educating and developing leadership amongst their members, connecting unions with wider social movements, and applying forms of action learned through participation in non-union social campaigns (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018).

Political studies researchers agree that youth are not disengaged and argue instead that definitions of political engagement – including participation in formal institutions such as election voting and political party membership – do not capture political actions that youth engage in (Bosi et al., 2022; Manning, 2013; Renström et al., 2021; Soler-i-Martí, 2015). Youth appear to be more likely to take part in 'do it ourselves' political action (Pickard, 2022, p. 732), as opposed to relying on representational avenues for change (Soler-i-Marti, 2015). For example, youth may not vote en masse in political elections but are more likely to take part in protest actions (Renstrom et al., 2021).

Studies have sought to explain young people's motivations for engaging and sustaining involvement in activist movements, focusing on social and psychological factors. Personal life experiences and family socialisation,

combined with exposure to a key political or social event, appear to prompt young people to become involved in activism (Quéniart, 2008). Participation in activist events and organisations also appears to be driven by a need for social belonging (Renstrom et al., 2021; Bosi et al., 2022). One study showed that young people's participation in political protests was positively affected by the need to belong, whereas belongingness need had no effect for those aged over 33 years (Renstrom et al., 2021). Individual social identity development is heightened in younger people (Renstrom et al., 2021), and activist spaces may fulfil belongingness needs by assigning members specific tasks and clear roles (Bosi et al., 2022). Developing knowledge and skills through activist roles, and on a personal level, building friendships, may also bring a sense of individual success and contribute to sustained activism (Bosi et al., 2022).

While youth engage in activism and volunteer for organisations pursuing social causes, research suggests these organisations do not always protect or serve young people's interests (Carlton et al., 2022; Cha et al., 2018; Laroche & Dufour-Poirier, 2017; Yates, 2023b). For instance, youth are less likely to hold leadership positions within unions, so their interests may not be adequately represented (Laroche & Dufour-Poirier, 2017). Moreover, the interests of workers in core, secure positions tend to be prioritised at the expense of those in peripheral, precarious roles, where youth are more often situated (Yates, 2023b). One study suggests that union leaders may distance themselves from young workers because young workers' interest in adjacent social causes could lead to a "dilution or destabilization of labor's core identity" (Cha et al., 2018, p. 470). Another study, examining young people's civic engagement, found that youth experienced discrimination and a lack of power and voice within organisations they volunteered for (Carlton et al., 2022). In response, young people attempted to change problematic practices and supported the wellbeing of new young volunteers in these challenging environments (Carlton et al., 2022). Perversely, these findings suggest that young people's resistance may not only occur through activist organisations but may be required to respond to issues within those same organisations.

Overall, literature on youth activism, including through unions and in political spheres, shows that youth are highly engaged in alternatives to traditional, formal institutions, such as political protests (Renstrom et al., 2021; Soler-i-Marti, 2015), and youth-driven groups within the union movement (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Moreover, young people strengthen their capacity for sustained activism by building knowledge and skills (Bosi et al., 2022) and developing the leadership capacity of other young activists (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). These findings underline the need for further research on young workers' resistance, given debate over whether young workers resist their challenging work and employment contexts (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018).

2.2 Analytical framework for exploring young workers' resistance

As explained above, empirical research on young workers' resistance is limited; consequently, young worker resistance is under-theorised. To explore youth resistance in depth, this thesis' analytical framework draws

on two core industrial relations theories and two further social science resistance frameworks. The two IR theories are Labour Process Theory (Hodson, 1995; Thompson & Newsome, 2004), Mobilisation Theory (Kelly, 1998, 2018), and the non-IR theories are the Everyday Resistance Framework (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), and Three Rs Typology (Katz, 2004, 2022).

IR theoretical frameworks have resulted in empirical research often limited in scope to single workplaces, industries or occupations (Thompson & Newsome, 2004); and formal, collective resistance through unions (Atzeni & Cini, 2024; Holgate et al., 2018; Martínez Lucio, 2016). An in-depth exploration of young workers' resistance can therefore build on traditional IR approaches by using non-IR resistance frameworks to understand young workers' resistance within their wider working lives, beyond formal collective and workplace boundaries. The following subsections discuss each theory in turn, including an overview, links with the thesis' questions, and gaps in relation to exploring resistance. The theories offer relevant definitions of resistance, theorise how resistance connects with other responses, and provide insight into how social contexts prompt and shape resistance. The section concludes by illustrating how, when combined, the theories provide a strong basis for in-depth exploration of young workers' resistance.

2.2.1 Labour Process Theory

Labour process theory (LPT) is an important starting point for this thesis, as a significant IR theory that explains worker resistance. Drawing on Marxist theory, LPT explains how capitalist systems foster struggles for control between managers and workers (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1978). LPT emerged from concerns about how evolving managerial regimes and control strategies under capitalism, such as Taylorism, were used to extract value from workers to increase profits (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1978).

Although early labour process theorists linked managers' control strategies with developments in capitalism (Burawoy, 1978), following research has tended to focus on how managerial control is exercised at the point of production within workplaces, where people's capacity to work is converted into doing work that produces value (Burawoy, 1978; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Workers' outputs are difficult to predict: the value they produce depends on human factors such as discretionary effort (Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Managers can extract greater value by controlling labour processes, with aims such as increasing productivity and decreasing labour costs (Cohen, 2012). Forms of control and worker resistance will vary between workplaces and industries, because of the "distinctiveness and peculiarities of particular points of production" (Thompson & Newsome, 2004, p. 142).

Reinforcing this workplace focus, labour process theory distances itself from its Marxist roots by not viewing worker resistance as an automatic precursor to working-class uprisings (Edwards, 1986; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Instead, workplace-level struggles divert worker attention from the exploitative nature of capitalism, reducing the likelihood of larger-scale resistance (Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Thompson & Newsome,

2004). Consequently, analysis is usually positioned at micro- or meso- levels, within the scope of a single workplace, occupation, or industry (Thompson & Newsome, 2004).

How LPT explains resistance

Resistance is explained by labour process theorists as workers countering managerial control to advance their own interests (Barnes, 2004; Edwards & Hodder, 2022; Hodson, 1995). For young workers, this implies that resistance may be an effort to reassert or advance their interests, in response to downward pressure on their work and employment conditions. While LPT explains why workers resist, it has been critiqued in industrial relations for not conceptualising worker resistance strategies (Hodson, 1995; Kelly, 1998).

Hodson (1995), seeking to address this theoretical gap, proposed four broad categories covering both individual and collective resistance, based on empirical studies of worker resistance. The four categories are: regulating the amount and intensity of work, deflecting abuse by managers, defending autonomy, and expanding control (Hodson, 1995). To regulate work intensity and amount, workers restrict their outputs and effort, for example by claiming ignorance of correct processes, working to rule by following requirements so closely as to slow down work, and making their labour unavailable by quitting. Regarding effort restriction, LPT explains that workers engage in a constant 'effort-reward bargain' with managers, negotiating their effort in relation to the rewards for their work (Edwards & Hodder, 2022; Hodson, 1995). Deflecting interpersonal abuse by managers includes physically venting frustrations, such as destroying materials, pilferage or theft, and asserting more socially positive values in hostile environments, including through mutual social support (Hodson, 1995). Defending autonomy focuses on how workers defend their autonomy as skilled professionals, such as maintaining professional standards, and pushing for minimum staff levels in collective agreements. Finally, workers may take advantage of formal internal avenues for participation to expand their control within organisations.

Forms of resistance and other responses

LPT also identifies that resistance co-exists alongside non-oppositional responses (D. Collinson & Ackroyd, 2006; Hodson, 1995; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Workers' responses depend on the situation and managerial approaches (Thompson & Harley, 2008). Managers may take approaches beyond seeking direct control to evoke alternative worker responses (Edwards & Hodson, 2022; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). For example, organisations with a pluralist approach to union-management relations may be viewed as aiming to win workers' consent (Smith, 2015). Overall, this perspective implies that young workers' responses will vary by context, and evidence of non-resistance does not preclude resistance.

The scale of responses ranges from consent to compliance, accommodation, and resistance (Burawoy, 1979; Thompson & Harley, 2008; Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Consent and compliance, although not clearly defined, have been linked with differing levels of acceptance of managerial strategies (Edwards, 1990). Accommodation differs from consent and compliance in that workers do not accept managerial control, but

also do not act on their non-acceptance (Barnes, 2004). In accommodation, workers adapt to or cooperate with managerial control, potentially because they are financially reliant on their employer (Barnes, 2004; Bray et al., 2020). The concept of accommodation is potentially relevant to research findings discussed in the introduction to this thesis: that some young workers adapt to precarious working lives (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021) and yet do not necessarily accept their poor work conditions as normal (Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018).

How LPT explains the relationship between context and resistance

Although LPT research tends to focus on the workplace level, some labour process scholars make connections with macro-level contexts (Edwards & Hodson, 2022), as this thesis seeks to do. For instance, labour process studies highlight workplaces which are significantly impacted by macro transformations, such as growth in High-Performance Work Systems; globalisation and the spread of neoliberalism; and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Thompson & Harley, 2008). For instance, the pervasive nature of surveillance through new digital technologies was first emphasised in earlier studies of call centres, with close monitoring of calls and metrics by supervisors (for a review see Woodcock, 2022). More recently, gig platform work has attracted considerable attention, with key mechanisms for control including surveillance through algorithmic management, and independent contractor arrangements (Gandini, 2019; Woodcock, 2022). Data is continuously collected and used to automatically impose rewards such as bonuses, or punishments such as deactivation (Woodcock, 2022). Drivers on gig platform apps can be understood as using 'algorithmic resistance' in response (Cini, 2023; Panimbang, 2021)such as using bugs to deceive GPS into registering them as closer to customers than they are, so they can access more jobs (Panimbang, 2021). These studies illustrate the LPT view that workers' forms of resistance are often closely connected with, and evolve alongside, the managerial control mechanisms that they seek to counter (Hodson, 1995).

In their seminal work on misbehaviour, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) call for greater attention to how social factors beyond relations with managers shape worker resistance, noting that "not all activities can be directly related to a pattern of control and resistance" (p. 24). For example, resistance may be shaped by occupational identities – such as in the concept of defending professional autonomy (Hodson, 1995). Moreover, resistance could be prompted and shaped by factors not linked with the workplace whatsoever (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999). While not offering theorisation of how wider social contexts shape resistance, the acknowledgement that worker resistance may also be shaped by wider social contexts (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) is supportive of this doctoral thesis' wider focus on young workers' resistance, beyond control and resistance dynamics within a specific occupation or industry.

LPT and Young Workers

As discussed in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, young workers experience significant pressures on their work and employment conditions (ILO, 2024a; Kalleberg, 2020; Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023). Related

to these conditions, a small stream of labour process studies has highlighted control strategies connected to young people's labour (Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2021; Yates, 2023a). Youth LPT research highlights manager strategies such as low wages and flexible hours (Lucas, 1997), wage theft (Yang et al., 2021), and work intensification through repetitive work, long hours, and high levels of surveillance and monitoring (Yates, 2023a).

Two of these studies, discussed earlier in this Chapter, focused on young students in hospitality and adjacent sectors, offering examples of individual youth resistance (Lucas, 1997), and an instance of informal, large-scale collective resistance (Yang et al., 2021). Although these two studies are unique in focusing on young workers' resistance, they also reflect labour process research's focus on specific workplaces and industries. Consequently, the following section turns to the IR theory of mobilisation, which theorises more generally how worker resistance may develop, offering a detailed, process-oriented perspective.

2.2.2 Mobilisation Theory

Mobilisation theory, developed by Kelly (1998) and bringing together prior work (McAdam, 1988; Tilly, 1978), is a second prominent IR theory related to worker resistance. Mobilisation theory explains how workers come to organise and act collectively in response to injustices (Kelly, 1998, 2018). A distinctive feature of mobilisation theory is its emphasis on exploring mobilisation as a *process* that develops over time (Kelly, 2018). For this doctoral thesis, mobilisation theory suggests a potential for exploring how young workers' resistance develops, rather than simply what forms it takes.

Mobilisation theory is also critical in providing further understanding in IR of what prompts worker resistance: resistance is not only a response to pressure on workers' conditions and interests but is motivated by a sense of injustice (Kelly, 1998). Connecting with youth resistance, although studies suggest youth are cognisant and dissatisfied with their poor conditions (Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018), MT suggests that an additional sense that these conditions are unjust is needed for resistance to develop.

How MT explains resistance as a process

The mobilisation process has several key stages, with resistance shifting from individual consciousness to collective action (Kelly, 1998). At the micro level, individual workers must first perceive work conditions as not only dissatisfying but also unjust or unfair, illegitimate, or socially wrong (Kelly, 1998; 2018). Workers also need to view an external structure or actor, namely their employer, or potentially government, as the cause of the injustice. Workers then come to identify with each other as a group, connected by shared interests that oppose the interests of their employer or government, building on their sense of injustice and external attribution of blame (Kelly, 1998). In highlighting worker resistance as potentially responding to government actions, such as policy and law, MT moves beyond the more restricted managerial control-worker resistance dynamic within LPT.

Connected by shared interests, workers also need to hold a sense of collective agency: that they can act together, and that acting together could effect change (Kelly, 1998). Workers will then organise, such as developing an informal group or joining or creating a formally established organisation such as a union. Once organised, workers prepare to mobilise by developing collective strategies and actions, while accounting for opportunities and barriers in their context. Individual leaders play an important role throughout the process, such as by fostering perceptions of workplace issues as unjust, helping to build workers' sense of shared interests, facilitating strategy development, and encouraging and coordinating action (Kelly, 1998).

Aligning with a traditional IR focus on unions (Martínez Lucio, 2016), some mobilisation researchers have interpreted MT as a theory of *union* organising and mobilising (for example, see Holgate et al., 2018; for a critique see Atzeni & Cini, 2024). However, MT was also intended to explore non-union collectivising (Kelly, 1998). Some studies have explored grassroots worker organisation, for example showing how migrant workers develop non-union and informal groups for coping and fostering resistance (Cioce et al., 2025; Jiang & Korczynski, 2016). Research has also highlighted how freelance and gig platform workers use social media communities to offer mutual support and share information about problematic employers (Cini, 2023; Wood et al., 2018). Evidence that workers self-organise into informal support communities is relevant for exploring young workers' experiences, given earlier findings that non-unionised young workers may take a collective approach to resolving workplace problems (Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

MT and young workers

While studies of young worker mobilisation appear rare, Kelly (1998, 2018) makes suggestions that could be useful for this doctoral thesis. First, Kelly (1998) notes potential links between generations and waves of mobilisation, asking, "How do large numbers of workers come to feel similarly aggrieved at about the same time?" (p. 99). It is suggested that generational propensity to engage in collective action could be linked with differing early labour market conditions (Kelly, 1998). Supporting this, one study suggests that ways of mobilising young workers may differ, showing how unions have used protests and mass media to mobilise precarious young workers against 'junk contracts' (Mrozowicki et al., 2015).

Second, Kelly (1998) explains that if any elements of the mobilisation process are absent, this can explain the absence of collective action. Kelly (2018) touches on normalisation, suggesting that it may interfere with workers' sense of injustice. While young workers may be dissatisfied, they may lack higher 'benchmarks' and therefore accept the 'inevitability' of poor conditions such as insecurity and low wages (Kelly, 2018, p. 706). While MT makes a valuable contribution to IR resistance research by highlighting factors that lead to, or impede, collective action, broader theories are needed to explore how and why other forms of resistance and responses may emerge across young people's working lives.

2.2.3 Everyday Resistance Framework

Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) provide a framework for studying everyday resistance (Scott, 1985, 1990). Johansson and Vinthagen's (2016) Everyday Resistance Framework (ERF) draws attention to four interrelated pillars of resistance: "repertoires of everyday resistance; relationships of agents; spatialisation; and temporalisation of everyday resistance" (p. 419). These four pillars, in essence, represent: the practices that constitute resistance, the social relationships which shape resistance, and the connections between resistance and time and space.

The Everyday Resistance social pillars emphasise that resistance is embedded in a wider context, supporting this thesis' exploratory approach, which seeks to place young workers' resistance within their broader working lives and in the context of macro-level forces. Moreover, everyday resistance is considered to be a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1985), and could be prominent in young workers' resistance experiences, given that young workers are viewed as having limited political and economic power (Cote, 2014; Yates, 2023b) and less access to union representation (Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Tapia & Turner, 2018).

How the ERF explains resistance

Everyday resistance focuses on people's everyday practices of resistance, which are usually more informal and hidden, when compared with formal, collective, or public displays of resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Johansson & Vinthagen (2016) point to examples of workers' everyday resistance, such as withholding information from managers to avoid increased work (Collinson, 2000), and slowing down the pace of work (Collinson, 2000; Stevens & Lavin, 2007). However, industrial relations literature has tended to emphasise formal and collective avenues for worker resistance, such as trade unions and collective bargaining (Collinson & Ackroyd, 2006; Martínez Lucio, 2016).

Everyday resistance is informal and therefore understood as varied and changing: "heterogeneous and contingent due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or coherent form of action)" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 418). Everyday resistance practices are not limited to acts that are intentional, conscious, or result in a particular outcome (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Importantly, this definition does not view acts of resistance through a value-laden lens as a theory of how resistance creates change (Tuck & Yang, 2014), but as everyday practices. Resistance may sometimes be intentional and also create change, but equally could align with the umbrella metaphor: an automatic act to keep the rain off, not to stop the rain (Fordham et al., 2014). This means that while we do not ignore everyday resisters' conscious intentions and outcomes of resistance, we may be agnostic about them – an approach adopted in this thesis. Resistance and other responses are not only experienced and enacted in the moment but may also be reconstructed or recognised differently in young workers' reflections on their working lives. As noted in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, acts carried out without oppositional intent or conscious awareness in the moment could, in retrospect, be viewed as acts of opposition.

While relatively agnostic toward change, proponents of everyday resistance do highlight the change-potential of everyday practices of resistance (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Scott, 1985). Everyday resistance has been described as generative: it can "nourish such spectacular eruptions against power for decades before they come to the surface" (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016, p. 4). Scott (1985) explained that everyday resistance can provide a social "bedrock" for larger-scale and potentially transformative moments of resistance. In contrast with this understanding that everyday resistance may be sustained and cumulative, resistance research within organisations has not focused on how resistance is "maintained and sustained in the long run" by workers (Sanson & Courpasson, 2022, p. 1694).

The Framework may also support exploring how young workers' forms of resistance develop, through how it explains resistance repertoires. The first pillar of Johansson and Vinthagen's (2016) framework of everyday resistance, *repertoires of everyday resistance*, refers to constellations of *learned* ways of resisting. People may learn ways of resisting through wider social contexts, including culture and socialisation, and through prior experiences of resisting (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Moreover, ways of resisting may be shaped by the forms of control people respond to, as labour process theory suggests (Hodson, 1995).

Brink et al. (2023) build on Johansson and Vinthagen's (2016) work, to suggest five specific dimensions that may shape or motivate people's repertoires of resistance. The first dimension is that resistance may be designed to mirror or reflect the power exerted over people. Second, resisters' personal backgrounds or circumstances shape their resistance, including, for example, the networks and resources available to them. Third, the macroenvironment, including political, economic, and social factors, shapes resistance. Fourth, culture and epistemology shape resistance, including cultural identities and ways that communities have resisted in the past or know how to resist. The fifth and final dimension acknowledges that resisters may themselves be dominant in some ways, while oppressed in others (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016).

How Everyday Resistance is anchored in context

The Everyday Resistance Framework helpfully focuses attention on resistance as interrelated with social relationships, space and time. The second pillar, *relationships of agents*, highlights how resistance is shaped by relationships between resisters, relations with actors that resistance is directed at, and any observers (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). This aligns closely with industrial relations theories, where social relations such as managerial control (Thompson & Newsome, 2004) and attribution of blame (Kelly, 1998, 2018) are seen as fundamental to resistance. The following two elements of space and time are where the Framework's pillars can particularly help to build on IR theories to explore young workers' resistance.

Spatialisation explores the ways that resistance and power are shaped by, and shape, spaces (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Spaces include both fixed physical sites and more fluid social spaces, such as social imagery and people's bodies (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Spatial aspects of resistance could include what spaces people resist in and use to resist, and how these spaces influence their resistance. The link between space

and resistance is evident in labour process theory, which focuses on resistance within specific workplaces. However, young workers often move between workplaces through temporary, flexible jobs (Kalleberg, 2020; Wyn & Woodman, 2021), which may help explain the lack of focus on young workers in LPT studies. Moreover, young workers' temporary and flexible work limits traditional avenues for resistance by challenging union efforts to organise young workers (Tailby & Pollert, 2011). Whether shifts between workplaces generate different experiences of control and resistance for young workers could be an avenue for exploration of spatialisation.

Temporalisation highlights how resistance is linked to time, both shaped by and shaping social conceptions and experiences of time. Research on workers' resistance over time has focused on how workplaces use time for control and how workers use it to resist (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Hodson, 1995). For example, in struggles over work intensification, workers slow down to resist managers' attempts to control working time (Hodson, 1995). The temporal element of everyday resistance, however, points to opportunities to broaden exploration of young workers' resistance in relation to time. Young workers' experiences of resistance could be connected with negative experiences of time in their working lives: research argues whether extended transitions in reality constitute a new adulthood (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016). Further theory offers a way to explore how young people's resistance might evolve over time (Katz, 2004), as discussed below.

2.2.4 Three Rs Typology

Katz (2004) developed the Three Rs Typology (3RT) while following the personal development of a cohort of children into early adulthood, across two geographically disparate communities affected by capitalist development and globalisation. The Three Rs Typology is uniquely relevant for this doctoral thesis, in that it was developed to explain young people's everyday responses – to changes in their communities, resulting from political economic shifts. As discussed earlier, this thesis similarly contextualises young workers' resistance within a broader pattern of disadvantage, linked with government policy, employer practices, and social stigma.

Katz (2004) originally delineated the Three Rs along a scale, from resilience to reworking to resistance. The three Rs were scaled from less to more oppositional responses, with resistance elevated as intentional and transformative acts. Katz (2004), however, acknowledged that resilience, reworking, and resistance were not mutually exclusive. Katz (2022) and others (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2023; Hauge & Fold, 2016; Hughes et al., 2022) have since helpfully argued that the Three Rs are more interrelated, and may build on one another, as well as evolving as people's contexts change. For instance, resilience could make resistance or reworking "imaginable over time or quite suddenly", and reworking and resistance could "cultivate enduring grounds of resilience" (Katz, 2022, p. 2).

In other words, workers' experiences of responding could form a coherent process over time, shaped by their previous responses and their changing contexts. This aligns with the perspective that everyday resistance

practices are learned (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016) and challenges the way that labour process studies tether worker resistance to specific workplaces, occupations or industries. For this doctoral thesis, the challenge to view responses as mutually reinforcing over time encourages exploration of young workers' resistance across their working lives (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2023; Katz, 2004).

How Three Rs explains resistance and other responses

The first of the Three Rs, acts of *Resilience,* allow people to cope with or mitigate the effects of systems on their everyday lives (Katz, 2004). This could be understood as finding ways of "getting by", without acting to change systems (Hauge & Fold, 2016, p. 125). However, acts of resilience have also been discussed as more productive, enabling the "recuperation of dignity" by communities, for instance, where people in communities offer caregiving to one another (Katz, 2004, p. 246). The second, *Reworking* involves pragmatic attempts to resolve everyday problems (Katz, 2004) and improve conditions or situations to make these more "workable" (Hauge & Fold, 2016, p. 125). In reworking, people seek to shift power or resources within existing systems (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2023; Katz, 2004).

Studies have offered examples of workers' practices of reworking and resilience (Anwar & Graham, 2020; Barratt et al., 2020; Hauge & Fold, 2016). In gig platforms, workers illustrate Resilience by forming social media communities where they offer advice, training, and trade accounts and jobs (Anwar & Graham, 2020). Gig workers' attempts to increase jobs and income have been identified as either resilience or reworking and include paying for positive feedback (Anwar & Graham, 2020), manipulating GPS location, and using multiple apps or accounts (Barratt et al., 2020). One further study highlights how, for migrant workers, resilience and reworking are evident in using jobs to save money to set up a better life for their families (Hauge & Fold, 2016).

In contrast to reworking, *Resistance* is carried out with the intent to change exploitative systems and, to be effective, should be underpinned by an alternative vision to the status quo (Katz, 2004; Hauge & Fold, 2016). Resistance practices are oppositional acts that are usually strategic and overt, as opposed to resilience and reworking, which may be informal, indirect, and covert (Hauge & Fold, 2016). The third R, resistance, has been more difficult to identify (Barratt et al., 2020; Hauge & Fold, 2016), but one study suggests gig workers resist by cancelling contracts to push up wages and publicly posting negative feedback about customers (Anwar & Graham, 2020). The third R of resistance reflects Katz's (2004) effort to counter narratives that 'resistance is everywhere' by framing resistance as transformative and intentional. Katz's (2004) notion of resistance moves beyond a theory of resistance to a theory of change (Tuck & Yang, 2014): change may be achieved when people resist with intent, strategy, and an end-vision for changing systems.

While this thesis may use the concepts of resilience and reworking to explore how young workers respond to challenging work and employment contexts, it understands a wider range of acts as resistance, according to the Everyday Resistance Framework (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), for the reasons discussed earlier. The

following section offers a more complete summary of how each of the four theories will be used in this thesis, drawing together the key elements from each theory which are relevant to the research questions.

2.2.5 Combining resistance theories

Together, the four theories discussed above provide an analytical framework for this doctoral thesis' exploration of young workers' resistance. **Figure 1** below gathers key elements from these theories, showing how they support a more encompassing exploration of young workers' resistance. Together, these theories provide a basis for informing the research questions and discussing findings about young workers' resistance, both in the context of their work challenges and in relation to wider social contexts. While this thesis will centre young workers' own recognitions and explanations of their resistance and other responses, the theories also describe a range of resistance forms and other responses that may support explanations of young workers' resistance.

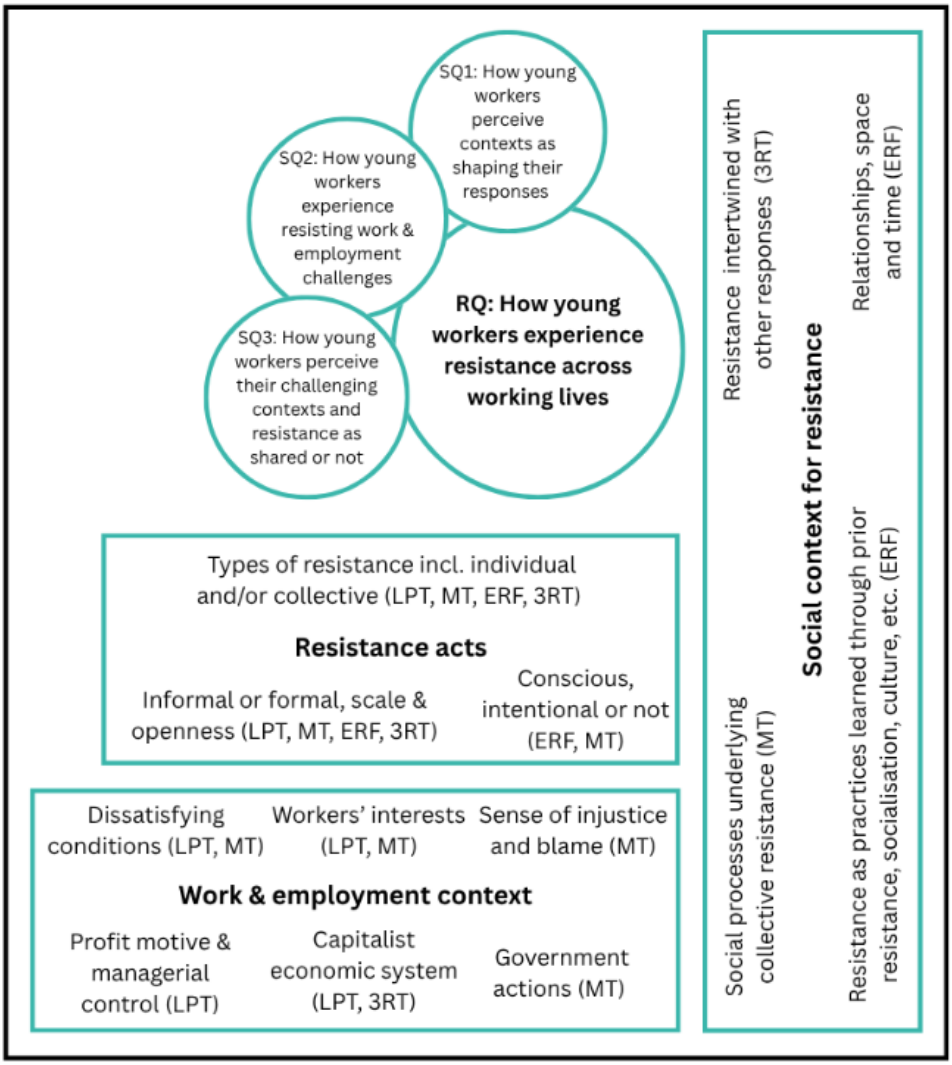


Figure 1: Analytical framework for exploring young workers' resistance.

As the diagram shows, the industrial relations theories explain how young workers' disadvantageous work and employment contexts could prompt resistance, or non-resistance responses. For labour process theory,

young workers' experiences of downward pressure on their work conditions could prompt opposition to managerial control, and efforts to shift conditions to better meet young workers' interests (Hodson, 1995; Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020). Mobilisation theory adds that discontent with conditions is necessary but not sufficient to prompt resistance, and that young workers must view employer practices as unjust or illegitimate (Kelly, 1998, 2018). However, there are limitations to the explanatory power of these IR theories, leading empirical studies to adopt a narrower scope than this doctoral thesis. For instance, labour process theory tends to focus on resistance at the point of production, and studies are usually limited to a single workplace, occupation, or industry (Thompson & Newsome, 2004). Mobilisation theory, while offering a unique focus on resistance as a process, focuses on collective resistance, and studies have centred on union settings (Holgate et al., 2018).

The two non-IR resistance theories support this thesis by raising further exploratory questions about young worker resistance, primarily by connecting resistance within a wider social context. The first framework, everyday resistance, focuses on informal, day-to-day practices of resistance, which have been described as a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1985), as opposed to formal and large-scale or public resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Everyday resistance may be important and evident in young workers' resistance experiences, given they are viewed as having limited political and economic power (Cote, 2014; Yates, 2023b). Johansson & Vinthagen's (2016) everyday resistance framework also widens the scope of social factors that could be understood to inform the ways people resist. This includes socialisation and learning from previous resistance experiences, as well as how resistance may relate to experiences of time and space (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). These understandings are relevant for this thesis, which explores young workers' resistance not as bound to specific workplaces or institutions such as unions, but as experienced across their working lives.

The second framework, the Three Rs typology, has a more direct link with young workers compared with the other theories, as it originated with a study of young people's responses to the effects of their political economic context on their lives and communities (Katz, 2004). The framework, while offering a typology of both resistance and non-resistance responses, is particularly unique in suggesting that people's responses may be mutually reinforcing over time (Hauge & Fold, 2022; Katz, 2022). For this doctoral thesis, this perspective implies that young workers' resistance should be studied alongside their other responses, as these may be interrelated over their working lives.

2.3 Summary

As the first part of this Literature Review Chapter discussed, studies of young workers' resistance have been few and far between. These studies highlight young workers' forms of resistance as more informal and unplanned, while including both individual and collective acts (Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020). Studies of youth involvement in activist spaces also show that youth are highly engaged in

alternative forms of action, such as protests (Renstrom et al., 2021), and may help broaden union tools for action (Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Moreover, youth are motivated to find roles within activist spaces and develop their skills, knowledge and leadership (Boris et al., 2013; Bosi et al., 2022; Cha et al., 2018). These studies highlight the need for further knowledge and theorisation of young worker resistance.

The second part of the literature review sets out the analytical framework, which provides a theoretical basis for this thesis to question and explain young workers' resistance. The analytical framework combines two IR theories: Labour Process Theory (Hodson, 1995; Thompson & Newsome, 2004) and Mobilisation Theory (Kelly, 1998; 2018); and two non-IR theories: Everyday Resistance Framework (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), and the Three Rs Typology (Katz, 2004; 2022). The analytical framework enables stronger articulation of the research questions, which are theory-informed, and ask about young workers' resistance across their working lives, how they perceive their contexts as shaping their responses, and how they perceive context and resistance as shared. The following Methodology Chapter outlines the thesis' approach to answering these questions and meeting the research aims, including the philosophical background, research methodology, and methods.

Chapter 3 A Roadmap for Exploring Youth Resistance

The previous Chapter highlighted limited research and theorising on young workers' resistance and constructed an analytical framework for the thesis to explore this. This chapter provides a roadmap for how the research will be carried out, to respond to the research aims and questions, and to ensure the research process is congruent with both the analytical framework and the philosophical background of the research.

The chapter begins with foundations for the research design: the philosophical basis of critical paradigm, historical realist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, and researcher positionality. The chapter then discusses research methodology, justifying the use of arts-informed methodology in place of traditional methodologies from the resistance theories in the analytical framework. Three data collection methods are detailed: collage-making in groups, semi-structured follow-up interviews, and a town hall meeting. The data analysis methods are discussed, including thematic analysis and triptychs. The chapter then outlines sampling criteria and recruitment processes, participant demographics, and ethical considerations and research rigour.

3.1 Philosophical background

To provide context for the belief system underlying this thesis, the following sections begin with a brief overview of the common philosophical groupings which shape approaches to social research (Denzin et al., 2024; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011)). Researchers situate their views about research within paradigms, abstract belief systems which influence what is researched, how research is carried out, and how researchers evaluate the quality of knowledge produced (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Paradigms have been colloquially described as 'cloaks', which overlay every aspect of research. Within paradigms sit associated ontologies that describe the nature of reality and epistemologies that explain what can be known and how (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Social science has historically been based in the positivist, and more recently post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Gray, 2018). Positivist research focuses on discovering facts about the real world through observation (Gray, 2018). The ontological position associated with positivism is realism, which holds that one reality exists independent of subjective human thought or belief (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gray, 2018). Post-positivist research builds on positivism by acknowledging that observation is imperfect and, consequently, knowledge is fallible (Gray, 2018). This understanding of post-positivism is linked to critical realism, an ontology that recognises objective reality may not always converge with what we can observe (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Positivism and post-positivism link with an objective epistemology, where truths about reality can be discovered through observation – though in the case of post-positivism, observation may be imperfect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gray, 2018).

Interpretivism moves a step beyond post-positivism and guides researchers to seek out and interpret people's perceived realities (Gray, 2018). Interpretivism is linked to relativism, an ontology that holds that

no single external reality exists and that reality is relative to each individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gray, 2018). The interpretive paradigm is often associated with subjective epistemology, acknowledging that truth is subjective and that knowledge is co-created through interpretation by the researcher and research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While the interpretive paradigm offers greater opportunity than positivism for the researcher to openly express their values in research, a further paradigm, critical theory, offers a stronger basis for research which is critical of existing power relations, as in this doctoral thesis. Compared with critical theory, interpretivism has been contrasted as "an uncritical form of study" (Crotty, 1998, p. 112). Critical theory is therefore discussed in the next section as the paradigm for this doctoral research.

3.1.1 Critical paradigm and this doctoral research

Critical research is intentionally value-laden: it responds to social injustices, and research is intended to be a means for "producing social change" (Giroux, 1983, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Aligning with critical theory paradigm, since its inception, industrial relations scholarship has been underpinned by values which question a status quo that creates power differences: emphasising worker interests and human rights in opposition to a prevailing view of workers as a commodity (Kaufman, 2008). This doctoral thesis aligns with this values-based legacy of industrial relations, which is congruent with the critical paradigm. A critical cloak has therefore been worn while developing the questions and aims and the research design of this doctoral thesis.

As described in the introduction chapter, this thesis has two key aims, which together seek to stimulate change by highlighting and inspiring young workers' resistance. First, this doctoral research aims to enhance knowledge of young workers' resistance experiences and contribute to the debate over whether young workers resist. Second, the thesis seeks to develop knowledge that can support burgeoning resistance by young workers in New Zealand, by spotlighting their resistance experiences in relation to, and despite, their disadvantageous context. To achieve these aims, the thesis asks one overarching research question and three sub-questions. The overarching research question is: How do young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience resistance across their working lives? The sub-questions are: 1) How do young workers perceive their contexts as shaping their responses?; 2) How do young workers experience resisting challenges in their work and employment?; and 3) How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not?.

3.1.2 Historical realist ontology

The critical paradigm has been described as holding a historical realist ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Historical realism assumes that historical, social contexts have led to power relations being "crystallised over time" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 100). Power relations are socially and historically produced but are perceived as virtually real (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, the thesis introduction chapter highlighted

that precarious forms of employment have crystallised as a dominant way to manage young workers, prioritising employer interests, increasing employers' control over young people's labour, and worsening the inherent imbalance of power in employment relationships. However, precarious employment is an alterable social structure (not a natural reality), strategically used to organise young people's work.

However, power relations can be challenged and changed over time, just as they developed (Gray, 2018). This means young workers may challenge the forms, use, and even existence of precarious employment. More broadly, young workers could question and oppose the disadvantages they experience in the labour market and workplaces, rather than accepting them as an external and unquestionable reality. Critical scholarship focuses on questioning and offering knowledge to aid in challenging dominant social realities perceived as natural. This means that an epistemological distinction for critical research is that knowledge production is part of these social struggles for power.

3.1.3 Subjectivist epistemology

Critical theory promotes research as stemming from and contributing to society (Horkheimer, 1937 as cited in Horkheimer, 1972), as opposed to understanding research as an unbiased and objective observation of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ricci, 2016). For this doctoral thesis, this means that the researcher accepts that young people's disadvantages are a 'virtual reality' and does not seek to eliminate or mitigate a personal desire to empower young workers, including the research participants. Instead, these beliefs are the basis for doing this research and are incorporated into the research design. This could perhaps be likened to the famous incident of the BBC wildlife film crew who breached the principle of non-interference to dig a ramp for a trapped colony of penguins (BBC Earth, 2018). Critical scholars seek to build 'ramps' of knowledge, breaching a normative 'non-interference' rule in other paradigms, which often advocate for either minimising or closely managing the effects of researcher bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Relatedly, the parameters of research ethics and quality differ in critical research and are discussed later in this chapter.

The critical paradigm is attached to a subjective, rather than objective, epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). With a critical and historical realist background, a subjectivist understands people’s experiences of social structures and power dynamics as subjective and shaped by individual contexts. However, given that social structures are experienced as 'virtually real', subjective experiences may be shared or similar within groups with a shared position within social structures and power dynamics. The third sub-question in this doctoral research about how young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared is closely aligned with this element of shared subjectivity.

As noted above, knowledge development in critical research aims to expose and question power relations so that knowledge can be used for socially just transformation and the empowerment of social groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002). Correspondingly, industrial relations scholars position themselves as activists, both through their scholarship and in taking part in movements outside of the academy (Thomas

& Turnbull, 2025). Industrial relations research often seeks to draw societal and political attention to issues for different groups of workers, such as job insecurity and gender inequality (Wright, 2023). This doctoral research is positioned within these activist traditions of industrial relations and the critical theory paradigm, aiming to contribute to the empowerment of young workers.

This thesis also seeks to produce knowledge that embodies three guiding principles of critical research from Alvesson and Deetz (2000), who draw on a range of critical theories. The first principle is that data should be interpreted to create insights for "enriching understanding", to support the questioning of "accepted knowledge" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 142). The knowledge produced in critical research can help people to move away from accepting existing social structures as natural. This doctoral research focuses on producing insights about young people's ways of resisting to support their empowerment. This contrasts with existing literature, which has not given sufficient attention to young workers' resistance, and indeed highlights how young workers are positioned to accept and accommodate their natural-seeming realities. A second, interrelated principle is that research views dominant understandings of the world and social structures as the result of power relations (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). In producing knowledge, research should critique these dominant views and raise alternative understandings. For instance, this thesis privileges the voices of young workers, given that young workers' voices are less often heard in social dialogue (Yates, 2023b). Third, critical research should enable people to "reexperience" or "redefine" what reality could be, to challenge existing social structures (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). This thesis offers a channel for sharing knowledge about ways of resisting amongst youth, whether they are new to the workforce or experienced, and searching for new ways to challenge and improve their working lives and workplace conditions.

3.1.4 Positionality statement

Addressing researcher positionality is important when holding a philosophy which recognises that knowledge production is value-laden and developed within interactions between the researcher and participants (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). From a critical perspective, where research is based on concerns with injustice and aims to support social transformation (Denzin et al., 2024), a position statement provides background for the intent and basis for doing critical research. My positionality, or personal history and beliefs, contributes to every aspect of the research, from what is researched and the philosophy and design, to the decisions made while collecting data, analysing and presenting findings.

Three core areas of my personal history have shaped my focus on resistance and a critical approach: my family socialisation, involvement in worker organisations, and work experiences. Everyday resistance scholars highlight that family and cultural histories of resistance, and personal life experiences, may shape people's understandings of, and ways of resisting (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Brink et al., 2023). Family socialisation around resistance, at least in part, guided my understanding and selection of resistance theories which were discussed in the literature review chapter.

As a first-generation child of Afrikaans migrants from South Africa, I grew up in a household determined not to accept political and social structures which oppress people based on their backgrounds, including race and gender. Our fireside stories were tales of covertly setting black women up as business owners, risking jobs by refusing to join the Afrikaans 'broederbond' (brotherhood society), and, on a smaller scale of rebellion, ensuring that racist family members ate off plates used by black friends. I was therefore predisposed to accept mobilisation theory's preoccupation with a sense of injustice, and viewing actions by authorities as illegitimate, as prompting resistance (Kelly, 1998). The concepts of everyday resistance as a learned, day-to-day practice (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), and that people respond in their everyday lives to macro-level forces, also felt evident to me (Katz, 2004). In our day-to-day lives in New Zealand, questioning authorities (including our teachers), and responding to unfair treatment by others (such as school bullies), was a normal part of discussion and household activities. Turning to Labour Process Theory (Thompson & Newsome, 2004), it offered a life raft for understanding the downward pressures I experienced in my work conditions during my teenage years and early 20s, which I will discuss later in this section.

My family socialisation has also shaped my assumptions about resistance and how I define it. William Henley's (1875) 'Invictus' poem, recited by Nelson Mandela, was a much-recited artefact in our family, the final two lines repeated with reverence: "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul". I see resistance in this poem, and in Mandela's use of it, as persistent assertions of dignity in opposition to being subjected to indignity. I therefore agree with broad definitions of resistance as acts of opposition (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Juris & Sitrin, 2016), that can be understood as resistance, crucially, independent of external outcomes. I think that as researchers focusing on change or outcomes, we miss the underlying value of resistance that can be seen in the poem above and resistance definitions. Defined as opposition, resistance can be valued as an inherent critique or non-acceptance of a status quo (a key aim of critical research) (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000), regardless of whether it achieves concrete or external change.

While human rights were a bread-and-butter topic in our household, the adage that 'union rights are human rights' would not have been recognised. Perhaps ironically, against their background of opposing apartheid, my parents were enamoured with the neoliberal rhetoric of equality. I therefore only found my way into the union movement while working as a teaching assistant during my master's studies, when one of my supervisors encouraged me to join and become a union delegate for temporary staff. I entered the union movement as a near-complete outsider (Gair, 2012; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015), with the union having an older demographic, stable membership, and members with generational union backgrounds or long-term membership. Given the high need for education and socialisation in this context, I faced barriers to learning union processes, terminology, and institutional knowledge. I also noticed that the challenging nature of organising casual staff meant there was less infrastructure in place to organise, mobilise, and represent our interests.

These experiences within the union contrasted with my experiences as a board member of the charitable Young Workers Resource Centre. Although experiencing some discomfort with the decision-making power associated with being a board member, I quickly felt like an insider to the organisation. The Centre was run by youth and for youth and required less institutional knowledge to step into this space. My contrasting experience with YWRC has supported my interest in exploring young workers' resistance beyond union spaces (though not excluding unions), rather than following the traditional IR focus on unions (Holgate et al., 2018; Martínez Lucio, 2016). The YWRC staff also shared common workplace problems they heard from young workers via their helpline and workshops, and they were enthusiastic about the focus of my master's and doctoral research, which I viewed as supporting the rationale for my research topic.

The third core influence on my critical approach and topic has been a pattern of repeated negative work experiences as a young worker in my teens and 20s, which positioned me as an insider to the group that my doctoral research focuses on. My experiences aligned with findings in the literature regarding the labour market and workplace disadvantages that young workers experience (ILO, 2024a; Shin et al., 2023; Verick, 2023; Wyn & Woodman, 2021). Through high school and university, I worked part-time and casual jobs, primarily in hospitality. A pattern emerged: across jobs, I felt I was unfairly employed at minimum wage, worked challenging hours, and was mistreated by managers. Contributing to this sense of unfairness, my (socialised) protestant work ethic had no impact on the value employers placed on my work. Alongside work, I studied commercial law as part of a Bachelor of Commerce degree. I found hope in employment law as a space where power differences in employment were somewhat acknowledged, and where the law could be used as a tool for response. To explore this further, I enrolled in a master's degree in employment relations.

Drawing on my work experience, I used my master's thesis to expose young workers' experiences in non-standard employment in New Zealand. It became clear during my master's research that other young workers were also dissatisfied, and even angry, with their conditions and treatment by managers and employers (Ewertowska, 2020; Ewertowska et al., 2023). Knowing that youth were not accepting their conditions, I felt that further research valuable to young workers would identify and share ways young workers resisted. My master's findings therefore justified this doctoral focus on young workers' experiences of resistance.

In carrying out the literature review, I was surprised to read that young workers appeared to be accepting of disadvantages in workplaces and working lives, and disengaged from traditional resistance avenues (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Laroch & Dufour-Poirier, 2017). These findings contrasted with my own experiences of young people's determined activism through both the union and YWRC. Moreover, while both my own and others' research has found evidence of non-acceptance by young workers (Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018), research on their resistance has been very limited. Based on my own experiences, I felt that exploring young workers' resistance was needed to extend debates and knowledge.

My research and others' work (Ewertowska, 2020; Wyn & Woodman, 2021) identify patterns of challenging work and employment conditions across jobs and over time for young workers. Given these findings, and the

patterns in my own work experiences, I did not want to confine the research to young people's experiences within a single workplace context. Consequently, the overarching research question focuses on young workers' resistance experiences across their work lives. This approach is also supported in the analytical framework, which highlights resistance as developed through social contexts (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016).

As young worker resistance does not have a distinct body of research yet within IR, offering a critical approach to the research design – intended to empower young workers – is another way that this research can contribute to future research. I therefore step away from methodological traditions within industrial relations and other resistance theories, as you will read in later sections of this chapter. The following section discusses ethical considerations relevant to ensuring the quality of critical research, before reviewing methodologies in resistance research and the methodology and methods in this thesis.

3.1.5 Ethical considerations in critical research

Axiology explains the ethical relationship between researchers' values and the quality of research – for instance, whether research is accepted as being value-laden or not (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast, in a constructivist paradigm, the researcher's values are accepted as influencing the research (Ponterotto, 2005) and accounted for through practices such as reflexivity, where the researcher continuously reflects on and accounts for their decision-making. In comparison, within a critical paradigm, the influence of values on research is intentional and foundational (Ponterotto, 2005). Values are built into critical research, which aims to empower people through the knowledge produced and the research process. The quality of critical research may then be judged by how participants are empowered and by the socially transformative potential of the research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

There are two key criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research which are important for critical research: credibility and authenticity (Bell et al., 2019; Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014). Credibility means that the research findings can be trusted to represent the subjective experiences studied (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, relating credibility with authenticity, Cope (2014) explains that qualitative research is credible "if the descriptions of human experience are immediately recognized by individuals that share the same experience" (p. 89). Authenticity focuses on how people's experiences are presented in the research, and the role research plays in helping people to process their own experiences (Bell et al., 2019; Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014). Several types of authenticity have been suggested, including whether the knowledge produced is fair in representing people's perspectives, including where these differ; helps people to reflect on and understand their own and others' experiences; and whether the research inspires and empowers people to change their realities (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2018).

A critique of critical research may be that, in assuming that there is social injustice and both embedded and changeable power relations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gray, 2018), the researcher could be at risk of privileging their own views over those of participants. Moreover, within the critical paradigm, the researcher focuses on

locating and developing knowledge to support transformation toward greater social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002). Indeed, in this research, participants were purposively selected for their ability to provide information related to the research questions (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2018); this allowed the research to uncover experiences of resistance by young workers. However, the data collection protocol included questions that enabled young workers to share their wider experiences. For example, young workers were invited to share both positive and negative experiences (collage question two), and to explore their responses more broadly, which could include non-resistant responses (collage question three). The research findings did not exclude experiences of non-resistant responses.

To further support credibility and authenticity in this doctoral research, methods triangulation and member checking were included in the research design (Bryman, 2012). Triangulation of research methods involves the use of more than one method to collect multiple types of data (Cope, 2014; Gray, 2018). In this case, three data collection methods (group collage, semi-structured interviews and town hall) were chosen to gather different types of data, including group discussion, visual participant-created collages, and in-depth individual conversations between researcher and participant.

Authenticity and credibility were further enhanced through using methods which could enhance participant voice in the research (Bell et al., 2019). Young workers were not viewed as data points, but as producing knowledge alongside the researcher. As one of the young workers taking part in a collage group described, “not at one point throughout this session, did I feel like, information was just being extracted from me” (P3-G1, group). Voice-enhancing aspects of this research included participants producing and analysing collages and checking draft findings with participants through the town hall method. The data collection and analysis process section (3.6) offers further detail about how participant voices were prioritised in the research.

Authenticity was also supported by the position of the researcher as an insider (Berger, 2015; Drake, 2010), being a young worker in their 20s. An insider researcher is part of the social group that participants belong to or has shared experiences with them (Gair, 2012). As a result of those shared contexts or experiences, insider researchers may be able to more authentically present participants’ experiences (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). However, the researcher must avoid relying on shared assumptions in conversations with participants, which could limit research findings (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). In this doctoral research, the researcher asked naïve follow-up questions during interviews to gather in-depth explanations of participants’ experiences and views (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

Another relevant criterion for this research is transferability, which concerns whether the research makes it clear how or where the findings could be applied to other people, processes, settings, and so on (Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014). Transferability can be supported by using theory to guide research design and contextualise findings (Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014); this thesis used the analytical framework in the literature review chapter to strengthen the research questions and support discussion of the findings. Transferability is also supported by providing sufficient (but non-identifying) information about the participant sample and

providing context-rich findings (Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014). To support transferability, this thesis includes an overview of participant characteristics in the Sampling and Recruitment section of this chapter, and a context-rich findings chapter (Chapter Four). However, given the small population in Aotearoa New Zealand, some participant characteristics are summarised through overall trends, rather than individual-level information, to support confidentiality.

This critical research did not focus on some further concepts in research ethics, often used within the interpretivist paradigm. For instance, dependability means that research decisions and processes are recorded in detail with biases accounted for, such as through reflexivity practices, so that if carried out in a similar context or with similar participants, similar findings could be produced (Bryman, 2012; Cope, 2014). Different definitions of confirmability have been proposed. One, which is perhaps the least relevant to this research, is that the researcher should avoid bringing their values or ethics into the research process and development of findings (Bryman, 2012). Another definition is that research is confirmable if the findings are close to the data, and the interpretations made by the researcher are clearly explained (Cope, 2014; Gray, 2018).

Traditional university ethics approval processes in research are primarily concerned with 1) protecting the researcher and participants and 2) ensuring the quality or rigour of the research. Protecting the researcher and participants includes issues such as making decisions that will protect their physical and emotional safety, ensuring their privacy and confidentiality, and ensuring they are able to make informed decisions about their involvement in the research (Gray, 2018). For this thesis, these concerns are comprehensively addressed in the ethics application the researcher submitted to, and was approved by, the AUT ethics committee (AUTEC) (21/407). Examples of ethical measures include not informing participants that they would receive a koha for their participation until after the group collages ended, to prevent financial coercion. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage. Appendix A provides the AUTEC approval, information sheet, and consent form given to participants.

3.2 Methodology

Methodologies can be described as theories about how to design research (Grant & Giddings, 2002) that inform the processes used to carry out research (Bell et al., 2019; Creswell, 2013). The choice of research methodology is aligned with the research paradigm and questions (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2018). Creswell (2013) explains that, in critical theory research, methodologies "start with assumptions of power and identity struggles, document them, and call for action and change" (p. 37). Critical theory also raises questions about power relations within the research itself, for example, questioning the power and privilege the researcher has over knowledge creation (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Cannella & Lincoln, 2019). In response, critical researchers often use methods that empower participants, such as making them equal partners in research processes, knowledge production, and the dissemination of research findings (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Miller, 2008). The methodology and methods in this thesis are qualitative, given the subjectivist epistemology, so that the research focuses on producing detailed, contextualised findings (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.1 Methodologies in resistance research

This section reviews methodologies commonly used within the theoretical literature used to build the analytical framework for this thesis in Chapter Two, as well as methodologies and methods in youth resistance research. Ethnography has been a central methodology in the early development of all four theories discussed in the Literature Review Chapter. For instance, the Three R's typology (Katz, 2004) and the concept of Everyday Resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Scott, 1985) were both developed through multi-year ethnographic studies within selected communities. Seminal labour process research also used ethnography (e.g., Burawoy, 1979).

Of the four theories, labour process research has particularly well-established methodological traditions: LPT has long been oriented toward case studies, often with an ethnographic approach, to provide in-depth descriptions of control and resistance strategies within selected settings such as workplaces or events (Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Thompson & Smith, 2009). LPT ethnographic case studies are usually carried out over several months, and utilise multiple qualitative and quantitative methods, including producing field notes through observations and researcher participation in work tasks, secondary document analysis, surveys, and semi-structured interviews and focus groups (For some examples, see Elliott & Chambers, 2025; Lloyd, 2017; Veen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). In some studies, methods have been negotiated with case study organisations in exchange for formal access, so that methods are not always determined by the researcher or participants (Alcadipani et al., 2018; Townsend, 2007). Data is predominantly analysed through thematic analysis, with qualitative coding methods which are sometimes more inductive, such as open coding (Elliott & Chambers, 2025), and sometimes theory-informed with a priori codes (Alcadipani et al., 2018; Veen et al., 2020).

Case studies also appear to dominate Mobilisation and Three Rs studies. The widespread use of case studies in applications of these theories may be because cases can be selected based on potential theoretical contribution; for instance, organisations that typify an industry, unique events, or usually difficult-to-access information (Veen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Within mobilisation theory, case study and ethnographic studies have unsurprisingly focused on unions as a formal access point for studying how workers' collective resistance develops (for example, Cioce et al., 2025). Studies employing the Three Rs do not always report methodology (for instance, Anwar & Graham, 2020; Hauge & Fold, 2022, contrast with Barratt et al., 2020) but appear to also use case study approaches, with research boundaries based on theoretically valuable locations, jobs and employers, and worker characteristics.

Qualitative research processes and questions may be informed or guided by theory, though qualitative research is largely inductive (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, Chapter Two in this thesis constructed an analytical framework to aid in developing aspects of the research, such as research questions and data collection protocols, and to support discussion of a range of findings that could emerge in an *exploratory approach* to researching young workers' resistance. However, the research design for this doctoral research is not as highly theoretically driven as the research approaches found in the resistance theoretical traditions reviewed above. Instead, a more exploratory, less deductive, and critical methodological approach is adopted (and discussed below), given the aims and research questions, which seek to address a wide knowledge gap and empower young workers' resistance.

Although not reviewed in this thesis, some areas of youth resistance studies have employed methodologies more closely aligned with the critical theory paradigm; for example, within *educational* spaces, critical ethnography and participatory action research are used (Guishard & Tuck, 2014). These critical methodologies often feature creative approaches to traditional methods to enhance participant voice, such as using storytelling and games within interviews and focus groups (Guishard & Tuck, 2014). This doctoral research leans into the critical potential of creative approaches by using arts-informed research methodology, discussed below.

3.2.2 Arts-informed methodology in this thesis

This research explored young New Zealand workers' resistance using arts-informed methodology primarily because of the ability to enhance participant voice in data collection and analysis. Arts-informed methodology encourages using art forms as an accessible way for participants to take part in knowledge production, privileging their perspectives (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008). Arts-informed methodology is therefore responsive to critical theory's critique of how power relations are reproduced in traditional research approaches (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). It also encourages the production of findings that are evocative for, and made accessible to, a broader non-academic audience (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008), enhancing the socially transformative potential of research findings. The process of industrial relations research can, and should, empower those who take part in research, as opposed to 'extracting' data from participants (Ewertowska et al., 2023).

Arts-informed methodology guides research to draw on forms of art and artistic processes to answer qualitative research questions (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008). In contrast to arts-based research, Cole and Knowles (2008) describe arts-informed methodology as "influenced by, but not based in, the arts" (p. 59). Arts-informed methodology has been growing in use in business disciplines as an alternative to arts-linked methodology, although not within industrial relations. It has been used, for example, for research on careers and employability (Bennett, 2016); professionals' conceptions of their work (Joseph & Hartel, 2017); and professional identities (Lavina et al., 2017). It has also been utilised for research with young people, and in research outside of business disciplines (Collier & Perry, 2021; Furman et al., 2019).

Arts-informed methodology differs from the traditional resistance research methodologies discussed above in its emphasis on research processes which benefit participants, and its focus on artistic processes for achieving this (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). For example, it acknowledges the value of visual data in enabling participants to communicate their perspectives and experiences (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008). Arts-informed methodology holds similar values to and is sometimes combined with participatory research to enhance participant involvement in data production through accessible art-making (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Collier & Perry, 2021; Furman et al., 2019; Lavina et al., 2017). However, unlike participatory methodologies such as participatory action research, arts-informed research generally does not involve participants in research design, such as determining questions and methods; the researcher retains decision-making power over the research process.

The most informative texts on arts-informed methodology are provided by Adra Cole and Gary Knowles (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008); this section relies heavily on their descriptions. This research used several of Cole and Knowles' (2008) elements of arts-informed methodology to guide the research process. First, in an arts-informed research project, an art form is selected – visual, literary, or performance-based – to more specifically inform research processes and the research text or products (Cole & Knowles, 2008). In this thesis, the art form of collage-making has been selected and is discussed below in the methods section. The selected art form must be able to fulfil the purpose of the research and answer the research questions, ensuring methodological integrity. For this doctoral thesis, collage-making is a highly exploratory method that enables reflective exploration of young workers' experiences across their working lives. Moreover, the analytical framework also positions young workers' resistance within broader work and employment and social contexts, and one research sub-question focuses on exploring this context. The use of collage-making and its connections to the research questions and aims are discussed further in the methods sections below.

The researcher also needs experience with the art form used to ensure it can fulfil the research questions and purpose. In this case, the researcher has a grandmother who is an artist and art therapist and a mother who was a strategic marketing consultant, and both used collage-making in group settings. The researcher therefore had personal experience with collage-making and could also seek advice from these family members on practical aspects of using this art form with groups to explore their experiences and views. This ensured the art form was used in a way that would meet the purpose of the research.

Arts-informed research shares principles with other qualitative methodologies; for instance, researcher decision-making is fluid (Cole & Knowles, 2008). For example, in this doctoral research, interviews were semi-structured, with flexibility to adapt questions in conversation with each participant. Arts-informed methodology also views the researcher as subjective and therefore influencing the knowledge produced, linking with the epistemology in this thesis (Cole & Knowles, 2008). However, arts-informed research is also informed by artistic processes, including approaches linked with the art form selected (Cole & Knowles,

2008). For example, during collage making, participants cut out images that ‘stood out’ to them before reflecting on them more deeply.

Finally, connecting with critical paradigm, the research should play a social role: the researcher should use art produced in the research to get viewers of the research thinking, feeling, and even acting (Cole & Knowles, 2008). To support this outcome, the researcher should intend and plan to communicate the research findings beyond academic audiences. Supporting this, as discussed below, the town hall method was used to gather participants' ideas for sharing the research and expand the transformative potential of the knowledge produced.

3.3 Sampling and recruitment

3.3.1 Sampling methods

In this research, a purposive sampling approach was used, with criteria used to select participants based on the information they could provide in relation to the research questions (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2018). Qualitative research often utilises more than one purposive method; this research utilised maximum variation and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2018). This section describes the purposive criteria used, approaches to reach maximum variation and snowball sampling, and locations for sampling participants (recruitment channels) (Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2018).

Maximum variation is where ‘diverse cases’ are selected for the research, highlighting shared and differing experiences and viewpoints (Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2018). Following a maximum variation approach, the age criteria for participants – 18 to 30 – were broad but also linked to life stage. The minimum age for participation was 18, as young workers at this age are likely no longer full-time secondary school students. The maximum age was set at 30, following suggestions that the 20s is a critical period of insecurity for young workers (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Woodman & Wyn, 2021), providing a specific life-stage context for exploring young workers’ resistance.

Three further criteria ensured participants could provide information relevant to the research. First, participants needed to have worked in New Zealand for at least 9 months in total; these 9 months could be split into multiple temporary periods of work. This criterion ensured participants had at least some work experience within the New Zealand context, which the data collection focused on. Two further criteria related directly to the analytical framework and participants' potential to provide information on the research questions, which asked about the context for resistance and resistance practices or acts. The two criteria invited participants who: ‘had negative experiences at work, and had done or would like to do something about those experiences’.

The research criteria did not exclude participants based on occupation, industry, or location; involvement in unions or other work-related activist organisations; or other backgrounds, such as not currently being in work or employment. Participants were also not excluded based on personal characteristics, such as citizenship

status, gender, and so on. This enabled exploration of patterns in young workers' experiences across backgrounds, work-related settings and organisational affiliations.

There were 96 recruitment outreach events across a range of recruitment channels to support achieving maximum variation in the sample. Recruitment channels included social media posts, sharing of the advertisement with researchers' professional and personal networks, and emailing relevant organisations. Appendix B provides the recruitment advertisements. The researchers' networks included connections with both youth structures within the New Zealand union movement and young worker advocacy services. Social media channels included regional Reddit pages in New Zealand, local social media communities, some occupational groups where group administrators granted the researcher access, and the researcher's own social media pages. The table below summarises the recruitment channels of the 21 participants who took part in the study.

Snowball sampling was also used alongside maximum variation, with early participants asked to identify any further potential participants and share an invitation with them (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2018). This approach is useful not only for reaching the planned sample size, but also for identifying participants who may be able to provide salient information related to the research questions (Gray, 2018).

3.3.2 Sample size

At the outset of the research, it was estimated that 18 to 24 participants should be recruited, based on several pragmatic and research design considerations (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Malterud et al., 2016). As qualitative research focuses on collecting detailed information (as opposed to generalisable data), decisions about sample size need to take into consideration the amount and detail of data likely to be produced through each research method (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell, 2013). Offering specific guidance, Malterud et al. (2016) propose that qualitative research sample sizes should be based on the 'information power' of participants, in relation to the research.

Applying Malterud et al.'s (2016) guidance, some features of this study pointed to the need for a larger number of participants: more ground to cover with broader and relatively complex research questions and topics, and potential diversity within the participant sample. However, other features of this doctoral research moderated the sample size needed, including purposive sampling to recruit participants with specific relevant experiences; the use of theories to develop questions for data collection protocols; and the potential for the researcher's insider position to enhance the quality of dialogue with participants. Moreover, detailed and extensive data were likely to be collected with each participant, with three stages producing discussions between participants and between the researcher and participants, descriptions of visual data, and the visual data itself.

Braun and Clarke (2021) also advocate acknowledging pragmatic sampling decisions, including the time and financial resources available for research. Practically, there were constraints on the travel expenses available

for carrying out collage groups. As a result, three collage groups were carried out in person in Auckland where the researcher was based, and one in the nearby city of Hamilton. Two collage groups were also carried out online, including one with participants based in Palmerston North, and another with participants based in Hamilton. Regarding the size of the collage groups, these were based on the availability of participants. However, attendance was capped at a minimum of three participants, and no more than eight. For focus group methods in social research, a maximum of eight participants per group is usually recommended to keep the group discussion and the amount of data manageable (Barbour, 2007; Zuckerman-Parker & Shank, 2008).

The final sample comprised 21 participants who were invited to participate in all three stages of the research. A summary of each participant's involvement across three data collection stages is included in **Table 1** below. One group of six participants belonged to a non-union workplace group, and these participants signed up to contribute to the research as a group.

Table 1: Participant involvement in research stages

Participant	Participant's Location	Collage Group	Interview	Town Hall
P1-G1	Hamilton	Group 1 (online)	Y	N
P2-G1	Hamilton	Group 1 (online)	Y	N
P3-G1	Hamilton	Group 1 (online)	Y	N
P4-G2	Palmerston North	Group 2 (online)	Y	N
P5-G2	Palmerston North	Group 2 (online)	Y	N
P6-G2	Palmerston North	Group 2 (online)	N	N
P7-G3	Auckland	Group 3	Y	N, emailed feedback
P8-G3	Auckland	Group 3	Y	Y
P9-G3	Auckland	Group 3	Y	Y
P10-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	Y	N
P11-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	Y	N
P12-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	Y	N
P13-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	Y	N
P14-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	Y	N
P15-G4	Hamilton	Group 4	N	N
P16-G5	Auckland	Group 5	Y	Y
P17-G5	Auckland	Group 5	Y	N

P18-G5	Auckland	Group 5	Y	N
P19-G6	Auckland	Group 6	Y	N
P20-G6	Auckland	Group 6	Y	Y
P21-G6	Auckland	Group 6	Y	N
	9 Hamilton, 9 Auckland, 3 Palmerston North	21 Participants	19 Participants	4 Participants

While 21 participants took part in the collage groups, and 19 continued to complete an interview, only four participants took part in the town hall meeting. The town hall section (3.4.3) describes the outcomes of the town hall meeting, which did not lead to change in the research findings, but did gather information about where participants would like to see the research findings disseminated after completion of this thesis.

3.3.3 Participant summary

The participants were 21 young people living in three urban centres in Aotearoa New Zealand: Auckland, Hamilton, and Palmerston North. Participants' overall years of work experience in paid and unpaid roles (such as internships) ranged from 1 to 15 years. Participants were highly diverse: they were aged 20 to 30 and included eight male, eight female, and five non-binary and gender queer young workers. Ethnicity groupings were NZ European/Pakeha, Pacific Islander, Māori, Asian, and other European. These included eight NZ European, 2 Other European, and 1 NZ European & European; 2 Māori & Pacific Islander; 2 Māori & NZ European; 4 Asian; and 1 Asian & Pakeha participant. A key commonality among the 21 participants was that most were university educated: 20 had previously been or were presently engaged in tertiary education. Among participants, the highest completed qualification levels included 7 with upper secondary or post-secondary qualifications; 10 with bachelor's degrees; and 4 with postgraduate degrees. **Table 2** below summarises participant demographics and work experiences.

Table 2: Summary of participant demographics, including education and relevant affiliations

Participant	Age	Years paid & unpaid work in NZ	Ethnicity	Highest qualification	Current education activity	Affiliations with formal workers' groups
P1-G1	24	11	Maori & Pacific Islander	Bachelor's degree		Union, and other labour movement organisation
P2-G1	28	4	Asian	Master's degree	Postgraduate degree in progress	Non-union workplace group
P3-G1	21	6	Maori & Pacific Islander	Upper Secondary		Other labour movement organisation
P4-G2	20	3.5	NZ European	Upper Secondary	Bachelor's degree in progress	Nil

P5-G2	25	9	NZ European	Post-Secondary Diploma		Nil
P6-G2	29	9	Maori & NZ European	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree in progress	Union
P7-G3	25	6	Asian	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree in progress	Nil
P8-G3	25	10	NZ European	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree in progress	Nil
P9-G3	29	8	Other European	Bachelor's degree		Professional association
P10-G4	28	15	NZ European	Master's degree		Union, and non-union workplace group
P11-G4	22	5	NZ European	Bachelor's degree		Union, and non-union workplace group
P12-G4	22	1	Asian	Upper Secondary	Bachelor's degree in progress	Non-union workplace group
P13-G4	26	10	NZ European	Master's degree		Union, and non-union workplace group
P14-G4	21	> 1	European & NZ European	Upper Secondary	Bachelor's degree in progress	Union, and non-union group
P15-G4	26	10	Asian	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree in progress	Union, and non-union workplace group
P16-G5	20	8	Asian & NZ European	Upper Secondary	Bachelor's degree in progress	Union
P17-G5	30	13	NZ European	Bachelor's degree		Nil
P18-G5	30	12	Maori & NZ European	Bachelor's degree		Nil
P19-G6	28	8	Other European	Master's degree		Union, and other labour movement organisation
P20-G6	28	14	Pacific Islander & NZ European	Upper Secondary	Bachelor's degree in progress	Other labour movement organisation
P21-G6	22	4	Asian	Bachelor's degree	Postgraduate degree in progress	Nil

Participants included young workers who held union roles (paid or unpaid), were union members, were members of non-union formal workplace groups, and had formal or informal affiliations and interactions with other relevant advocacy organisations within the labour movement (whether as clients, employees, or volunteers). Among participants, 9 were affiliated with unions and 12 with non-union workplace groups or

labour movement organisations. Overall, 14 participants held a mix of affiliations with unions and non-union workplace groups, and seven did not identify any affiliations. This meant the data reflected both union and non-union mechanisms for organised or collective resistance.

Table 3 below summarises how many participants had worked in each role and sector, either in the past or currently at the time data collection began. Overall, the three most common sectors were: education and training (12), food and beverage services (10), and retail trade (10). The three most common roles were: sales support worker (13), education professional (10), and administrative professional (5).

Table 3: Overall summary of participant roles and sectors

Sector	Current sector	Past sector	Total sector	Role	Current role	Past role	Total role
Education and Training	8	4	12	**Sales Support Worker**	2	11	13
Food and Beverage Services	1	9	10	**Education Professional**	7	3	10
Retail Trade	0	10	10	**Administrative Professional**	3	2	5
Arts and Recreation Services	1	5	6	**Management Professional**	2	3	4
Civic, Professional and Other Interest Group Services	3	2	4	**Administrative Support Worker**	2	1	3
Construction	2	1	3	**Personal Service Worker**	0	2	2
Public Administration	2	0	2	**Arts and Media Professional**	1	1	2
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	1	1	2	**Legal Services Professional**	1	0	1
Agriculture	1	1	2	**Self-employed**	1	0	1
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	0	2	2	**Defence Force Member**	1	0	1
Accommodation	0	2	2	**Engineer**	1	0	1
Administrative and Support Services	1	1	2	**Horticultural Worker**	1	0	1
Defence Force	1	0	1	**Labourer**	0	1	1
Financial and Insurance Services	0	1	1	**Agricultural Worker**	0	1	1
Manufacturing	0	1	1	**Distribution Worker**	0	1	1
Health Services	0	1	1	**Factory Worker**	0	1	1
				Cleaner	0	1	1
				Store person	0	1	1

Note. The ANZSCO and ANZSIC industry and occupational classification systems (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, 2024) were used to categorise roles and sectors to reduce identifiability.

When reading the findings in Chapters 4 and 5, it is relevant to note that participants generally had a high level of education, were located in urban settings, and had a high level of affiliation with workers'

organisations. The large number of participants in education and training sector roles, and the above-average rate of bachelor's degree attainment (47.6 percent), are partly related to the recruitment and sampling methods described earlier, which included advertising through the researcher's own networks and snowball sampling. However, most participants discussed work experiences across more than one sector and role, including experiences of precarity (including flexible employment), in the collage groups and interviews.

As noted above, the research participants included four young workers identifying as Māori. The thesis is situated within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, which is a constitutionally bicultural nation based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the 1840 Treaty between the British Crown and many Māori chiefs (Hayward, 2004; Williams, 2013). Biculturalism includes a commitment to these cultures co-existing productively (Hayward, 2004). Among the principles drawn from Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a commitment between Māori and the Crown to protect and uphold Māori sovereignty or self-determination, and taonga (treasures) such as culture, worldviews, and language (Hayward, 2004; Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural context is reflected in the research at times, particularly in both Māori and non-Māori participants' use of Te Reo Māori terminology. For instance, participants used the terms korero (a conversation or discussion) (Moorfield, n.d.) and take (cause, which requires a resolution) (Mead, 2016).

It is also important to acknowledge key sociological events experienced by this cohort of young workers which could influence their shared experiences of work and employment during this life stage (Woodman & Wyn, 2013). Participants in this study most likely entered the workforce from age 15 onwards, over a 15-year period from 2007 to 2021. Therefore, these participants experienced at least one, or potentially two, significant socioeconomic events during this life stage: the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Although participants' experiences of these events were not the focus of data collection or analysis, awareness of these markers of generational sociological context for this cohort of workers could be relevant when reading the findings.

3.4 Data collection

Different data collection methods produce different types of data, and support answering different research questions (Gray, 2018). Additionally, triangulation of research methods – the use of more than one method to collect data – enhances the credibility of the research findings (Cope, 2014; Gray, 2018). Through methodological triangulation, different types of data are combined to provide comprehensive insights into participants' perspectives and experiences (Denicolo et al., 2016; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). The following sections describe three methods used in this research: individual collage making in a group setting; individual semi-structured follow-up interviews; and the town hall meeting.

3.4.1 Method 1: Collage making in a group setting

There appears to be no previous use of collage making within industrial relations research. However, participant generated collage has been used in a range of other disciplines, including education (Roberts &

Woods, 2018; Russo-Zimet, 2016), political and social sciences (Vacchelli, 2018), social marketing (Siemieniako & Kubacki, 2013), public health (Mackworth-Young et al., 2022), tourism (Pavesi et al., 2017), and careers research (Culshaw, 2019; Morey et al., 2018). Collage is a form of visual communication that uses metaphors (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Roberts & Woods, 2018; Russo-Zimet, 2016) in a way that "… reflects reality, relays messages, and reveals meanings…" (Russo-Zimet, 2016, p. 802).

A key reason for using collage making in this thesis was that collage making is an accessible art form for non-artists and people who have not made collages before (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Pavesi et al., 2017), for example compared with drawing or painting. Youth resistance researchers highlight the value of utilising creative and participatory methods with young people to make the process of sharing experiences accessible and enhance participant voice in knowledge production (Guishard & Tuck, 2014). The process of creating a collage does not require physical artistic technique (as painting might) or even 'good' aesthetic sense (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010).

For the purposes of this research and other studies with non-artist participants, collage is defined simplistically as cutting out media from print media materials such as magazines and newspapers and gluing them onto paper in an arrangement (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Davis, 2008; Pavesi et al., 2017). Other materials, such as textiles and beads, are sometimes used for collage as well (Culshaw, 2019; Kay, 2013; Morey et al., 2018) – however, in this research, printed media magazines were used. Two magazine producers donated magazines for the research: one in the women's lifestyle genre and one in the environmental genre. One magazine retail store also donated a wide range of magazines, including hobby topics, political commentary, and travel.

Collage making has participatory elements, as participants are involved in both producing and analysing data (Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Vacchelli, 2018). In participant-generated collage, participants are prompted to create collages around a question or theme which is based on the research questions (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Roberts & Woods, 2018). In creating collages to respond to questions, participant collage-making has three key participatory elements: 1) participants are able to *reflect* deeply on the theme or question, making connections while considering how to communicate their experiences and views by selecting and placing images; 2) this deep reflection means that collage-making can be used to *elicit* wider and deeper conversations between the researcher and participant(s); and 3) participants may move from recounting to *conceptualising* their experiences in relation to the research question (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Roberts & Woods, 2018). In sum, collage making involves an in-depth process of reflecting and representing, and discussing and conceptualising experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Participants created three collages, with each collage guided by a central question. These questions linked to the research questions and were informed by the literature, as discussed below. Participants were provided with a collage process but were also welcome to follow their own creative process. Participants were encouraged to keep the collage question in mind, look through magazines, and cut out anything that stood

out to them. Afterwards, participants sorted through their cutouts, considered each one and what it represented, and decided whether to stick it onto their collage. Some participants strategically placed their collage images or decided on a particular style while they worked, for example, using only words, or splitting their collage into 'good' and 'bad' parts of their experiences. The collage questions were:

1. **What is your current workplace like for you?**
2. **Thinking back on all your work experiences up to this point, create a collage about your experiences of how you and/or other young people are treated at work.**

   An additional explanation of this question was provided to participants: *This question is about how you see treatment of young people at work. It can be about treatment you've experienced or how you have seen other young people you know treated at work. It can be positive or negative, anything you've liked or disliked.*

3. **Following on from the previous collage, create a collage about what you do or what you have done, when you experience treatment that is unfair to yourself or unfair to other young people at work.**

   An additional explanation was provided with this question: *This isn't just limited to what you do on your own – so it could include anything you've done together with others as well, or you've seen others do as a group in response to unfair treatment.*

The first collage question was intended to provide a warm-up and practice, while also potentially providing context for later discussions. The second and third collage questions were more closely linked with the research questions. The terminology used for the collage questions was sourced from relevant literature. However, language with a wider scope of interpretation was used, as participants may not have labelled or viewed their experiences using terms such as *disadvantage* and *resistance.* Using specific terminology could have narrowed participants' explorations of their own experiences. For collage question two, the term "treated" was used, and in question three the terminology focused on *unfair* treatment. These terms are frequently used in definitions of workplace and systemic discrimination (Jones et al., 2016; Lopez, 2021; Palumbo & Manna, 2019). For collage question three, broader term *responses* was used in place of *resistance*. In labour process theory, responses is a broader term that may capture both resistance and worker actions that are not necessarily resistant, for example, accommodating or consenting (Lucas, 1997; Thompson, 1990). Participants were also prompted to consider how they would have liked to respond, in retrospect.

This doctoral research combined collage with a focus group method, similar to other studies in which participants create individual collages in a group setting (Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Morey et al., 2018; Roberts & Woods, 2018; Vacchelli, 2018). Each participant produced their own collages and participants were encouraged to converse during the process, following similar methods in prior research (Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Morey et al., 2018; Roberts & Woods, 2018; Vacchelli, 2018). Participants were also invited to present and explain their collages to the group after completing each collage (Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Roberts & Woods, 2018), and discussion was welcomed after each participant shared their collage. Before creating each subsequent collage, to support the conceptualisation process, participants were asked to write

two or three words or sentences on the back of their collage to describe their experience overall, and then explain these verbally to the group.

There were six collage groups ranging from three to six participants, and groups met in person and online, based on participants' location, preferences, and availability. In total, 21 participants across the six groups produced 61 collages and approximately 16.5 hours of digital audio recordings. Two collage groups were held online over Zoom, and a package was sent to each participant containing magazines, scissors, cello tape, and a pen. Four further collage groups were held in-person: three in Auckland in meeting rooms at the AUT city and south campuses, and one in Hamilton in a public library meeting room. The collage groups were audio-recorded using Zoom cloud recording and a digital recorder and transcribed using software. The researcher listened to each recording to familiarise themselves with the data. Collages were scanned, and participants could choose to have their collages returned.

The composition of collage groups was heterogeneous, being based on physical location of participants rather than work background or other personal characteristics. Homogeneous groups can produce groupthink, as group members' shared ideas go unquestioned, and members can feel more pressure to agree with socially accepted ideas (Gray, 2018). Using heterogeneous groups may also encourage the participants to explore differing experiences, enabling more nuanced discussion. Moreover, considering the transformation and empowerment aims of critical research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), heterogeneous groups held the potential for participants to form connections and expand their social networks to include other people concerned about young people's working conditions. Participants were, however, informed about protecting the confidentiality of their fellow group members and required to sign a consent form acknowledging this before participating in the groups (see Appendix A).

A key benefit of the group setting was the unique data produced through interaction or discussion between participants (Creswell, 2013). Collages produced in the group setting offered insight into shared elements of young workers' contexts and resistance, supporting exploration of the third research sub-question: How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not? Participants were also guided through the collage questions to consider the experiences of other young people at work. This meant some participants sought to represent both their own experiences and experiences they believed were shared more widely among young workers.

Frequently, after participants explained their collages, others commented on what they related to in the experiences and representations shared through the collage. One participant explained how the group setting helped them realise a sense of collective disadvantage with other young workers: "And I really enjoyed listening to [P6-G2] and [P4-G2] your ideas? Yeah, sort of just Yeah. Made me made me feel like it's like a collective feeling. Being a young person in the workplace" (P5-G2, group). The participant later explained that their group "covered a lot", with the sharing process drawing out relevant experiences from each other: "they sparked things in me as well, which got brought up when they would show their piece and

everything" (P5-G2, interview). Another participant highlighted how finding shared experiences across their group validated their experiences as a shared reality: "main takeaway was kind of finding the commonalities that actually other people have had similar experiences as well, which is quite reassuring" (P7-G3, interview).

As discussed earlier, the art form selected for an arts-informed study needs to be justified by its ability to produce knowledge that will answer the research questions (Cole & Knowles, 2008). The process involved in creating collages gave participants time and a material way to reflect on and represent their experiences of the complex concepts in this research. One participant summarised the deep reflection and shared conceptualising in making and discussing collages: "… it was really good, was quite good to sort of visualise and think about the ideas that hadn't really been thought about before. And then realise that, you know, everyone else has had sort of the same experiences as well." (P4-G2, group). Another participant explained that they felt they were able to discuss their experiences in a more nuanced way, and that the approach "opens up space for more articulate resolutions, if that makes sense" (P21-G6, interview). In sum, the ability to elicit deep discussion from collages (Butler-Kisber, 2010) positioned young workers to explore complex workplace and resistance experiences together with each other and the researcher, within the group setting. The group discussions and written summaries further enabled young workers to analyse their experiences and develop individual and shared conceptualisations.

Following the group collage-making stage, each participant was invited to complete a semi-structured interview with the researcher. Collage research often utilises semi-structured interviews following collage-making to gather participants' detailed explanations, stories and experiences related to their collages (Määttä, 2020; Mackworth-Young et al., 2022; Morey et al., 2018). The follow-up interview method used will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 Method 2: Semi-structured interviews

Each participant was invited to an individual semi-structured interview following the group collage. In this research, follow-up semi-structured interviews served two purposes. First, interviews collected deeper contextual information about each participant's work background and specific experiences. Semi-structured interviews are a conversation between the researcher and each participant, loosely guided by a set of pre-prepared open-ended questions based on the research project's aims or questions (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2018). This provides an ideal method for investigating individuals' context and perspectives, with flexibility for the researcher to modify the pre-prepared questions and ask follow-up questions to probe participant responses (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2018). Second, interviews were used to spark further discussion and ask for further detail about experiences, or clarification about their collages and comments during the collage group discussions. Participants were invited to share any personal reflections that surfaced after the group collage process, and specific follow-up questions were developed for each participant's collages or verbal contributions in the collage groups. Later in the interviews, more specific, research- and theory-informed

questions were used to gather participants' views and knowledge, for instance, about larger-scale movements among youth.

Of the 21 participants, 19 took part in an individual interview, producing 24.6 hours of digital recordings. Two thirds of the interviews were longer than one hour, with the mean interview length 1 hour and 17 minutes. The shortest interview was 27 minutes, and the longest was 2 hours and 8 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person and, where necessary, online using the digital video conferencing software Zoom. The in-person interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder, while the online interviews used Zoom's built-in recording feature. The interview protocol, including questions, is included in Appendix C. Overall, the semi-structured interviews gathered more detail on participants' work histories, followed up on participants' experiences explored in stage one, and asked for participant perspectives on further research-informed questions.

3.4.3 Method 3: Town hall meetings

The town hall meeting method is named after town halls where communities meet to discuss community issues (Zuckerman-Parker & Shank, 2008). This method is effective for gathering individual views, as well as group discussion (Zuckerman-Parker & Shank, 2008). Town halls have been documented as a research method where group sizes are much larger than is manageable for focus groups (Zuckerman-Parker & Shank, 2008). The town hall method has also been used by researchers to facilitate community discussions specifically about oppression and how to respond (Schaefle et al., 2011).

In this doctoral research, the town hall method was not used to gather significant new information; instead, it served as a member-checking method. The primary purpose of using the town hall for this thesis research was to gather participants' feedback on the initial research findings, including whether important themes had been highlighted and whether the findings authentically represented participants' experiences. Although the thematic analysis of the collage and interview data followed a Big Q approach (Braun & Clarke, 2020), the questions used in data collection drew on the analytical framework in Chapter Two, so the research process was not purely inductive. This made it particularly important to discuss whether the findings resonated with participants' views and experiences.

A second purpose of the town hall method was for the researcher and participants to discuss as a group how the research findings, including the collage art, could be shared with non-academic communities, to inform outsiders about young workers' realities, and foster solidarity between young workers. This aligns with the critical paradigm's transformative goals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011)and with the intent of arts-informed methodology to communicate research beyond academic audiences (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

One town hall meeting was held with four research participants. Five additional participants were interested but unavailable to take part in a town hall, and a further town hall meeting was set up but cancelled because participants were unable to attend. The four participants who attended took part in a 94-minute-long

meeting in November 2024, online through Zoom video conferencing. PowerPoint slides for the town hall meeting (see Appendix C) were emailed to participants ahead of the meeting, and included a findings summary, questions to guide discussion, and the collages created by participants across all groups. The town hall data was audio-recorded, but not analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, given its purpose as a member checking tool.

Primarily, the four participants confirmed that the findings reflected their experiences. One further participant who was unable to attend the town hall sent written feedback via email, also affirming that the research findings reflected their experiences. During the town hall, one participant added that their experiences following participation in the research had emphasised the importance of finding meaningful work (discussed in the subtheme 'Lost in the Capitalist Business World' in Chapter Four). Participants also suggested several ways to share the findings, which will be carried out following submission of this thesis. Suggestions included: publish a piece in a news outlet such as The Conversation; share the collage art in different ways and to different audiences; and create short-form digital content on platforms such as TikTok to reach a young audience (the participant also sent detailed guidance for doing so via email, following the town hall); and create a 1-page guideline for organisations and professional associations.

3.5 Thematic analysis

The key method for analysis of the textual data produced during group collage and interviews was Big Q thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that themes are "stories about particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset" (p. 592). Thus, themes highlight the commonalities the researcher interprets between different participants' experiences and participants' shared understandings of their experiences. Thematic analysis involves six main steps: immersion; systematic coding; initial theme development; reviewing themes; naming and defining themes; presenting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). The codes, their groupings, and the associated subthemes and themes are illustrated in the tables provided in Appendix D.

Thematic analysis is informed by the research question and may be informed by theory (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Accordingly, in this thesis, analysis was carried out with awareness of the research questions, analytical framework, and specific coding methods. However, following Big Q thematic analysis, codes were not pre-determined, and the analysis process was generally inductive. The explanation of the thematic analysis below captures the general flow of the thematic analysis process; however, thematic analysis is also flexible and iterative (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In this thesis, at times in the thematic analysis process, the researcher moved back and forth between research questions, the analytical framework, textual and visual data, codes, and themes.

In accordance with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020), the initial step of textual analysis was immersion or developing familiarity with the data. This was applied by reading the interview and collage

transcripts prior to coding and highlighting and adding comments where data stood out as analytically interesting, for example, closely related to a research question or the analytical framework. Interviews and collage transcripts were then coded in batches by collage group. For example, the interviews with participants from collage group one were analysed in a batch together with the group one collage transcript. The collage groups and individual interviews at times provided context for one another. For example, some participants initially raised experiences in the collage group, with a view to discussing these further in the individual interview.

Initial themes and subthemes were developed by exploring relationships and patterns across the codes, with the research questions in mind, and then grouping codes together. To review the themes, the researcher considered the labelled data for each code against the respective theme and reflected on the 'map' of how the initial themes related to one another and to the data as a whole. Analysis continued while writing findings, with themes and subthemes developed and clarified further as the findings chapters were written, including while selecting quotes and collage images to illustrate themes. For instance, some more repetitive subthemes were collapsed. Names and overall descriptions were also finalised while writing each theme and subtheme.

3.5.1 Visual triptychs

For analysing the visual data, two main visual analysis methods were considered, but ultimately not used. These visual methods included metaphorical collage analysis (Russo-Zimet, 2016), systematic visuo-textual analysis, which combines textual and visual analysis processes (Brown & Collins, 2021). Brown and Collins (2021) developed systematic visuo-textual analysis to provide a step-by-step method for interpreting visual and textual elements alongside each other, drawing on common qualitative visual and textual analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gleeson, 2011). Russo-Zimet's (2016) metaphor analysis process involves analysing collages by recording explicit observable visual elements, identifying elements that sit between the implicit and explicit, such as who is represented, and then, at an implicit level, finding and interpreting metaphors present in the collages. Appendix D shows an adapted version of Brown and Collins' (2021) framework which incorporates Russo-Zimet's (2016) metaphorical analysis, initially developed to guide a metaphor-focused systematic visuo-textual data analysis.

After initial applications of these two frameworks (Brown & Collins, 2021; Russo-Zimet, 2016) separately, and the adapted combined version, it became evident that these methods did not fit the research approach. These visual analysis processes involved researcher-driven, and highly interpretive coding processes. Further interpretation of hidden visual metaphors and artistic elements diminished the participant-generated analyses. While these are well-accepted analytical methods, re-interpreting metaphors and artistic elements could undermine the individual and collective analysis processes that took place in the collage-making groups. Centring the researcher's further analysis on participant discussions and explanations of their own collages aligns with the critical and participatory approaches in this research, prioritising participant voices.

As a result, the researcher focused on textual data in which participants explained and discussed their collages for the findings presented in the following chapters. Presented as triptychs, the collages are used in the findings presentation to illustrate and provide visual context for subthemes. The images included in each subtheme link with textual data within codes that led to the theme's development. Triptychs provide rich representations and can "distill complex stories in a bold way" (Goldstein, 2016, p. 5). Triptychs are artworks composed in three separate parts to convey a complex theme, narrative, or facets of a phenomenon (Simeon, 2024; Thomas et al., 2018).

Triptychs visually highlight both shared and varied representations of subthemes across participants. The three parts of each triptych are intended to be viewed together – though they are not sequential (Sinner, 2010). Presenting the collage visuals in an artistic format and allowing the collages to 'speak for themselves' (rather than the researcher re-analysing them) gives voice to the collages as a form of resistance. While arts methods are rare in employment relations, sociologists Bailey and McAtee (2003) framed visual artefacts in union protests as a shared element of workers' struggles. The collage triptychs similarly offer a shared protest against, and illustration of, young workers' struggles.

During the collage groups and later interviews, participants shared their motivations for taking part in the research, and their experiences of the collage process. It became evident that participants in this doctoral research viewed the research as part of their resistance. One participant explained how the research was part of their resistance as a form of speaking out: "one of those opportunities to like, get your word out. […] I'm quite vocal about it. I don't kind of hold it in. So if there's an opportunity to kind of get that out there to more people, then I'm gonna take it up" (P13-G4, interview). Another participant described that the research was part of their own efforts as an activist to counter employment barriers for youth: "in terms of what I like to get out of it, it's kind of more of what I want to put into it" (P3-G1, interview). In sum, presenting the collages in the findings honours participants' desire to use the research for resistance. This approach strengthens the research's credibility from a critical perspective, serving participants' interests in opposing disadvantageous conditions.

3.6 Data collection and analysis process

This section provides an integrated overview of the stages of data collection and analysis described above. Below are a figure and brief discussion illustrating what each data collection method enabled and surfaced in the research process and findings. The green phases explain key aspects of data collection, while the orange phases highlight where individual participants moved beyond contributing to data collection to analyse their own experiences through reflection and conceptualisation (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The yellow phase highlights how, through the conversations elicited by the collages (Butler-Kisber, 2010), collage group participants engaged in shared analysis, while grey phases describe the researcher's analysis. The phases are discussed further below.

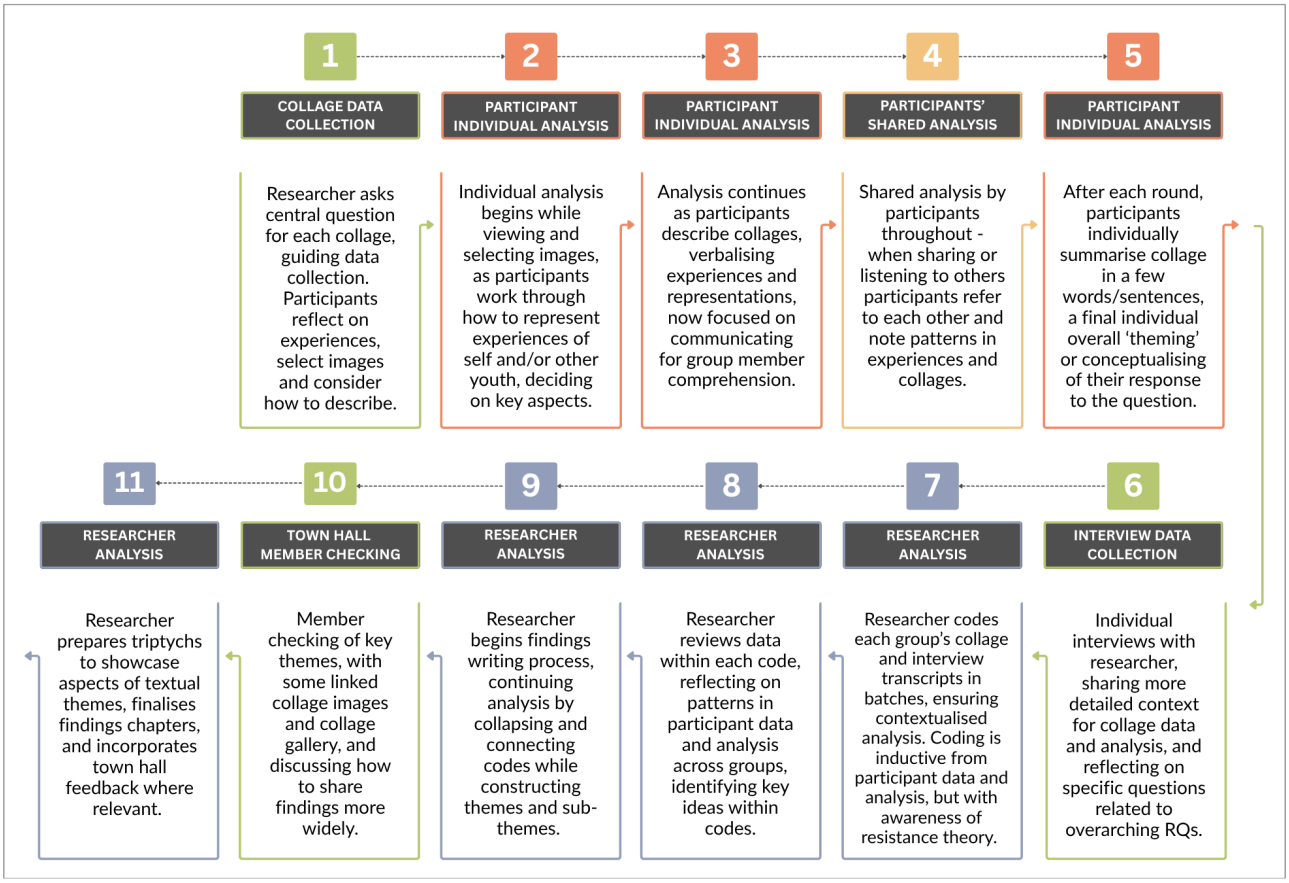


Figure 2: Data collection and analysis process

The process of identifying or interpreting acts of resistance has been linked to the visibility of acts and to recognition of acts as resistance by resisters, observers, or targets (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Applying the concept of *visibility* to the data collection and analysis process in this thesis, phases one to five highlight the capacity of the data collection methods to surface acts of resistance that the researcher might otherwise not have identified. Collage making enabled deep individual participant reflection (Butler-Kisber, 2010), surfacing a range of ways that young workers viewed themselves as responding to disadvantageous conditions. The group setting, including verbal sharing of and discussion about the collages, also enabled participants to highlight shared experiences and patterns in resistance contexts and acts. As will be shown in the Findings, Discussion and Conclusion Chapters, this shared analysis, in addition to the researcher's later analysis of transcripts, surfaced common stages that young workers' resistance often – though not always – progressed through across their working lives.

In phase 6, individual interviews began with filling gaps in the researcher's knowledge of individual participants' work histories and experiences, and asking follow-up questions to gather more in-depth context for the collages and collage group discussions. Because the collage questions were relatively broad, the second part of the interviews included a range of more specific, and at times theoretically motivated, questions. For example, young workers were asked whether they were aware of 'large-scale' efforts to create

change for youth, any other systemic challenges they could identify for young workers, and what they viewed as solutions to these challenges. The interview data largely reinforced and deepened data about the context for resistance, young workers' individual experiences, and gathered new data for the 'shared visions for the future' section of the findings.

Applying the concept of recognition, phases seven to nine of the data collection and analysis involved the researcher analysing data to explore young workers' acts as resistance or other responses, as well as examining elements of context which were pertinent to resistance. Using an inductive Big Q coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2020), these phases centred more on participants' own individual and shared recognition in collage groups and interviews of their acts as resistant or serving other non-oppositional or inward-focused purposes.

To ensure that participants' resistance and other responses were analysed in a contextualised way, the interviews from the participants in each collage group were analysed together in a batch with the group transcript from the collage making. The collage visuals were not ultimately analysed using a visual analytical process (as discussed earlier), given that participants engaged in individual and collective analysis of their own visual data during the collage groups. Instead, during phase 11, triptychs were prepared by selecting striking elements from the collages, usually referred to within the written findings, to illustrate key aspects and variation within subthemes (see Goldstein, 2016; Thomas et al., 2018). Overall, the data collection and analysis process supported this research's position within the critical paradigm (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Grant & Giddings, 2002), as it empowered and privileged young workers' individual and collective experiences of resistance.

3.7 Summary

The critical theory paradigm provided a philosophical background for this research oriented toward uncovering power relations inherent in the social world and achieving social justice by empowering the oppressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also raised questions about how the researcher could ensure participants were empowered by the research process and played a shared role in producing data (Cannella & Lincoln, 2019). The arts-informed methodology used to guide research processes recognises how arts can inform qualitative research, offering an accessible approach for participants to share their experiences of discrimination and resistance (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

The first stage of the research employed group collage methods (Butler-Kisber, 2010), with participants producing visual collages and discussions about discrimination and resistance. The collage-making process enabled participant reflection, eliciting deeper thought, and enabling shared conceptualisations between participants (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In the second stage, individual semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012) were then carried out with each participant to gather contextual information about their work experiences, and further reflections on the data from stage one. Finally, a town hall meeting (Zuckerman-Parker & Shank,

2008) was carried out with participants to discuss the initial findings and how the research could be shared. The next chapter in this thesis presents the findings of thematic analysis of the research data, particularly related to the third research question – what and who influences young workers' resistance.

Chapter 4 Resistance Context: Prompting and Constraining

> *"And so also just I found horrible history, because I just think that the workplace has been horrible for young people for a very long time, there's a long history of that." (P5-G2, group)*

This findings chapter provides context for young workers' resistance in two ways. First, by illustrating experiences in the context that *prompted* young workers' resistance. Second, by conveying experiences that *constrained* how and when young workers resisted. This context provides background for chapter five, which presents findings on how young workers resisted in response to this context. This context provides the basis for young workers' acts of resistance, both early and later in their working lives. These underlying experiences are critical to the overarching question, which situates resistance within young people's working lives rather than a single workplace or union context. The chapter also presents findings related to sub-question one: 'How do young workers perceive their contexts as shaping their responses?'

The chapter presents two overarching themes and six subthemes in the context. First, young workers were trapped in extended transitions characterised by precarious work and movement between work and education. Three interconnected subthemes related to being trapped in transition: experiences of youth labour being devalued; being treated as disposable labour; and vulnerability to poor work conditions. The second overarching theme was that youth experienced culture shock when entering the world of work, where their employment experiences did not match their preconceived expectations. Three subthemes connected with experiencing culture shock: being 'sold a dream' that did not eventuate; finding that age shaped power at work; and feeling alienated from the capitalist culture of the business world. In the findings chapters, the participants are generally referred to as 'young workers' rather than 'participants'. This aligns with the participatory approach of critical paradigm and arts-informed methodology, where research participants are recognised as producing knowledge alongside the researcher.

4.1 Trapped in transition

The theme of *trapped in transition* encapsulates key aspects of young workers' experiences of moving between education and paid work. Rather than a one-off shift from school to employment, or tertiary education to employment, there was cyclical movement between insecure employment, education, and for some, unemployment. Young workers experienced being trapped in this transition, struggling for years to gain secure employment and employment in a field of their choice. In other words, both secure employment and careers were elusive for much of their working lives.

There were three interconnected key subthemes within the theme of being trapped in transition. First, young workers described how their labour was devalued, contributing to years spent trapped in insecure and

volunteer work. The second subtheme presents the consequences of devaluation for young workers' sense of their purpose or place in the workplace – being dispensable, cheap labour. Young workers felt reliant on employers for any paid work they could get, creating a power dynamic that made youth vulnerable. The third theme discusses the outcomes of this vulnerability – young workers experienced poor conditions, exploitation and, at times, self-exploitation. The fourth theme shares young workers' discussions about unions, often viewed as inaccessible and, at times, less willing or able to help with the workplace issues that youth faced.

4.1.1 Devalued labour

Young workers described how employers did not value their education and work. The young workers in this study described the large investments of time and money they made in gaining an education. Nearly half of the young workers in the research held, or were completing, postgraduate qualifications, and all except one had some form of post-secondary qualification. During and following their studies, young workers described applying to many jobs and not getting them. Young workers were disappointed by a lack of recognition from employers, who were not willing to employ them, despite years spent gaining an education:

> *"And so you're spending all this time trying to prepare yourself for a workplace where it's almost like education is becoming less valued. And it's hard to determine what is now valued. Obviously, I think right now, it's like that split between education and practical experience." (P8-G3, group)*

Young workers perceived employers as preferring experienced workers to avoid investing in on-the-job training. This made it difficult for some young workers to gain employment, even in entry-level roles. One young worker critiqued this perceived unwillingness by employers to provide training, despite young workers being "cheap" to employ:

> *"You could be like, hey, I can hire this teenager for really cheap, and train them up and just and turn them into somebody really valuable. Who can do a lot of work for me. And I mean, probably still work for cheap, anyway, but I could train them up. Nobody really wants to invest in their workers and turn them into, like, better than they thought they could become." (P9-G3, interview).*

Another young worker used a quote on their collage that stated, "What is the right age?" (P15-G4, group), reflecting on the impossibility of the job hunt for young workers when they were not seen as preferable even for entry-level roles. This created a chicken-and-egg situation: without experience, it was difficult to gain employment, and without employment, youth could not gain experience. The expectation that young workers gain both experience and education before employers would hire them placed significant pressure

on them to "just make it work" (P8-G3, group). As several young workers explained, there was no clear way of becoming a preferred candidate.

> *"And, I mean, she said, she spent a year applying for jobs before getting the [sales] position of all... And it's like, you know, there's the catch-22 of like, you don't have any experience, but you need experience to get experience. Yeah. So I don't think that'll go away." (P9-G3, interview)*

Some young workers deduced that while both a bachelor's degree and relevant experience were necessary, they were not always sufficient for entering their preferred career paths. Participants found it difficult to enter their chosen career paths and, once in the field, to move from insecure to permanent roles. Several young workers described doing volunteer work and spending years in insecure employment to become more employable in their chosen career. One young worker shared that ten years after leaving school, they still had not found a secure, full-time job and had returned to study again. These career barriers forced some young workers to return to university to change career paths or complete higher qualifications within their chosen fields. Indeed, some employers expected higher degree qualifications or much longer stints of relevant work experience – as pointed out by participants interested in culture and arts careers. One young worker likened youth struggling to enter their career to birds living in a barren landscape:

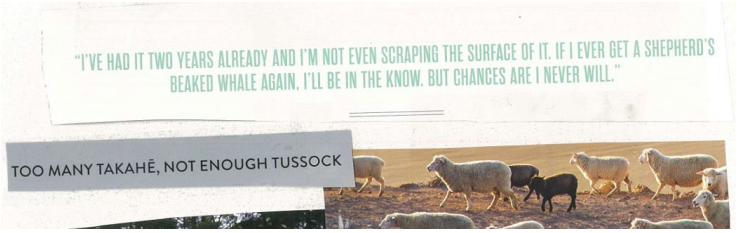
> *"This quote says too many takahe, not enough tussock. That kind of refers to, like, so many people going to university now, going to get their bachelor's, going to get their master's, going to get their doctorate. So now it's kind of like it's stepping up the level each time. So now it's kind of if you have your master's, you might actually be considered for a role. But to be considered for something you really want, you might even have to have your PhD. So I guess like, the takahe is like students: too many takahe and not enough tussock, in terms of jobs or jobs that we want or expect to get out of what we do." (P13-G4, group)*

The lack of demand for young workers' education, and their subsequent entrapment in roles that were insecure and even irrelevant to their careers, left them looking for ways to escape. For one young worker, returning to education was not primarily a path to reach a goal or preferred career, but more a place for escape from a cycle of unsatisfactory and insecure work: "I guess my current situation is kind of like trying to escape work by going back to uni" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker contrasted their investment in preparing for their career with feeling "frozen in space", unable to progress into a permanent role in their chosen career:

> *"But it was kind of just to tie back into that theme of feeling, feeling trapped. And the statue in particular, when I remember looking at that photo and thinking, like, that's how I feel very frozen. And, you know, when you think about, like, any kind of statue, there is*

time, care, dedication, persistence put into creating that thing. And that's how I looked at it with myself: I invested money to get an education. I've done professional development; I've shown an eagerness to learn. But despite all those things, I was still very frozen in that space." (P8-G3, interview)

Triptych 1: Young workers' experiences of being trapped in transition



(P13-G4, collage 2)



(P8-G3, collage 1)



(P1-G1, collage 2)

Note. The triptych above illustrates young workers' experiences of feeling trapped and unable to progress into their chosen careers, including because of factors such as a lack of graduate jobs, a lack of family or personal connections, and being 'frozen' in precarious forms of employment.

A few of the young workers acknowledged that career security differed by educational background. Holding more prestigious professional degrees led to shorter pathways into employment for some young workers. Two young workers with professional degrees (engineering, law) found well-paid, secure jobs and felt they had more salary-negotiating power than other young workers. However, during university, their experiences aligned with those of other young workers, with a period of insecure jobs. Nepotism also seemed to enable shorter transitions for some. As one young worker explained, the adage of 'it's not what you know but whom you know' rang true:

And then in the background of all this nonsense, you can't really see, but there's all these doorknobs and door handles and things. Which I demonstrate, I use it as like, there's a lot

> *of closed doors when you try and get into the workplace, because it's like, Oh, you don't have enough of the skill or whatnot. And just like it comes to, sometimes it's just who you know, not what you know, because a lot of people do get into certain industries and businesses because of who their parents are. And I disliked them for it. (P1-G1, group)*

The battle to gain recognition for skills and experience continued beyond initial barriers to entry to employment and careers. Youth felt trapped doing tasks at work that were seen as less valuable and less responsible within organisations. They felt unable to get ahead at work. For example, although insecure jobs were youth-dominated and did not require significant prior work experience, prospects for progression seemed limited to older workers in their workplaces. One young worker suggested that managers may promote older workers whose ideas align with management. Moreover, young workers perceived their jobs as not opening doors to career progression. As one young worker pointed out, the type of work that young workers do is often 'non-promotable', involving unseen work that does not open opportunities to doing other roles or tasks within the workplace:

> *"But there's basically like, you have to be seen as well as get promoted, promotable work and non-promotable work. And I think a lot of us might just happen to be doing a lot of, you know, non-promotable, promotable work. So it's like, how do you get you out there? How do you get yourself seen and then be able to promote, be promoted and be able to develop in your career?" (P7-G3, interview)*

Young workers highlighted that employers also overlook their skills and efforts because of untrue stereotypes about them. For example, they pointed out that youth are seen as lazy, having a poor work ethic, or as unskilled or incompetent. Several young workers used the metaphor of managers viewing and treating youth like children. As one young worker explained, "young workers are often seen as idiots, and they need close supervision" (P10-G4, group). Another young worker described "backhanded" remarks about her age and strong work ethic, including being told, "you're not like other people your age" (P5-G2, interview).

Young workers were critical of employers' deficit-based view of young workers. In contrast, young workers highlighted the effort that youth put into their workforce transitions. This included investments of time, money, and energy in gaining work experience and completing tertiary qualifications to be competitive in the job market. They spent considerable time and effort job hunting for secure work. Young workers contested negative views through their own appreciative discourse, highlighting youth as "talented" and producing work "worthy of celebration".

> *"And so there's no room for younger people to move into those jobs. Which is a sort of ignorance is arrogance as well, because I don't think they're aware of how talented and skilled the young people are. They just have these ideas of who they are." (P6-G2, group).*

> *"This quote says a lot of our day-to-day accomplishments are invisible, but they're no less worthy of celebration, which again, kind of relates to the sort of roles that younger people take on in workplaces." (P13-G4, group)*

This section described how youth felt their labour was undervalued or not desired by employers, and how this affected employment and career prospects. The following section describes, in relation to this devaluing, young workers' experiences of being a cheaper, disposable workforce.

4.1.2 Disposable: Plugged in and burned out

Linked to the devaluing of their labour, young workers felt exploited by being *plugged into jobs and then burned out*. Being dispensable workers meant underutilisation of their capabilities, undervaluing of hard work, and a failure to recognise their potential to 'make a difference' in their roles. Failing to recognise young workers' skills, potential, and education meant they were employed in lower-cost roles and treated as more dispensable. One young worker explained how they were significantly affected by the experience of being actively discouraged from knowing their worth to the business, when a new manager disclosed the following strategy:

> *"And also, I constantly had this impression that I was doing a bad job…then […] she told me that I had the best [performance indicators] out of anyone on the team. And then she said that there was this sort of strategy that the managers there had been kind of using where it's like I was the kind of most productive person there because I had the lowest labour costs, but then also the highest output. And then I would just never ask for a pay rise because I was constantly thinking that I wasn't doing a good job. And then she was like, you should just ask for a pay rise. […] I feel like I've been exploited over this whole time. And it's impacted my mental health and made me feel like shit working here." (P19-G6, interview)*

Given the limited choices available to them, young workers were vulnerable to being employed in ways that were extractive – less costly and resource-intensive for employers. For many young workers, this meant being employed in lower-paid, temporary, lower-level roles with limited decision-making power. Young workers were often hired for, or given the opportunity to work in, lower-skilled frontline roles that were not 'career pathways', and in less prestigious industries such as retail and hospitality. While these types of jobs and industries could be described as "essential" (P7-G3, group) and involving "harder" labour (P5-G2, interview), young workers felt that in many workplaces their work was undeservedly viewed as lower status and often went unseen. It was profitable for employers to keep productive and essential young workers undervalued: "if you start saying that they're valuable employees, then they'll start asking for more money" (P19-G6, group).

There was also a sense of being depersonalised by managers. One young worker pointed out that managers avoided getting to know young workers, so that they could impose difficult work conditions without troubling their conscience: “A lot of managers try not to learn much about us so that they had the excuse of calling you up on a Saturday asking you to come into work” (P4-G2, group). Rather than looking at how youth could be developed within organisations, managers ‘plugged in’ and ‘burned out’ youth through poor work conditions:

> *“… it's just plugging them into places where you need them, rather than, hey, this person's coming in, they're coming in young, before we can get them into higher level manager roles by the time that they're 25 […] you know, we can have them, you know, really make a difference, rather than just we're gonna plug them into a hole and burn them out till they leave.” (P4-G2, interview)*

The roles and tasks young workers were given sometimes felt less meaningful in terms of the impact they could have in the workplace. Young workers were, by default, allocated the undesirable tasks that other workers didn’t want to do, “[…] if you look at who ends up having to be the one that takes up the rubbish at the end, it's literally the dirty jobs […] just the youngsters do that sort of stuff” (P10-G4, interview). Another young worker explained:

> *“And then there's this little kid holding these light poles, kind of feel like that, in terms of being a young person in a workplace with a lot of older people, they get the, the roles, where they actually do the job, and you just kind of walk around behind them doing all the little shitty jobs in the background.” (P13-G4, group)*

Young workers were cognisant of their disposability through interpersonal interactions, for example through experiences like not having their ideas listened to or being quickly managed out if they did not toe the organisational line. A few young workers described not being given the support they needed to succeed in some roles, being given meaningless tasks, or having work outputs disregarded, leading to “Disappointment Island again” (P18-G5, group). Even in roles considered lower status, such as sales work in retail and food services, or off a career pathway, young workers had an “inquisitive” (P10-G4, interview) perspective as front-line workers, with many ideas for improving work processes and products. However, because their labour was devalued, young workers’ ideas for improving how things were done at work were disregarded. Several young workers described most managers' unwillingness to listen to their suggestions.

Youth were not treated as collaborators at work but instead as “the black sheep” (P13-G4, group), when they voiced ideas for doing things differently. This inhibited their ability to succeed and demonstrate their value at work, further devaluing their labour. One young worker explained, “[…] you're the junior, and nobody likes you. Nobody wants to hear what you have to say” (P17-G5, group). They highlighted that the interns in their

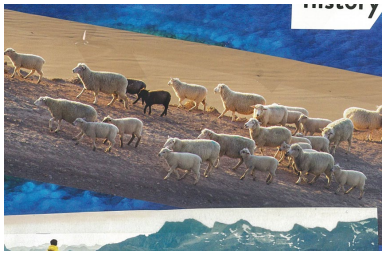
workplace were labelled “rats” (P17-G5, group), degrading them as workers. Another young worker used a sheep analogy to explain how their ideas were not welcome at work:

> *“The herd of sheep is basically just saying, as a young person, you're expected to just follow everyone else, you're not really expected to have your own unique ideas, you're not expected to innovate, you just know, you just put your head down and just go with it.” (P5-G2, group)*

Being disposable generated pressure on young workers to be compliant in their behaviour at work. Under threat of job loss, they felt employers left little room for making errors, expressing negative emotions, or behaving outside workplace norms. One young worker described this experience of being dispensable as being treated like undesirable “nuclear waste” – looked at with distaste, and something to get rid of urgently, should it present as a bigger problem:

> *“Then it goes nuclear waste, because some employers treat us like nuclear waste. And just like, if we explode one time, then we're like, a waste of their time. Because we're dispensable, not indispensable.” (P1-G1, group)*

Triptych 2: Young workers’ experiences of being disposable workers



(P5-G2, collage 2)



(P18-G5, collage 2)



(P1-G1, collage 2)

Note. The triptych above shows young workers’ disappointment that their work is devalued, as shown by experiences such as their ideas and work outputs being ignored. Disposability increased pressure to comply with workplace norms and expectations.

Young workers felt that their capabilities were not recognised in pay rates when compared with older workers doing the same jobs, “And a lot of young people are probably getting severely underpaid […] a young person could be just as capable at doing that particular job, even if they don't have the years of experience, but they might do a better job than that person” (P5-G2, interview). Employer devaluing of education was also reflected in pay rates. One young worker deduced that youth pay thousands for their education and then this education is not recognised with commensurate remuneration – leading to a sense of being doubly exploited:

> *“It seems like educational exploitation. Yeah. Yeah, like it goes. For me. It goes hand in hand with like, the privatization of tertiary education and the exploitation of workers to*

> *be like, Oh, well, you only have a degree that you worked three years to get paid, you know, like, on average $30,000 to get so therefore, we will only pay you this much." (P17-G5, interview)*

Young workers also described doing unpaid work or volunteering for organisations where they had previously done paid work (or were doing paid work alongside). Some were expected to take on supervisory or higher-level tasks without any recognition of this in their pay or job description. For example, one young worker explained that they were given specialised tasks without recognition of this in their pay or job description, "[…] would have to hire someone special for this job. And in that case, as a business, you would need money to hold you know, to hire that person. So why can't you just give me that money?" (P3-G1, interview). Another young worker who was allocated higher-level responsibilities remarked on the lack of reciprocity – there was no offer of a supervisory allowance, secure work, or paid development opportunities:

> *"It was a good experience, but like, they didn't pay me any more for it; there were just more responsibilities. And yeah, so that whole thing of like, we're gonna use you because we need you for this, but we're not going to offer you anything that you want. That's like, I don't really agree with that…. And I've kind of been, like, off and on volunteering at [employer] […] that was kind of my way of experiencing other areas." (P13-G4, interview)*

Some young workers were critical of their own past acceptance of exploitative roles. Young workers revealed experiences of allowing exploitation or self-exploiting, because to increase their value to employers they needed to prove themselves, for example by working unpaid. Acceptance of poor work conditions as a young person was described as a self-exploiting rite of passage:

> *"And I think also just the mentality of saying, Oh, you have to work by at all like a certain amount of hours at some rubbish like crappy slave labour job to actually be recognised as a real person. That's what I've been through …" (P14-G4, interview)*

Another young worker described pressure to accept exploitation, to be able to potentially progress into a more stable career:

> *"Because you're expected just to be like, you just keep your mouth shut. You don't rock the boat. And, you know, because yeah, you've got to have a reference. You've got to build your career." (P5-G2, group)*

Some young workers found it difficult to say no to employer requests, such as uncompensated increases to their workloads or responsibilities, for moral reasons. Young workers described accepting exploitation because they were sympathetic toward overworked managers and human resources teams. One young worker described the dissonance created by the pressure to self-exploit, and a desire to do good work:

> *"But also feeling, you know, having to give, having to prove myself, having to show that I was capable. But there's also kind of, like, you know, actually wanting to do it out of, you know, out of my heart, make sure that I can do well, wanting to give back. But also, you know, struggling with that balance of actually, you know, how much is it kind of like, am I just being exploited at this point kind of thing." (P7-G3, group)*

One young worker spoke about being dependent on every new employment offer and eventually finding value in aspects of their insecure work. The barriers to entering other industries meant that there was a perverse sense of safety in each new contract:

> *"So I feel very trapped in [industry] […] But I've written my haven here, because I've become so used to the precarity, that it almost feels like a safe option for me…. And no word of I'm going to get rehired. But the moment I do, I'm emailing back within like five minutes, being like, okay, this is a safe option for me. They've given this to me; I'll be sorted for the next year, [seasonal period] or whatever." (P8-G3, group)*

Experiences of unemployment and job insecurity left a mark on young workers, causing significant, long-term stress. One young worker described through their collage the ever-present feeling for a young person in their position that "its habitat is so precarious" (P15-G4, group). This increased the value they placed on secure employment, with decent minimum working conditions, disregarding traditional views of some industries and roles as lower status:

> "And I felt, you know, I mean, I worked really hard in school. And I thought, if I just believed what they told me is, if you work hard, you can have the job that you want, you know, if you don't work hard, you'll be flipping burgers. But what they don't tell you is that, you know, being the manager of McDonald's is, you know, not bad." (P9-G3, interview)

4.1.3 Vulnerable to poor conditions

Young workers described how, because they relied on employers for work, they were under pressure to accept any jobs offered and the conditions within them. As dispensable labour, young workers therefore described being *vulnerable to poor work conditions* across jobs. Poor conditions, illegal practices and mistreatment were described as widespread. One young worker stuck the words 'Labour pains, pt. 94' on their collage to describe the numerous problems for young people in the workplace, "I was like, do I do I remove the 94? And I was like, it's, you know, I'm gonna keep it. Because there are many labour pains" (P16-G5, group).

In contrast, some young workers perceived that employers were unconcerned about retaining young workers. Turnover among young workers, largely driven by poor conditions, did not threaten organisational

capacity because young workers were employed in lower-level roles. As a result, providing fair working conditions became less important, or even unnecessary. As one young worker explained:

> *"Like that process that I kind of described of going through having bad experiences and then realising how fucked it is to work in that kind of environment is something that I think lots of young people go through and also a lot of something that, like, it's kind of built into the way a lot of businesses operate. So they sort of operate through, like, having, like, oh, we'll get some uni students to work at the weekend or, like, we'll get some young person to do this or that. And then it's like, that person isn't going to be doing that for very long. So then they'll, they'll sort of, like, factor that in […]." (P19-G6, interview)*

Poor work conditions experienced by young workers included low pay; long, unsocial, or unpaid hours; and a lack of training provided before starting work. Several young workers remarked on their low pay – as one remarked, "I didn't put the dollar signs on, but I'll just say that's kind of probably for all of us, we want more money" (P10-G4, group). Young workers also described negative mental and physical effects of the difficult tasks and long hours they did, both paid and unpaid. They noted that working in these conditions is unsustainable. For example, discussing the long hours that youth work, one young worker said, "How long are you expected to sustain this before? You know you can be allowed by your company to live your life again" (P17-G5, group). As another young worker explained, while jobs represented coveted work experience and income, the work conditions could have negative implications for the wellbeing of this generation of workers:

> *"[…] you've, you've really expanded yourself emotionally, mentally and physically doing all those tasks, which may have made you happy, but mostly, it's quite taxing. […] And it's like, to exploit young people like that, who have that kind of energy at the time. And to run them down in that way is not a way to go. Because you're not building a generation; you're running people out of energy, you're burning people out, rather than fostering them towards growth." (P21-G6, interview).*

Young workers felt that they had little negotiating power – as they held little value in the workplace, there was no inherent shield for their work conditions and treatment. In other words, although most young workers were highly educated and experienced, this did not appear to give them power over workplace conditions. Furthermore, young people faced financial and time pressures to invest in their education and experience, which not only made them reliant on employers but also constrained their resources for resistance. One young worker pointed out how time and financial pressures to combine work and study are relevant factors that prevent student protests like those seen in the 1970's and 1980's:

> *"And just from hearing people talk about it, like their parents or, at lectures and reading stuff written by older activists, university was a time where that was like your time to be politically engaged, because you were being more financially supported, and you had more time. Whereas now I feel like, and I've kind of been annoyed when lecturers have brought it up, being like, why don't you guys go into protests? Because I'm like, because you expect us to work 40 hours a week at uni, and then we don't have enough money. So we have to work one or two or more days as well." (P20-G6, interview)*

Young workers pointed out that in larger organisations, the poor conditions they experienced were the responsibility of those with overarching power. One young worker contrasted their relationship with immediate managers with those in power at higher levels: "decent trust for direct employer" was compared with the "systematic" issues with their "overall employer" (P10-G4, interview). Discussing systems, one young worker described having their pay delayed unexpectedly and without communication due to an altered schedule of pay processing during a public holiday – this not only meant a week without income but also affected the initial tax deducted (P14-G4, interview). One young worker explained that they had come to view these issues as part and parcel of their organisation, and a result of the pressure the organisation placed on all workers, including HR teams: "I've now normalised. The idea that the HR department is always under stress, there's always too much for them to do. You're never gonna get your contracts on time" (P8-G3, interview). This young worker described how, in one of their earliest jobs, the employer failed to organise an induction for them, and as a result they worked unpaid for over two months:

> *"So I was never told that you had to submit pay like timesheets yourself. I just assumed that you get paid; they asked for my bank details. So I just assumed you get paid. And I didn't speak up until [over two months], and asked, like, Do you know why I haven't been paid? And the HR manager just said did no one tell you that you had to submit these timesheets? There's meant to be induction – that wasn't done. And I was too worried to speak up against that." (P8-G3, interview)*

Young workers described how, particularly early on in their working lives, they had entirely knowingly or at least with some awareness, worked under illegal conditions. Wage theft was particularly common, such as small tasks not being counted toward hours, "[…] the employer would constantly try and not pay us for little, tiny bits of work" (P19-G6, group) and "[…] do all this extra work. But again, we're not paying you for it." (P13-G4, interview), and excessive hours that put hourly pay below minimum wage "[…] quite exploited because I ended up doing like, working for like, I think it was like three, four dollars an hour" (P16-G5, interview). Other examples included illegal deductions made from wages: "[…] if there was like a [customer theft], that would come out of your pay" (P10-G4, interview), and underpayment of wages owed for public holidays (P20-G6, interview). Another shared experience, including for young workers who had worked in

the education and training sector, was working without an employment agreement. As one young worker described, "[…] for the first four months that I was working there, I didn't actually have a contract" (P11-G4, interview). Another young worker described working extra hours unpaid:

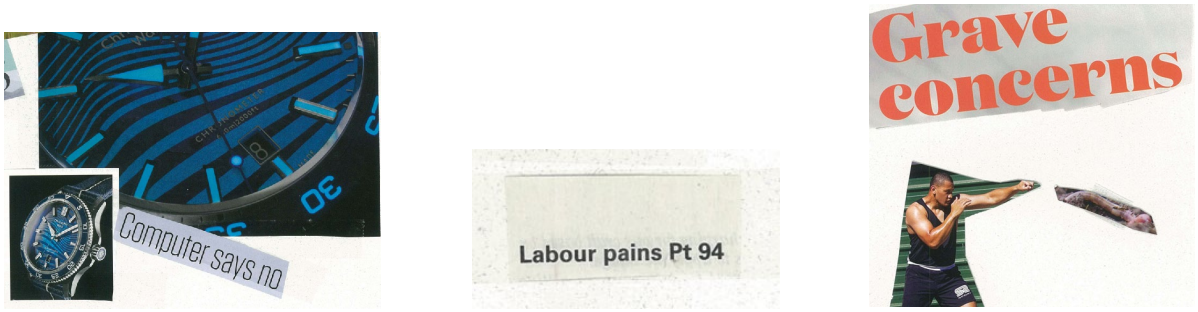
> *"[…] sometimes they used to make us work after hours, like more than the rostered hours. But like they would only pay us like for the rostered hours […] And it's like, you'd be surprised, right? Like, it's like a [public sector workplace]." (P21-G6, interview)*

Some young workers who had experienced illegal conditions described how difficult it was to speak up. One young worker explained they felt powerless to protest such conditions: "I used to just not say anything, I didn't want to rock the boat" (P8-G3, group).

Illegal practices often, though not always, coincided with experiences of mistreatment, bullying and violence at work. One young worker described their experience of this combination of illegal practices and mistreatment: "[…] I didn't get like holiday pay, and I didn't get breaks, and I was verbally bullied and harassed by my boss" (P16-G5, interview). Another young worker described their experience of being blindsided by an attempted constructive dismissal: "[…] she was like, well are you going to quit? And I was like, what? And then she's like, I need you to tell me by [time], I'm going to a meeting" (P1-G1, interview). One young worker used the image of fighting to convey two experiences: firstly, young people being in a position of having to fight for better treatment in the face of "systemic violence" encompassed in their conditions and interpersonal treatment; secondly, the interpersonal violence from customers, coworkers and managers:

> *"[…] grave concerns for young people and how they are treated at work. […]. I've worked in [food services, education and training], just, you know, the whole thing is not, it's not normal, no, it's not good. This is a fighting person for, like, I guess, representing young people fighting. And like, also, the violence that happens is not only, like, physical, but just like the systemic violence and all that happens." (P11-G4, group)*

Triptych 3: Young workers' depictions of poor conditions and treatment at work



(P10-G4, collage 1) (P16-G5, collage 1) (P11-G4, collage 2)

Note. The triptych above highlights young workers "grave concerns" with the multitude of poor conditions youth experience at work, including mistreatment and wage theft.

4.1.4 Distanced from unions

In addition to struggling to protect their working conditions because employers saw them as a disposable workforce, young workers discussed the constraints they faced in accessing improved conditions through unions. Fear also limited union accessibility for some young workers in insecure jobs. One young worker explained that as a precarious worker, they feared that joining the union could remove the possibility of their employer offering them a permanent agreement, "[…] it says, Do you want to join the union? If you do upload this document? Yeah, I took that as if I do this, then I will be less desirable […]" (P8-G3, interview). Another young worker, who was not a union member, shared a story about receiving a notice that was intended for union members engaged in industrial action. She described her fear and newfound understanding of the treatment that active union members may face:

> *"My heart was racing… She was like, what the hell, this is so threatening […] I got really scared because that's never happened to me before. To attack people like that, who are not in the union. But I guess like, quite an experiment. For my end, I feel it was an accidental experimental situation. Because like, I wouldn't have known that this is doing if I had signed up for the Union, you know?" (P21-G6, interview)*

Young workers also offered explanations for the challenges unions faced in attracting workers of their own, and other generations. Some young workers noted that in general, unions were not available in the organisations they had worked in. However, disengagement from unions was also linked with emerging generations of workers losing strong awareness of what unions were about, "So, we're getting to the point where like, we have parents who have never experienced unionism, either […]" (P16-G5, interview). Another young worker described young workers as unaware of the historic power unions had in New Zealand: "I'm thinking about the young, the young-young people and how it might be different for them […] lots of young people don't even know what has happened" (P20-G6, interview).

Moreover, some young workers felt unions failed to communicate in accessible ways with young workers who had limited prior exposure to the concept of unions. Some young workers were uncertain about whether unions offered membership or coverage for temporary or insecure jobs. As one young worker explained, despite previous contact with unions, they were still unclear about unions' roles, and frustrated at the lack of direct contact and accessible information from unions: "I still don't know what a union is meant to do", and that "I don't want to have to trawl through CTU's website to try and find out what union I'm meant to join" (P1-G1, interview). Similarly, another young worker pointed out that they didn't join their workplace union because they didn't know what functions unions served:

> *"And then I was like, I just felt like I didn't know enough about work or union functions at the time because I didn't sign up to the union. I was like, they don't do anything. They just, like, you know, to be honest, like, I should have just joined." (P21-G6, interview)*

However, for some young workers, a lack of knowledge about unions did not deter them from joining; an invitation or basic information was enough to prompt them to decide to join. As one young worker explained, they did not realise their workplace union might cover them, "I said […] isn't it just for [secure workers] and stuff and all that. And they were like, oh, just go and have a chat and see what? You know, what comes of it? And I did." (P11-G4, group). Another participant explained that although they didn't know what unions were for, they joined when they started working for a large employer where HR notified them that they could join, "I decided on the first day of [workplace] – I didn't know what a union was – that I would join the union" (P16-G5, group). This young worker argued that despite the preconditions being there for organising younger youth, they don't join unions because of intentions to leave:

> *"And they recognise the power imbalance. And they recognise what they need to do in order to see the change they want. But also, they refuse to join the union because they also want to leave the workplace very quickly. [...]" (P16-G5, interview).*

Some young workers who had exposure to unions, either through awareness of them in their workplace, being union members, or even employed by unions, were more critical. One young worker pointed out that unions may create barriers to their own growth and member participation: "constantly having barriers to, like, organise for a start, when there shouldn't be". There was a sense of information being difficult to access within unions, "[…] what is being kept, why and by who is information being gatekept? And what do we need to do to unravel […]" (P1-G1, group). They also highlighted burnout within unions as one challenge to effective organising and support for members, "And then no support. Because like, everyone that organises is burnt out anyway. So, it's like, who am I meant to reach out to?" (P1-G1, interview).

Some young workers described the struggles they faced in getting unions to act when there were collective concerns. Some unions appeared reluctant and were instead perceived as "having all these discussions like with HR, sitting down politely at meetings" (P16-G5, interview). This young worker shared their experience of initiating a member-led approach in their union, organising young workers from the ground up in order to progress action, "And so I led that group, then this, like in a similar vein that I sort of led the organise the collective bargaining from the employees, local workers side, from the delegates ourselves, because it was someone needs to step up" (P16-G5, interview). Unions were viewed by some young workers as a more individualised, privileged service for those with good income – as one young worker described: "if you're not earning that much money, and you're trying to scrape by paying, basically what is insurance, a lot of cases could be a bit of a hard sell" (P4-G2, interview). Another young worker talked about how, in the face of large scale redundancies, union staff appeared to be disassociating and leaving individuals to respond on their own:

> *"[…] even the union staff have said, are now just go to your manager about it. So, it's like even the unions, which are meant to be that space of collective action, individualising it, it's really, it's just such an uncanny situation." (P8-G3, group)*

Some young workers criticised unions for offering youth networks within their structures but not equipping them with voice or resources. As one young worker pointed out, *"[...] there's a lot of people in these roles that want to maintain the power but not actually, like, redistribute any kind of resource […]"* (P1-G1, interview). Another young worker pointed out that there was a tension with unions appearing to be less inclusive of young workers, despite clear incentives for unions to include young workers in the fold:

> *"I think I'm very supportive of the union movement. I think it's ironic that unions, or at least some unions, are almost loath to include young workers, which make up a sizable portion of the working population, I would guess. And I think it only serves to benefit both parties [...]." (P10-G4, interview)*

Some young workers had also been employed by unions or organisations within the labour movement and were critical of their employment practices. As one young worker explained when working for a workplace within the union movement, "They were like, Oh, my gosh, like, yes, let's be employment, people, but also like, not even, like realising how bad their practices were" (P1-G1, group). Another young worker explained that in their role within a union they felt they weren't taken seriously as a young woman, and experienced a climate of expectation to work over allocated hours:

> *"Yeah, and one thing that's really weird about working in a union is that I didn't expect I don't know- I kind of expected to be in this perfect working environment. But you know, we stress to our members to not work over the hours that you are given. […] I'm not sure about other unions. That's not the case here. You're almost expected to work over your hours." (P11-G4, interview)*

4.2 Culture shock

For young workers, the realities of work and norms they encountered when entering the business world clashed with their earlier school and family socialisation. Young workers felt deceived by unexpected differences. They discussed how societal and business norms supported the exploitation of youth. This resulted in culture shock, cognitive dissonance, and negative experiences, which became relevant to later experiences of resistance.

4.2.1 Being sold the dream

Young workers felt employers, their parents, and society more broadly had sold them a dream. The dream related to what work would be like, and the purpose and outcomes of working – a dream which contrasted

with their realities. As one young worker described, “you just enter, and you're trying to do this you have been sold this dream […] you know the world's your oyster, and now you're treated like everybody just can't it like absolutely can't stand you” (P17-G5, group). This meant the dream entailed a social contract in which the promised rewards would not eventuate. Instead, the dream functioned as social control, requiring young workers to be compliant and hardworking without reward. As one young worker explained, they were sold a dream that being successful in life meant working hard and building wealth but felt this was perhaps a deception to get them to accept exploitation by employers: “we've been told you gotta have your little own personal kingdom. But at the cost of being someone's slave, yeah, funnily enough” (P9-G3, interview).

Young workers spoke about the shock of poor treatment – they did not enter the workplace expecting to be treated poorly. As one young worker described, “it could have been my naivety as well as a young person thinking that, you know, be treated a certain way” (P7-G3, interview). Moreover, young workers were caught off guard and felt vulnerable to pressure to internalise poor treatment at work. One young worker described how they grappled with ‘lies’ or gaslighting:

> *“When you're a young person, you're entering the workplace, you're treated pretty bad. And you're all you're told, it's just part of life, and you're just gonna have to deal with it. It's like, your concerns don't really matter, the things that happened to you don't matter, you just have to, you know, fit into this completely messed up psycho culture. And you are, you're told you're the problem, and you're constantly lied to, and you're constantly made to lie to other people as well.” (P9-G3, group)*

These experiences stood in stark contrast with the conditions youth initially expected, “In an ideal world be able to claim all hours of pay? Yeah. And to have training for new people […]” (P12-G4, interview). Another young worker represented these jobs as being ‘broken’ through their collage, despite a veneer of being whole – in reality, poor work conditions left youth in a dark and uncertain place:

> *“So this guy is kind of looking around in the dark, not knowing what he's doing. This bird feels like constrained by the tape, which is how I feel about the hours and the pay. And this one here is like a broken jug. That appears to be okay in some parts, which is probably what it seems like from the outside and to people who don't want to make changes.” (P13-G4, group)*

The reality of how youth were treated contrasted with some employers’ outward projections that they were youth-friendly employers. Young workers found they were often outsiders in the labour market and workplaces, struggling to move into secure work, attain promotions, and navigate unfamiliar workplace expectations and poor treatment. One young worker pointed out that young people may be touted by some voices in society as future leaders, but that this acts as a social control over young people’s labour:

> *"[…] we're being told that like, this is the dream, to work. And we are like, the voice of the generation, like we are the next generation of leaders and stuff like that. And we're like, Oh, yes, we sell each other the thing of like, we have a wealth of talent in New Zealand, and we need to thrive." (P1-G1, group)*

Youth initially entered the world of work expecting their quality of life and wealth could match or exceed their parents', only to find that vision unattainable. Instead, the financial disadvantages youth experienced meant that the expectation of a successful life, with material wealth and good living standards, felt out of reach. One young worker described how while this was true for older workers, in New Zealand it was no longer a realistic dream for younger generations entering the workforce:

> *"I think that just that Boomer ideology of like, you get a job and you work hard. And like, the Yeah, I think the dissociation of that generation from like, it was okay for you because of the economy. But the economy for us is completely different." (P17-G5, interview)*

In contrast with the dream, another young worker likened their reality to moving back to 'caveman' times:

> *"And then also modern humans moved into caves; here's how you need to eat in order to live. I just remember that a lot of my early working experiences were like, in real shitty flats, and eating real shitty, not the best food. And that was sort of like, that's all part of it: not having a weekend or being able to eat properly, not having a good place to live. It's like, that's being a young person. Also being on the benefit through most of my jobs, you know, being on and off the benefit." (P19-G6, group)*

Given that hard work had apparently led to success for older generations, young workers explained that they faced external pressure to prove themselves and go the extra mile, such as through unpaid work, so they could succeed at work and achieve the promised dreams of home ownership and a financially comfortable life. One young worker explained through their collage that they were caught by surprise by the incommensurate pay for the level of work they did: "I was not ready for this. Like situation that I'm in, I have to work so much for like five coins, you know? I just thought that was funny" (P21-G6, group). Other young workers similarly explained the necessity to work hard despite poor conditions: "I guess going above and beyond, it's a requirement to get up in life and your career" (P11-G4, interview); "I think it's like mainly around really having to prove yourself and build the foundation" (P5-G2, interview). As another young worker explained, "the impossible race because it's impossible to buy a house. It's impossible to get anywhere" (P6-G2, group). Some young workers pointed out that going above and beyond was no longer part of a reciprocal relationship of good conditions for good work:

> *"In the heyday, when they were working, like 40-hour weeks, they did have secure contracts. And they did have highly unionised workforces. So it may have been alright to go above and beyond because, you know, the workplace had your back or whatever. But nowadays, that's just not the case." (P11-G4, interview)*

Young workers highlighted that they were encouraged by their parents to get an education, work hard and meet bosses' expectations, and that in turn getting good jobs would be easy, "[…] they very much were that work hard and you'll get somewhere and people recognise you […]" (P1-G1, group). Young workers suggested that their parents' experiences of how employers viewed skills and education differed greatly. In comparison, as one young worker explained, youth currently experience education being necessary but not valued, "[…] it was more about the skills rather than what your actual degree was in. Yeah. And now it feels like even those skills don't matter" (P17-G5, interview). The primary idea that young workers felt their parents or families pushed was that they should work hard. Some young workers shared that their parents worked hard and found success (particularly in self-employment or family businesses) and therefore did not recognise the systemic barriers young workers face today. One young worker explained how following this familial and societal advice to work hard led to exploitation, instead of leading to career opportunities as their family suggested:

> *"I've got Underground Battle. That's just because I feel whenever I talked to somebody outside of the company who was older, so like my parents or family members or whatnot, that always just sort of say, Oh, you just got to knuckle down and work harder and get noticed. But instead it was having the opposite effect. It was letting the bosses know, hey, this person is willing to do shit jobs. Let's keep him there and get the, you know, and so that you didn't feel as though there was much there to help you with, because every other bit of advice was sort of pick, you know, pick up by your bootstraps and sort of get back to it. Like genuinely got told to skip taking breaks. Like don't take your 15-minute breaks because it looks bad." (P4-G2, group)*

Triptych 4: Being 'sold a dream' of successful working lives



(P19-G6, collage 2)



(P9-G3, collage 2)



(P6-G2, collage 2)

Note. The triptych above shows young workers' feelings of having been lied to about what they could expect from entering the workforce. The 'dream' of a successful or good life is contrasted with the stark realities of lack of career progression, precarious work, and poor conditions and their impacts.

Young workers contrasted the expectations and values of older and younger generations of workers around work practices and norms. For example, explaining that "nowadays that, you know, working hours that you're not paid for, that's not acceptable. But some people in that age group do think that that is expected" (P11-G4, interview), and "[…] it's lucky like we've just been brought up in a different generation of people. Like I'm like, if I'm sick, I'm going to take my fucking sick leave" (P1-G1, interview). Young workers explained why these norms were no longer realistic or tolerable. One young worker poignantly described this as an internalisation of capitalist values, "people try and be proud of like, you know, being controlled by capitalism" (P14-G4, interview). Another explained that:

> *"[…] they did have secure contracts. And they did have highly unionised workforces. So it may have been alright to go above and beyond because, you know, the workplace had your back or whatever. But nowadays, that's just not the case." (P11-G4, interview)*

Two young workers commented that older managers upheld poor work conditions through their "archaic ideas" about work norms (P5-G2, interview), such as "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" (P6-G2, group) and "mental health issues aren't real" (P6-G2, group). These young workers highlighted the difference in attitude of a younger manager they had, who held the perspective of "[…] what's good for you is good for the business […]" (P6-G2, group). One of these young workers further explained the negative effect of these traditional perspectives for youth in workplace-based education:

> *"And yeah, maybe some of the older generations have been brought up on that. You know, you have to be tough and hard. And yeah, you know, and also working in [industry], the amount of apprentices I have seen that get treated like absolute shit. And it's terrible, because these people are meant to be the future of our country." (P5-G2, group)*

Surrounding 'the dream' metaphor, young workers spoke about an array of other controlling social norms in New Zealand that failed to recognise the reality facing young people – a reality which lacked positive experiences and opportunities, while setting expectations for young workers to take on individual responsibility (as opposed to social responsibility) for success or failure. One young worker described young people as being 'gaslighted' by the older generations' norms which discourage 'rocking the boat' and argued that this affects their "confidence to stand up" against poor treatment at work (P5-G2, interview). Another young worker discussed the 'lies' that they had uncovered:

> *"And then so like the lie. Sort of the lies that we're told and that we tell ourselves […] more in terms of like, pay and opportunities, and so on, so forth. If you dress for success, you'll do well. And it's just like, not true. Inherently, inherently true. And that we're working wonders. No, we're just people to do well […] we're told that, like, you know, we should sort of get what we're given and be grateful. And that, you know, the classic 'if you stopped eating avocado on toast, you could buy a house.' You know, and all the rest of the little things like, 'Ah, dang, people are spending too much money on education instead of just working.' God knows what else things we're told." (P16-G5, group)*

One young worker described this situation as feeling like they had lost power over their life, being pressured to accommodate unsustainable work conditions:

> *"In the middle is the claws of a predatory bird. And then it's also about kind of, like the lies that I think like young people were told when they enter the workforce. Like, you like being told, like the world is your oyster. But only if you, I think you know, like the world that is your oyster is the same as our world. And you're on your feet all the time. And then the amount of work that's, you know, kind of like the increasing amount of work that you end up getting given because you can't really say no, I guess. […] And then yeah, like the idea that you're always working towards your freedom, you're working towards your pension, you're working towards a house, you're working towards having enough money to do things, and it all kind of Yeah, just goes a bit topsy turvy" (P17-G5, group)*

Young workers also described how their socialisation through school supported the acceptance of these societal controls. As one young worker described, "[…] school is meant to just turn you into a compliant worker […]" (P9-G3, group). Another young worker suggested that the schooling system socialises young

people to understand that “everything is a test” (P18-G5, group), creating hypervigilance at work and ongoing pressure to prove themselves. Another young worker explained that in their industry they similarly experienced pressure to be constantly creative: “Keep the creative juices flowing. I feel like again, like that's a constant thing that people just assume that you’re meant to do […]” (P21-G6, group). These perspectives suggest that young people may be prepared to be questioned, rather than socialised to question the world around them.

Related to this, young workers noted that no stakeholders in Aotearoa have taken responsibility for employment rights education – not the Ministry of Education or the peak union body, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (P11-G4, group), and of course not employers “because then they can take advantage of them without them even knowing” (P17-G5, interview). As another participant explained, while rights education is powerful, there is no systemic approach to its provision: “inevitably if we just like, make resources accessible to learn about our rights in different spaces in what is and isn't acceptable, then we'd all be better, but we're not” (P1-G1, group). One young worker summarised how secondary school employment rights education would have better prepared them to know how to respond both for themselves and their coworkers when treated unfairly:

> *“[…] you just kind of have no idea what the heck do you even do when there's something that happens at work, and you just kind of get a gut feeling that it's wrong, but you have nothing to, to base it on. Because a) you don't have any kind of employment rights education in school. And your boss certainly isn't going to tell you what you're entitled to or aren't entitled to, in the worst-case scenario. So yeah, this little person here running into the middle of nowhere. And I think, with their arms up, and I think they're shouting, and for me, that kind of says, yeah, like, what the heck do I even do.” (P3-G1, group)*

Young workers described areas of employment relationships that youth lack knowledge about. One participant identified three key areas of knowledge, including what to expect at work, what trade unions are, and how to address problems at work: “Young people don't learn about trade unions. They don't learn about healthy relationships at work. You know, they don't know how to raise the concerns, the grave concerns that they have […] (P3-G1, interview). Further supporting this perspective, some young workers pointed out the lack of education for young people about their employment rights, amongst other basic civic information at school:

> *“I think it's like I would like to say, yeah, just like this. I think there's like something really missing in, like, education around just like, kind of like real life skills. Yeah. It's like, you know, like education around politics, education around like taxes and money education around, you know, like, your rights as a human being, here are your employment rights*

here. Your housing rights here are your, you know, and just like, general, people should know this stuff." (P17-G5, interview)

4.2.2 Stereotyping of youth

Young workers felt they were viewed and treated differently from older workers, and at times their poor conditions were related to *stereotypes and misconceptions about youth*. As one young worker pointed out, exploitation was supported by stereotyping, "[…] especially with like, the negative social stigma that can come with young people in the workforce, you know, from the viewpoint of more experienced elite types" (P14-G4, interview).

Several young workers discussed young workers being infantilised at work. As part of this infantilisation, employers and managers assumed young workers didn't have significant personal responsibilities. In reality, young workers' financial and family responsibilities meant they were reliant on their employment. As one young worker explained, "I personally had like heaps of expenses that I needed to pay as, like working. Again, it's then this assumption that young people don't need money in the same way that older people do" (P16-G5, interview). Another young worker described having their wages referred to as "pocket money", demonstrating this perspective that young workers have easier lives than other workers:

"And I've had that with a lot of employees where it's like, they're somehow blind to the fact that like, this isn't something I'm choosing to do just for fun. […] And I'm like, I actually need this to survive. That's why I'm working this job. It's not because I actually necessarily enjoy it or want to; this is because I have to." (P20-G6, interview)

Another young worker used the imagery of a young person placed within a fishbowl, underneath an "employer's shoe", to highlight this ignorance about young workers' personal responsibilities:

"[…] that was probably what I was trying to capture by having the shoe there is that especially when a young person who in the workplace is vulnerable, but also out in the real world may be experiencing hardship." (P3-G1, interview)

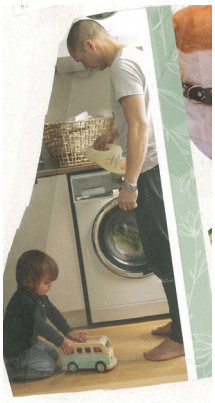
Ignorance of young workers' responsibilities apparently led to the assumption that they had more time and energy for work and less need for higher wages. One young worker explained that lower wages, combined with personal financial responsibilities, in turn supported exploitation of young insecure workers: they are "easily exploited" because of their "wealth disparity" (P14-G4, interview). Another described this experience: "So suddenly, we're, like, expected to like, just work for less because we're younger, that we have to work harder for less […]" (P16-G5, interview). Another described how their difficult financial situations were used to pressure them to work additional hours:

> *"I guess they would try pressure me with [colleagues] because I knew that I was young and broke. And it says that I would work shifts because they had the assumption, even though I don't remember talking to them about it, that I was young and broke and needed work." (P11-G4, group)*

Youthful appearances also created barriers for some young workers – they pointed out that they were not chosen for jobs, underestimated by other workers, and not expected to be in management positions, based on their age and physical youthful appearance. One young worker who had been a manager explained that he would frequently be asked, "Is your boss around? Is your manager here? […] And I'd be like, that's me" (P10-G4, group). Another young worker explained:

> *"And she was like, oh, no, I don't really know, like I'm new here. You should ask her […] And it's like, yeah, I've been here a while. But those kind of like views about, because someone's young, assuming that they don't know, well that an older person will know and will be able to like I don't know, pick it up or act more professionally, or I don't I don't know what the views are behind it." (P13-G4, interview)*

Triptych 5: Young people stereotyped, infantilised



(P10-G4, collage 2)



(P3-G1, collage 2)



(P15-G4, collage 1)

Note. The triptych above shows images of children, which were commonly used in collages to illustrate how young workers experience stigma at work, including being infantilised and assumed to be less capable.

One young worker reflected on why this stigma was so hurtful. They described how this represented a failure by others to recognise their life experience and background, looking beyond their age:

> *"I think there were a lot of comments made about my age. And there was one time was that there was something that was said about, you know, how like, me being too young, or that I'm not kind of suggesting that I wasn't mature in a way. And I think that was quite hurtful. For someone like me, with the upbringing that I had and all that stuff, you know, I think it's quite hurtful to know that basically, you sometimes have had to step up. But*

> *that experience isn't kind of validated in a work context. [...] it kind of highlights the dangers of making assumptions based on someone's age and lack of experience, because, you know, they may not have a lot of work experience, but it doesn't mean they have, they lack, you know, experience in terms of being able to have other skills in order to deal with particular situations and deal with stress." (P7-G3, interview)*

Young workers also felt disempowered at times because of their age. In one sense, this was because young workers generally did not have access to or influence over levers of power within their organisations. Those who gained power at work were instead perceived to be generally older Pakeha males, with a lack of diverse representation. For some young workers, interpersonal differentials in age and values with managers also complicated the process of standing up for their rights. As one young worker explained, when confronting her employer, "the like power dynamic of age was something that was very present for me […]" (P20-G6, interview). This young worker also explained that while she took a formal approach to handling an employment dispute, her employer was "offended that I emailed him, instead of talking to him in real life" (P20-G6, interview). For this young worker, an email was used as a professional way to begin addressing a serious matter, as it gave the employer time to respond without direct confrontation. For young workers, being of a different age to most managers therefore presented additional barriers to having their ideas heard: "being the youngest one being, yeah, someone with slightly different ideas about how the company or the organisation should do things, but knowing that, you know, they kind of hold the power" (P13-G4, group).

4.2.3 Lost in the capitalist business world

Transitioning into the world of work and business was described as a "a culture shock, you know, into the business world" (P7-G3, interview). They also described participation in this system as inescapable: young workers said they had to "adapt or die" (P11-G4, group). As one young worker explained, in the workplace, young workers are trapped under the "shoe" of capitalism: "[…] that shoe not only represents the employer, but also represents capitalism, in the fact that we all have to work to survive." (P3-G1, group).

Some young workers described their identity and place in the business world as "bugs" (P17-G5, group) and "worms" (P11-G4, group). They felt they lacked opportunities for individual expression or a more meaningful existence at work and were, ultimately, replaceable. For young workers, being dispensable compounded feelings of general unsafety in being and expressing themselves at work, along with greater pressure to fit workplace norms around communication, clothing, body language, and so on. Young workers described the jarring experience of having to hide their identities and feelings to fit into the workplace, placing them in a position of reduced confidence:

> *"You know, you've got to obviously put on your happy face, you know, yeah, a large part of the work is the performative aspect of it; you have to create this new personality […].*

> *So you might feel like you've had a facelift. And you might want to shoot yourself in the face." (P9-G3, group)*

> *"And then the price of being me, it's like putting your identities to the side in order to like feel safe in a workplace environment and having to like compartmentalise, when is the right time to present as this way?" (P1-G1, group)*

Young workers were highly conscious of being outsiders entering the workplace, feeling lost and confused about workplace practices, and unsure how to behave to be accepted. They occupied a vulnerable position as outsiders to the world of business, entering ill-prepared for the challenges they would face. As one young worker explained using their collage, "I started with a crossword puzzle, and took away the clues because the workplace is a puzzle and you have no clues" (P9-G3, group). Another described, "It's like, what, how will I be perceived from the get-go." (P1-G1, group).

Young workers felt that in combination with arriving unprepared for the world of work, employers were unwilling to provide on-the-job support to socialise them. As one young worker explained, "[…] it's always been challenging in terms of, you know, support and organisational socialisation […]" (P7-G3, interview). For young workers, navigating 'how to be' and 'how to present' was omnipresent early in their working lives. As one young worker shared, for young workers this was an isolating experience:

> *"And I think that young people have a certain, you know, weight on their shoulders, and the world can seem quite daunting. And so it's, you don't, you can't just like bounce it off another person at work, because they may not actually understand what you're going through, understand why you feel that way. Because they've just, like, they've obviously advanced past that life stage and don't remember what it's like to be, you know, starting out in the world." (P5-G2, interview)*

A significant part of feeling out of place was that young workers were unprepared for clashes between workplace norms and expectations, with their own values and identities. Workplace norms felt unsafe because they warred with young workers' values and preference for honest communication and ethical practice. Young workers described finding workplaces "performative" (P9-G3, group) and characterised by "toxic positivity" and corporate jargon (P17-G5, group). One young worker spoke about the disturbing experience of people being managed out of their organisation, and then organisational leaders singing the praises of the workers they had ousted (P17-G5, interview). Two young workers used the imagery of a smiley face with skulls in place of eyes to highlight the underlying toxicity and invasiveness of workplace cultures (P17-G5, group; P15-G4, group). One young worker described navigating conversations at work, explaining they felt unsafe and had to be careful to say the right things to the right people:

> *"…the conversations that you have sometimes do they feel incredibly unnatural, where it's just, you can't, I don't know, I guess there's also this feeling of unsafety […]. I don't know, if the person that I'm talking to is gonna see things the way that I see them or understand things the way that I understand them." (P17-G5, interview)*

For young workers, there was a disturbing sense of everyone around them in the workplace performing a fake corporate culture rather than being true to themselves. Young workers saw their workplaces as disingenuous and felt real issues were being ignored, leaving them demoralised by the belief that it would not change. As one young worker explained, the depression of wages and cost of living crisis was being ignored, "And then, you know, it's just not the system isn't working like this. Yes. Like, people aren't willing to face up that, like things are getting worse" (P16-G5, group). Another young worker explained young workers' experiences of workplaces as unnatural. This young worker spoke about employment as having an inherently exploitative and anti-humanistic dynamic – labour being viewed as a commodity:

> *"…nobody acknowledges your needs; when you're an employee, it's all about their needs and how you are meant, how you're being paid to fulfil them. Because like, money, I guess, is coming into the situation, which is turning into a transaction, which means I am paying money; therefore, I want my money's worth. And but it's not like, well, I need to give you money because you'll die if you don't." (P9-G3, interview)*

Young workers used their collages to call attention to the absurdity of the behaviour and conditions they witnessed, the harmful values of those with significant power, and how this went unchallenged within organisations. Some young workers spoke of the psychopathy of senior leadership, and one young worker noted that for younger workers, they may be more likely to internalise their experiences under these leaders, instead of spotting them as "narcissists or psychopaths":

> *"[…] people who are narcissists or psychopaths can be very good at masking that fact. You know, people who love to see themselves in positions of power. There are some who are just very good at presenting as if they are generous and presenting as if they're, you know, thinking about everyone in the team kind of thing. But really, just thoroughly in it for themselves. And I'm grateful that I, you know, have the skills and experience to identify it, but not everyone does. And sometimes young people in this situation, they're too close to it too, just to think about it in that way. And to get help. They just go, oh, well, everything's our maybe it is my fault. Or maybe it is my responsibility to deal with this stuff. [...]" (P3-G1, interview)*

Another young worker described a dysfunctional hierarchy found in workplaces, consisting of those at the top focused on extracting labour, young people at the bottom, and confused or directionless middle managers providing a buffer in between:

> *"So when you're a young person, you are a loser working in the office; you are having your labour extracted by these psychos, you know, for whatever stupid purpose they think makes money. And if you're lucky, you have a middle manager who's completely idiotic and does not know what the hell's going on. And that is a buffer between the you know, unbridled, you know, mental unwellness of the people who are usually in charge of a company, but sometimes you work directly with them." (P9-G3, group)*

In response, some young workers spoke about seeking employers with a more meaningful or ethical mission. They saw the employer's ethical purpose as potentially leading to more meaningful jobs and better employment practices and working conditions. However, these young workers were left feeling deceived, as they also encountered unethical employment practices with those employers. As one young worker described, they felt that these employers could get away with poor practices, because their reputation as an employer was protected by their unique purpose:

> *"[…] and then that appeal meant that they could get away with all the things that I talked about before because ultimately, I'm so glad I'm working here. […] I was like, oh, this is kind of, somewhat seems ethical […] we're just kind of naive people who've been exploited or taken for a ride. […] And then with [job], [task] can be quite rewarding. […] that's way to, like, use this like a, like a bargaining tool to make it so that you get like they can get away with treating you like rubbish or messing you around or like anything like that. So, so yeah, that was like, sort of like a theme that ran through a lot of my employment." (P19-G6, interview)*

These young workers were critical of organisational motives that undermined the meaningfulness of work and the quality of work conditions. This affected the quality of the services they could provide or shifted their job tasks away from the objective of their role in serving the organisation's mission. Young workers were willing to work hard because they felt connected to the positive purpose of their jobs, and doing a good job was important to them. However, they also felt their valuable and "essential" work went unseen, and passion for their work was a source of exploitation:

> *"… there's also kind of, like, you know, actually wanting to do it out of like, you know, out of my heart make sure that I can do well wanting to give back but also, you know, struggling with that balance of actually, you know, how much is it being as it kind of like, am I just being exploited at this point kind of thing." (P7-G3, group)*

Triptych 6: Young workers' sense of exploitation by employers



(P3-G1, collage 2)



(P15-G4, collage 1)



(P7-G3, collage 2)

Note. This triptych illustrates young workers' experiences of discomfort in the capitalist world, where employers and workplaces did not acknowledge young people's realities or the essential nature of their work, and where workplace norms clashed with young workers' morals and values.

Valuing the meaning and purpose of their role and organisation was often a response to negative past work experiences. In precarious roles, with meaningless tasks and dirty jobs, young workers went unseen, "[…] you sort of feel like you're not seen as anything outside of what you can do for people" (P20-G6, interview). It became important to find a job that enabled them to live their own identity through their work and not simply feel like they were being used, "Like, who am I isn't like, I want to be able to, you know, like live my values and like, do what's important to me. But how can I do that? And instead, I'm being made to do this other thing" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker argued that youth invest in their higher education to contribute to society and develop as people – not to be competitive job seekers – conflicting with societal perspectives and expectations:

> *"This is like the generation that's like, oh, I've done this, and I've done this, and I now expect this. And I always kind of hear that from older generations, which puts me on edge as well. Because they're almost saying that we haven't worked towards it. And we have [...] we want to, we want to further ourselves, and we want to gain certain skills to be able to get somewhere. But because so many people go through this, you know, there are only so many jobs available for us all to take, as they offered them to us in the first place. But we're paying to go to uni. And yeah, there's just kind of this, this weird like, we are educated. So please don't treat us like we're not - we're trying to do this to further ourselves and to make society better. Like we're here being educated for a purpose, but you're not giving us the chance to put that into action." (P13-G4, interview)*

4.3 Summary

The chapter showed young workers' criticisms of their context, how this context shaped their work conditions, and features of the context that may have enabled and constrained young worker resistance. Young workers' experiences in the workplace and labour market were marked by being trapped in extended

transitions in insecure work. Young workers felt they were used as cheaper, disposable labour, which affected their workplace conditions. Young workers also experienced culture shock when faced with poor conditions and unexpected workplace norms that clashed with what they had been socialised to expect through school, family, and society. The following chapter presents the research findings on young workers' resistance, beginning with how their early resistance emerged from this challenging context.

Chapter 5 Stages of Resistance

> *"And he was just saying, every little thing that we do today has to be done, because no matter how little it is, it has been done. And the people who come after us have already needed that for them to do the next thing that will be done, which might be slightly bigger than an old, maybe slightly smaller, but it's still persistent. And I think I realised that and, you know, I abide by it because I no matter how little it is, it has to be done." (P21-G6, interview)*

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the overarching research question: how young workers' resistance was experienced across their working lives. These findings also connect with sub-questions two and three: 'How do young workers experience resisting challenges in their work and employment?' and 'How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not?'. Clear themes emerged in how young workers resist, and in how these ways of resisting differed over the course of their working lives. Although young workers had worked across a range of occupations and industries, and their work histories differed, common patterns emerged in how their resistance repertoires developed. This chapter presents the common stages of resistance progression. While the stages are presented in a common narrative order, the chapter highlights individual differences in whether, when, and how these stages were experienced.

There are four overarching themes in young workers' resistance, each with two or three subthemes. Theme one covers the early stages of resistance, including subthemes of young workers' earliest individual experiences of resistance; how flying away or quitting became a form of resistance; and how, after these early experiences, young workers stepped back to reflect and recover. Theme two is about how young workers diversified their repertoires of individual resistance, including subthemes of accessing education and developing awareness; using new individual ways of resisting, such as speaking up and using existing formal channels; and becoming resisters-for-others. Theme three is about collective responses among young workers, with subthemes of finding ways to share mutual support with other young workers; and for one group of participants, developing grassroots collective mobilising. Theme four shifts to a future focus, sharing young workers' visions for resistance moving forward, including: how youth are taking power over socio-cultural practices; how young workers envision making formal collectives work for them; and whom youth are calling on to support transformation.

5.1 Early stages of resistance

This theme presents findings on how young workers' early resistance developed. The first subtheme discusses early individual efforts to speak up at work, and why young workers sometimes chose not to speak up. The second subtheme explores how, after early individual resistance was frustrated, young workers' next

act of resistance was to escape. The third subtheme describes how following these early acts of resistance, young workers moved into a period of reflection and decision-making about future resistance.

5.1.1 Testing the waters: Early individual responses

Responding to differences between their expectations and the reality of workplace conditions, some young workers began to *test the waters* of resisting their poor conditions. Resistance to shift conditions at this stage primarily involved speaking up to managers and employers to ask for improvements. One young worker described that it takes young workers time, and nudging by others, to come to the conclusion that they can speak up for themselves, and then work out how to do so, "it's quite hard to like also come to that conclusion, and it takes a lot of time to figure out how you want to communicate the things that you should" (P21-G6, group).

When young workers began to speak up, their position as a disposable and precarious workforce often meant that speaking up led to negative outcomes. For example, one young worker described unsuccessfully asking for their work experience to be paid: "And I did actually ask the question about, you know, candidates be paid. And that wasn't successful, unfortunately" (P7-G3, interview). For another young worker, asking for and receiving a pay rise resulted in losing hours, and then not being re-hired at the end of the employment period: "However, the caveat was, after getting that pay raise, there was only about three hours' worth of work for me. And they didn't rehire me" (P8-G3, interview). Another young worker described their employer's temper when they tried speaking up: "he could get angry really quickly. And so I was just very wary, quite wary of that" (P20-G6, interview). After speaking up about a breach of legislation, their employer tried to fire them: "[…] basically saying, like, don't come to work [...] he just, like, brought up all these reasons why I wasn't as good [...] And kind of all these things where I'm like, you hired me knowing that" (P20-G6, interview). Some young workers were also affected by witnessing the repercussions their coworkers experienced when speaking up. One young worker described employer retaliation toward a coworker as a reminder of workers' disposability, "[…] they are reminding her that she's just a bug, you know, like, yeah, fully replaceable" (P17-G5, interview).

As one young worker summarised, it felt like a multitude of injustices happened and were ignored when raised by young workers: "[…] there's always a new grievance wherever you go […] we get brushed aside, especially with our grievances in the workplace" (P16-G5, interview). Another participant explained the repetitive experience of workplace problems, "every single job I'm like, here we go again" (P21-G6, group). One young worker described feeling that their energy to fight for better conditions was constrained by the cumulative effects of repeated poor conditions:

> *"This quote was a bit random, too. I saw something in it. Nine meters of poo a day is Takahe, something written in scientific language; consider how much a gut that long, full of grass might weigh, and you start to grasp why Takahe don't fly. So I guess like the whole*

> *idea of like, taking on all the shit. And then like, sorry, excuse my language, but it does say poo. And then it says starting to grasp why they don't fly. So like being so weighed down that you never have the chance to like, get further." (P13-G4, group)*

Young workers also battled with cultural and workplace norms that challenged speaking up. One young worker described a "stiff upper lip British mentality where people don't want to cause scenes", which meant that when "you're young at a workplace with older people, a lot of them don't want to cause a scene or make trouble." (P4-G2, interview). Another young worker spoke about overcoming their socialisation to not be direct:

> *"In New Zealand, we're not a very direct people. And there's a lot of indirectness in the language we use and the way that we say, I'm not doing well, or, yeah. And it's like, kind of like quite a valuable tool to just be like, not like standing on people's toes, but just hey, actually, this is what I need." (P17-G5, interview)*

Some young workers became wary of speaking up after witnessing the outcomes and the risk of further illegal or unfair behaviour by employers. For some, early attempts to speak up led to a period of silence and conformity early in their working lives. One young worker used imagery on their collage to explain the experience of conforming, after resisting:

> *"So I just become the dog. And another is becoming Miss Universe. It's like, becoming the model employee kind of thing. That's just how I deal with things sometimes, particularly when I was younger. And then they don't need to know anything about my work. So just at a certain point, I just stopped bringing issues up. After obviously trying to previously." (P15-G4, group)*

However, for others, resistance became more hidden. One young worker described pushing back more cautiously against exploitation through subtler means, to see whether they could improve conditions without drawing managerial attention. For example, in a contractor role they attempted to circumvent wage theft by including extra time in their invoices:

> *"I was like a fake self-employed contractor. For this, like, I had a clear, like, employer. And so I was like, if I'm a self-employed contractor, I can just, like, invoice for that time. [...] And I started sort of testing by, like, invoicing for that time. And then it didn't always, but sometimes it would work, because they just wouldn't pay attention to the numbers, but then sometimes it wouldn't. And then, so was like, Yeah, trying to find ways of responding like that." (P19-G6, group).*

Triptych 7: Early resistance and setbacks



(P17-G5, collage 1)



(P15-G4, collage 3)



(P19-G6, collage 3)

Note. The triptych here shows the effects on young workers of negative reactions when they speak up. For some, this led to pressure to "be quiet" and pretend to be a model employee, muting efforts to speak up. For others, this led to testing more subtle ways of resisting.

5.1.2 Flying away: Escaping mistreatment

The constraints that young workers experienced in early acts of speaking up eventually led to *flying away* – quitting – becoming the next best action, in their perspectives. Most young workers had endured long periods of challenging conditions and attempts to speak up within their respective role, before deciding to quit as a final resort. Young workers discussed a range of purposes that quitting served, and some varied views on whether quitting was fighting back.

For some young workers, quitting was an act of defiance against disrespect and poor practice. This was a decision to respond with clear rejection of employers' practices; quitting signified no longer being willing to put up with bad management practices. As one young worker explained, "They were horrific. They'd have like weeks where they forget to pay you. Or I think I said the other time it was I worked like four 12-hour days in a row or something. So, I was ready to leave" (P4-G2, interview). Another young worker described how increased employer surveillance was one factor that finally triggered them to quit, along with their employer discouraging them from recognising their real value to the business (P19-G6, interview). Another young worker highlighted the massive wave of worker resignations during COVID as an example of this: "[…] people are actually doing that. Because like, there's a lot less respect post COVID for poor management" (P16-G5, interview).

For young workers whose personal circumstances allowed, leaving was seen as a logical choice for personal justice. As one young worker explained, "sometimes it's better to just walk away" in the face of "being so disrespected", but if leaving was not possible then they advised "kia kaha, stay strong" (P11-G4, group). Another young worker decided to quit over an issue that they perceived as a minor or one-off issue, but took as a sign that their employer was unwilling to fulfil even their smallest obligations:

> *"I was happy to stay in that job for some time, but it wasn't long after that that I just resigned because it couldn't be, you know, something so small, having to keep going back and forth about it and yet even though that was like a really small thing. I was like, you*

> *know, if this could be an indication of what, you know, they're prepared to do or not do." (P3-G1, interview)*

Quitting also involved acknowledging the hopelessness of expecting change in employers too resistant to change, and that existing methods of raising concerns would not effect the level of change needed. Quitting responded to experiences of raising their voice and being silenced amid mistreatment. Quitting was seen as the clearest alternative to acceptance, "that has become my mantra, keep moving" (P15-G4). Another young worker described the choice to stay or leave:

> *"So I suppose the people, you know, just do their best to have a better life. We cannot choose work environment, but we can adapt to it, or, or find another place, it's like that. Yeah, sometimes, it's hard to change it." (P2-G1, group)*

Young workers also shared an imaginary in which quitting could become a vehicle for reclaiming voice, making speaking up more forcefully possible. Young workers described this shared – though not often lived – fantasy of raising their grievances at the same time as quitting. Quitting could eliminate some of the otherwise threatening "consequences" of speaking up:

> *"I often have really struggled to fight, like to know what to do in, if we're in situations of injustice. And if I'm honest, most of the time. It's like, I don't, I've just not been able to respond that successfully or more like, used coping mechanisms to sort of deal with the bad situation. And, and sort of like talk. I think a lot of people do this just like talking, talking about it to their friends and complaining about it, and then being like, I'm going to speak up about this at some time, like, now's the time, it's going to be the time, but then like, never, and just do it before you leave, you know. Do it, just like, I want to quit, I just want to say, say my piece, and then get out of there. And then there'll be no consequences kind of thing. That's like, I guess the, the attitude I, I've often had." (P19-G6, group)*

Quitting was not an easy way out – it placed young workers between a rock and a hard place – choosing between poor work conditions and financial insecurity. Because young workers were trapped in transition, quitting carried risks of unemployment and uncertain job prospects. This meant that quitting required a significant act of courage. Young workers in more financially insecure situations generally waited until they reached a breaking point before leaving. Some young workers left their jobs to study, as an alternative escape. Going to university provided at least some – albeit limited – financial assurance, as they could draw on student loans or allowances. One young worker explained how leaving their "toxic" job "was like the end of the world for me", given the difficulty of gaining that job in the first place (P5-G2, interview). Another young worker explained how youth could become trapped in poor conditions:

> *"You know, like, you need to find a job, or when you need to be able to pay your rent, if there's like some downtime between jobs, you need to, you know, like, there's all of those all of these outside factors that keep you in the job that you are currently in, even if you're having a bad time, or it sucks…" (P17-G5, interview)*

However, for many young workers, the decision to quit served another worthwhile function: protecting their mental health. Their mental health, and for some, sense of self-worth, had been significantly affected by the mistreatment they struggled to speak up against. One young worker described how their experiences in the workplace were "very traumatic" and eventually their mental health was too significantly affected by staying in the job (P1-G1, interview). Another young worker explained:

> *"[…] sort of the top one, this couple of birds flying away, I sort of feel as though you know, there's gonna be circumstances where that may be the best option… You know, so I think that it was a very hostile territory. And I had to then chart a new course where I was going, so I flew away; I had to leave this situation for my own mental health. And just, there was no point in trying to make, you know, I wasn't getting anywhere with the company that, you know, I had to go, I had to fly away." (P5-G2, group)*

Triptych 8: Flying away or quitting as resistance



(P5-G2, group, collage 3) (P4-G2, group, collage 3) (P11-G4, group, collage 2)

Note. The triptych above shows images of birds, with the metaphor of 'flying away' often used to represent quitting in the face of exacerbated early efforts by young workers to create change at work.

However, some young workers also pointed out that from a longer-term perspective, quitting could be seen as counter-productive to resistance, as it supported views of young workers as disposable. As one young worker explained, going back to university and having dreams of self-employment could be viewed as "sidestepping the issue of, like, directly confronting my employers" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker explained that, without support, leaving would remain a primary form of agency for young workers: "everyone whom I know who was in that situation has quit the job and gone back to university, you know, they've made the change themselves?" (P4-G2, interview). For one young worker, they avoided quitting when pressured by their employer because they felt it would mean their employer would have "got what she

wanted" (P1-G1, interview). The potential larger-scale counter-productive effect of quitting as a normalised tool for youth resistance is explained by one young worker here:

> *" […] there's just this process of people like leaving shit jobs to find other shit jobs and all the young people have left us all these like jobs because no one there isn't the information or there aren't those techniques lying around or digging up from the past on how to actually improve those workplaces." (P19-G6, interview)*

5.1.3 Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance

This section describes how, following early experiences of resistance and challenging conditions, young workers went *to ground* to recoup and reflect. These early experiences were traumatic for many young workers, and recovery and reflection formed a necessary in-between stage before developing a wider set of tools for resistance. Below are themes from young workers' recovery and reflections, and how these changed their approaches to resistance.

Young workers described their early workplace experiences as highly traumatic, affecting their mental health and sense of identity. After leaving these situations, they needed time to process their experiences. As one young worker explained, they began "trying to figure it out, unpack those experiences that I've had in the workplace" (P7-G3, group). Another young worker explained that this also required coming to terms with losing trust in the workplace because of mistreatment: "[…] there's a bit of a hole where before you, you felt content with the way people treated you right" (P14-G4, group). One young worker described how they could not forget negative experiences, but that it was important to try to move forward:

> *"You know, the growing, the best thing you can do from those experiences is not carry them around with you forever. I mean, I know I probably do. I know I do that still. But moving on." (P9-G3, group)*

Understanding and reflecting on their early experiences helped young workers regain confidence in themselves individually and de-internalise negative experiences. This involved young workers re-asserting and "acknowledging that you have been treated unfairly" (P16-G5, group). Young workers highlighted that, to later stand up for their rights, they needed to overcome psychological gaslighting. This meant overcoming a sense that they were being made to believe they were imagining their conditions or were the cause of the problems themselves. As one young worker explained, "if young people weren't gaslighted, as much as they are now, they'd probably have more confidence to stand up for the situations that are happening" (P5-G2, interview). Young workers also discussed why they were vulnerable to internalising negative workplace experiences. This included exposure to negative stereotyping of young workers and underestimation of their capabilities, as well as their socialisation to work hard. These experiences could knock young workers' self-

worth, leaving them "really trying to prove themselves in a world that they don't, you know, view themselves as good enough for" (P14-G4, interview). As another young worker explained:

> *"they don't have that kind of confidence in themselves to be able to actually know that's not them […] a lot of the times like, you know, all those assumptions that were made about me and my ability to do the job." (P7-G3, interview).*

A few young workers also criticised the pressure on young people to carry responsibility for successes and failures in the labour market. As one young worker explained, it becomes an entirely individual responsibility to navigate education systems and the labour market, "[…] get your education, work, five jobs, you know, volunteer, do all the stuff, but it's up to you to make it work. If it fails, it's on you" (P8-G3, group). Another young worker contrasted the possibility of taking collective responsibility with the norm of placing responsibility on individuals, "[…] It's not necessarily like, you know, it's not a community fault. And like, this isn't an issue in the way that we're working. Like no, no, it's just a-you-thing" (P16-G5, group). Popular cultural concepts of gratefulness and resilience also represented societal and employer efforts to deflect attention away from injustices:

> *"I know that I'm resilient. And I don't need to be told that I need to be more resilient. You know, in the face of adversity, and all that kind of stuff. That's been one thing. But yeah, I guess going back to the whole, the second value of gratitude, or being grateful. You know, I am grateful. But sometimes in a work context, I need to know that gratitude, is it going to serve me? You know, it's important, but I need to be able to know that I'm gonna be paid, you know, enough and not been treated the same way as other people are, not being taken advantage of." (P7-G3, interview)*

Young workers realised they had been isolated from asking for support to fight back at work. For example, one young worker who was in temporary employment described how they had felt exposed by the standard process of joining a workplace union – uploading their sign-up form to the employer's portal. They explained this felt like direct defiance that could displease their employer, and consequently jeopardise future job offers: "I had a fear of not being desirable by [employer]" (P8-G3, interview). Another young worker described the trauma caused by their workplace experiences, leaving them isolated despite having support services within reach:

> *"So, when I was fucked over, because of lack of a better term, I isolated myself. And there is this, like, quote; it's meant to go with this […] the towers, the astronomy places. Anyway, it's like, 'you can have my time on the telescope tonight; I feel small and insignificant enough already'. And so I kind of got stuck in this rut, but there were tools that were around me, but I was like, too depressed to use them. And because, like, even engaging*

> *with [support services], I was like, I have these resources. But I'm too far gone to kind of get, address my issues." (P1-G1, group)*

Young workers also explained that limited early resources made it difficult to discern what was their fault and what was a result of the actions of others in their working lives:

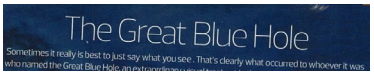
> *"And I'm grateful that I, you know, have the skills and experience to identify it, but not everyone does. And sometimes young people in this situation, they're too close to it too, just to think about it in that way. And to get help. They just go, oh, well, everything's our maybe it is my fault. Or maybe it is my responsibility to deal with this stuff. Because they don't know any different." (P3-G1, interview)*

Reflecting helped young workers recover from internalised negative rhetoric about youth, removing self-blame and self-doubt around mistreatment they had experienced. As one young worker explained, youth must "remain grounded, and that you know, that you're actually you're not wrong, even though people are blaming you" (P7-G3, group). These reflections enable young workers to regain "confidence" (P1-G1, interview; P5-G2, interview), self-worth, and "identity" (P7-G3, group). One young worker explained that after being mistreated and micromanaged, they had internalised their treatment, and moving into a new workplace where they were treated well also helped with regaining confidence:

> *"It was like a breath of fresh air, to be honest, coming from such a toxic work environment and in my previous workplace, because I've lost so much confidence, like I really just thought that I was just, you know, so awful. And so I was very nervous for maybe my first six months of working at [workplace]; I was incredibly nervous. Like, I thought that they're gonna find out that I'm actually really terrible. And it was the opposite." (P5-G2, interview)*

Another participant offered advice for other young workers to "make your own spring bouquet", to represent moving on from difficult work experiences to protect their mental health: "[...] the best thing you can do from those experiences is not carry them around with you forever. I mean, I know I probably do. I know I do that still. But moving on" (P9-G3, group).

Triptych 9: Gound to ground to recover







(P14-G4, collage 3) (P1-G1, collage 3) (P9-G3, collage 3)

Note. The triptych here illustrates the mental health impacts of poor conditions, illegal and mistreatment early on, and the struggle to change these in young people's early working lives. This led to a need to recover and rebuild their confidence before they could fight back again.

Following early forms of resistance, young workers also reflected on what they could have done differently and considered what they might do differently in future. A common area for reflection was the decision not to pursue a personal grievance after quitting. Many young workers noted that, in situations where they decided to quit, pursuing a personal grievance would have been an option that provided a sense of justice. However, young workers explained that taking such a grievance was something they were not prepared for when their mental health was already affected by their workplace situation. One young worker explained the challenges raised by lost confidence and internalised blame for experiences: "[…] because I seriously was just gaslighted and lost heaps of confidence in myself. So, I probably wouldn't have I probably at the time felt like a fight that I was never going to win or anything […]" (P5-G2, interview). They worried that bringing a claim would be unsuccessful, and whether they had gathered enough evidence. Another explained that protecting their mental health was more urgent than "retribution":

> *"But I'm too busy trying not to die right now. And I wish I could, like, I tried to start the process with [support service], just to do a timeline. And I was like, I can't do this; it's just making me, like, have a panic attack. Yeah, it was like, I'm not going to put myself continuously in that situation just for like some sort of retribution." (P1-G1, interview)*

For young workers, stigma around personal grievances and fear of the process's implications and unknowns made it harder to raise them early in their working lives. As they explained, "There's a stigma against it when you have a PG when you're getting other jobs" (P5-G2, interview), and "I don't even know what like the process is. It's like how am I supposed to want to do it when I don't even know what it is like" (P1-G1, interview). One young worker noted that those engaging in PGs could sometimes be silenced, for example through confidentiality agreements: "[…] people are going through formal processes. They, you know, because of whatever reasons, they could be silenced as well." (P7-G3, interview). Only one young worker

disclosed that they had taken a personal grievance early in their working life – and that their coworkers chose not to do so:

> *"[...] I had not realised at the time, but I really started talking to my coworkers and started organising them. And so like, not directly because it wasn't, and it didn't result in anything, because everyone just kind of ended up leaving because they hated the job. But I was the only one who ended up putting forward like a personal grievance." (P16-G5, group)*

Some young workers found a sense of justice in employers' failures instead. One young worker described their employer going under after not listening to staff advice, using words on their collage to describe this as "the Great Reckoning" (P4-G2, group). Even imagining employer failures brought a sense of retribution, with two young workers using the words "poetic justice" on their collages to describe their imaginings of employers struggling (P9-G3, group; P17-G5, group). Although one young worker described this musing about "wanting to see the employer suffer" as a "temptation" that moved attention away from youth taking action, "But I think it's like important to see it in terms of like, the role that you had, and like the outcome […]" (P19-G6, interview). Another explained how envisioning "poetic justice" was cathartic where action was not possible:

> *"And then I guess, I like the idea of like, some sort of. Yeah, poetic justice. Exactly that. There where, you know, like, I guess, even if it's just a dream, sometimes it's, I think it's really helpful to just like, be like, Yeah, you know what? You're gonna have a mosquito in your bedroom for the rest of your life. Yeah, I think sometimes, like imagining can be just as much of a catharsis as any actual thing." (P17-G5, group)*

5.2 Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance

This theme describes the next steps in young workers' resistance as individuals. Young workers drew on their early experiences and reflections to revive their resistance at work. The first subtheme focuses on the resources that became important for developing individual resistance at this stage. The second subtheme explores how young workers resisted for themselves, focusing on reinvigorated ways of speaking up. The third subtheme discusses how young workers came to take on resistance for others as an important part of their working lives, including through more formal roles as activists.

5.2.1 Building power: Seeking knowledge

Young workers described how, driven by anger over the injustices they had experienced, they sought out and received knowledge which could support resistance. Sometimes they sought and gained knowledge during challenging early work experiences, while reflecting on those experiences, or later following a period of recovery. Regardless of when it occurred, young workers highlighted gaining knowledge as an important step

in fighting back against poor conditions. Having reflected on their early experiences, young workers emphasised the value of employment rights education.

Young workers focused on two different types of education which were important for their and other young workers' resistance: practical and academic or theoretical education. Practical knowledge came from young-worker-focused services, from friends, and through young workers' own online research. One young worker explained how attending an employment rights workshop helped them to realise their employer was indeed breaching basic employment laws, "But for the first four months that I was working there, I didn't actually have a contract…Like, and yeah, I didn't even think to ask for one" (P11-G4, interview). Another young worker explained that this type of hands-on knowledge was "empowering" for them in a practical sense (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker argued that young workers should empower themselves by taking the search for knowledge into their own hands: "[...] young people that don't have a lot of knowledge around employment [...] it's also with us, you know, going to find the right people", so youth could then "speak up and stand up for your rights" (P7-G3, group).

Young workers were empowered in a practical sense by learning from others' knowledge and experience. One young worker described asking other people and services for support and having a "community around you" so that they could do "sense checking to see if you know, what you're going through is actually, it is unfair treatment" (P7-G3, group). Another young worker described learning from others how to "utilise" information about employment rights. As they explained, "being like, hey, you know, you can take a support person out with you like that, you know, that's a really valuable piece of advice" (P17-G5, interview).

Young workers also observed and learned from other workers, including friends, who stepped in to help with early challenges. Young workers described, with admiration, witnessing these helpers' retaking power. For one young worker, a connection stepping in and successfully helping them keep their job led to them being willing to ask for better conditions in future jobs: "we successfully won the battle. […] And yeah, I feel like I've actually with both of my employees this year, have had some good, some good convos and some, like successful negotiation" (P20-G6, group). Another young worker described a friend helping them through a process of writing a letter of complaint, and going to meetings with management, "she really stood out for me in these meetings, and she tried, and she was so confident, and just, I just loved her for that" (P5-G2, group). They further described how the scene, with their friend citing employment law, and the impact this moment had for them:

> *"… but then having my friend there go actually in the employment law, like section [number]. I don't know what she said. But it just kind of like made them all silent […] you know, when she said that, I was like, yes. It's just like, someone had, you know, someone really had my back. And, yeah, it just felt so great." (P5-G2, interview)*

Another young worker admired and learned from how their support person, a friend, took back power in a meeting with their manager:

> *"And she basically just takes minutes. And so she says, so you said this specific thing, and then couldn't, like, provide an example. In the moment, I would like you to provide an example. Just finding that power of being like, you can't just tell me that I'm doing a bad job. Yeah, yeah. Like, you can't reprimand me without a reason behind it." (P17-G5, interview)*

Sometimes these helpers were people in positions of power. One young worker spoke about a team leader who used their position to become an "advocate" for better conditions for the young worker and their coworkers, who were in insecure roles: "[…] he would always say … let's come together, let's talk about your workload and your pay. And I can be the person who goes to the boss about it" (P8-G3, interview). Another young worker had a manager who encouraged him to learn his employment agreement thoroughly: "And he said, learn every clause in your contract. I sort of didn't believe him at the time" (P18-G5, interview). One young worker described a manager who encouraged them to ask for a pay rise, after which they "started asking, kept on asking for pay rises […] I sort of gave up after they stopped giving me pay rises because they would give me little tiny ones" (P19-G6, interview). Similarly, another young worker spoke about an encounter with an interviewer, who transparently encouraged the young worker to increase their pay rate expectations:

> *"[…] she was like […] I'm just gonna tell you, as a young person who's Māori, […] don't settle for anything less than […]. She's like, that's not even a lot to them. And I was like; that's not even a lot? So that's like, my whole entire student loan" (P1-G1, interview).*

Sometimes knowledge came with a newfound sense of anger, particularly over the vulnerability created by their past lack of knowledge and the need to fill gaps in knowledge provision left by social institutions such as government, unions, families, and school. One young worker learned from coworkers that they could negotiate their pay, which brought a sense of injustice over past exploitation of their lack of knowledge: "[…] if I was not a young worker, the conversation would have gone differently" and "So that's, I guess, some exploitation of like, knowledge, imbalance" (P10-G4, interview). Another young worker described the search for accessible information as disappointing: "It's amazing how the information was not that easy to come by" (P17-G5, interview). As another young worker explained, the online information available was limited:

> *"A lot of it was just like, make sure you have a contract. And I was like, I can read a contract. That's fine. I want to know, like, my actual rights. It's like, I only just found out that you don't, like, if you have an unpaid break, don't include that in your hours. Yeah. I was just like, Why? Why does no one tell you this?." (P1-G1, interview)*

Another young worker described individual education as necessary but not sufficient to create systemic change in work conditions. As they explained, sometimes having employment rights education simply meant knowingly entering exploitative situations:

> *"… I kind of knew that I was going to be dodgy when I signed up for it. But it was just the best thing that I had; the best option I had at the time. […] there's definitely limits to education, like if you know about how you're gonna get messed around. But then it's the best option that you have, like, then you're still going to get messed around." (P19-G6, interview)*

Driven by challenges to their own early resistance, young workers also began to actively equip others around them with new knowledge and support services. Their goal was to ensure that others could enforce their employment rights. As one explained about another young worker, "he was like, I don't like this. I'm gonna learn everything that I can about it so that I know what my rights are" (P17-G5, interview). Another young worker described how, after quitting, they now share information about support services with others (P1-G1, interview). Their intent was to encourage others not to back down from taking action, as they felt they had done:

> *"And I've been like, you should get help. And like, if you get a bit too much about it, like, don't, try not to just like, let it go. Because I wish someone was there to kind of keep telling me to go through the process. (P1-G1, interview)*

Another young worker explained that they generate creative works that helped them to process their experiences, and could enable other young workers to recognise patterns of unfair treatment at work:

> *"I just ended up like finding that as a result where I process everything that has happened, and break it down and articulate it so that I tell other people so that they know what's happening, and they can recognise what's happening to them." (P21-G6, group)*

Triptych 10: Building power through knowledge



(P20-G6, collage 3)



(P7-G3, collage 3)



(P21-G6, collage 3)

Note. The triptych above shows how young workers empower themselves and others by seeking and sharing knowledge.

A second key type of knowledge, theoretical, was generally gained through university, or through university educated social circles. One young worker described this type of knowledge as enabling young workers' confidence and understanding of the value of their own labour: "kind of makes me realise whatever I'm asking for is like, it's really nothing, was really quite small compared to what they were gaining from me working for them" (P20-G6, interview). Knowing their value could give young workers leverage to push for their rights. Another young worker concluded that "workers are literally, like the bedrock of the economy", and emphasised that everyone entering the workforce should have a "clear understanding of what their rights are" (P8-G3, interview).

Young workers suggested that improving theoretical and practical knowledge on a wider scale could support larger-scale, informal resistance by raising young workers' expectations. One young worker argued that once they're educated, workers can decide "[…] they've had enough […] I was like, I've had enough, Fuck this. I don't need to because also, like, after knowing the rights that I have as a person, why shouldn't I, you know" (P21-G6, interview). Another young person explained how widespread employment rights education would enable workers to regain power: "[...] we've talked about, like, knowing your rights, and knowing your expectations, like the power, knowing how much money to ask for, for a job, or, you know, like, all of those things come from education" (P17-G5, interview).

5.2.2 Shouting from the rooftops: New avenues for speaking up

After enduring and recovering from challenging early work experiences, and gaining new knowledge, young workers began anew to speak up for themselves at work. Early experiences and resistance shaped their later desire and ability to speak up individually. One young worker described how speaking up for them was driven by an awareness of their rights and needing to right injustices: "it's important to speak up, but when there are injustices, it's important to speak up and stand up for your rights and just be aware of kind of, like, what you can do […]" (P7-G3, group). Another participant similarly emphasised that standing up for yourself was about righting wrongs: "Standing up, speaking up, and being prepared to fight for what is right, or what you're entitled to" (P3-G1, group).

Other young workers focused on speaking up as a response to an imbalance of control and to counter bad managerial behaviour. One participant spoke with anger about employers' excessive control over their life, "[…] think about all the money they're making off my labour. And really, like the amount of control they have over my life, and it just really, like puts it into perspective" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker recalled their previous negative experiences with a manager, as a driver to not accept bad behaviour:

> *"I remember thinking my head like, oh my gosh, she's just like that manager that I had at my old workplace. And so that sort of gave me that confidence to just say, like, No, you're making me feel uncomfortable […], and I was like, oh, do this big breath. I was so terrified to like, say that to her. But yeah, I'm glad I did it." (P5-G2, group)*

Once young workers found their voice, they kept using it; speaking up was usually not a one-off event. One young worker explained, "[…] I used to just not say anything, I didn't want to rock the boat. And now I'm very much like […] I feel empowered enough to engage with unfair behaviour when I feel like it's towards me" (P8-G3, group). However, for some, speaking up was a lonely endeavour: "I'm the only one who complains like the most vocally" (P21-G6, group). While speaking up became a dominant option for resistance, quitting remained a final option in young workers' toolbox: "And then if that doesn't work, you can always leave" (P17-G5, group). Another young worker explained how their tools for responding expanded from "flying away" to include "speaking up":

> *"So yeah, speaking up and providing feedback is something that I believe I am capable of now, even though before it was full-on fly away. But flying away is also good; sometimes you just have to, because you know that company I worked for that was very toxic was there were a small company, they didn't even have an HR structure or anything that was just there was no way that we're gonna change." (P5-G2, group)*

Some young workers shared that it took time to speak up with confidence: "I feel like my own voice for injustices towards me is loud. Now, it took a while to get there […]" (P8-G3, group). This young worker recognised the value of their own work as essential: the young worker was then "able to step into my confidence and utilise a bit more bargaining power than I would have ever felt before" (P8-G3, group). Another young worker explained that speaking up required them to be 'staunch': "And I've felt like I've had to, yeah, like, be quite staunch and standing up for myself" (P20-G6, interview).

Triptych 11: Individuals finding confidence and power in speaking out



(P6-G2, collage 1)



(P8-G3, collage 3)



(P17-G5, collage 3)

Note. The triptych includes representations of young workers finding greater confidence to speak up for change in their workplaces later in their working lives. Walking away or quitting remained an option if change could not be made at work.

A few young workers also described socio-cultural influences that supported their strength and willingness to speak up proudly. Notable New Zealanders Chloe Swarbrick and Dr Hinemoa Elder (who featured prominently in some magazines used) were held up by a few young workers as embodying confidence and

power. For example, one young worker described the power that these figures held as inspirational to them when they were standing up for themselves at work: “Hinemoa Elder, just immense power”, and “Chloe Swarbrick she has an amazing knowledge of the law […] knowing the letter of the law the letter of your contract […] a lot of managers will just back right the fuck down” (P18-G5, group). Another young worker, who was engaged in activist spaces for young workers, combined the traditional union iconography of a raised fist and overlaid it with Dr Hinemoa Elder’s arm. They explained that their adaptation represented “being able to express my indigeneity in the work that I do”, strengthening their activism (P3-G1, group).

Some young workers talked about using organisational structures and hierarchies to improve their work conditions. One young worker noted that connecting with higher-level management often brought power: “[…] they see that you're getting along well with the boss's boss's boss. I've heard it so many times, all of a sudden you get treated better?” (P18-G5, group). Similarly, another young worker described how they had “written many, many emails about workplace things. And they often escalate to the point of I've cc'd so and so into this email, that kind of level, which has actually been quite effective […] (P15-G4, group). One young worker shared how they organised a meeting with a manager and were blindsided by a senior leader being invited to the meeting and subsequently downplaying the problem:

> *“[…] I got so irritated by the fact that we weren't paid properly. At one point, I was like, You know what, I'm just gonna organize a meeting with like, the manager of [organisational group]. […] And then she invites along, like, I'm pretty sure he was [senior leader]. And I'm like, now I feel like I'm friggin’ ambushed and because I didn't know he was coming. And talk didn't really go anywhere. And at one point, he said something, [remark about company’s discretionary spending], and I was like, I just looked at him because I was like, I don't know if that was meant to be a joke, but it's not frickin funny.” (P13-G4, interview)*

Two young workers tried to use annual performance reviews to push for pay rises but found their organisations had no formal process for this (P17-G5, interview; P7-G3, interview). As one of these young workers explained, they learned through this experience that the lack of process for performance and salary review was a signal from the organisation that no pay rises would be given: “It was no point in seeking a pay rise, because I wasn't going to get it” (P7-G3, interview). In other words, the absence of formal organisation in these workplaces made it difficult to push for improved conditions. Another young worker talked about their attempts to push for “freedom” in their traditional workplace, where a high level of control was exerted over employees’ tasks and location:

> *“And the girl from revolution row, this is what I feel like, at the moment with changing, trying to get them. I'm trying to change my working policy. I'm also trying to get them to*

> *change their working policy for all people, because it doesn't matter whether you're disabled or not." (P6-G2, group)*

Young workers also admired the "playground" tactics used by younger workers in the workplace, in response to being infantilised by managers (P18-G5, interview; P16-G5, interview). One young worker shared that the younger generation was more "vocal" and willing to break the rules to fight back, "16-year-olds tell my [workplace] manager like fuck off to his face […] becoming kind of ruthless, because they're not willing to take shit" (P16-G5, interview). Younger youth may not have experienced the same socialisation to keep their heads down and work hard. As one young worker described, they saw lack of shame as central to the sort of resistance that younger youth engaged in:

> *"You can scream at a Gen Z all day, but they're not going to look up from their phone. And that's a great defence. Chloe is famous for her 'Okay, Boomer'. Like we're taught, you know, when someone's trying to rip you down and, and they're using playground tactics and you just use them back. Because they use it to drag you down to their level. […] So we find the older generation at work just avoid this younger generation entirely, or they treat them like kids. And then, you know, the younger generation, they just lap up the good side of that, if you know what I mean. […] There's no shame. It's great. Yes, it's fixing itself." (P18-G5, interview)*

However, one young worker highlighted how younger workers' approaches to resistance may contribute to negative stereotypes about youth. For example, they discussed the weaponising of sick leave by young workers:

> *"Most just go against the system quite hard, you know, they take sick days constantly. […] And so I think that perpetuates that issue, because the stereotype comes in. So I think it's quite hard when they're left to make the decision on how to deal with it, when, in all actuality, a lot of us are just kids who have just come out of high school, you know, when we're not particularly great at making big life-changing decisions to better things, you know. You try to revert back to what's easy. And, you know, go back to the high school sort of mentality of Oh, we'll just take the piss, you know, the teacher's out to get us." (P4-G2, interview)*

Other young workers sought to effect change by choosing workplaces and careers that would increase their position and power. One young worker noted that after working in the retail industry post-secondary school, they decided on a career that would give them more decision-making power:

> *"And then I went back and went back to my last one and said, Well, if I do go to [industry], what will that mean? Well, I still get pushed around the buttons. So that's when I decided I should then […] go into a leadership role. Because that means I do get to have a say, and I do get to have that and whatnot." (P4-G2, group)*

Young workers who were union members also used unions to support speaking up at work, contacting them for help on an individual basis. As one young worker described, "[…] when they responded, and I didn't appreciate the response, I went immediately to the union" (P3-G1, interview). Other young workers highlighted the emotional support provided by union representatives: "I rang him up, and I just sobbed" (P6-G2, group), and "[…] it was like a really caring kind of supportive" (P18-G5, interview). Similarly, one young worker explained that unions help individuals because they offer specialised experience and knowledge: "one of the most important things about it is having people who understand your specific needs and even having like, the skills around the law […]" (P17-G5, interview). For other young workers, the lack of union presence and support contributed to the need to raise issues individually and fight for their own rights. As one young worker explained, "[…] only way to sort it is on an individual basis, you know, gathering the courage to speak to the manager […] I can't say I've in unions helping out on one or two occasions? I've seen anything." (P4-G2, interview).

5.2.3 A new purpose: Resisting for others

After experiencing unfair treatment and gaining knowledge, some young workers resisted as individuals *for* others. Indeed, for some of these young workers, resistance for others became a central purpose or project in their working lives. This was particularly evident among young workers who took on formalised roles as advocates and activists, primarily in unions or adjacent organisations, and who undertook other activist projects. For example, one young worker who was a member of an activist group explained her desire to be an activist, and how this was sparked by critical perspectives learned in tertiary education: "a lot more like critical and able to like, wanting to be an activist and wanting to do things and learning to speak up" (P13-G4, group). Their collage showed how their education watered the seeds of a desire to engage in activism:

> *"And then comments like eyes on the prize and learning to speak about issues as well. I've always been the sort of person that's like, this isn't right, and something needs to happen. But kind of, through studying social sciences become a lot more like critical and able to like, wanting to be an activist and wanting to do things and learning to speak up about it." (P13-G4, group)*

Some of these young workers emphasised the role their negative workplace experiences played in pushing them to seek positions where they could drive change. One young worker, who held a paid role supporting young workers, spoke both about their education and negative workplace experiences: "I had an interest in

kind of worker organising that came from [studying]" and "[…] through people I was hanging out with and talking to in my own time […] as well as having all of these negative experiences in the roles that I had" (P19-G6, interview). One young worker explained that they were driven by having "been in many different types of work" and from "conversations with friends" who had similar experiences, to initiate a youth-focused project: "I'm really passionate about, as well, young workers" (P8-G3, group). One young worker who later took on a union leadership role started their activism journey a few years prior as a teenager, when they naturally and informally organised their coworkers when faced with a challenging boss. They later joined the union in their next workplace. They explained how they came to be heavily involved in their union, snowballing from being unsure about joining, to reaching out for help and then active involvement:

> *"And I was the only one in that group who actually joined the Union. Because I was a bit hesitant about, like, the person from HR said, like, yeah, I can't really tell you whether or not you should join a union, and like, I don't know, you should think on it. I was like, okay, I think I'm gonna join. Because this sounds like I can always leave; you can always leave things; it's fine. […] So I contacted my organiser and said, like, I didn't know; I just, like, Googled my union and decided to contact him. And it turned out he was the right person to talk to […] And then next thing I know, I kept doing things, and I met more people from the union. At the time I was sort of like the only person in the Union at my [workplace]. And yeah, and then just kept doing things, got more and more active." (P16-G5, group)*

Beyond those who took on formalised roles, young workers with the power to speak up often took on the role of developing others' ability to resist. One young worker observed that other workers struggled to say no (P21-G6, interview). In response, they tried to build their colleagues' capacity to resist by raising their awareness of the possibilities: "I'm always talking shit at [workplace], I'm like, you know you can do this, you can do that, and they're like, oh god yes." (P21-G6, interview). However, this open resistance came at a cost: "that's why they don't roster me for many shifts, I'm turning their staff away from them" (P21-G6, interview). Another young worker described resisting for others as being like a firefighter, unconditionally ready to support and defend when others encountered difficult experiences (P17-G5, interview). This was about ensuring others felt "the power of not being alone in a situation" (P17-G5, interview). The young worker explained:

> *"[…] for me, it's funny, because I'm like, I don't really care about the people that I work with, on a personal level, really, at all the people that I'm friends with, but then like, if somebody came to me at work, and was like, I'm being taken advantage of, I'd be like, I am on your side. What do you need?" (P17-G5, interview)*

While some young workers were not yet willing or able to speak up for themselves, they still found an outlet in pushing for change on behalf of others. Resistance for others was more easily morally justified and carried

less personal risk compared with resistance for self. Sometimes, young workers also perceived the challenges they faced as more subtle than those faced by other groups. As one young worker described, while their parents were faced with more blatant exploitation such as not being given sick leave, “the stuff that I'm faced is often quite trivial, trivial, but kind of, you know, a lot more kind of like the unconscious bias stuff” (P7-G3, interview). They explained that it was also harder to fight for themselves:

> *I'm like, actually, this is this is important to fight for because I get frustrated when I see my parents are going through this. But in a way, sometimes it's like, when it's happening to yourself, it's kind of almost harder to stand up and say something in a way too. (P7-G3, interview)*

Young workers described what they valued in their activist roles, including being a voice and a positive force for change in other young workers' lives and having a sense of hope. One young worker explained that they found satisfaction through a role where they supported younger people’s activism, “the most meaningful part of my job is represented by these [youth]” (P8-G3, group), emphasising one of the rewards of the role was that they “love it and they value it”. Another young worker who also worked with youth explained it as “an opportunity to hopefully intervene in what's going on for young people so that they don't have to go through bad experiences” (P19-G6, interview). One young worker explained that the value they found in taking on representative roles was the opportunity to “speak it out loud”; to voice young workers’ concerns to those with power (P2-G1, group). Another young worker used the celebratory image of fireworks to represent feeling driven by the hopefulness engendered in working in the labour movement, “I got these fireworks here because this is how I feel working in like an advocacy space. It just feels really nice, hopeful and all that […]” (P11-G4, group). The same young worker started a workplace group, which will be described later in this chapter, and described the sense of “magic” in seeing her ideas for change engage people: “to have something in my head suddenly out there in the world and moving people I was like, what magic is this?” (P11-G4, group).

Young workers sometimes spoke about the toll that their resistance for others took on their health and wellbeing. As one young worker explained, they needed to focus on taking care of themselves: “And then I've also got, like, take it easy. So this is just like looking after yourself. Like, especially in like activist spaces” (P11-G4, group). The young worker depicted the cognitive load of supporting others by using an image of a person sleeping, “because I was tired all the time. So she like, dealing with like advocacy stuff […], it can get tiring, and taking in people's negative experiences […]” (P11-G4, group). Another young worker explained that trying to create change among young workers came with a sense of carrying a mental weight alone:

> *“I guess, just having that awareness is taxing. It's like, it's not recognised in my space […] they [younger people] recognise it, and they know because they're not getting it elsewhere. And I can see it because I didn't get it anywhere.” (P21-G6, interview)*

Similarly, another young worker described how supporting the needs of other youth involved accepting exploitation in terms of working unpaid: “and so that cognitive labour is still being put on me of trying for people. And it's, I saw it as a very valuable job for [early career people] coming, ushering them in. I never had that [...]” (P8-G3, interview).

Both self-care and carrying anger were tools that young activists used to sustain their resistance. One young worker described the importance of holding on to some anger to fuel action, “leaning into the pain” and “keeping the red fire behind your eyes” so that “you have a bit of a mission” (P16-G5, group). Young workers were also better mentally prepared to fight back by working toward regaining their well-being. Young workers described the importance of practicing self-care, so that they could fight for themselves and others. As one young worker explained, self-care was important both for being in “activist spaces” and for protecting oneself from negative experiences: “[…] where you were like so disrespected, just making sure that you like, do self-care and all of that” (P11-G4, group). As another young worker explained, taking care of themselves enables young workers to “continue advocating” for their rights:

> *“But I've kind of focused a lot around, you know, kind of, like we talked about, a lot of young people don't have the skills in order to kind of deal with these injustices and these emotions and stuff like that. So kind of just a lot of stuff about mindset and self-care. So there's a lot of stuff about, you know, personal agency, connecting and belonging, etc., etc. Also, being, staying active as well, keeping yourself, giving yourself back to, feeding yourself. So you can actually continue advocating for yourself and fighting for yourself.” (P7-G3, group)*

Triptych 12: The experience of being an advocate or activist



(P13-G4, collage 3)



(P8-G3, collage 1)



(P11-G4, collage 1)

Note. This triptych shows the hope young workers feel as activists in spaces where they can transform other young workers’ lives, with a prize in sight and fireworks celebration in store.

5.3 Coming together to respond collectively

This third theme shows how young workers responded and resisted collectively. The first subtheme focuses on mutual support, where young workers drew together to support one another through challenging experiences and foster individual resistance to those challenges. This subtheme also describes the research site as a place young workers used for mutual support. The second subtheme describes the experiences of young workers involved in grassroots organisations created by and for young workers.

Some young workers engaged in collective resistance without ever being individual resisters. Collective responses were therefore an important oasis for those willing to support others, without a willingness or desire to resist individually. Collective responses and resistance became a place where prior resistance experience varied.

5.3.1 A safe haven: Offering mutual support

Equipped with knowledge and power to speak up, finding mutual support was important for sustaining young workers' resistance. Young workers found informal communities of people supporting one another in their workplaces. This included having conversations to share experiences and offering a sympathetic ear to support each other's wellbeing. As one young worker explained about their coworkers, "there's a lot of solidarity with the staff of this similar age group" (P21-G6, group). Another young worker explained that mutual support entailed "conversations with friends […] you've got your workplace with other people around the same age as you who get the same issues" (P6-G2, group).

Young workers highlighted the importance of mutual support at work for finding out about shared issues and differential treatment. As one explained, "it's always good to have like conversations around like pay and conditions, and just checking in with your coworkers" (P11-G4, group), and another described ", So co-workers. You know, I found solidarity […] we're all treated similarly" (P3-G1, interview). Another young worker explained that this helped them find sympathetic managers: "there's a lot of conversations within just trying to say, you know, which managers should you talk to? What manager reacts to what better" (P4-G2, interview).

Mutual support included spreading the word among young workers about bad employers and employment practices. These warnings were intended to both shame employers and encourage other youth not to accept poor employment practices. One young worker explained the importance of speaking out, "I think what young people can do is to speak out about their experiences […] without us talking about our experiences, no one's gonna know about it. So that's probably one way of starting" (P7-G3, interview). Another young worker explained how they sought justice by sharing the stories and names of bad past employers, "Oh I love naming and shaming" (P1-G1, interview). Two other young workers described making creative works to criticise their employers (P9-G3, P21-G6), though one explained they could not publish this, "I wanted […] to publish them. But […] if I'm criticising [employer] while still being employed here…" (P21-G6).

Young workers explained the value these conversations held in fostering change. As one young worker explained, it meant that you "know that you're on the same page" in experiencing issues at work (P13-G4, group). This meant that they would not feel alone in their experiences, and could learn from how others responded, "when they go through, you know, something oppressive, they know that this is a common experience and these ways to, you know, respond to it as well" (P7-G3, interview). One young worker described creating artwork both as a therapeutic way to work through their experiences, and as a form of conversation – to raise awareness, "[…] break it down and articulate it so that I tell other people so that they know what's happening, and they can recognize what's happening to them" (P21-G6, group). Another young worker used the word "kōrero" several times on their collage, to highlight how speaking with others helped to sustain the sense of needing to resist:

> *"[…] one of the magazines had the word korero through it 100 times. So I got a hold on that. Because I'm, like, talking about, like, keeping the conversation going is really important. Not like, this thing happened. And it was really shitty. And then you just move on. But like, this thing happened, and it's really shitty, and okay, so what can we do about it? How can we keep the conversation going? And how can we make sure it doesn't happen to other people? And you know, like, what do we do to make sure it doesn't happen again? What do I do to not forget that this has happened?" (P17-G5, group)*

For some young workers, talking with others was a way to get a sounding board and find solutions before and while they stood up for themselves. For example, this helped them decide to stand up for themselves: "like, going for a walk and talking about it with safe people and then taking a stand" (P17-G5, group). For one young worker, they explained they were fortunate to start new jobs with others, creating a bond that enabled them to navigate difficulties together, "whenever I joined a workplace, I joined with other new people, sort of two people completely in the dark, trying to figure out sort of where they are" (P4-G2, group). Two young workers spoke about the importance of solidarity for overcoming "gaslighting" so that people understood that their experiences and needs were valid, and they weren't "crazy" or "unreasonable" (P17-G5, group; P6-G2, group). As one of the young workers explained, solidarity helped to overcome gaslighting that they experienced while standing up for better work conditions:

> *"So I've got a school of fish. And I've got a group of people gathered around some garbage, because all of us are gathered around the workplace garbage. And we all share the garbage. That's sort of what jumped out at me. It sort of made me think of how often, when we're sort of hanging out together, having cups of tea, we talk about me and other people in our age group issues that we're having, and we support each other. And I feel like I'm not sure what it is about other people that are in the same age group, but you can trust them not to go and knock on you. […] there is a lot of gaslighting, and often it's*

> *talking to other people who are the same as you've been like, Am I crazy? Am I crazy? Or is this not fair? Like, am I being unreasonable? […] And they're just like, No." (P6-G2, group)*

Expressing solidarity did not necessarily go hand in hand with taking action: "[…] in terms of like calling it out in the workplace and all that kind of stuff, I think I'll probably need to build a bit more experience in order to do that" (P7-G3, interview). As another young worker noted, there was a tendency among youth to "talk" without acting: "I think a lot of people do this just like talking, talking about it to their friends and complaining about it […]" (P19-G6, group). Similarly, another young worker explained that amongst their work colleagues, where they found solidarity, the purpose of this was releasing emotions rather than taking action:

> *"And I find that if there is unfair treatment happening to my close colleagues, it's almost like we team up, we huddle up, really just to vent. That's why I had the volcano; it's not that we actually do anything to take action. But what we do to help release, some of that is just like venting to one another." (P8-G3, group)*

Some young workers used imagery and words about nature to represent mutual support in their collages. These images showed young workers finding and offering a sense of belonging and humanity in response to unnatural and inhumane workplace cultures and practices. One young worker explained mutual support as being like birds in a flock, "Return of the last birds, which is the same sort of thing, which is sort of bringing people into the fold and supporting them" (P6-G2, group). Similarly, another young worker used the imagery of "the hands and the soil" to represent "offering support where you can" (P3-G1, group). Another young worker used the image of "a little park bench with people talking" to represent how they and their coworkers coped together at work (P15-G4, group). This included having conversations and connecting with others, while the park bench was also used to represent looking after their wellbeing by resting: "we come into a discussion. And another thing is finding similar people, or just chilling out, that kind of thing, solidarity, but also relaxation" (P15-G4, group).

For young workers, talking with others and listening was largely about providing comfort. One young worker explained that fighting for others' rights required more than offering solutions; it meant providing emotional support, "[…] we try to navigate it, and find the solutions. And that is not enough. And then people need to be cared. So, we also empathise […]" (P2-G1, group). For some young workers, humour was also an important, shared reprieve, "we just laugh" (P6-G2, group). There was also emotional relief in finding that these negative experiences were "common", which went some way toward reducing the "personal attack" element (P7-G3, interview). Another young worker explained that finding humour dispelled the pressure to normalise difficult workplace situations, explaining "we all you know, laugh about it […] where you're like, somebody just said this outrageous thing to me. And everybody seems to be acting like it's normal" (P17-G5, interview).

Even when conversations did not lead to further concrete action, young workers explained why they still mattered. One young worker said that, at times, having these conversations was the only action available: “kind of doing as much as I can” (P13-G4, group). They noted that this could be mistakenly viewed as failing to resist: “It's kind of hard for people to imagine that people having conversations is also doing something” (P13-G4, interview). Similarly, another young worker highlighted that sharing experiences was a collective responsibility for youth, “what young people can do is to speak out about their experiences […] without us talking about our experiences, no one's gonna know about it” (P7-G3, interview).

Triptych 13: Giving and receiving support



(P17-G5, collage 3) (P3-G1, collage 3) (P4-G2, collage 2)

Note. This triptych shows young workers’ experiences of providing mutual support in response to workplace issues. Young workers talk about their experiences with each other, offer support, and navigate issues together.

Mutual support was also important in the face of threats to solidarity, such as workplace individualism. One young worker vividly described the individualising effect of their insecurity, which resulted in paralysing fear for their own job: “I'm afraid to engage when I can see injustice is happening to others” (P8-G3, group). The young worker observed people in their workplace, and in the workforce more broadly, intentionally disassociating from other workers' struggles. This was a type of bystander effect: “When a collective voice would be so much more powerful. But […] There is a disassociation from other’s experiences, or disconnection. Purposefully, you know […]” (P8-G3, group). One young worker described a cycle where, in the face of a loss of sense of community, people’s lives revolved around work, a further individualising phenomenon: “[…] there's something that's keeping us apart from each other, and then and then so work, I guess has inserted itself into the thing that completes you as a person” (P9-G3, interview). Another young worker presented the idea of “working-class torment” as an outcome of being aware of the possibility of action, but being unable to work together to resist:

> *“So like, it's really hard to find avenues to like assert yourself whenever you want, when there's like, such low levels of solidarity, and whatnot, and then it's like, yeah, so that's been so that's why we're like in pure working-class torment or something. Where it's like, I guess from the idea of like, thinking about the working class and thinking about like solidarity, but then […] being tormented by the idea of solidarity because it's not being actualised.” (P19-G6, group)*

For some young workers, taking part in the research was a way to speak up by spreading the word. Young workers spoke about taking part in the research as a potential pathway for change. This was similar to workplace conversations with co-workers, but it also brought young workers' attention to the wider spread of these issues, with experiences shared in groups across locations and job types. As one young worker explained, “was quite good to sort of visualise and think about the ideas that hadn't really been thought about before. And then realize that, you know, everyone else has had sort of the same experiences as well” (P4-G2, group). Another young worker in the same group responded, “And I really enjoyed listening to [P6-G2] and [P4-G2] your ideas? Yeah, sort of just yeah. Made me feel like it's like a collective feeling. Being a young person in the workplace.” (P5-G2, group). Young workers explained how sharing their experiences through the research was important for raising awareness of young workers’ experiences, “And I guess, for me, like, putting my hand up to be part of the research is, there's different ways to speak out about things, right” (P7-G3, interview). Another young worker explained their motivation for taking part in the research, “if there's an opportunity to kind of get that out there to more people, then I'm gonna take it up” (P13-G4, interview). Another described, “You are really on a cool, like, pathway to research and the next couple of years. Yeah. And stuff like that comes to light, and I hope it changes stuff” (P18-G5, interview). Another young worker explained that they chose to take part in the research because it could bring change through improving public and government awareness:

> *“[…] I have had terrible experiences in the past for being a young worker. And if this research can sort of bring that to light a little bit more, then perhaps it's going to be that easier for things to change, like whether it's in the workplace, or whether it's in our policies through government, you know, whatever, whatever level that you can think of that would make it a bit better in terms of the experience of young workers. I guess that's what motivated me to take part. I feel as though, yeah, something needs to be done. And things like this, when you know that there's injustice, or just, you know, any sort of movement has always just been backed up by research and people speaking up, you know, you're not going to get anywhere if no one knows about it. Like I'm still kind of, I know, it's probably been on the news before, but even with the way that apprentices are treated, I don't know why that's not talked about more and on the news. […] In short, I want people to be more aware of the experiences of young workers, and hopefully from that, something is done about it.” (P5-G2, interview)*

5.3.2 Growing from the grassroots: Collectivising young workers

This section shares findings on young workers’ grassroots organising. One such organisation was a formal, workplace-specific group, and the other was an advocacy organisation described as being developed by and for young workers.

The workplace group findings came from a group of young workers who chose to take part in the research together. The group leader decided to create a formal group for insecure workers in their workplace, after experiencing their own struggle to resolve problems through meetings with managers. The group shared a desire to enforce their employment rights, and one of their key plans at the time of the research was to institute a collective agreement covering their work. As one group member explained, “There's another little bit of text that says hungry for rights, which I think is how most people here feel” (P15-G4, group). Another young worker used the words “no more silence” and “time for a comeback” on their collage to describe how joining the group meant being willing to speak out (P13-G4, group). They would no longer accommodate the situations they faced at work.

Negative workplace experiences were not necessary as a precursor to joining; rather, for some, believing in the cause and seeking belonging seemed more important. One young worker explained that they join groups when they care about the cause, and this group was no different (P10-G4, group). Another member shared that they had joined the group even though “I'd say, overall, my experience has been more positive than negative” (P14-G4, group). As one of these young workers explained, this was about joining a collective movement which offered some hope for change in work conditions:

> *“And I was like, Ah, I'm a [occupation]. And actually, these are similar issues that she's put on the poster that I kind of face. And actually, no, you're right, those are real shitty. And so it kind of like gave me this like, Eureka moment of Jesus Christ has been right there this whole time. That's something I could like, waste my time with and probably get nowhere but hope to get something.” (P10-G4, interview)*

While continuing to work in their challenging environment, being part of the group meant that these young workers had the opportunity to change things “from within” (P13-G4, group). As one member explained, the group created a ‘third place’ where they could work from, “A third place as in like, I'm in a crap place, I'm in a good place, and this is us in the third place trying to make the crap place a little bit better” (P13-G4, group). This member also had a message for the group which they taped on their collage, which referred to the group as working ‘in the shallows’:

> *“[…] in praise of small wins so I thought that was good to put on there for us to keep in mind: if we get a small win it's a good thing. A lot of things like what we do in the shallows like things behind the scenes […].” (P13-G4, group)*

The group also provided opportunities for friendship and belonging. As one member explained, there was a sense of providing a space to be vulnerable as members shared personal experiences to help each other, “And then to help people in these difficult situations, you kind of have to open up, and so I've got piece of my heart here” (P11-G4, group). Another young worker explained that they found belonging in “Being a part

of something with like-minded people in a way" (P14-G4, interview). The group reduced members' previous sense of isolation when experiencing and responding to workplace problems:

> *"So I found this picture of a boat kind of stranded on the ocean that I chucked up in the corner as to how I was before I joined [grassroots workplace collective]. […] So I was like this in the shallows or this boat kind of outfit, it's doing its own thing, kind of struggling. And in this is us, like chatting about issues and working together. And then I found this, this picture of people holding hands, which I thought kind of fitted with that." (P13-G4, group)*

Triptych 14: Forming a grassroots group, planning and taking action together



(P13-G4, collage 3)



(P11-G3, collage 3)



(P15-G4, collage 3)

Note. The triptych above shows members' experiences of the group: leading the group, the actions they were able to take together and shared wins, and the sense of having built a third, safe collective space for themselves.

As group members worked in generally temporary roles, some group members explained that taking part in the group came with the understanding that their aims were, in a sense, about laying the groundwork for future workers. As they explained, they were motivated by "bettering the future people to come after you" (P10-G4, interview), and "even if I can't make the system good for myself, I want to make it good for people who come after me" (P13-G4, interview). One of these young workers acknowledged that the group's slow progress could be frustrating, but this was acceptable given their intergenerational aim:

> *"I don't think there's been any tangible results […], we made steps, which is good. And hopefully, we'll get, you know, a collective agreement. And then, probably long past when we're still working here. There'll be [workers in our roles] who are bitching about how their collective sucks, and they need a new one or something. But that's like, that's progress." (P10-G4, interview)*

The group also tried to raise their members' awareness about unions as a potential avenue for change. The group affiliated with their workplace union, encouraged membership, and stayed active within it. One young worker explained that the affiliation could lead to mutual benefits, with the group supporting union activities and the union supporting the group's aims: "to support them in the hope that they will also support us" (P13-G4, interview). Another young worker explained the educational benefits: "[…] [group] and the [union] are sort of, like, my main and so far, introductory channels into, like, union culture, and, you know, employment rights and advocacy" (P14-G4, interview). Union affiliation did not always bring opportunities for voice for the group, "I was like, I don't want to put some other points across that are kind of irrelevant but might not matter to you guys. But it didn't really feel like we had an opportunity to do so." (P13-G4, interview). Indeed, it was suggested that for some union officials and representatives, having active young members simply ticked a box for the union (P13-G4, interview).

The group maintained independence as an organisation, and were wary of the union's power, capacity, and willingness to support them. For instance, union activity at times delayed the group's planned activities which the union had intended to support. One member explained that the group's interests were not a priority for the union in terms of investing time and resources: "[…] But the union has just, we're on the bottom of their priority list […]" (P11-G4, interview). Some members gave the union the benefit of the doubt, explaining that "Obviously, there can't be any promises. So, they're trying their best" (P12-G4, interview). As one young worker described, the union was not yet quite a life raft: "And well I guess the [union], but we'll wait till they make some changes for us" (P13-G4, group). Another young worker explained that they desired greater reciprocity from the union: "our rights are important as well, which they sort of don't see […] Well, can you do something for me to like, if I'm gonna help you out?" (P13-G4, interview). Another young worker likened this experience to how they were treated by their employer:

> *"it's stupid, because like, you get [insecure workers] and you want them to sort of help out the [union] […] But you don't get anything out of it. And what that is always like, kind of ironic to me, is because that's the same reason we joined to try not to be mismanaged by the employers and the team, you know, so I have a mixed opinion." (P10-G4, interview)*

Conversations were, however, ongoing about whether to strengthen their relationship with the union. As one member explained, these debates revolved around autonomy and the level of resourcing the union would offer, "And we are still struggling to see the benefit of having to essentially give up our autonomy to a

certain extent." (P11-G4, interview). Another young worker described the tension around the group being linked to a union, calling the relationship "parasitic" (P10-G4, interview).

Beyond the workplace-specific group discussed above, several participants had current or prior affiliations or interactions with an advocacy organisation that was driven by, and for, young people. Young workers highlighted the organisation's value in empowering them by raising awareness of illegal practices and showing youth how to respond to workplace problems. One young worker explained the importance of the organisation in raising awareness as a preventative approach, "it's like an opportunity to hopefully intervene in what's going on for young people so that they don't have to go through bad experiences […]" (P19-G6, interview). This young worker also explained that the service filled gaps in union capacity to organise precarious young workers:

> *"[…] but then for all those other jobs, they're all like precarious work, where there is no union; unions won't touch that stuff. The barriers to organising are really high. And so these, for these people working in these industries, they sort of get left behind. So it's awesome that [service] exists, I guess to support people in areas like that." (P19-G6, interview)*

Young workers emphasised the organisation's empowerment approach: walking alongside youth while also empowering them to take action for themselves. For example, one young worker received advice on their rights and, following this, sought a meeting with their employer, where the young worker "stood my ground" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker shared that the service backs up young workers by emailing employers with a warning. The young worker spoke about how they approached a situation using the organisation's advice, and the employer's response:

> *"[…]And they [service] said, [P11-G4 name], do not touch this with a 10-foot pole. […] I went back to them [employer] and said, Hey, look, I've gotten advice. And they say that this, this is the stuff that really should be changed. And I was like, Look, I'm really happy to accept this job if these changes are made. And that was really huge for me. Yeah, but unfortunately, they said, we're not doing that." (P11-G4, interview)*

Another young worker explained that the organisation enabled young workers to raise problems at work by making the legal process more accessible, financially and in terms of the knowledge required: "[…] because I'm not going to pay hundreds of dollars to potentially win or lose a case. And like, I don't even know, like, I do know, but like, generally, I don't even know what like the process is" (P1-G1, interview). They spoke about referring other young workers to the service, and the positive outcomes this led to:

> *"I've definitely referred a lot of people to [service], even if it's just like a CV […] Seemed like a lot of people will kind of, like I got people messaging me on Instagram being like, oh,*

like, I've found this like really helpful. And they called me, and now we're gonna go through mediation." (P1-G1, interview)

5.4 Sharing visions for the future

The previous themes in this chapter presented the ways that young workers resist, and how they come to resist in these ways. In sharing how young workers resist, the research aimed to empower other young workers to respond to the disadvantages they face in work and employment. Some young workers described the research as an act of resistance: a way to spread the word about young workers' experiences. This final theme represents a final effort in the findings to contribute to, and honour young workers' use of the research for resistance, by assembling their visions for the future.

Each young worker drew on their personal and professional background to share how they foresaw changing patterns of disadvantage for youth. The first subtheme explores how youth seek to gain power by shifting workplace and employment cultures, including nurturing new expectations in younger youth. The second subtheme shares how young workers reimagine unions to be by and for youth. The third subtheme brings together young workers' calls for those with political and economic power to improve young people's work conditions.

5.4.1 Youth taking power: Intergenerational support

Young workers spoke about how they were working to contribute to wider change by, and for, young workers. One way to do this was to influence how youth are viewed in society and to develop young workers' critical understandings of their experiences at work. Young workers acted on this by sharing positive views about young workers and offering new perspectives and advice to young people who were struggling at work.

There was a desire to change societal narratives around young people "not having the motivation" to work, and difficult experiences being a rite of passage for youth, only "having a good life, once they've like, had a shit life for like, five years or something five to 10 years" (P19-G6, interview). Similarly, another young worker explained that encouraging critical reflection on widespread stereotypes that influence mistreatment was important, "part of this revolution is kind of checking the script, changing the rhetoric around, you know, youth aren't all you know, youth aren't lazy [...]" (P7-G3, group). Instead, employers should be questioned on "why are you paying such a, like, small amount of money for like, I mean, why are your pay rates so low? Like maybe you should reflect?" (P19-G6, interview).

Young workers spoke about their desire to "nurture" younger youth. As one young worker explained, they wanted to provide better support for those younger than them entering the workplace, "[…] I want to be able to help those like the younger ones, like this young baby chick here that's needing some help, and providing a place to thrive." (P5-G2, group). Another young worker suggested that youth who move into managerial positions need to promote other youth and not fall into the trap of mirroring generations of

managers before them – to support their generation and future generations to achieve change (P5-G2, interview). They explained, “We just have to be that generation that breaks the cycle. Yeah, at the very least, you know that. As long as you know, everyone else our age understands that” (P5-G2, interview). Another young worker described a determination to do things differently for youth coming in, “I don't want to drum someone down where like when they're doing a job, and then they're just like, tired by the end of it all” (P21-G6, interview).

Young workers felt that youth needed encouragement to move beyond wanting the bare minimum in work conditions and feeling “lucky to get any job”, because for many the status quo is that “the possibility of anything getting better, doesn't exist” (P19-G6, interview). Similarly, another young worker highlighted that changing expectations meant preventing gaslighting so young workers would “have more confidence to stand up for the situations that are happening” (P5-G2, interview). As another young worker described, the key to change is to shift the expectation of power dynamics instilled from a young age:

> *“there's sort of these institutional problems as well that can't necessarily be resolved for just collective action. […] these sorts of things need to start very much at the ground level. That is from the moment people are born. There needs to be some alternative ethos and, like, kind of mantra to the whole thing instilled in people moving through school. […] you're born, and you're automatically put into a position where there is a superior person, there's like an authoritative figure, your parent or parents, and then you go to school, and you have the same thing. And you're kind of, you're kind of indoctrinated without realising it into this, this lifestyle of, okay, there's always the boss, man or whatever. And then you go to work, and it's just a natural extension […]. (P10-G4, interview)*

Another young worker spoke about how youth could drive culture shifts by raising their expectations together:

> *“Having, like, a cultural shift, but also a cultural shift that comes from young people themselves, kind of increasing their expectations, and then having a mutually agreed-on higher set of expectations for how young people are treated. And kind of, those expectations being raised through young people, working themselves together to raise them, as well as, being supported by other people to have that be the case.” (P19-G6, interview)*

Another young worker highlighted a hidden potential to promote alternatives approaches to organising work and employment: “there's a lot more space for being like, we want a completely different society that operates completely differently” (P20-G6, interview). Similarly, one young worker spoke about the importance for workers of not accepting old-school norms and approaches to workplace problems, which

result in worse working conditions, "[…] if we just accept the old-fashioned ideas, they're never gonna change. So that's something that's important to me" (P6-G2, group).

Young workers highlighted different elements key to sustained youth activism; much of this centred on lessons they learned from observing younger youth. They spoke about the importance of youth connecting with each other, "it's like a matter of like getting enough people on board with that. Yeah. So maybe young people could talk by themselves?" (P20-G6, interview). One young worker explained that younger youth lead the way in learning to work as a wider community to fight for systemic change, "[…] school strikes for climate, like school age, you know, people taking, like action against government and against the powers that be in terms of the systemic issues which will affect them and everyone in their lives […]" (P16-G5, interview). This young worker highlighted recent events that caused societal trauma, such as COVID-19 and the Christchurch Massacre, as events further encouraging community building and social cohesion in New Zealand (P16-G5, interview). Another young worker highlighted the potential for harnessing the strengths seen in youth movements, within the sphere of work as well:

> *"I feel like us today have real strengths with tackling and engaging with issues related to inequality, poverty, climate change. But I do still think that there is a real separation between those kinds of work, and that they don't harness the same amount of tools that they would in that sort of unpaid, voluntary advocacy. In the paid workspace, I don't think there is a connection for young people between the skills that they can apply in both spaces." (P8-G3, interview)*

Building leadership amongst youth was also recognised as important. Young workers again highlighted the strength of leadership and community building displayed amongst younger youth. For example, one young worker highlighted Greta Thunberg, noting that "that generation is very quickly going to be coming into power" (P18-G5, interview). Another young worker described the voting age campaign to illustrate how strong youth leadership in activist spaces is about getting youth to "band together":

> *"[…] it was a completely youth-led campaign. And so I think that it takes somebody who has not just the care for the thing, but the skills to be the leader, or to, like, you know, rally the people together." (P17-G5, interview)*

Young workers also spoke about what it felt like to hold power and the importance of feeling a sense of power for youth to enact change. Indeed, one young worker described the feeling of power that came with identifying as holding power: "I think about when power looks like me […] also, like, it's just the ability to speak up and just say something" (P16-G5, group). Another young worker, speaking about Chloe Swarbrick, offered a metaphor to highlight how she made power look natural, despite her young age: "It's a big seat, but it's not. You know, it's not a big seat if you know, I mean, her seat is kind of perfectly aligned to her" (P18-

G5, interview). One young worker also highlighted that taking ownership of successes could support a sense of power – as they pointed out that those who campaign for change are often not acknowledged when governments make changes, "we're often undersold on like, on that fact that like, it comes from people like fighting" (P19-G6, interview). This young worker also explained the importance of youth achieving change for themselves – as achieving justice meant feeling a sense of power:

> *"[…] it's best to motivate change if the change comes from workers themselves. Yeah, like young workers themselves, because of that sort of sense of justice that they can experience and like, I'm definitely not saying that, like, we should just leave it up to them, you know. But I do think there is a level of having workers' experience what they want, actually get actualised. Justice to me is, in a way where it's attributed to them. Like, this is the thing that you were wanting and we're going to do it" (P19-G6, interview)*

Some young workers spoke of taking a more aggressive approach to resistance. As one explained, while compromise is often required to make progress, a stauncher approach should be normalised, "there needs to be a little bit more aggressive action taken towards the higher-ups, you know, let them know that we aren't taking it at all anymore" (P14-G4, interview). Another young worker highlighted that younger youth resist both collectively and individually, in bolder ways and outside of union spaces (P16-G5, interview).

Social media was pointed out as a valuable commodity that youth have control over production and consumption of, "[…] seen as valuable to the old guard of people who know there's TikTok doesn't know what a TikTok is, but they know they need a TikTok. […] So that is a way that young people have power" (P9-G3, interview). Though one young worker highlighted the risk of social media in focusing people on more individualistic aims, "presenting your views in the right way" so that they "lose sight of, like, the broader political struggles" (P20-G6, interview). In contrast, another young worker highlighted that social media could be a powerful tool commanded by youth to spread the word about workers' rights:

> *"I think our generation is one of the most informed generations with social media. Yeah. And we know how to use social media. One thing that I think the union really needs to start utilising more [...] I really feel like young people can utilise that within workplaces and, you know, educating about workers' rights and, and all of that." (P11-G4, interview)*

However, young workers also shared the difficulties they could experience in sustaining themselves within large-scale movements for change. One young worker explained that given the struggles they faced, and as a result of their everyday working lives, they ran out of energy for pushing for change, "depressing to say, like as I get older, I find it harder to connect with that sense of hope" (P20-G6, interview). This young worker worried that youth would end up disempowered because of large societal challenges such as climate change: "I do think that thing feeds into, like, how much power you feel you have as a worker as well" (P20-G6,

interview). However, they were grateful that younger workers showed willingness to fight for change collectively, for example through climate strikes, “there is a lot of momentum with younger young people as well” (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker explained how they learned that to contribute to future resistance and long-term change, they needed to do the small pieces of everyday resistance that were within their power:

> *“And so I was talking to this activist about this. And he was just saying, every little thing that we do today has to be done, because no matter how little it is, it has been done. And the people who come after us have already needed that for them to do the next thing that will be done, which might be slightly bigger than an old, maybe slightly smaller, but it's still persistent. And I think I realised that and, you know, I abide by it because I no matter how little it is, it has to be done.” (P21-G6, interview)*

Triptych 15: Participants envisioned the empowerment of young workers



(P5-G2, collage 3) (P7-G3, collage 3) (P20-G6, collage 3)

Note. This triptych illustrates ways that young workers envision youth creating change in their working lives on a large scale. This included nurturing younger youth to break the intergenerational cycle of negative treatment of young workers; flipping the ‘script’ so that employer practices are questioned and young workers are valued rather than stereotyped; and fostering the existing willingness of younger youth to carry out large scale collective action such as protests.

Other young workers returned to the importance of youth taking the simple action of sharing their experiences and stories, “I think a lot of it needs to be driven by youth. And I guess one thing is, I'm really, I think the one thing that I always go back to […] without sharing their experiences, they're not going to know” (P7-G3, interview). As another young worker pointed out, sharing experiences could remind older generations of the challenges and sense of hopelessness that youth face, and make people aware of their own role in perpetuating issues for youth:

> *“[…] get people who hadn't been in that position for a very long time, I guess an insight into what it is like, and how people are treated. So I don't think many of them realise, you know, the effects. Because I mean, I remember, for quite a while, it seemed quite hopeless*

> *working in a lot of these places, you know, because everything was quite downtrodden. And, yeah, there wasn't much hope for what was going to be happening. […] get some understanding to the people who, you know, could be possibly causing that environment without realising." (P4-G2, interview)*

5.4.2 Collectives that work for youth

Gaps in union power and presence beckoned to some young workers: they spoke about the possibilities for setting up their own formal collective organisations. As one young worker explained, "I did think about starting [an occupation-specific] union, actually. Because I think it's an industry that could really do with something like that" (P20-G6, interview). Another young worker highlighted how easy it is to start a union, "today like if we have if we have another hour like we could find 15 people, write a constitution, get a union registered within an hour […]" (P16-G5, interview). Young workers spoke about the potential for organising precarious workers specifically. One young worker noted that more flexibility, or not working full time, could actually generate opportunities to organise precarious workers (P8-G3, interview). This young worker shared their observations from their workplace, contrasting insecure with permanent staff, "The [insecure workers] in [area] seem to desire collective negotiation and action and are willing to support each other […]" (P8-G3, interview). Another young worker spoke about their desire to learn how to collectivise unorganised precarious workers, while acknowledging the challenges in organising a largely non-unionised workforce:

> *"[…] and this is something that I want to look into, is ways of organising precarious workers so that they can […] improve the workplaces, make them better places to work on their terms, not have it be like the employer, sort of like offering just enough more to attract people to work there. But actually, make it like something that comes from the people working there. […] it's just like you having to look back at how it was dealt with previously, and then also adapt to how it is how it is now." (P19-G6, interview)*

In line with this, some young workers highlighted unions' potential to raise minimum standards and drive workplace- and industry-wide change. As one young worker shared, their union pushed for changes in industry practices around employment arrangements because employers in their sector "[…] navigate a very fine legal line" (P8-G3, group). Young workers also described the good work conditions that could come with strong unions: "now I can reflect on why it was good because they had, they were very well unionised. They're a really good union. And the pay rate was really good" (P19-G6, interview). As another explained, "[…] I tend to get like, good, like rostering as a result of being in a union" (P16-G5, interview). Similarly, another young worker explained that without union action, they would not have experienced positive improvement in minimum standards in their workplace, which would affect both current and future employees, "if we hadn't done that, even that wouldn't have happened. And the people who come after that, they wouldn't have had that […]" (P21-G6, interview). One young worker highlighted that their union gained leverage for their

workplace problems by pushing for member activism to develop public pressure through media attention, "[union leader] was there and he's like […] the media needs to see how many people are affected […]" (P13-G4, interview). Another young worker advocated for unions organising and acting with young, insecure workers, to better tackle ongoing poor conditions in these jobs: "the de facto method that is sort of presented by our society […] if you have a crap job, then just quit it and find a better one" (P19-G6, interview).

While young workers recognised the important place of unions, they emphasised the changes needed in unions, which, similarly to the changes needed in organisations, involved a less hierarchical and more empowering approach to organising. One young worker explained that the focus should be on building a sense of connection and support between people, "[…] solidarity is what gets you to, like, there's nothing else that you can actually like, do in one generation […] in terms of like changing structures […]" (P21-G6, group). Another young worker also spoke about the need for more relational approaches by unions, "organisers need to ensure that they have good relational meetings with their delegates. And the delegates do the same thing with the members, strong structures in place" (P16-G5, interview). This would contribute to building leadership within the membership, and a stronger movement overall by building trust in unions, "[…] creating connections and trust building is really important." (P16-G5, interview). This perspective resonated with findings that a sense of belonging motivated engagement in mutual support and grassroots mobilising. Another young worker, while disillusioned with unions, spoke about the potential for youth to change things by taking leadership in movements for change, both in politics and workers' movements:

> *"It's the older generation that dominates the movement. And I feel like it's getting to that stage where young people are starting to realise, actually, no. Some of the spotlight needs to come back on us. Yeah. Yeah. And I feel like that's starting to happen with political parties, and also unions and, you know, workplaces?" (P11-G4, interview).*

5.4.3 Calling for systemic change

Young workers also called on other stakeholders in employment and society to support their resistance at a systemic level. One key area was in creating space for youth voices. As one young worker illustrated in their collage, they needed greater voice at the systemic level, "I feel like I've made this little baby bird who doesn't really have a voice in the grand scheme of things, but I want to like scream at the rooftops like this is not okay" (P8-G3, group). Young workers spoke about the importance of organisations valuing workers' voices. As one young worker highlighted, employers need to value young workers' input and view them as offering legitimate solutions to workplace problems: "you can't keep treating us like dogs. We actually have really brilliant solutions […] we're not heard of or not listened to, because like we apparently, we don't understand the workplace" (P16-G5, interview). However, one young worker explained that it would be idealistic to think achieving change was simple, particularly in bureaucratic environments, where reaching "whoever's in charge" is obscured by layers of hierarchy (P10-G4, interview).

Some young workers spoke about the importance of ensuring workplaces have support in place for youth: “for younger people with not a lot of experience we're coming through and working in small and medium businesses, how can we know they've got the right support?” (P7-G3, interview). One young worker pointed out work underway in the careers space to improve young workers’ preparation for the workplace. They highlighted that young people on a pathway to tertiary education did not receive employability support, and those on a non-tertiary pathway did not receive support for how to engage in further education and lifelong learning (P3-G1, interview). However, this young worker went further in arguing for systemic change, pointing out that a focus needs to be placed on preparing employers to support young workers – flipping the responsibility for employability from young person to employer:

> *“[…] the population of young people and young people seeking work is growing at a faster rate than I think that employers are prepared to take them on. And so I think the challenge there is, I think there's a lot that's going on everywhere around preparing young people for the workplace. But certainly, more work can be done in preparing employers for young people.” (P3-G1, interview)*

Young workers emphasised the role of employment and education stakeholders in supporting them in nurturing different values and expectations in younger generations. One young worker advocated for NZCTU, the peak union body in New Zealand, to work with the Ministry of Education to institute employment rights as a “core part of the education system” (P11-G4, interview). They explained that this should start from a young age, so that “when the next generation grow up and start getting jobs, they know what is acceptable and what is not” (P11-G4, interview). Another young worker highlighted the importance of mass education, explaining that “[…] if everybody came in on the same, like, having that same basis of like, I know that these are my rights”, that this would challenge the employers’ unreasonable expectations “to ask that of, you know, people” (P17-G5, interview).

Young workers also spoke about the value of young people, and why this needed greater recognition in society and the business world. One young worker offered a business-oriented justification for employers to change their attitude toward young workers (P3-G1, interview). They explained that as older generations age out and young workers make up larger proportions of the workforce, employers find it will be “imperative that they become youth friendly, or they're not going to have access to that job market” (P3-G1, interview).

Young workers pointed out that young workers have skills and ideas that set them apart, and that this develops with each new generation. For example, one young worker explained that the mistreatment and lack of recognition of young workers in workplaces means that “businesses miss out a lot when they oppress the younger workers”, as young workers could offer alternative ways of thinking and being, “innovative ideas or create a much better workplace culture that will actually benefit everyone” (P5-G2, interview). This young worker argued that younger generations are “always going to be, you know, wiser than us” as society,

information and technology advance. They pointed to how Chloe Swarbrick was underestimated as a result of her age, “looked at her as a young person that didn't know anything”, and yet outperformed other politicians, “[…] knows more than anyone else say she's probably the best MP that we have in government” (P5-G2, interview). Another young worker similarly shared a story about the technological skills of an intern who worked with them, highlighting how young workers use technology from a young age and can harness it to do things that “older people cannot understand” (P9-G3, interview). Another young worker who had worked as a manager explained that while youth are often in roles where they don’t have career prospects, their curiosity can spark improvements when valued:

> *“And that was why it was particularly useful to actually employ younger people […] they're interested in an uninterested way. Because you know, having been, young people we know you work in hospitality […] Fuck I don’t give a shit. That's a dumb job. But at the same time, you kind of have the mindset where you're like, Oh, why don't we do it this way? Or why do I have to do this like, so it's like this inquisitive […]?” (P10-G4, interview)*

Young workers highlighted a range of legislative changes needed to close gaps enabling employment rights breaches and poor working and living conditions. As one young worker explained, the government has the power to pressure change from those not willing to improve work conditions, “[…] the government kind of influences all of those things. […] needs to start with them and be forced on people to if they're not willing to make that change themselves” (P13-G4, interview). Another young worker noted a lack of clarity in employment legislation, and that it was not always protective for employees: “[…] the legislation behind employment, like employment rights is yeah, it sometimes it's incredibly unclear. Often, it is on the side of the employer and often leaves employees out” (P17-G5, interview). Young workers identified several areas for improvement, including wages, apprenticeships, and recruitment. One young worker pointed out that New Zealand does not have a minimum wage for workers under 16, “people start working at, you know, 13, 14. There needs to be a minimum rate” (P11-G4, interview). At the time of data collection, there were discussions about introducing voting for 16- 17-year-olds; one young worker expressed their support for this law change, describing the situation of not being able to vote as “bizarre”, given that they were “driving a car and paying tax?”, and by the time they could vote they had already “been working for years” (P5-G2, interview). Another young worker highlighted issues with apprenticeship systems, where funding goes to employers rather than to the apprentice themselves, “none of the systems are set up to even to make it easy for people to be ethical employers, […] you know, the grants […] they're set up so that they don't go to the apprentice” (P17-G5, interview). Another young worker suggested developing legislation requiring transparency around recruitment decisions:

> *“[…] legislation to sort of circumvent these loopholes that allow employers to take advantage of workers. […] like, be completely transparent, say whether you didn't get the*

> *job or not, and why not, for example, you know, and then let the candidate think for themselves take that away to analyse how they could be better […]" (P14-G4, interview)*

While most of these suggested changes were targeted at youth specifically, some young workers discussed changes as they would benefit workers more broadly. As one of these young workers explained, this was about creating change for the next generation while also benefiting those currently in work, "Invest in the future, sort of like what's good for society seems to be good for young people" (P16-G5, interview). For example, this young worker highlighted the need for accessible training for Health and Safety representatives (P16-G5, interview). Another young worker pointed out that good faith, a core tenet in New Zealand employment law, is not being truly adhered to by employers, "[…] supposed to be like, both people have to put on their best, like, be their best selves for each person in the employment relationship" (P19-G6, interview). Another young worker suggested that government subsidies for HR systems, compliance monitoring of HR systems, and provision of HR advice would be beneficial (P5-G2, interview). This idea was triggered by their experience of workplace bullying, and they pointed out that while all age groups experience bullying, "young people taking it harder, because it is a bit daunting, having the weight of the world on their shoulders" (P5-G2, interview). They explained their idea:

> *"When I went through the experience of workplace bullying, I always thought that every business in New Zealand has to have a robust HR system in place that is also subsidised by the government […] that you have to get an external compliance […] this workplace that I worked in, they didn't have a HR system, they didn't have like, a process in place for HR problems […] start a business of just HR advisors, and you just have an external but run by the government and mandated for every small business" (P5-G2, interview).*

Young workers also discussed possible changes to how we organise and value work that would benefit all workers. One young worker highlighted how new social and technological trends could affect how working time is organised, such as the four-day week and automation technology, to reduce pressure on workers in short-staffed industries (P18-G5, interview). Another young worker suggested reducing hierarchy and increasing team-based autonomy in organisations as another important way to improve work by valuing workers' collective intelligence:

> *"[…] the problem begins with having hierarchies […] letting someone you know, together decide what they need to do as a team […] I'd rather have agency over what needs to be done in conjunction to the group that I'm working with" (P21-G6, interview).*

Finally, another young worker advocated for a "[…] society where we can all survive, regardless of the kinds of work we do and what status that work has […]" (P20-G6, interview).

5.5 Summary

This chapter's findings addressed the first two research questions: how young workers respond to challenging conditions in their context, and how their everyday resistance changed across jobs and as they aged. This findings chapter began by presenting findings on young workers' early resistance, including how they raised concerns but struggled to be heard. Young workers often turned to quitting, then entered a stage of reflection and recovery from their early challenges and resistance experiences. The chapter then presented findings on young workers' subsequent stages of individual resistance, following challenges to their early resistance. Young workers developed greater knowledge of how to resist, made renewed efforts to speak up for themselves, and engaged in resistance on behalf of other young workers. The chapter then showed how young workers responded collectively, including by providing mutual support and, for one group, developing their own collective. Finally, the chapter shared young workers' visions for the future, honouring their use of the research for resistance. This section presented young workers' views on how they could support one another intergenerationally, what collectives that work for youth could look like, and shared young workers' calls for change by those in positions of political and economic power. The following chapter discusses key aspects of the findings, including connections across the two findings chapters, Resistance Context and Stages of Resistance.

Chapter 6 Aware and Resisting Together, Over Time

This research set out to explore young workers' resistance in light of gaps in knowledge of young workers' resistance, and debates over whether young workers are indeed positioned to resist or not (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Ewertowska, 2020; Mrozowicki et al., 2018). A few studies have suggested that youth engage in individual (Lucas, 1997) and collective resistance (Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020; Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). This thesis sought to build on promising signs of individual and collective young worker resistance in some studies (Cha et al., 2018; Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020) by contributing more comprehensive knowledge of whether, how, and why young workers resist.

The overarching research question was: 'How do young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience resistance across their working lives?' Departing from the industrial relations tradition (Holgate et al., 2018; Martínez Lucio, 2016; Thompson & Newsome, 2004), this question guided the research to explore resistance beyond a single workplace, occupation, or trade union setting to produce a more encompassing understanding of young workers' resistance. The research sub-questions were: 1) 'How do young workers perceive their contexts as shaping their responses?'; 2) 'How do young workers experience resisting challenges in their work and employment?'; and 3) 'How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not?' These sub-questions examined the context for youth resistance, how they resist and respond in other ways, and whether and how these experiences were shared. To answer these research questions, primary methods of individual collage-making in a group setting, semi-structured follow-up interviews, and member checking town hall were used.

The previous two chapters presented the findings of the thematic analysis. The Resistance Context chapter highlighted context which prompted and constrained resistance. The chapter highlighted young workers' long-term, and for some, cyclical movement between insecure employment, education, and unemployment. Young workers were trapped in transition, with a sense that they were not fully integrated into the labour market. Being trapped in transition was linked to employers' devaluation of youth labour, education, and skills, and to youth being treated as a low-cost, disposable workforce. These experiences led to greater vulnerability to exploitation and poor workplace conditions, and ongoing or significant stress. Experiences of poor conditions and being trapped in transition contrasted with a social contract that youth perceived parents and society more widely had 'sold' to them. Young workers described that in contrast to this social contract, hard work did not lead to success but instead continued exploitation. These experiences of disadvantage were compounded by norms youth encountered in the world of work, including stereotyping of young workers, and harmful workplace cultures.

The Stages of Resistance chapter highlighted forms of resistance and other responses present across young people's working lives. The Chapter also described young workers' motivations for enacting different responses at different times in their working lives. Young workers' resistance began with initial individual

attempts to speak up about poor workplace conditions and quitting to escape or reject those conditions. The trauma of early workplace experiences led to a period of needing to focus on recovery and reflection. During and after these negative early experiences, many young workers developed their knowledge about employment rights and, for some, gained theoretical awareness of the systems shaping their experiences. Some young workers found renewed conviction and ways of speaking up, and, for some, resisting for others became a central theme in their working lives. Young workers also enacted collective responses by sharing mutual support with other young workers in their lives, and, for one participant group, by resisting through organising their own workplace collective.

This discussion chapter discusses and interprets the research findings in relation to prior empirical literature and the analytical framework from the Literature Review Chapter. The following sections focus on three key areas to show how young workers' resistance emerged and changed across their working lives. First, drawing together elements of the Resistance Context and Stages of Resistance Chapters, the chapter discusses how key contextual elements led to, and shaped, young workers' early resistance. The chapter then discusses how resistance was interwoven with other forms of response, changing and sustaining resistance over time. The third section discusses how young workers' responses and resistance were also experienced collectively, even though findings predominantly highlight individualised forms of resistance.

Chapter 6 is not structured as a disaggregated discussion of each form of resistance and each response which emerged in Chapter 5. However, the discussion distinguishes resistance from other responses, aligning with the definition of resistance provided in the Introduction Chapter. Acts included as forms of resistance include those young workers recognised as opposing disadvantageous work conditions, for example by rejecting, disrupting, or challenging those conditions (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). For some young workers, quitting represented rejection or disruption. Speaking up, centring resistance for others, and forming a grassroots collective were often more openly expressed forms of challenge. Other responses by young workers, such as recovery and offering mutual support, were usually described by participants as less oppositional, though they were interrelated with acts of resistance. For instance, young workers' experiences of recovering from traumatic early experiences, while important for later resistance, are discussed as resilience rather than resistance (Katz, 2004). This chapter links such responses to non-resistant or less-resistant responses described in resistance theories (Katz, 2004; Burawoy, 1979; Thompson & Harley, 2008; Thompson & Newsome, 2004).

6.1 How youth come to resist

This section responds to the first research sub-question, and resistance scholars' calls for greater attention to how context shapes resistance (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). This section discusses key findings from Chapter Four around how context constrained and prompted young workers' resistance. Young workers experienced disadvantageous circumstances in their working lives that could

theoretically have led to accommodation (Berry & McDaniel, 2020). While young workers' resistance was indeed partially constrained, their work and wider social contexts also prompted and shaped initial resistance. The following sections begin first with key elements of the work and employment context for young worker resistance and other responses, and then turn to wider social context.

6.1.1 Transitions as a source of unfairness

From a theoretical perspective, young workers' experiences of being trapped in transition across their working lives provided a fundamental basis for resistance. As described in the context chapter, young workers moved between precarious jobs, and for some, between employment and education to improve their prospects of entering stable career pathways. This experience reflects young people's working lives in Australia, which are similarly marked by early instability (Wyn & Woodman, 2021). This transition context may prompt resistance, because young workers' *interests* in financial and career stability are not being met by their jobs.

Young workers' view of these widespread employer practices as unfair aligns with mobilisation theory's view that resistance also requires a sense of injustice and attribution of blame (Kelly, 1998). This unfairness stemmed from workers feeling their work was valuable, but employers instead viewed them as disposable or easily replaceable. This practice, repeated by employers across jobs, further fueled dissatisfaction and a sense of unfairness. Research supports youth perceptions of being a disposable workforce, showing that young workers may be a 'reserve army of labour' used by employers on an as-needed basis (Burrows & O'Brien, 2016). This experience of continuously not being fully integrated into labour markets was a source of frustration for young workers in this doctoral research.

However, the work and employment context also challenged young workers' resistance. Young workers described a strong sense of reliance on their employers: their ability to find and keep jobs was challenged, and wages were often low, creating financial instability. Within this context, young workers described pushing back against conditions as a high-risk endeavour. These contextual findings are consistent with literature which shows how job and financial insecurity reduces young workers' control over their work and employment conditions (Chesters et al., 2019; Einboden et al., 2021; López, 2021; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021) and can create a fear of challenging poor employer practices (Asahina, 2021; Einboden et al., 2021).

Further constraining potential resistance, young workers struggled to gain a foothold in their desired careers, with employers preferring workers with higher levels of education and experience, and with qualification requirements inflated to postgraduate level in some industries. The literature explains that high youth unemployment fosters greater competition among youth for jobs, justifying employers inflated expectations for experience and education in entry-level skilled jobs (Yates, 2023b). Some young workers returned to university after working. From a labour process perspective, returning to study could be seen as a compliance

response (Edwards, 1990; Barnes, 2004), with young workers forced to accept and act on inflated employer expectations.

Despite these constraints, young workers engaged in early individual resistance to respond to poor work conditions. Young workers also tried to improve their conditions by raising concerns with managers and employers through formal and informal avenues, aligning with Hodson's (1995) notion of worker participation as a route to resistance. However, young workers' disposability meant that this early resistance was not immediately successful in achieving their claims. Young workers noted that while they raised concerns about their conditions early on, employers deflected them or responded with hostility. For example, when some young workers questioned their conditions, they were met with anger or faced retaliation such as losing their jobs at the end of temporary employment periods. Yet, as this chapter will explore later, these early outcomes did not permanently extinguish young workers' resistance; instead, it continued to evolve.

6.1.2 Responding to culture shock

The broader social context constrained young workers' resistance, illustrating how the world outside work influences workers' resistance (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Young workers perceived their socialisation, workplace social norms, and stereotypes about youth as legitimising employers providing poor conditions for young workers (Doellgast et al., 2021; Duffy, 2017; Raymer et al., 2017). For example, social norms that youth should put their head down and work hard were linked with pressure to accept poor work conditions. Research has underscored societal pressures on young people to conform, such as to switch off their anger, and to pretend happiness (Duffy, 2017; Ikonen & Nikunen, 2019). However, within the research process, young workers expressed their anger and dissatisfaction with the world of work for youth.

Relations between young workers and managers also contributed to poor work conditions. As noted in the findings, young workers felt managers depersonalised them to maintain distance and remain unconcerned with their conditions. Related to this, young workers felt they were stereotyped, including being infantilised at work. Moreover, employers and managers were perceived as ignorant of young workers' adult responsibilities outside of work. These experiences align with normalised views that youth have a poor work ethic and are entitled (Duffy, 2017; Raymer et al., 2017). Infantilising young workers may justify greater control over their work.

Rather than acquiescing to social pressures to conform, young workers were jarred by culture shock in the social landscape at work – elsewhere termed 'reality shock' (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006). In this research, young workers encountered unexpected mistreatment and hostile, alien norms in the work and business world. This sense of shock can be understood as stemming from contrasting normative frameworks that young workers learn through socialisation by parents and school (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006). Young workers' experience of poor treatment contrasted with their expectation that workplaces would be

characterised by professionalism, respect, and recognition for hard work. Indeed, young workers were jarred by expectations that they should be grateful for their jobs, while being allocated the hardest or most undesirable tasks for limited pay and recognition.

This early culture shock prompted resistance among young workers because they did not see workplace cultures as normal early in their working lives. As noted above, young workers raised their concerns with managers and employers regarding conditions such as long hours and poor pay. The types of resistance sparked by this culture shock can be understood as falling within Katz' (2004) notion of 'reworking'. Reworking involves conscious, intentional efforts to redistribute resources and improve work conditions (Katz, 2004). Young workers' early raising of concerns represented pragmatic attempts to rework and make their conditions more tolerable.

Moreover, young workers' efforts to rework their conditions may be explained by their personal attributes and experiences, and cultural-epistemological beliefs (Brink et al., 2023). The young workers in this research likely had experienced home or school environments where at least some norms of interpersonal treatment were more respectful and supportive than those they encountered in the workplace. Moreover, young workers' decision to voice their concerns suggests they expected speaking up to be the right or normal response to mistreatment. In other words, the young people in this research had prior experiences that gave them a baseline for recognising injustice and some know-how for responding (Brink et al., 2023).

These experiences can also be understood as early social precursors to mobilisation, where previous research has argued that workers eventually come to identify as a group and resist collectively (Kelly, 1998, 2018). In the early stages of mobilisation, it is argued that there arises "a perception of a social wrong that departs from 'widely shared social values'" (Kelly, 2018, p. 704). In this case, young workers found themselves contending with a world of new workplace norms that held legitimacy, distant from those they and other youth had grown up with.

6.2 How youth resistance is sustained

The findings showed that young workers' resistance repertoires changed over time. For example, young workers' resistance moved from early efforts to raise concerns to quitting and resisting for others. In contrast, previous research on workers' resistance has given little notice to how resistance endures or is sustained over time (Sanson & Courpasson, 2022). This section provides insight into these movements in resistance, discussing how and why young workers' resistance was sustained over the course of their working lives.

6.2.1 Extended transitions contribute to sustained resistance

A key insight from the findings is that being trapped in transition provided fertile ground for young workers to build and sustain repertoires of resistance. As discussed earlier, young workers' early experiences of work and employment were characterised by being trapped in transition between insecure employment and

tertiary education for much of their working lives. This aligned with similar findings in research overseas, which show how young workers' 'adulthoods' have changed – they enter permanent employment later in life (Wyn & Woodman, 2021). This instability in young workers' lives was sustained over a long period, which is significant for young workers' resistance. As young workers moved between multiple insecure jobs, the challenges they encountered at work were noted as recurring across workplaces. In essence, being trapped in precarity and poor conditions gave young workers time to evolve and test repertoires of resistance. Experiences of resisting, regardless of their outcomes, led young workers to develop subsequent new ways of resisting, which were then embedded into their resistance practice.

Testing and turning points in resistance

Young workers' testing of and expanding ways of resisting are illustrated in the stages presented in the resistance findings chapter. One example of a turning point in resistance is how young workers tested raising concerns and, after enduring ongoing poor conditions and significant barriers to early resistance, took the financially risky step of quitting. For young workers' resistance stages, quitting was significant not only as a form of resistance, but as a turning point which led to a later stage of reflection and reinvigorating resistance repertoires.

From a theoretical perspective, quitting can be understood as resistance: workers withdraw their labour from employers rather than accepting employer control over conditions (Hodson, 1995). Indeed, following other efforts to oppose poor conditions, quitting offered some young workers another way to refuse poor treatment, poor conditions, and the undervaluing of their labour. Young worker resistance expressed through 'flying away' also reflects an understanding of quitting as an attempt to regulate those who have power (Doellgast et al., 2021). For some young workers, quitting and withdrawing their labour meant showing their employer that providing poor conditions would have consequences – that they would lose their workers. Quitting is not an empty threat, "employer behaviour is still constrained by the threat of worker exit…" (Doellgast et al., 2021, p. 15).

Some young workers, however, pointed out that quitting as resistance is unlikely to change employer practices. Indeed, high youth unemployment in Aotearoa suggests high competition for a too-small pool of available jobs (Te Tai Ōhanga The Treasury, 2024). High youth turnover is unlikely to pressure employer practices, as other young workers are ready to replace them. In other words, some youth saw quitting as problematic because it reinforced the disposability of young workers (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016).

For other young workers, quitting also stemmed from a need to escape poor conditions and protect their mental health and wellbeing. The trauma of poor conditions and culture shock took a toll on young workers' wellbeing. In this sense, quitting was an act of resilience for some, as young workers shifted to self-protection after earlier efforts to rework or improve their conditions (Katz, 2004). This meant that young workers'

experiences of reworking and resilience were interconnected and shifted their resistance over time. Hauge and Fold (2016) support this view of resistance types as interconnected and mutually sustaining.

Quitting was also a way of seeking freedom, opening pathways to escape oppressive employers. This aligns with a notion that seeking freedom and autonomy is at the core of resistance (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Fleming & Spicer, 2009). Some young workers spoke about seeking jobs and organisations with a social justice impact, because of their early difficult work experiences. This aligns with recent research in Aotearoa which found that doing meaningful work is a key motivator for young volunteers (Nissen & Carlton, 2023). Further, for the young workers in this research, finding meaningful work was a way of reworking their own lives (Katz, 2004). Searching for meaningful work combatted young workers' sense of being given the 'dirty' tasks at work and having their ideas ignored. These young workers sought dignity and wellness through their work, resisting being trapped in parts of the business world where youth were more likely to be treated unethically.

Practices for sustaining resistance

At times, young workers engaged in practices necessary to sustain their resistance, including fomenting new or renewed ways of resisting. To illustrate this, the experience of quitting, and traumatic experiences which led to it, triggered periods of resilience for some, where young workers focused on restoring their self-confidence and worth, and reflected on their resistance approaches. Young workers discussed the importance of recovering their confidence and developing their knowledge before they were able to speak up again – this time with greater power. Additionally, after having their concerns deflected, youth developed new ways to speak up for themselves, such as using institutional processes, to try to improve their employment conditions.

For young workers who had experienced unfair treatment and conditions, moving into a phase of self-care and reflection was important for addressing their eroded self-confidence and mental health. This stage can be understood through Katz' (2004) first R of resilience. Reflection and self-care were both sustaining and restorative: practices which could "enable material and spiritual survival, but also the recuperation of dignity" (Katz, 2004, p. 246). These acts enabled young workers to move forward into future workplaces, with a recovered sense of their own value as workers.

Reflecting on experiences and gaining knowledge were important for sustaining ongoing processes of youth resistance, including growing resistance repertoires. The findings showed experiences of choosing not to resist at times, for example, not pursuing personal grievances, because they did not have the requisite knowledge or emotional capacity for pursuing injustices. In this reflection stage, young workers also learned from their own previous choices about whether and how to resist: some reflected that they would do things differently now. Katz (2004) concept of 'resilience' recognises self-care and personal reflective processes as part of people's struggles with those in power. Self-care and reflection are rarely features of resistance studies, with few exceptions (Katz, 2004; Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999). The findings provide empirical support

for Katz (2004) suggestion that acts of resilience "offer the possibility of fostering something beyond recuperation" (p. 246). These practices help sustain and broaden young workers' resistance.

Further demonstrating the potential of acts of resilience, young workers often externalised blame for their difficult early experiences. Young workers felt gaslighted, as though they had been made to believe they had deserved or earned their mistreatment and poor conditions. One key aspect of this was having space to question their socialisation to 'work hard' and 'be grateful' to their employer for providing them with a job – and recognise the vulnerability to exploitation that this socialisation created. These findings show how youth work to counter neoliberal narratives, which focus on young people's deficits (Sofritti et al., 2020). Such narratives encourage young workers to focus on enhancing their employability – their desirability for employers – and to internalise responsibility for success and failure (O'Keefe et al., 2021; Sofritti et al., 2020). Externalising blame also represents young workers' efforts to overcome 'false consciousness' – the internalising of dominant, oppressive ideas, such as stigma towards youth (Cote, 2014).

Shifting blame away from the self and toward employers can also be explored through the lens of mobilisation theory. In the early stages of mobilisation, workers build a sense of injustice and attribute blame externally to their employer (Kelly, 1998, 2018). Acknowledging injustice and attributing blame justifies acts of resistance (Kelly, 1998, 2018). Later, carrying this sense of injustice and blame attribution, some young workers reflected on their earlier experiences as missed opportunities to achieve greater employer accountability. For example, they re-imagined quitting to include openly and directly challenging or damaging their employers. Many young workers shared past fantasies about attaining some form of 'poetic justice', such as their employers' businesses failing. Young workers allowing themselves to feel this sense of injustice can be understood as breaking free of societal oppression of youth anger and emotional expression (Duffy, 2017). Interestingly, the finding that young workers' desire to resist was enhanced in this process contrasts with findings in Europe that some young precarious workers experience *diminished* personal agency and resistance because of externalising blame to systems (Mrozowicki & Trappman, 2021).

Sharing resistance during shared transitions

Sharing experiences of extended transitions with other youth workers not only helped them sustain their own resistance but also enabled them to resist for other youth at work. Young workers moved from focusing on their own struggles to using their knowledge and experiences of resisting within precarious employment to advocate for other young workers. Some young workers became direct advocates for others, including in formal activist roles, while others advocated indirectly by sharing resources and knowledge. These young workers spoke about increasing the capacity of their coworkers and other youth to resist. This stage of resistance also included a desire to provide early intervention by educating the next generation. This finding of intergenerational solidarity is reminiscent of recent New Zealand-based research which found that young volunteers protect new young volunteers from issues such as burnout (Carlton et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the findings show that, for some young workers, resisting for others became a central theme in their working lives. Their choice to take on these resister-for-others roles stemmed from a sense of injustice developed through young people's earlier resistance and reflection experiences. Mobilisation theory can highlight the important leadership role these young workers take on (Kelly, 2018). These resisters can foster future collective action by "promoting a sense of grievance amongst workers by persuading them that what they have hitherto considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' is in fact unjust" (Kelly, 2018, p. 127). This finding supports an emerging strain of industrial relations research that challenges views that youth are disengaged from unions and collective worker movements (Aleks et al., 2020; Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018). Rather than disengaging, resistance for others became a core part of some young people's working lives.

6.2.2 Critical awareness buttressed resistance

As highlighted above, after culture shock, and while reflecting on and recovering from earlier experiences, young workers developed awareness of the social pressures that shaped their conditions and sought to win their compliance. This illustrates how young workers' awareness and sense of injustice can form the basis for questioning and pushing back against the power imbalances and disadvantages they experience in the world of work and employment (Cote, 2014; Kelly, 1998; 2018). Within the research process, young workers' critical awareness was evident in their discussions of the contexts shaping their employment experiences. For example, young workers were critical of how their education and experience were devalued, and aware that this devaluing positioned youth as cheaper, disposable workers. These findings align with studies suggesting that young people recognise structural problems that disadvantage them, both in and out of work (Ewertowska, 2020; Farthing, 2016; Mrozowicki et al., 2018).

Seeking Knowledge and Renewed Resistance

Young workers also developed critical awareness by receiving and seeking knowledge through a range of avenues. While developing knowledge was often less directly and immediately oppositional, it sometimes also involved reworking, as some young workers actively adjusted their knowledge to gain a stronger sense of power. Young workers were critical of the lack of education on employment rights they received before entering the workforce. During and following difficult early experiences, young workers were determined to empower themselves by filling gaps in their knowledge and resistance skills. Studies in New Zealand and Australia have previously highlighted the notable absence of employment rights education in secondary schools (Ewertowska, 2020; McDonald et al., 2013). As a result, youth turned to largely informal sources of knowledge.

Sources of knowledge included self-education and learning from information shared and skills modelled by friends. Youth seeking to self-educate and educate one another supports efforts to dispel myths that young people are disinterested and disengaged from activism (Aleks et al., 2020; Boris et al., 2013; Cha et al., 2018).

Young workers gained practical knowledge by searching online and through conversations with friends and other young people, who shared information they had sought out during their own difficult times. Those who stepped in to advise young workers, or even wrote letters and attended meetings, offered not only emotional support but also practical lessons on *how* to fight for employment rights.

Young workers' growing knowledge of employment rights and how to enforce them validated what may have previously been more a 'sense' of past injustices. Knowledge of regulations delegitimised employer actions and fostered a sense of entitlement to better conditions – both precursors for mobilising (Kelly, 1998; McAdam, 1988). Significantly, for some young workers, attending university – and in particular social science education – extended their knowledge into theoretical and contextual grounds. These young workers were critical of neoliberalism's unjust effects on their working lives, for example, discussing its rise and the decline of unions and collectivism. Overall, these young workers' theoretical knowledge enhanced their awareness of structural and workplace injustices, and their desire to act (Kelly, 1998; Cote, 2014).

With a greater sense of injustice, and awareness about ways to enforce their rights, young workers began to resist with greater confidence and in more ways. These experiences of challenging employer practices connect with Katz's (2004) notion of 'reworking', with young workers responding to workplace challenges in pragmatic ways. Young workers found a renewed ability to speak up for themselves, with greater justification for doing so, and spread the word about employer practices among other young workers. Critical awareness was therefore a driver for acts of reworking conditions, which Katz (2004) explains is driven by increased consciousness or "explicit recognition" of issues, with resisters then pursuing "focused, often pragmatic, responses" (p. 247).

The difference between earlier raising of concerns and these new acts of speaking up can also be understood in terms of how workers come to deflect abuse at work (Hodson, 1995). To deflect abuse at work, "workers must first symbolically reject the definition of the situation provided by those in power" (Hodson, 1995, p. 84). In other words, for young workers this resistance could represent not only pragmatic attempts to change their conditions, but also an engagement with ideological power struggles at work (Cote, 2014; O'Keefe et al., 2021; Sofritti et al., 2020).

6.3 How youth respond collectively

This research demonstrates that young workers began to come together to respond, including by offering mutual support and, for one group of young workers, developing their own grassroots collective organisation. Challenges to accessing and drawing on union protections fostered these alternative collective means of struggling for power and control by young workers. As others have argued, union decline does not signal the decline of worker collectivism (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Thompson & Newsome, 2004).

The political and community activism literature has examined why young workers become engaged in collective activities in the first place (Bosi et al., 2022; Quéniart, 2008). These uncover key factors such as

socialisation through family political discussions, as well as sociological experiences such as major political events (Bosi et al., 2022; Quéniart, 2008). For at least some young workers in this research, early challenges to their individual resistance appeared to spark a desire to connect with other young workers in the struggle to change their conditions.

6.3.1 Collective learning through mutual support

After earlier experiences of resistance, and challenges to that resistance, young workers came together to offer one another mutual support. Research with young workers in the UK similarly suggested that mutual support may follow early experiences of quitting to escape challenging conditions (Tailby & Pollert, 2011). They suggested that older-young workers may be more likely to discuss and then act on workplace issues because of workplace experiences and learning from past responses: "longer involvement in the world of work [...] and a learning experience that exit and different jobs are not necessarily solutions to problems at work which repeat themselves" (Tailby & Pollert, 2011, p. 514).

In this thesis, mutual support among young workers included acts aimed at spreading word among young workers about poor employment practices used by employers, including immediate coworkers and other young workers. Labour process theory highlights mutual social support as a strategy for workers seeking to deflect managerial abuse and mistreatment (Hodson, 1995). For instance, mutual support may help reassert positive values in the face of managerial mistreatment (Hodson, 1995). Similarly, in this thesis, young workers validated one another's concerns by providing a sense check – confirming that they were indeed experiencing unfair treatment.

Mutual support most often took the form of young people discussing workplace problems with each other in groups of young coworkers. At times, this was a resilience practice (Katz, 2004), where young workers supported one another through challenging experiences without necessarily taking further action to influence change. This finding highlights a view in the literature that young workers who engage in activism alongside their peers often seek a sense of social belonging (Bosi et al., 2022; Carlton et al., 2022; Renström et al., 2021). Significantly, research highlights young workers' higher need for social belonging than other age groups (Renström et al., 2021).

At other times, young workers' mutual support was more oppositional and included helping each other develop plans to respond individually to workplace issues, including sharing tried-and-tested resistance approaches. These processes of sharing experiences and views, and developing and agreeing on ideas for action, are generally critical for mobilising toward collective action (Kelly, 2018; 1998). However, at the mutual support stage, young workers' discussions tended to be supportive of individual action, as opposed to collective. Young workers' mutual support therefore illustrates a unique connection between informal collective processes and individual actions (Lloyd, 2017; Tailby & Pollert, 2011).

The analytical framework in Chapter Two creates space to theorise the role of mutual support among young workers in their resistance. Mutual support was usually a covert, collective response that in turn fostered individual resistance. Mobilisation theory (Kelly, 1998) suggests that resistance may be rooted in shared, socially constructed understandings of workplace injustice and worker interests. The everyday resistance framework's emphasis on *learned* ways of resisting, and relationships between resisters, suggests that individual resistance can develop from, and contribute to, shared understandings of resistance (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2023; Johansson & Vintgagen, 2016). A more recent labour process study highlights a combination of "individual responses and collective learning", where resistance is individualised, but workers share their learnings from resistance with others in their workplace (Lloyd, 2017). This means collective understandings of resistance could establish common approaches to workplace issues, even if they did not lead to formal collective young worker organising.

Young workers' mutual support can therefore be understood through the lens of collective learning to foster individual resistance (Lloyd, 2017). The purpose was not to take action on behalf of the collective; however, collectively informed individual actions do signify a collective *approach* to workplace problems (Lloyd, 2017). In other words, while young workers continued to respond individually to workplace challenges, they were creating collective knowledge or a shared pool of ways of resisting. Moreover, in sharing experiences, young workers also intended to prevent others from internalising their experiences and to validate them as a shared problem. Young workers were therefore working to enhance other young people's awareness and potential for dissatisfaction with workplace practices (Kelly, 1998)– a form of collective learning that moved beyond sharing pragmatic everyday support.

6.3.2 Finding belonging in a youth-grown group

While young workers generally focused on collective informal mutual support, one group in the research belonged to a grassroots collective at their workplace and chose to take part in the research together. Grassroots organising may present a natural next step in young workers' resistance, moving from providing informal mutual support to young workers forming their own collectives. This section therefore discusses the group, aiming to explain why young workers joined and stayed, including how leaders and group features ensured its ongoing existence.

The mobilisation literature has been criticised for historically neglecting grassroots worker mobilisation (Atzeni & Cini, 2024). However, a recent study highlights three fundamental features of worker self-organising outside unions: developing a shared understanding of what workers are discontented with, identifying as a group, and forming a community bound together by shared struggle (Cioce et al., 2025). In this thesis, young workers described the grassroots group as a way to pursue improvements in shared poor conditions. Indeed, some young workers joined the group after seeing advertisements that connected with their own workplace experiences. For these young workers, their choice to join the collective came from a shared understanding of what they were discontented with.

However, contrary to the notion that shared discontent is a requirement for collective mobilising (Cioce et al., 2025), some group members said they did not feel personally strongly aggrieved by their employer. Instead, they joined the group because they believed in the cause of improving workers' conditions, even if they had not been affected by poor work conditions. Research with young volunteers similarly highlights that participation can be linked to passion for the cause (Carlton et al., 2022). Interestingly, group members also felt a strong sense of obligation to, and connection with, the next generation of workers who would fill these roles. Most of these young workers spoke about a shared mission to improve conditions for those workers, even if they did not see the benefit of their efforts. In other words, the cause extended beyond the interests of the immediate group members, to those of the next generation.

The group's activities, as discussed by group members, aligned with those of other young worker activist groups: “education, mobilisation, and social” (Boris et al., 2013, p. 233). Group leaders emphasised the importance of the social and emotional support they needed to provide young workers experiencing personal workplace problems. Supporting this emphasis on emotional support, participating in resistance groups offers opportunities to bolster self-esteem and validate negative experiences (Hodson, 1995).

Moreover, the social elements of group activities enabled a sense of belonging, ensuring young workers’ ongoing participation in the group. Belonging developed not only as group members supported one another through challenging work experiences, but as they worked towards a shared cause and spent time together at meetings and social events. Sanson and Courpasson (2022) discuss how workers’ informal collectives can cause resistance to become a “way of life”, and how this normalisation of resistance is interconnected with a need for belonging (p. 1693). Workplace collectives develop norms of resistance, and by resisting members reiterate their belonging to the group (Sanson & Courpasson, 2022). Similarly, research with young people who participate in political organisations has found that sustained activism is linked to finding a sense of place within activist organisations, and to achievement not only in the outcomes of actions, but also through building friendships (Bosi et al., 2022). The findings of this thesis reiterate the importance of developing friendships and a sense of belonging for young workers’ ongoing participation in organised collective resistance.

The group leaders' approaches to maintaining the grassroots group can be examined through traditional mobilisation theory, which highlights leaders' roles in organising workers (Kelly, 2018). Following the early stages of mobilisation, which included a sense of injustice and attribution of blame to the employer, the group needs to define its collective interests (Kelly, 1998). In this thesis research, group leaders ensured ongoing definition of collective interests, in part by leading regular meetings to discuss and pinpoint key shared issues at work (Kelly, 1998). During the research, group members highlighted the shared nature of their grievances and how the group worked together to challenge these issues. Group leadership also facilitated decision-making on how to address these shared issues, coaching the group to choose strategies for action and encouraging continued member attendance and participation (Kelly, 1998). The group

provided formal, collective strategies for resistance, aiming to shift power relations at work (Katz, 2004). At the time of the research, the group's principal strategy was to pursue a collective agreement to cover their work. This would increase young workers' power to set their employment conditions.

Interestingly, the findings revealed a unique strategy for attaining resources for group action: the young workers used union connections without being subsumed into the union. Group leaders initiated a mutual exchange of active participation in, and promotion of, the union in return for power and financial resources for the group's actions. Using this strategy, the group retained autonomy to pursue change in its own way, rather than through large-union bureaucratic processes and structures. This strategy represents the creation of an autonomous and relational, rather than physical, space for resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Indeed, this connects with the concept of 'third space' (Soja, 1996), a phrase used by one of the participants on their collage (P13-G4, collage 3).

This third social space was moulded to the young workers' own values and ideals. It provided a place where young workers could pursue change in ways determined collectively, by and for themselves. The third space insulated young workers from losing voice and control over their own cause. Autonomous from the union, the young worker group did not have to contend with potentially conflicting interests and resource battles that can arise within unions representing multiple groups of workers (Cha et al., 2018; Laroche & Dufour-Poirier, 2017; Yates, 2023b). By offering a mutual support arrangement with the union, the group also felt justified in pushing the union to advocate for their cause.

6.4 Summary

This chapter discussed key findings from Chapters Four and Five in relation to prior empirical and theoretical literature. The first section discussed how poor workplace conditions and the social context, including experiences of culture shock, prompted young workers' early individual resistance. The second section discussed why and how young workers' resistance continued over time, including the ability to test out repertoires of resistance within a continuous context of insecurity. Young workers also, importantly, developed critical awareness and knowledge, which supported their ongoing resistance. Finally, the third section examined young workers' collective responses, including how collective learning supported individual resistance.

The following chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting how this research contributes to industrial relations resistance research, and summarising the findings in answer to the research aims and questions. The chapter also provides guidance for those seeking to build on the findings of this thesis, by highlighting research limitations, avenues for future research, and recommendations for practitioners and policy makers.

Chapter 7 Trajectories of Resistance

This thesis aims to empower young workers' ongoing resistance and inspire those early in their resistance journeys. Despite an international 'call for action on the youth employment crisis' – the widespread poor quality and quantity of jobs for young workers (ILO, 2012) – little has been done to examine young workers' *own efforts to fight back* against this ongoing crisis. While literature has suggested that some young workers may accommodate the disadvantages that they experience in workplaces and labour markets (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016; Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2021), scant research explores young workers' *resistance* (Lucas, 1997; Yang et al., 2020; Tailby & Pollert, 2011). This thesis sought to address these tensions and knowledge gaps, and to empower young workers and those who walk alongside them, by exploring young workers' ways of resisting across their working lives.

The thesis offers an innovative approach to understanding resistance, showing how young workers' resistance progressed through stages across their working lives, shaped by their work and social contexts. The theoretical contributions section of this chapter synthesises this understanding and proposes a resistance trajectory with two types of stages (resisting and sustaining), highlighting the interlinked nature of resistance and other responses (Hauge & Fold, 2016; Katz, 2004; 2022) in the development of worker resistance. In turn, the thesis also contributes significantly to debate over whether young workers are positioned to resist and gaps in knowledge of how they resist, by showing that young workers resist and respond in a range of ways, which are not static and instead shift over time. The thesis also contributes methodologically to IR research by showing how departing from traditional methodologies (Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Atzeni & Cini, 2024) and instead using an accessible art-based approach can enhance participant involvement in knowledge production. Moreover, the thesis shows how critical and arts-informed approaches give workers a way to use research for resistance, contributing to activist approaches to IR scholarship (Thomas & Turnbull, 2025).

The first section of this conclusion chapter returns to the research questions and summarises how the research findings answered them. The chapter then discusses the thesis' theoretical and methodological contributions. It then presents the research limitations and suggestions for future research drawn from the findings. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations for practitioners and policymakers engaging with young workers and the issues they face. The thesis concludes with final takeaways for young workers in their resistance journeys, and those who seek to support young workers' resistance.

7.1 Answering the research questions

The research addressed one overarching research question and three sub-questions. The overarching research question was: How do young workers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience resistance across their working lives? The sub-questions were: 1) How do young workers perceive their contexts as shaping their

responses?; 2) How do young workers experience resisting challenges in their work and employment?; and 3) How do young workers perceive their challenging contexts and resistance as shared experiences or not?

In relation to the overarching research question and the second sub-question, the thesis shows how young workers began responding to disadvantageous conditions early in their working lives. Early resistance primarily involved informally raising concerns and questioning their conditions with managers and employers. However, despite repeated attempts, managers and employers met young workers' concerns with disregard or hostility. For example, young workers' experiences included not having temporary employment agreements renewed and being met with anger when they raised issues.

The thesis illustrates how young workers' resistance then continued to shift and expand over time. The stages of resistance shared in this thesis illustrate how young workers' resistance expanded over time. After early efforts to speak up led to negative repercussions or were deflected by managers and employers, young workers refused to accept these poor conditions and quit. Quitting represented a turning point – after this, young workers took time to recover, reflect, and learn from their early challenges in the workplace. Young workers were critical of their conditions and became aware of how social norms constrained their resistance. For example, they described that it took time to overcome pressure to internalise their experiences as being their own fault or responsibility.

Eventually, young workers returned to the workplace with greater confidence and critical awareness of the injustice of their experiences. Later resistance was enabled by seeking and receiving knowledge of employment rights and how to enforce these in practice. Moreover, primarily through university education, some young workers developed knowledge of the theoretical contexts shaping their experiences, providing further justification for resistance. Given that young workers continued to experience insecure work, they were then able to try renewed ways of resisting. Young workers' later everyday resistances involved both speaking up for themselves and, for some, advocating for and educating other young workers.

In relation to the third sub-question, the thesis shows that young workers responded to their shared experiences at work in non-traditional ways. These included mutual support, a collective response that fostered individual resistance, and grassroots collective resistance. While unions were often inaccessible, young workers came together to resist collectively in other ways, *by and for* young workers. Mutual support usually took the form of discussing problems and solutions with other young people at, and outside of, work. Young workers also validated one another's experiences as a shared reality. Validation occurred through sense-checking, sharing common experiences, and encouraging one another's sense of injustice to ensure conditions were not accepted or viewed as normal. Mutual support therefore provided both pragmatic information for individual resistance but was also a way to foster the cognitive elements supporting resistance – awareness and dissatisfaction (Kelly, 1998).

A second way that collective resistance manifested, for some participants in this research, was in young workers creating their own youth-led formalised collective in the workplace. The group leaders set up the

collective after becoming frustrated by previous unsuccessful efforts to seek change individually. Facilitated by the group leaders, the group developed collective strategies for change and provided a sense of belonging and friendship for young workers.

Returning to the first research sub-question, this thesis explained how and why the young workers resisted early in their working lives. Poor work conditions, including low pay, insecure hours, and mistreatment, prompted early individual resistance by young workers. Young workers were physically and mentally affected by conditions such as long hours, and described feeling burned out by their jobs. They described feeling disposable at work, with their time and effort going unseen by managers who appeared to distance themselves interpersonally from young workers.

Young workers were also prompted to resist because of culture shock in this environment. Workplace environments shocked young workers because they contrasted with the positive or supportive interpersonal treatment they expected from their prior school and family life. In other words, there was a disconnect between what young workers understood as socially normal, compared with the patterns of mistreatment and challenging work conditions imposed on young people at work. Moreover, young workers faced a disconnect between how they were expected to behave and view their work and the challenging workplace environments they encountered. For example, young workers were shocked by social expectations for them to be grateful for their jobs, which were disconnected from their realities of insecure employment, low pay, and being assigned the 'dirty' jobs at work. Young workers' responses to these contextual factors reflected efforts to change their conditions and reassert social norms.

Further, the thesis explains why young workers' ways of resisting shifted and expanded over time. A key factor that enabled young workers' resistance to change over time was extended transition periods. Young workers moved between insecure jobs and in and out of education, and experienced repeated patterns of poor conditions and mistreatment over time. Young workers therefore had time, as well as motivation, to build on previous work and resistance experiences and construct new everyday ways of resisting similar work contexts.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

The first, and perhaps most significant, theoretical contribution of this thesis is in offering knowledge of how young workers come to enact certain repertoires of resistance, over time. The thesis proposes that young workers' resistances follow trajectories that progress in shared patterns over their early work experiences. This trajectory perspective is explained below. The second theoretical contribution is that, in contrast with theories of normalisation, the thesis shows that young workers are critically aware of, and respond to, disadvantages at work and across their working lives.

7.2.1 Young workers' resistance forms a trajectory

This thesis explored young workers' resistance across their working lives, rather than using a more traditional IR case study approach focused on resistance within a formal institutional setting (Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Atzeni & Cini, 2024). Exploring resistance with young workers retrospectively, over the course of their working lives, expanded the contextual scope for understanding young workers' resistance (see the analytical framework in Chapter Two). This allowed the research to connect young workers' resistance with patterns in their experiences across jobs where poor conditions were repeated, the course of their working lives in which they were trapped in transition, and their wider social contexts such as pre-work socialisation clashing with capitalist workplace culture. This approach therefore proved critical for understanding not only how, but also when and why, young workers engaged in resistance and other responses.

The importance of studying everyday resistance in relation to time (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016) is evident elsewhere in the employment relations literature. Existing studies of worker resistance have highlighted working time as a tool of worker resistance and a focus of managerial control (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). Another aspect of time, emphasised by labour process theorists, is that resistance evolves over time in response to shifting managerial control mechanisms (Edwards, 1990; Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Thompson & Harley, 2008). In relation to young workers, Tailby and Pollert's (2011) survey research found that young workers' resistance differed by age group, suggesting that accumulated experience in the world of work may contribute to young workers' resistance approaches. Despite process-based theorisations in the literature, such as mobilisation theory (Kelly, 1998, 2018), there is scant examination of how resistance develops over individuals' working lives, including during transitions into labour markets and movement across workplaces.

This doctoral research argues that young people's repertoires of resistance are not static but are actively developed over time. It is proposed that young workers' resistance follows a trajectory linked to the contours of their working lives. The term 'trajectory' has seen limited use in resistance research, apart from Hauge and Fold (2016). Hauge and Fold (2016), building on Katz' (2004) 3 R's framework, point out that ways of resisting "can be conceptualized as transformative *trajectories* - workers' situated knowledge and practices evolve and change over time" (p. 124).

Moreover, the research contributes to understanding how young workers' resistance trajectories may connect to multiple levels of context, responding to calls for resistance research to develop stronger links between resistance and multiple levels of context (Lloyd, 2017). For instance, young workers' resistance developed from and responded to disadvantages at the workplace level, as well as frustration with being trapped in transition across working lives. Hauge and Fold (2016) similarly suggest that trajectories may be "*conditioned by the specific labor market contexts* through which the individual moves" (p. 124). Resistance also expanded through periods of reflecting on work and resistance experiences, recouping, and gaining knowledge. The everyday resistance framework similarly highlights repertoires of resistance as learned:

"These methods, or tactics, grow out of the particular circumstances of the social place and the life experience of the people that do the resisting" (p. 422).

Figure 3 below illustrates the common stages young workers discussed in this doctoral research, and the broadly shared context for this trajectory. The figure connects each stage with the resistance theories and frameworks from the analytical framework developed in Chapter Two and discussed in Chapter 6.

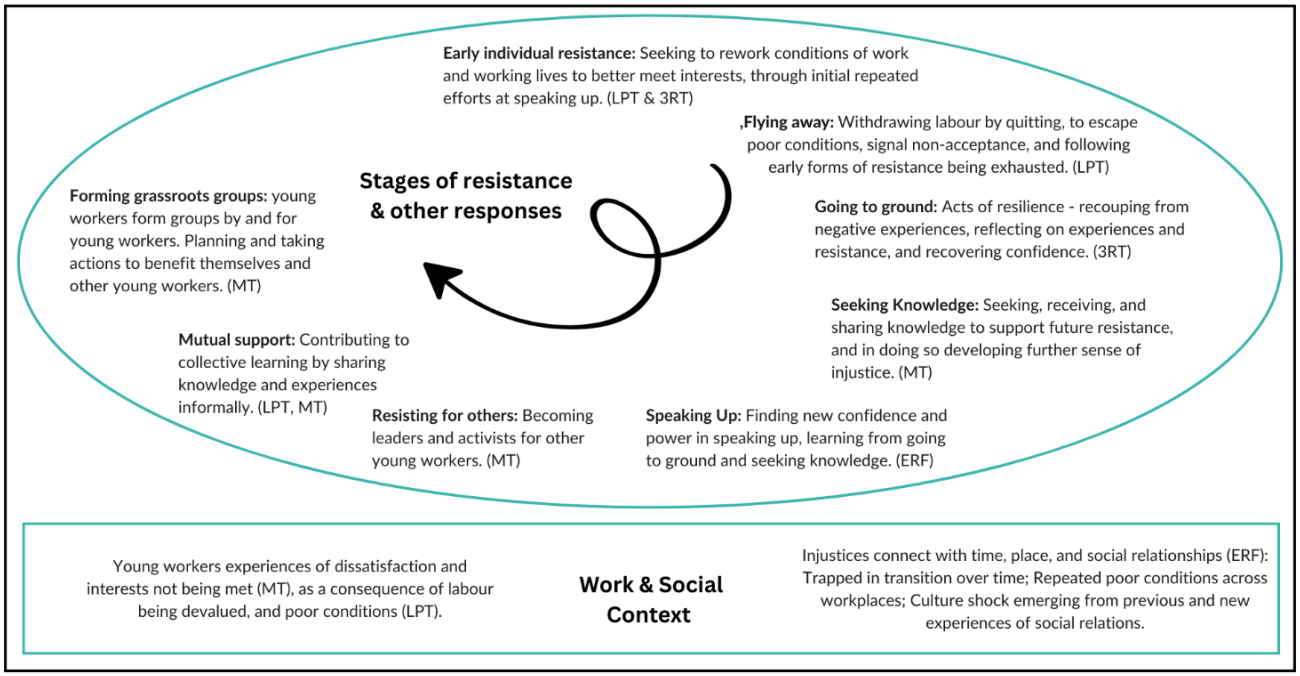


Figure 3: Young workers' resistance trajectories in Aotearoa New Zealand

The trajectory described here is not proposed as an ideal or universal type: not all young workers moved through each stage, or necessarily in this order; variations existed in why, when, and how young workers resisted. However, many participants highlighted these stages as experienced either by themselves or by other young workers, when asked how they saw 'other young workers' responding. Trajectories of resistance will differ between young workers, and their different places, and times. This perspective is supported by a sociological generations' perspective, which highlights that worker responses will differ by generation, and by culture and national context, as "young people forge generational patterns in response to their conditions of life" (Woodman, 2013, p. 8).

However, what may transfer across young workers and their contexts is that two interconnected stages can be identified in young workers' resistance trajectories. First, there are stages of actively opposing those with power, where young workers – whether consciously and intentionally or not – resisted poor work conditions. This stage may be called *resisting* stages. For young workers in this doctoral research, these stages included early individual speaking up, quitting to escape mistreatment, renewed efforts at speaking up, taking leadership in resisting for others, and grassroots mobilising. Second, young workers also worked to sustain a future trajectory of resistance by themselves and other young workers. These phases in the resistance trajectory can be called *sustaining* stages. Sustaining stages included going to ground to recover and reflect

on work and resistance experiences, learning from others and seeking knowledge, and growing their own and others' resistance repertoires through mutual support.

These different ways of resisting and responding over the course of young people's working lives can be linked with existing theoretical frameworks. For example, sustaining experiences illustrated Katz' (2004) concept of resilience, while resisting was linked with Katz' (2004) reworking and Labour Process Theory notions such as withdrawal of labour (Hodson, 1995; Lloyd, 2017). Importantly, both types of stages, resisting and sustaining, were essential in shaping young workers' resistance into a trajectory. Experiences of resisting informed subsequent periods of sustaining, and in turn, sustaining led to new stages of resisting. **Figure 4** below highlights connections between the young worker resistance trajectory and theoretical frameworks. This shows how ways of resisting, and explanations of context, offered by existing resistance theories and frameworks can be reconstructed as connected with stages in a longer-term process of resistance.

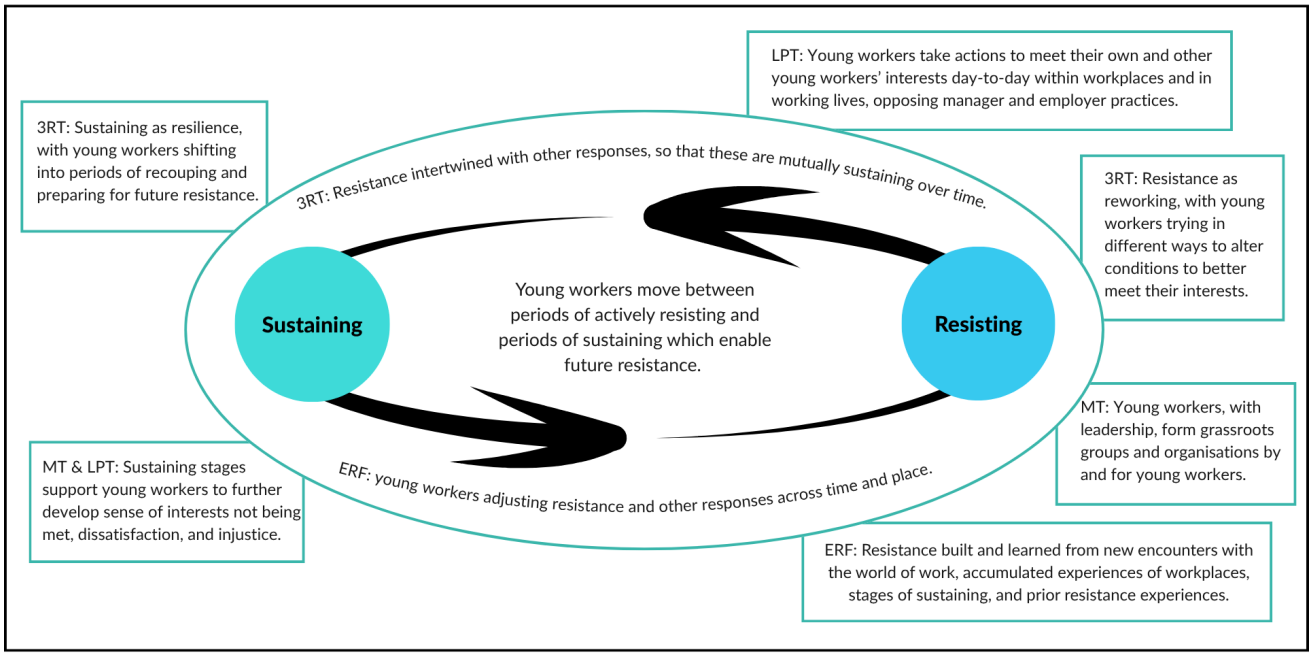


Figure 4: Resistance as a trajectory with stages of resisting and sustaining

The trajectory understanding of young worker resistance, and the two types of stages, may be used to carry out further research to develop knowledge of how young workers' repertoires of resistance are built over time, within contexts which shape their work and employment experiences, and their resistance.

7.2.2 Young workers resisting, not accepting

This thesis sought to respond to debates and gaps in knowledge of whether and how young workers engage in resistance. Researchers have asked whether young workers are critically aware of the ways they are disadvantaged in the world of work and employment (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016; Mrozowicki & Trappman, 2021). Some authors suggest that, regardless of awareness, young workers have accepted these experiences as perhaps inescapable and therefore adapt and cope (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki & Trappman, 2021). Inevitably, the normalisation thesis casts doubt on whether young workers

are positioned to resist. This study's findings contrast with these normalisation perspectives by showing that young workers' resistance was sustained by their critical awareness.

From early in their working lives, young workers were alert to, questioned, and acted on injustices. This early critical awareness and resistance was predicated, in part, on a sense of culture shock – dissonance between their prior expectations and realities in the workplace (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006). After early resistance was challenged, young workers' critical awareness matured through later efforts to reflect on and recover from negative workplace experiences. Young workers recognised they were not to blame for their experiences and were wary of individualising aspects of the world of work, avoiding the possibility of internalising responsibility for success and failure (Cote, 2014; O'Keefe et al., 2021; Sofritti et al., 2020). Over time, young workers expanded their ways of resisting, supported by their awareness and sense of injustice in their workplaces (Kelly, 1998), both within their workplaces and across their working lives, as they experienced being trapped in transition. Moreover, young workers sought to ensure that other young workers too could gain critical awareness and a sense of injustice by sharing their experiences and knowledge in acts of mutual support.

7.3 Methodological contributions

This section discusses the thesis key methodological contributions to critical resistance research. First, the thesis shows how collage making, as an accessible art form, offers an effective way to explore worker resistance in depth. Second, contributing to IR activist research (Thomas & Turnbull, 2025), the thesis used an empowering design that prioritised participant voices in data collection and analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Cole & Knowles, 2008), and young workers saw the research as part of their resistance.

The thesis contributes an accessible way to gather in-depth, contextualised data with marginalised groups of workers. In contrast to traditional IR resistance research methodologies, such as ethnographic case studies (Thompson & Newsome, 2004), this doctoral research used an arts-informed methodology, guiding a critical, exploratory, and participatory approach (Cole & Knowles, 2008) to studying young workers' resistance. Arts-informed methodology and collage-making methods have been utilised in other business disciplines (for example, Bennett, 2016; Culshaw, 2019; Morey et al., 2018), but do not appear to have been used within industrial relations. Collage-making was accessible, yet it also encouraged participants to reflect deeply and conceptualise their experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010), supporting this thesis in answering complex and exploratory questions. Further, as detailed in the Methodology Chapter (section 3.6), the collage-making process enabled individual and shared analysis of resistance and other responses, including how these were shared across young workers.

A second, related methodological contribution is showing how methodology and methods can empower workers through research processes in industrial relations research. In this thesis, young workers could use and view the research as part of their resistance trajectories. In the collage groups, participants used imagery

that would call into question their employers and employer practices. At a fundamental level, the research offered an avenue to 'shame' employers and expose patterns in their behaviours toward young workers. Bringing attention to employer practices can reassert moral social norms, enabling young workers to regulate employer actions by leveraging employers' desire for social legitimacy (Doellgast et al., 2021). Control over the imagery used in the collages may have helped create a sense of resistance (Alcadipani & Islam, 2017). By choosing how to represent their experiences and their employers, young workers gained control over these representations. Moreover, visual resistance by workers is part of a struggle for their interests and control over ways of life and work (Bailey & McAtee, 2003). Town hall meeting participants discussed how to share their collage images, reinforcing these visuals as a channel for resistance.

The collective setting of collage-making may have contributed to young workers' resistance by supporting a sense of shared struggle. Research participation reflected aspects of mutual support as a collective response aimed at fostering resistance (Hodson, 1995). Even in groups where participants had no prior knowledge of each other and came from diverse backgrounds, group members actively sought to validate others' experiences, for example, by connecting the collage to their own experiences. Group participants spoke about how they related to one another's collages and felt validated by the collage-making experience.

For many young workers, the research was also about offering broader mutual support to youth. Young workers stated that a key motivation for participating in the research was the opportunity to raise awareness among their peers. Young workers saw the research outputs as a way to warn younger workers about employer practices, and express support and validate their experiences. In other words, young workers sought to share their individual experiences to support collective learning and critical consciousness amongst youth as a wider group in society (Cote, 2014; Lloyd, 2017). Research participation therefore represented a form of solidarity with youth beyond the project, which could help foster broader collective approaches among young workers.

7.4 Limitations and future research

The research had several limitations, which can inform future research avenues. First, the research focused on gathering in-depth information with a small group of young workers and did not seek generalisability. Relatedly, a key limitation affecting transferability to other contexts was the sample characteristics: participants were based in three urban areas of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand (Hamilton, Auckland, and Palmerston North) and were aged 20 to 30. The resistance stages outlined in this thesis may be less reflective of younger youth and young workers in non-urban areas, where contributors to insecurity likely differ. The research also explored the experiences of young workers who were mostly in steady employment or education. As noted in the participant summary section, participants had higher bachelor's degree attainment than average, and most had either current or past engagement with tertiary education.

Future research could explore the workplace and resistance experiences of NEET young workers who experience longer periods out of employment and education, or who engage in forms of work other than formal employment. Moreover, participants' tertiary educational backgrounds were mostly university-based, with most participants having completed or being partway through university qualifications. Future research could explore the resistance of young workers with non-university qualifications, including apprenticeships and secondary school-level qualifications.

Participants in this research had diverse characteristics and identities, including ethnicity, gender identity, and so on. An area for future research is exploring young workers' intersectionality in relation to their resistance; how resistance emerges, differs, and is sustained, in relation to multiple different identities and backgrounds. Further research could also explore place in relation to young workers' resistance – as noted above, most participants lived in urban areas, which are likely to provide different economic and socio-cultural contexts to semi-rural and rural areas.

Another area for future research is that this research did not examine employer views, motives or strategies around young workers' employment and conditions. Further research could explore the relational dynamics between young workers and managers and employers further, by also including employer perspectives. It could be interesting, for example, to explore manager and employer experiences of young workers' resistance. Moreover, further information about employer strategies could shed further light on the constraints and enablers of young workers' resistance.

Finally, the research was cross-sectional, carried out at one point in time, and discussed young workers' resistance through their reflections on their working lives. Moreover, the research was smaller scale, and while the interview stage of the research provided an opportunity to follow up discussion generated by the collage groups, the town hall member checking method was limited by low attendance (four participants out of 21). A longitudinal research approach could continue developing understanding of young workers' resistance over working lives and across different backgrounds and contexts. The Life Patterns Programme at the Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, provides a model of successful longitudinal research, providing significant insights into the experiences of cohorts of young workers over the course of their working lives (The University of Melbourne, 2025). There is also potential for future comparative research, including how workers sustain resistance across different contexts and life courses.

7.5 Recommendations for practitioners and policymakers

Practitioners can use the findings to empower and work alongside young workers to transform their work and employment conditions. This may include not-for-profit advocacy groups, educators, and unions. The research showed that validating young workers' experiences empowered them to speak up, and that a sense of belonging was important for young workers involved in grassroots collective organisation. Practitioners may be able to offer a stable hub for young workers to build interpersonal support, strengthen belonging,

and access educational opportunities. Particularly for unions, organising strategies need to also recognise the instability of young people's work. For example, organising young workers by location rather than workplace could improve youth access, while acknowledging the shared problems youth face across sectors and roles.

As the research findings show, young workers will also spread the knowledge and skills they receive; practitioners can support this by working with youth to develop and provide physical and digital resources that are accessible and easy to share. Moreover, education and support for young workers can be developed with recognition that they may be at different stages of resistance. For example, some resources could focus on helping young workers recognise injustices at work, while others could offer guidance on how to start their own grassroots workplace collectives. Moreover, young workers spoke about being drawn to the creative collage-making methods used in the research, including participants who did not usually engage in artistic work. Tapping into young workers' desire for creative outlets could support education and young workers' reflective processes as they develop resistance.

For employers seeking to better support young people in their workplaces, several recommendations emerge. First, ensure clear institutional channels for voice are in place; some young workers later tried to raise concerns through these formal channels but found them missing or informal. Second, employers can better support young workers' socialisation into the workplace, recognising that the workplace is vastly different to their prior school and home life. For example, ensure a safe buddy system is in place so young workers receive clear institutional and tacit knowledge about the workplace. Third, recognise young workers' voices as valuable feedback, both on problematic conditions and workplace cultures, and on ideas for improving business outcomes. Suppressing young workers' concerns tends to lead them to leave, reducing opportunities to improve workplace environments and organisational bottom lines.

For policy makers, there are a range of implications for supporting young workers' empowerment in the workforce. First, given young people's vulnerability to poor work conditions and illegal practices, young workers will benefit from stronger support to enforce their employment rights. For example, dedicated youth-focused support services from the labour inspectorate and Employment New Zealand could be beneficial. Second, policymakers can help to ensure there is support, such as funding and curriculum requirements, for young people to receive employment-related civic education. Effective education will include practical information on employment rights and collective organising, as well as a theoretical understanding of workplace relations. Third, young workers' ability to negotiate with employers was also impacted by their financial instability and reliance on employers. Policies that provide financial security, such as protections for job security and reduced use of temporary employment, welfare for youth who are between jobs, and stronger social security for youth in education, can empower young people at work. Fourth, policymakers should consider education and funding to aid employers in ensuring that their workplaces are youth-ready and can provide high-quality employment conditions.

7.6 Resistance with, and by, young workers

This thesis explored young workers' resistance over the course of their working lives in Aotearoa New Zealand, responding to a significant gap in prior research on young workers' resistance in industrial relations (for exceptions see Lucas, 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020). The thesis contributes knowledge about how young workers' resistance emerges and is sustained over time in relation to their work and social contexts. Young workers' ways of resisting and responding expanded over time in working lives characterised by insecurity, described elsewhere as the 'new adulthood' (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Wyn & Woodman, 2021) and repeated experiences of poor employment conditions and workplace mistreatment. Young workers viewed their experiences as unjust, rather than normalising poor quality employment and challenging working lives, as they theoretically might have (Berry & McDaniel, 2020; Mrozowicki, 2016; Mrozowicki & Trappman, 2021). From the trajectory contributed through this thesis, young workers' resistance repertoires – ways of resisting (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016) – progressed and changed over the course of their working lives. This trajectory included two types of overlapping stages: resisting and sustaining. Future studies of resistance may use this trajectory lens to gain a more in-depth view of how and why people resist over time and across places.

For young workers, the message of this research is clear – continue to resist, every day, and for each other. These everyday acts of resistance, regardless of their immediate outcomes, are important building blocks for formulating new and renewed ways of resisting over time. The research also shows how youth support one another and create and use youth-led collective spaces to build resistance together. By sharing experiences of poor conditions and resistance, young workers will build one another's awareness and willingness to act. Moreover, as emphasised by the young workers in this study, education is power – taking up opportunities for education about employment rights is highly valuable for resistance. Resistance can be understood as the building blocks of large-scale social change (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Scott, 1985). Over time, young workers' everyday work and working-life struggles can shift norms and expectations among young workers, and drive change in practice and policy.

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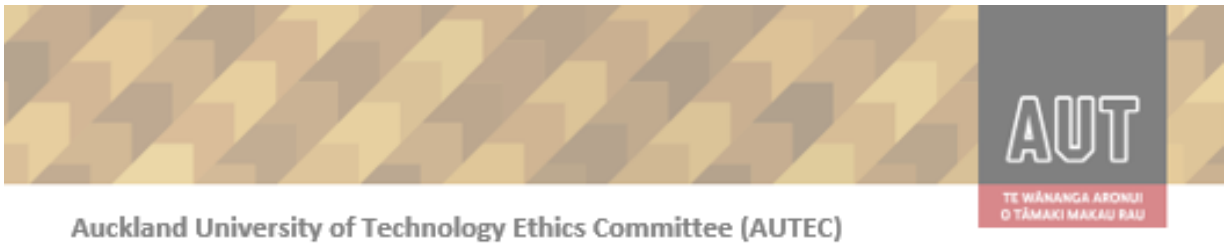
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A: Ethics Documentation

Figure A1: Ethics approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

26 November 2021

Katherine Ravenswood
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Katherine

Ethics Application:21/407 **Working title: Stand up, fight back! How young workers resist discrimination**

We advise you that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has **approved** your ethics application at its meeting of 22 November 2021.

This approval is for three years, expiring 22 November 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Include in the benefits section of the Information Sheet that a qualification is being sought and update the wording about AUT counselling being online.

The committee suggests you might like to consider having your supervisor attend the sessions at the town hall for support.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: wpn2956@autuni.ac.nz; julie.douglas@aut.ac.nz; Fiona Hurd

Figure A2: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

26 October 2021

Project Title

Stand up, fight back! How young workers resist discrimination.

An Invitation

Kia ora, my name is Tanya Ewertowska, and this research is being carried out as part of my doctoral degree at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). My research question asks how young workers resist discrimination in New Zealand. As a young worker in New Zealand, you are invited to participate in this research. Participating involves sharing your work-related experiences, through two groups and one individual session.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to find out about young people's work-related experiences in New Zealand. It focuses on what young workers do, for example any actions they take, about practices that are unfair or disadvantage them. This research is important, given that young workers often experience work-related disadvantages, such as poorer working conditions and unfair practices. The research aims to empower young workers by sharing how their peers are able to stand up, and fight back.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations, and the research is part of the requirements for completing my doctoral degree. Participants will also have an opportunity to discuss how to share the findings with non-academic audiences.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were identified and invited to participate in this research because you indicated your interest in participating by responding to an advertisement and emailing me. You also meet the criteria to participate in this research: aged 18 to 30; have worked in New Zealand for at least 9 months in total; have experience of where things have not been done well for yourself or other young workers; and would like to do or did do something about those experiences.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research, you will need to complete an online consent form, using the URL link emailed to you. A copy of your completed consent form will be emailed to you. When completing the consent form, there will also be a basic demographics questionnaire to fill out. The purpose of collecting this information is to aid data analysis. This information will be kept confidential and will not be used in a way that could make you identifiable in the research findings.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. Further, it may not be possible to remove your data from the group discussions that are part of this research.

What will happen in this research?

Participation in this research will include three main activities:

- A collage group with 5 to 7 participants, which involves taking part in group discussions and making picture collages.
- An individual interview
- A town hall meeting with all the participants in the research, which involves group discussions about the initial findings, sharing everyone's collages, and discussing how to share the findings.

These activities will take place in public meeting rooms where possible, or otherwise online using Zoom or Teams video calling software. If there are extenuating circumstances, any planned in-person activities will be postponed and/or carried out online.

I will keep your collages for the purposes of data analysis, and you will be given the option to have these mailed to you after data analysis is complete. However, if you wish to receive your collages sooner, these will be given or sent to you immediately after scans and/or photographs have been taken.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There is some risk of feeling stress or emotional discomfort in this research, as you will be asked to recall past work-related experiences and will hear about other participants' experiences.

It is possible that there may be a conflict of interest, or coercive influence or power imbalance between you and myself, or between yourself and another participant. If that happens, let me know or alternatively inform the project supervisor (details below) and alternative arrangements can be made for you to participate, or if you prefer you can withdraw from the research.

As this research involves group sessions, all participants are reminded that the identity of other participants and discussions in any group sessions are confidential to the group and asked to indicate on the consent form to agree to keep this information confidential.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You are not required to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with answering; if this happens let me know, and those questions will be skipped. You can also leave at any point during any session, or withdraw from the research.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health

Additionally, the following free national helplines are available:

- Lifeline available 24/7, by calling 0800 543 354, or texting 4357.
- The Lowdown available 24/7, by calling 0800 111 757 or texting 5626.

While this research does not ask about unlawful employment practices, if you feel concerned the following free employment advice channels are available:

- For employment advice from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment call 0800 20 90 20.
- For advice from a community lawyer, call a local Community Law Centre, or attend a free advice clinic. Information for local centres can be found here: https://communitylaw.org.nz/our-law-centres/

What are the benefits?

The research will benefit the wider community in several ways – including highlighting the issue of discrimination towards young workers, and empowering young workers by sharing what their peers can and are doing to respond to it. By focusing on young workers' resistance and social empowerment, this research will also counter stereotypes that young people are disengaged. The research could also be applicable for organisations looking to advocate for and support young workers, including unions, young workers' advocacy organisations, and government departments. I will also benefit from the research, as it fulfils part of the requirements for my qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

All sessions will be audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of data analysis, and scans and photographs will be taken of your collages. All data will be kept confidential; these will only be accessible by myself, my research supervisors, and a professional transcriber.

Data from the research and information such as your consent form will be stored at AUT, for six years following data analysis. It will then be destroyed and permanently erased using secure destruction services provided by AUT.

No identifiable information about you will be included in the research findings or any outputs from the research. A pseudonym will also be used for you in any research outputs, and you will have an opportunity to confirm that you are happy with the pseudonym, or to choose this yourself.

You will also have the opportunity to review your interview transcript so that you can remove any information which could make you identifiable. If you indicate on your consent form that you would like to do so, the transcript will be emailed to you, and you will have two weeks to review and make any changes.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Participation in this project will involve approximately 6 or more hours of your time. It is anticipated that these tasks will take place over a time span of 9 months:

- 5 to 10 minutes for consent and demographics forms
- Three-hour collage group
- One-hour individual interview
- Two-hour town hall meeting

Further costs include travel time and expenses, and internet connection for any online activities.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have approximately three weeks to consider this invitation. One reminder will be sent to you after two weeks, to confirm whether you are interested in participating or have any questions about the research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A URL link to a summary of the initial research findings will be emailed to you two weeks prior to the town hall meeting, where the findings will be discussed. The consent form also asks you to indicate if you would like to receive a summary of the final findings.

You will be able to access my final thesis after it is complete, by searching https://tuwhera.aut.ac.nz/open-theses. You can also indicate on the consent form whether you would like to have your contact details stored by me for the purposes of communicating when the research findings are shared or published in any future outputs.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Associate Professor Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz , (09) 021 9999 ext. 5064.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tanya Ewertowska, tanya.ewertowska@aut.ac.nz , (09) 921 9666 ext. 8372.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Associate Professor Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz , (09) 921 9999 ext. 5064.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26.11.2021, AUTEC Reference number 21/407.

Figure A3: Consent form

Consent and Demographics

Project title: ***Stand up, fight back! How young workers resist discrimination***
Project Supervisor: ***Associate Professor Katherine Ravenswood***
Researcher: ***Tanya Ewertowska***

Information sheet: https://autuni-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/em12119_aut_ac_nz/EeR_fZpoAzNOu3GlC1_ykJYBMSspS-Ppj-O1BAOtOK21Cg?e=dzppVP (https://autuni-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/em12119_aut_ac_nz/EeR_fZpoAzNOu3GlC1_ykJYBMSspS-Ppj-O1BAOtOK21Cg?e=dzppVP)

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on [xxx date on which final approval was granted], AUTEC reference number [xxx reference no.].

Consent Form

1. I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 26 October 2021.

○

2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○

3. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○

4. I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews, collage groups, and group meetings, and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○

5. I understand that if I withdraw from the study, then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, I understand that it may not be possible to destroy all records of the collage group and group meeting discussions of which I was part.

○

6. I understand that once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○

7. I understand that my collages and any photographs or digital scans of them will be used for academic purposes only, including in the thesis and any outputs from this research, and will not be published or shared in any other form outside of this project without my written permission.

○

8. I understand that the identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in any group sessions is confidential to the group, and I must keep this information confidential. This means I can not share anything which could identify any of the other participants in the research.

○

9. I agree to take part in this research.

○

10. I would like to receive a copy of my interview transcript, for the purpose of removing any information which could make me identifiable. I understand that I will have two weeks to review this transcript and make any changes.

○ Yes

○ No

11. I would like to have my contact details stored by the researcher for the purposes of communicating when the research findings are shared or published in any future outputs.

○ Yes

○ No

12. I wish to receive a summary of the research findings.

○ Yes

○ No

13. Participant's signature: (sign by entering your full name)

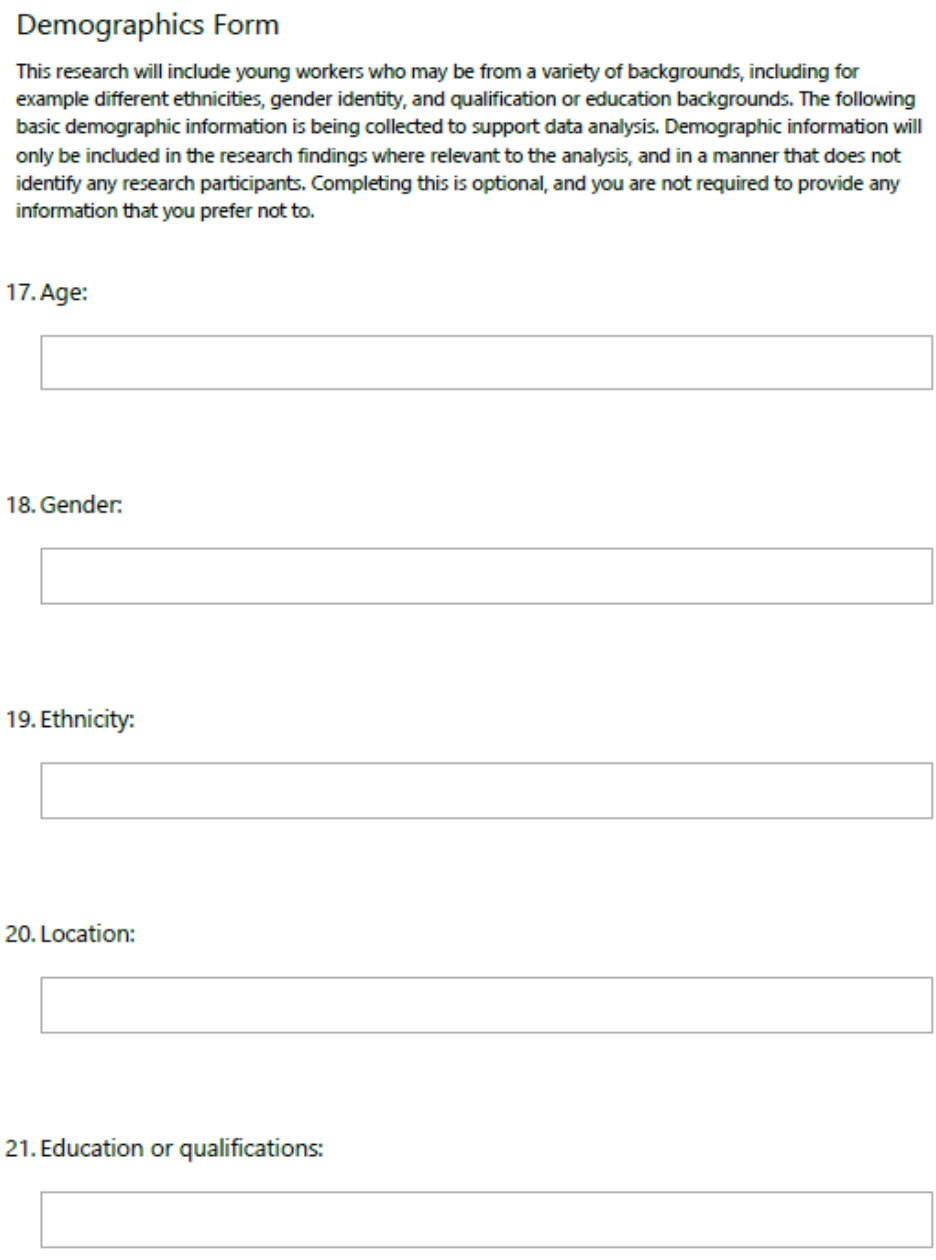
14. Participant's name:

15. Participant's contact details (if appropriate):

16. Date:

Format: M/d/yyyy

Figure A4: Demographics form



Demographics Form

This research will include young workers who may be from a variety of backgrounds, including for example different ethnicities, gender identity, and qualification or education backgrounds. The following basic demographic information is being collected to support data analysis. Demographic information will only be included in the research findings where relevant to the analysis, and in a manner that does not identify any research participants. Completing this is optional, and you are not required to provide any information that you prefer not to.

17. Age:

18. Gender:

19. Ethnicity:

20. Location:

21. Education or qualifications:

22. Any organisations that support, represent or advocate for workers, that you are associated with, e.g. unions: *(please include how you are associated, e.g. if you are a member of a union)*

23. Current or most recent job title and industry:

24. Occupation or industry that you have spent the most time working in: *(if possible include how long)*

25. Approximate total years that you have been in paid and unpaid employment: *(includes for example unpaid internships)*

Appendix B: Recruitment

Figure B1: Advertisements





ARE YOU 18-30?

WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AT WORK!

TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH IF YOU:

- Have worked in NZ for a total of at least 9 months
- Have had negative experiences in the workplace
- Have done or would like to do something about those experiences
- Can join 3 sessions - interview and groups

CONTACT TANYA: EM12119@AUT.AC.NZ



Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26.11.21, AUTEC Reference 21/407

Appendix C: Data Collection Protocols

Figure C1: Collage protocol



Collage protocol and questions

Introductions

- Welcome and thanks for spending their time on this project
- Introduction to researcher – PhD student at AUT, and do teaching and research work, and also on the YWRC committee to support their work. In past have researched young worker experiences in work like casual/fixed term.
- Reminder of research focus: This research looks at what young workers do about unfair treatment or practices happening at work, and systemic sort of structures, that disadvantage them.
- Confirm participants happy with audio-recording.
- Consent & demographics should be done beforehand, but copies handed out if not yet completed.
- Confirm participants happy with audio-recording.
- Invite participants to introduce themselves/share their Pepeha, and why they decided to take part in the research.

Group ethics reminders

- Collective responsibility for confidentiality around what said in the room, and anonymity for those present.
- Welcome to not answer any question, do a collage or share anything, and can withdraw from the research.
- Reminder of counselling helplines/AUT counselling in the information sheet.

Collage Process

- Today making three collages, each one based around a main question.
- Start with a broad warm up one, and then go into more specific questions related to the research topic.
- Once we finish a collage, each person will have the opportunity to talk about your collage, and everyone else is welcome to share any thoughts it brought up for them too.
- Welcome to chat with each other while working, move around, leave room, etc.
- Timing will be structured, to allow time for each collage.

Collage 1 Instructions

Will start with a warm-up collage. About 20 minutes of collaging and 20 minutes of sharing.

When you're collaging, the idea is to keep the question in your mind and cut out pictures and words that jump out at you – whether you can immediately see a link between them and the question or not. And as you're cutting things out place them ready without sticking them down yet. Look for things that suddenly make you remember or feel things. It's quite an intuitive process, so don't edit too much. If you start from the idea of I want to portray x or I want to find a picture of y, then it takes a long time and your brain doesn't have space to go in explore, because you tend to get stuck on a few ideas or plans.

The idea is to grab things that jump out at you, that trigger a memory or that you feel links to your experiences, and then reflect and think on them after that. When you get to that stage of sticking things down, you can start to reflect on why you picked out those images, what memories or feelings they brought up, how or if they do link with the question, what they represent – and you don't have to stick down everything that you cut out.

The question for the first collage is:

1. **What is your current workplace like for you?**

I'm going to ask each person to share what came up for you. Since this first one is shorter, we have about 5 minutes spare for each person to share (adjust for group size). Prompts:

- Reminder of collage question.
- Can you tell me more about.

Taking a couple minutes to reflect, could you write down 2-3 words or sentences on the back of your collage that describe the experience overall? And then we'll share.

Collage 2 Instructions

Okay let's move into the second collage (1 hour). The question for this one:

2. **Thinking back on all your work experiences up to this point, create a collage about your experiences of how you and/or other young people are treated at work.**

Further explanation: this is about how you see treatment at work. It can be about treatment you've experienced or how you have seen other young people you know treated at work. It can be positive or negative, anything you've liked or disliked.

We have about 10 minutes for each person to share this time (adjust for group size). Discussion prompts:

- Reminder of collage question.
- Why do you think that happens?
- What was the outcome or effect of that?

Again, we'll take a couple minutes to reflect, if you could each write down 2-3 words or even 2-3 sentences on the back of your collage that describe the experience overall? And then we'll share.

Collage 3 Instructions

Okay and now we're into the last collage (1 hour).

3. **Following on from the previous collage, create a collage about what you do or what you have done, when you experience treatment that is unfair to yourself or unfair to other young people at work.**

Further explanation: This isn't just limited to what you do on your own – so it could include anything you've done together with others as well, or you've seen others do as a group in response to unfair treatment.

We have about 10 minutes for each person to share again (adjust for group size).

Discussion prompts:

- What made you think of doing that?
- What was the outcome of that?

Okay and the final quick reflection, taking a couple minutes if you could each write down 2-3 words or 2-3 sentences on the back of your collage that describe the experience overall.

Conclusion:

- Ask how participants found the collaging process, if suitable/time available.
- Stop recording.
- Thank participants for time, and present koha (or let them know it will be mailed to same address as collage materials for online groups).
- Advise they will receive email to set up individual interview
- For online groups reminder to photograph collages and then return collages and materials using courier return bag. Reminder the collage can be returned to them.
- Ask if they could refer anyone else they think would be interested in participating.

Figure C2: Interview protocol



Welcome

- Welcome and thank participant for doing interview
- Explanation that questions start broader, and move toward more specific
- Interview conversational style, so welcome to ask questions, move the discussion in directions they think important etc.
- Reminders from info sheet – don't have to answer questions, can stop interview at any point, etc.
- Any questions before we start?
- Check participant happy for recording to start.

Interview questions

1. Are you able to walk me through a quick timeline of your jobs [notes here of any in the demographics or collage]
2. Reflecting on the collage group, was there anything that stuck with you after?
    - What did you think of the collage process?
    - What motivated you to take part in the research?
3. I wanted to ask a bit more about some things from the collage group: [notes here from their collages/explanations/discussions]
4. Thinking back on all your work experiences, what other sorts of challenges have you experienced at work/in employment?
    - Have you ever been mistreated or exploited at work? Would you be comfortable talking about that?
    - How did you respond to those challenges you experienced?
    - What were your options? Why did you do x? Is there anything you chose not to do? What were the outcomes?
    - Where would you say you are on your journey of responding, or learning to respond?
5. What other challenges do you see for young people as a group in NZ, in relation to work or employment?
    - Do you think there are patterns in how young workers are treated?
    - Are there policies or practices, institutions or norms, that you have seen cause issues for young workers?
6. In terms of the challenges young workers face as a group, what do you see the solutions being?
    - Do you think it's within young people's power to change any of those things?
    - Collage 3 [anything relevant raised in their collage 3 to discuss further around this?]
    - What do you think needs to change? Who can/should do that?
    - If you could do anything else, what would you do?
7. What do you know that's happening long term or on a bigger scale for youth? (has it been successful?)
    - Is there anything you've been able to do to support change for youth? On your own or with others, e.g. in union.
    - If you could do anything else, what would you do?
8. Is there anything I haven't asked about, that you would like to talk about?

Concluding interview:

- Invitation to town hall – meet participants, comment on findings, and talk about any ideas for sharing findings for impact.
- Welcome to get in touch if have any thoughts after this, anything want to add or change, or if have any feedback on the process.
- Present/organise koha if participant does not yet have their voucher.

Figure C4: Town hall slideshow & collage gallery

Auckland University of Technology

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

Feedback on preliminary findings:

How young workers resist systemic discrimination

2024

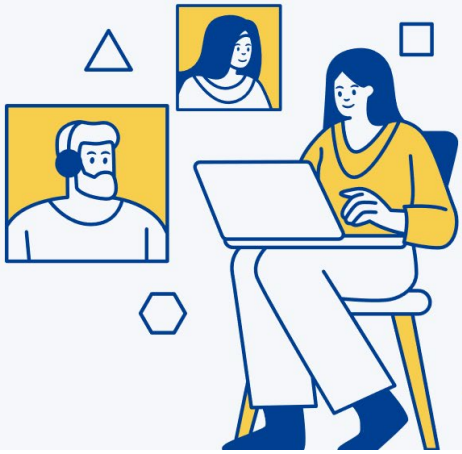
TANYA EWERTOWSKA

I Our why

Welcome & introductions

Why you are here

- Your own views and discussing as a community together
- Are findings authentic representation – do they resonate
- Sharing the findings



2

Outline

I Project update

II Themes 1 to 2: Experiences and treatment at work

III Themes 3 to 6: Responding to unfair treatment at work

IV Findings discussion and question time

V Brainstorm on sharing findings

Rationale for project

Systemic discrimination (López, 2021) in NZ:

- Policy settings disadvantageous in education and employment, and govt. negative bias (Beaumont, 2013; Scott, 2019)
- Patterns in labour market outcomes including precarious jobs, financial crises early in working lives (ILO, 2012; OECD, 2021; Statistics New Zealand, 2019)
- Practices of negative employer bias, exploitation and mistreatment (Anderson, 2019; Ewertowska, 2020; HRC, 2011, Mooney, 2016)

Whether/how youth resist in this context?

- Limited research on young workers' agency at work, globally (Lucas 1997; Tailby & Pollert, 2011; Yang et al., 2020).
- Some indications of youth movements and activism in NZ. (YWRC, Stand Up, SEA, RBHU, ALWU)



(P4-G2, Collage 1)



(P6-G2, Collage 1)



(P15-G4, Collage 1)



(P16-G5, Collage 1)



(P19-G6, Collage 1)



(P11-G4, Collage 1)



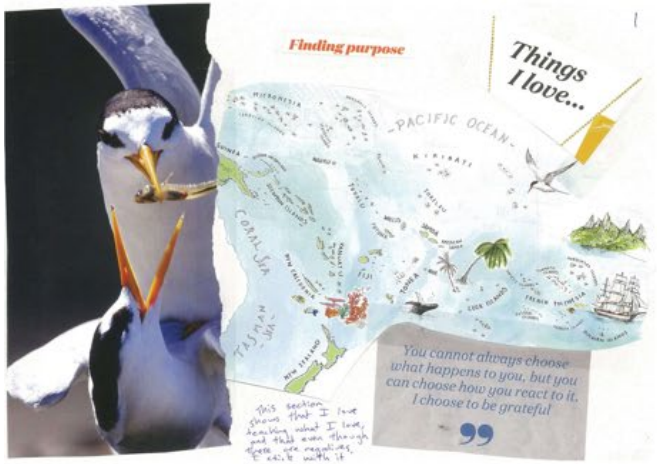
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(P12-G4, Collage 1)



(P20-G6, Collage 1)



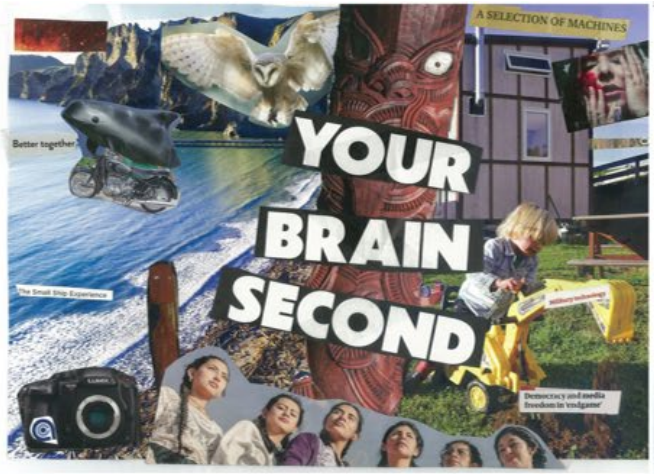
(P13-G4, Collage 1)



(P13-G4, Collage 1.1)



(P21-G6, Collage 1)



(P9-G3, Collage 1)



(P1-G1, Collage 1)



(P8-G3, Collage 1)



(P14-G4, Collage 1)



(P17-G5, Collage 1)



(P13-G4, Collage 2)



(P16-G5, Collage 2)



(P6-G2, Collage 2)



(P17-G5, Collage 2)



(P9-G3, Collage 2)



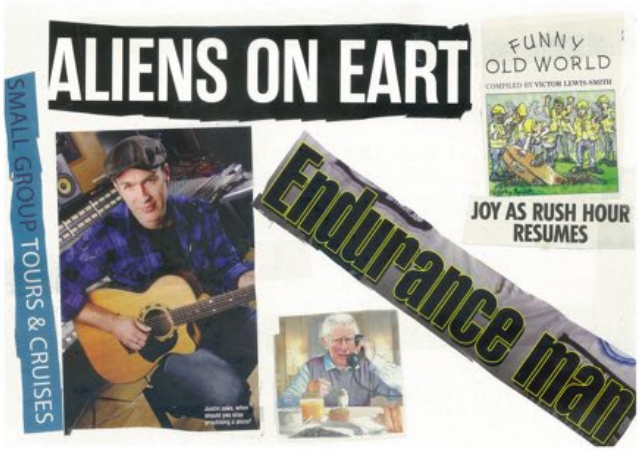
(P18-G5, Collage 2)



(P20-G6, Collage 2)



(P1-G1, Collage 2)



(P14-G4, Collage 2)



(P7-G3, Collage 2)

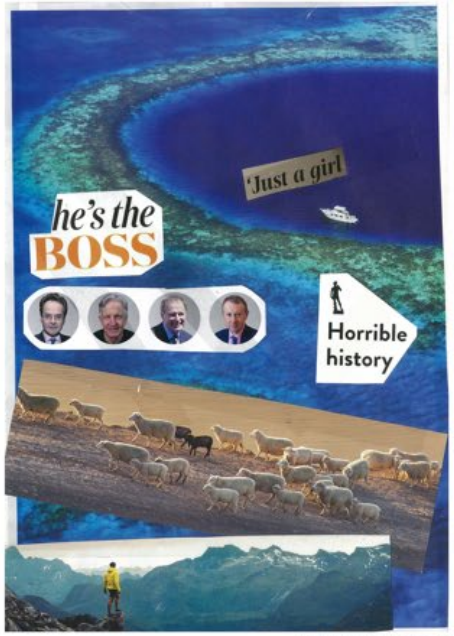


(P2-G1, Collage 2)



(P8-G3, Collage 2)





(P5-G2, Collage 2)



(P3-G1, Collage 2)



(P10-G4, Collage 2)



(P11-G4, Collage 2)



(P4-G2, Collage 2)



(P15-G4, Collage 2)



(P19-G6, Collage 2)



(P1-G1, Collage 3)



(P3-G1, Collage 3)



(P6-G2, Collage 3)



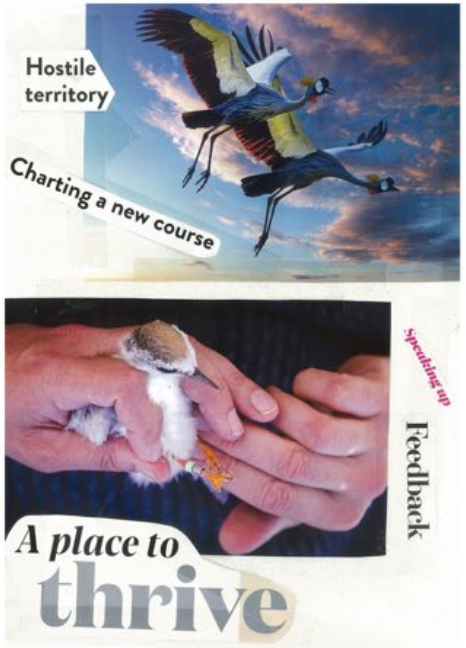
(P15-G4, Collage 3)



(P20-G6, Collage 3)



(P4-G2, Collage 3)



(P5-G2, Collage 3)



(P8-G3, Collage 3)





(P2-G1, Collage 3)



(P18-G5, Collage 3)



(P16-G5, Collage 3)



(P7-G3, Collage 3)



(P9-G3, Collage 3)



(P10-G4, Collage 3)



(P11-G4, Collage 3)



(P13-G4, Collage 3)



(P17-G5, Collage 3)



(P21-G6, Collage 3)



(P19-G6, Collage 3)

I Project update

Findings development process

- Analyse data from collage groups and interviews
- Initial feedback at AIRAANZ conference 2024
- **Town hall meetings**
- Complete findings
- Feedback at AIRAANZ conference 2025
- Submit thesis April 2025
- Share findings more broadly

4

II

Themes 1 to 2:

Experiences and treatment at work

II Questions as we go through findings

Question 1:

Do you feel the findings reflect your experiences?

Question 2:

Comments, questions, changes or additions that you would make?

6

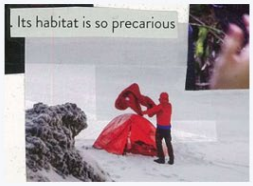
II Context theme 1: Trapped in transition to adult working life



(P13-G4)

Devalued labour

- Young workers' labour and education not valued or recognised.
- Seen in hiring practices, education policy, and stereotyping.
- Effect is struggle to find stable employment, and lack of career security and promotions.



(P15-G4)

Plugged in & burned out

- Devaluing increased reliance on employers and increased imbalance of power.
- Outcome was youth treated as disposable and cheap labour. Employed in low resource intensive, low status roles.
- Some acknowledgement of allowing exploitation.



(P19-G6)

Vulnerable to poor conditions

- Disposability fueled poor work conditions.
- Conditions included low pay; long, unsocial and unpaid hours; and lack of training.
- Work environments also poor, with mistreatment, bullying and violence.
- Illegal practices occurred, such as wage theft and working without an agreement.

7

II Context theme 2: Culture shock



(P1-G1)

Being sold the dream

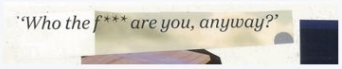
- Socialised to expect 'the dream' of material wealth and good living standards.
- Reality of treatment and conditions clash with this.
- Youth buy-in to the 'dream' creates pressure to work hard, supports exploitation.
- Pressure to succeed and be grateful; deflecting from injustices.



(P9-G3)

Age and power at work

- There is stigma and ignorance around young workers.
- This supports exploitation, expected to work harder for less.
- Lack of access to hierarchical power held by older workers.



(P20-G6)

Lost in the capitalist business world

- Outsiders in business world, navigating how to be and present.
- Business world and corporate culture norms unnatural, and values clashed.
- These experiences created a 'culture shock' early on in working life.

8

III

Themes 3 to 6:

Responding to unfair treatment at work

III Resistance theme 3: Resistance triggered

Early micro-resistances

- Lack of voice early on in working experiences as tried to push back, but generally ignored or deflected.
- Speaking up seen as risky for career/job---socialised not to do it.



(P5-G2)

Quitting

- The first major courageous pushback to signal non-acceptance of conditions was quitting.
- Generally however, last resort. Some point out that not creating long-term change for youth as supports disposability.



(P11-G4)

Reflection and change

- After early experiences such as culture shock, poor conditions, and struggling to assert rights through early resistance and quitting, there was a period of self-care and reflection on approaches.



(P17-G5)

9

III Resistance theme 4: Developing individual tools

Developing individual tools

- For many, negative experiences triggered seeking out knowledge.
- Practical knowledge and skills for raising concerns, and reducing vulnerability to exploitation.
- Theoretical knowledge to gain understanding of bigger picture around experiences, and reduce self-blame.
- Support also important as friends stepped in to help support in difficult situations; this also provided a model for future resistance.



(P3-G1)

Individual ways of resisting

- Speaking up - raising concerns and asking questions, asking for improved conditions.
- Quitting still a back-up option too.
- Once have these individual tools, this brings a feeling of holding power.
- This was enabled by knowledge and awareness of injustice.



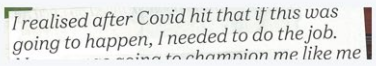
(P18-G5)

10

III Resistance theme 5: Collectives and solidarity

Resistance for others becomes your kaupapa

- Resistance for others on an individual basis, outside of collectives, e.g., using knowledge to raise others' awareness.
- Naming and shaming' - sharing information about bad employers.
- A promise to do things differently and nurturing younger youth.
- For some, awareness led to taking on formal activist roles.



(P16-G5)

Finding mutual support

- Conversations with colleagues, friends/other youth, to share experiences, so can find out about shared issues, and offer support, validate.
- Sometimes this solidarity led to action, sometimes more an emotional release.
- Speaking out so issues for youth aren't hidden or internalised.



(P6-G2)

Grassroots, non-union

- Own collectives organised around desire to speak out and enforce rights, and improve things for future youth.
- Spaces outside constraints of formal union and organisational structures.
- For some joining based on negative experiences, for others just believe in the cause.
- Find friendship and belonging.
- Filling gaps for youth left by unions, both preventative and empowerment focused, and taking action on issues.



(P14-G4)

11

III Resistance Theme 6: Visions for the future

Youth taking power

- Youth will need support, but can drive culture and norms change.
- Can build on the leadership and social media organising of latest generation in organising themselves. Can bring generations of youth to work together.
- There are lessons in the more direct ways of resisting by younger youth.
- Persist with everyday resistances.
- Youth to share experiences and stories with the public, stakeholders etc.



(P7-G3)

Systemic change recommendations

- Youth, and stakeholders involved in education, can empower youth by nurturing different values and expectations in younger generations. For example, shift expectations and social view around precarious and poor condition jobs - don't accept their existence.
- Change union approaches - more relational and empowering.
- Improve legislation and policies related to youth employment, careers, and management of young workers.
- Shift business attitudes to genuine appreciation of unique youth strengths.



(P21-G6)

12

IV

Findings discussion and question time



Question 1:

Do you feel the findings reflect your experiences?



Question 2:

Comments, questions, or changes that you would make?



Question 3:

Anything you'd like to raise not reflected in the findings?

Question 4:

Do you identify with evolution of resisting?

IV Discussion & questions



Question 5:

Anything you got out of taking part in the research/process?
And from hearing the findings?

16

V

Brainstorm on sharing findings

V Brainstorm on how to share the findings



Question 6: Sharing the research outcomes in future

- What is our purpose in sharing?
- Any ideas for where or who you want to share the findings with?
- How we share the findings? Formats?

18

Appendix D: Data and Analysis

Table D1: Thematic analysis coding for Chapter 4

Code categories	Codes	Subthemes	Themes
Systemic Disadvantage	Societal expectations and controls	Being sold the dream	Culture shock
Systemic Disadvantage	Being sold the dream	Being sold the dream	Culture shock
Early Workplace Experiences	Parent or family perspectives on early jobs	Being sold the dream	Culture shock
Systemic Disadvantage	*The capitalist business world*	Lost in the capitalist business world	Culture shock
Stereotyping & Age discrimination	*Disingenuous support of youth*	Lost in the capitalist business world	Culture shock
Early Workplace Experiences	Navigating workplace identity, expectations and practices	Lost in the capitalist business world	Culture shock
Early Workplace Experiences	*The purpose of the org or job matters*	Lost in the capitalist business world	Culture shock
Early Workplace Experiences	*Lack of support & education early on*	Lost in the capitalist business world	Culture shock
Managerial Issues & Controls	*Lack of youth at work*	Stereotyping of youth	Culture shock
Stereotyping & Age discrimination	*Youth are stereotyped*	Stereotyping of youth	Culture shock
Stereotyping & Age discrimination	*Young people belittled*	Stereotyping of youth	Culture shock
Systemic Disadvantage	Challenges in getting jobs	Devalued labour	Trapped in transition
Systemic Disadvantage	Issues with education system	Devalued labour	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	Lack of progression and training	Devalued labour	Trapped in transition
Systemic Disadvantage	Power and age	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	*Effort and jobs you do are exploited*	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	Youth as cheap labour	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition
Stereotyping & Age discrimination	Young people's ideas not listened to or ignored	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition
Stereotyping & Age discrimination	Youth dispensible	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition

Stereotyping & Age discrimination	*Policing of emotions*	Disposable: Plugged in and burned out	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	*Issues around working time*	Vulnerable to poor conditions	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	Employers not providing good or minimum standards	Vulnerable to poor conditions	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	*Micromanaging and control*	Vulnerable to poor conditions	Trapped in transition
Managerial Issues & Controls	*Harassment and bullying*	Vulnerable to poor conditions	Trapped in transition
Early Workplace Experiences	*Positive workplace experiences*		
Early Workplace Experiences	*Other difficulties of jobs*		
Early Workplace Experiences	*Freedom of self-employment*		
Early Workplace Experiences	*Experiences as students*		
Early Workplace Experiences	*Describing past jobs*		

Note. Coding and categorisation of codes here focused on the contexts experienced by young workers: their experiences of workplaces and the world of work, and in particular context which may have surrounded resistance and other responses. Some codes received less attention because data had been repetitively coded to multiple similar codes. These codes are in italics.

Table D2: Thematic analysis coding for Chapter 5

Code categories	Codes	Subthemes	Themes
Resistance for Others	Helping others becomes your purpose	A new purpose: Resisting for others	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance for Others	Being advocates or activists	A new purpose: Resisting for others	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance for Others	Offer voice to get change in practice or policy	A new purpose: Resisting for others	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance with Others' Help	Friends stepping in	Building power: Seeking knowledge	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance Barriers	Education and knowledge, awareness as power	Building power: Seeking knowledge	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Individual Resistance	Taking control	Shouting from the rooftops: New avenues for speaking up	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance with Others' Help	Union and union member support	Shouting from the rooftops: New avenues for speaking up	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance with Others' Help	What unions do and are for	Shouting from the rooftops: New avenues for speaking up	Coming back stronger: Rebuilding individual resistance
Resistance for Others	Listening & comfort	A safe haven: Offering mutual support	Coming together to resist collectively
Resistance with Others' Help	Solidarity, being in it together	A safe haven: Offering mutual support	Coming together to resist collectively
Resistance with Others' Help	Young Worker Non-Union Orgs	Growing from the grassroots: Collectivising young workers	Coming together to resist collectively
Resistance with Others' Help	Young Worker Formal Group	Growing from the grassroots: Collectivising young workers	Coming together to resist collectively
Individual Resistance	Quitting and taking risks	Flying away: Escaping mistreatment	Early stages of resistance
Individual Resistance	Having your own dreams	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Individual Resistance	Processing experiences	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Individual Resistance	Imaginaries & enjoying employer failures	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance

Individual Resistance	Personal grievances, negatives and not taking them	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Resistance Barriers	Isolation & precarious work	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Resistance Barriers	Fear & not believing change possible	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Resistance Barriers	Internalising, individualised	Going to ground: Reflecting on early resistance	Early stages of resistance
Individual Resistance	Speaking up	Testing the waters: Early individual responses	Early stages of resistance
Resistance Aspirations and Ideas	What is justice and its importance	Calling for systemic change	Sharing visions for the future
Resistance Aspirations and Ideas	What systems need to change and how	Calling for systemic change	Sharing visions for the future
Resistance Aspirations and Ideas	The value of young workers	Youth taking power: Intergenerational support	Sharing visions for the future
Resistance Aspirations and Ideas	Youth taking power	Youth taking power: Intergenerational support	Sharing visions for the future
Resistance with Others' Help	Criticisms of Unions	Distanced from unions	Trapped in transition *Chapter 4.

Note. Coding and categorisation of codes focused on resistance, including for example: ways of resisting and enablers and constraints, with and for who, and ways participants would have liked to resist or ideas for change. Some codes were touched on or drawn on in more than one subtheme. However, this table shows the primary subtheme which codes were used in.

Table D3: Visual analysis

The table below shows a visual analysis process initially explored, but not used, for analysis of the collage data (Brown & Collins, 2021; Russo-Zimet, 2016). This may be useful for other researchers analysing collages or other metaphorical visual data. The table was developed by integrating the frameworks offered by Brown and Collins (2021), and Russo-Zimet (2016), to show a metaphor-focused visuo-textual analysis method.

	Visual: Metaphorical collage (Russo-Zimet, 2016)	**Transcript: Reflexive thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020)	**Visuo-textual integration**
Level 1 **Immersion and initial analysis**	1. Describing explicit elements (image shapes, sizes, characteristics, placement, text), Identifying who is represented, the central concept metaphors and any processes or ideas in the metaphors.	2. Systematic coding method (Saldana, 2013). Includes participants' explanations of their visual collages.	3. Connecting the visual and the textual (textual codes, visual elements and metaphors)
Level 2 **Second level analysis**	4. Developing interpretations of metaphors, based on who represented, concepts, processes, and ideas	5. Initial theme development and reviewing themes.	6. Connections between metaphorical themes and textual themes. Based on Braun & Clarke (2006), reviewing themes found across both visual and textual data, theme definition and naming, and presenting findings

Note. Adapted from Russo-Zimet; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020; Brown & Collins, 2021.

Appendix E: Artificial Intelligence Declaration

Table E1: Artificial Intelligence Prompts

Chapter	Summary of instructive prompts in conversation
Chapter 1 Introduction & Chapter 2 Literature Review	I need alternatives for how to structure my thesis theoretical framework, which is the second half of my literature review chapter. One option is to cover each theory one by one. Another option could be to cover key concepts/assumptions one by one for all four theories; Could you confirm the literature review has theory in service of my research in terms of what aims the theory will help me respond to?
	I have a section reviewing literature on youth resistance, could you please give feedback on the structure and whether I am missing other angles or subsections?
	Could you please help with working out the structure, and what to keep and remove in the background section in my introduction? It is too long and a little off topic.; I would like your feedback on this structure for a section which defines resistance.; Should I separate out NZ stats into separate sections from international stats?
	Could you please provide feedback on my plans for restructuring my introduction and literature review chapters: I need help around what sections I should keep or remove?
	I am looking for a good reading on the resistance types under labour process theory, including resistance, accommodation, consent and so on.
Chapter 3 Methodology	Could you please explain social constructivism and social constructionism, their origins, and whether these are different from constructivism and constructionism?
Chapter 6 Discussion	I need help around what to include in the thesis discussion chapter, and how to structure the first few sections. Could you look at the structure I have planned and provide suggestions.
Chapter 7 Conclusion	Could you check my ideas for limitations, future research, and recommendations so far and offer suggestions?
Overall Thesis	Could you explain thesis meta-arguments and what they are based on?; How would you distinguish thesis meta-arguments from contributions?; I have some ideas for my meta-arguments, could you please suggest how I could best frame or structure these?
	Here are questions I wrote that people could ask of my work (null hypotheses) and potential responses to those. Could you please suggest takeaways to focus on from these, within the context of my meta-arguments and contributions?
	Do you have any guidance from reputable sources on how to write the PhD title?; Could you provide feedback on my title ideas and help me brainstorm more ideas.