

Community Resource Sharing and its Potential for Social Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies a community fridge located in Ottawa, Canada, and explores the lived experiences of people who were regularly accessing it. It uses the theoretical framework for emancipatory social transformation developed by Erik Olin Wright to analyze and understand the potential that this novel initiative has for social transformation that moves away from capitalism. This research employed a qualitative case study approach that included interviews with eight regular fridge users, observations at the site of the fridge and at a community consultation for it, and document analysis to understand the background of the fridge better. The interview results included themes that explored motivation and experiences, community, crisis, consumption, the impact of the fridge, and social change. The results of this research when analyzed using Wright's framework show that the community fridge introduced new potentialities for alternatives to capitalism, but on its own it did not inspire thoughts or actions outside of capitalism for the participants who were not already opposed to it before accessing it. This research concludes by presenting how the community fridge and other sharing initiatives like it could be integrated into and used in a broader strategy of emancipatory social transformation.

Keywords: Anticapitalism, Community Fridge, Sharing, Commons, Emancipatory Social Transformation, Non-capitalism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Context and Rationale

The global pandemic, the inflation crisis, and increased extreme weather events make the climate crisis and social injustices in our society harder to ignore. The increasing impact of these issues has made it clear that new solutions are needed to bring about social change and increase human flourishing, both now and in the future. The capitalist patterns of privatization, profit-maximization, consumption, and the corrosion of community are barriers to realizing social transformation. These patterns are helping to reinforce a system that is actively destroying our planet and social relations (Wright, 2010). The continued exploitation of our planet and its people can be attributed to the desire for continuous growth, a hallmark of capitalism, which is fundamentally incompatible with the finite resources of the workforce and the natural world (Monbiot, 2017). Despite the prevalence of capitalism and the appearance that there are no challengers or alternatives to its hegemony, scholars, organizers, and activists from all over the world are exploring, discussing, and enacting several theoretical frameworks, ideas, and initiatives. All of these anticapitalist ideas, concepts, and initiatives explore the potential for social transformation and ways to move away from our societal addiction to parasitic growth and implacable pursuit of profits (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Illich, 1973; Monbiot, 2017; Wright, 2010; Wright, 2019).

The gravity of society's issues require that we collaborate to rethink our existing structures and imagine innovative ways to build a better future. I was inspired to do research in this area through twelve years of experience in sales and equipment repair in the outdoor power equipment industry. Then, I was not questioning the broader system, and my thoughts and aspirations were wholly encompassed within the hegemony of capitalism. However, in the face of the climate crisis and societal inequality it became an experience of increasing dissonance for me to be employed and incentivized to ensure that as many individual people as possible had their own lawnmower, snowblower, and other pieces of equipment. The inefficiency and unsustainable nature of this work became most apparent to me when I worked with three next-door neighbours to sell them each their own lawnmower, trimmer, and blower. These three neighbours had all come to the store, where I was working, together since they were friends. They each spent over a thousand dollars on a piece of equipment they would only use once a week. The dissonance that I was experiencing meant that I went looking for alternative ways of consuming, and when I did, I was reminded of this experience between these neighbours where it was never even a question of whether they should individually purchase three separate units. At first, my search for alternatives was primarily focused on the industry that I was coming from, and this ultimately resulted in me finding the tool library model, which offered an alternative to individual ownership while also being centred around the values of community and helping to provide resources and assistance to each other.

I started volunteering at the local tool library and, through this experience, became exposed to more initiatives centred around sharing and gift-giving, such as community fridges, Buy Nothing groups, little libraries, and community gardens. Through this exploration, it became clear to me

that the ways we societally think about property ownership and consumption often pitch them as the only options available to us. However, outside the confines of the capitalist paradigm, there are viable alternatives that have a history of use and, in some cases, predate capitalist consumption (Belk, 2010; Graeber, 2014). As I experienced in my exploration, sharing and the commons are some of the possible alternatives to consumption and private property (Monbiot, 2017). These activities already existed in the past and have continued to survive and thrive in pockets within our predominately capitalist system (Graeber, 2014; Wright, 2010). The tool library where I volunteered is one example of this. In a neighbourhood surrounded by hardware stores and businesses that offer similar products, it has built a thriving community that can support itself and introduce people to the viability of sharing and its efficacy as an alternative to capitalism's rampant drive to consume and pursue individual ownership.

My experience getting involved with sharing initiatives led me to be more critical of capitalism and, ultimately, to conduct this research project. This inspired me to wonder whether other people had experienced similar effects from their experience with sharing initiatives. Could involvement with an isolated sharing initiative that was meeting an immediate need also become a jumping-off point for radicalization and the development of a critique of the capitalist system? Clearly, our current economic system does not encourage sharing, and there will need to be a significant level of social change to increase the role of sharing and commoning and build these alternatives to capitalism. This social change can only occur through collective coordination and the building of communities that foster sharing initiatives and spaces for the commons (Belk, 2010; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). This research will focus on this alternative to capitalist consumption, community

resource sharing, and its real-world potential for social transformation by exploring the lived experiences of people actively participating in a sharing initiative.

My research used a case study to explore the potential of community-based sharing for anticapitalist social transformation. I interviewed people participating in an Ottawa-based community-based sharing initiative to understand how it can shape their thinking about consumption and affect their overall well-being. The case study that I used for this research was an outdoor community fridge. Exploring this initiative and the lived experiences of those who regularly accessed it helped better understand the connection between this community resource-sharing initiative and social transformation. I examined this isolated initiative rather than a broader strategy of anticapitalism because I wanted to understand whether the community fridge, which is based on cooperation rather than competition, on its own can influence people to think outside of capitalism and market-based exchange. I applied the anticapitalist theory of erosion proposed by Erik Olin Wright to this case and assessed its potential through his framework for emancipatory social transformation (2010; 2019). Through exploring the experiences around this community fridge, I wanted to analyze the role local grassroots community activities and community-based initiatives can play in driving and inspiring social change. I also wanted to see if collaborative economic relations erode capitalism and bring about systemic change in the everyday lives of people and their local communities while improving their quality of life and welfare.

1.2 Positionality of the Researcher

For those who read this research to understand where I am coming from as the researcher fully, it is critical that I explain my positionality. Outlining my experiences, motivations, and location will ensure that my readers can assess the impact that my position has on this research study. I spent time reflecting on my position through all stages of this qualitative research project. I made attempts to be mindful of what I was explicitly and implicitly bringing to conversations with my participants and the results of this study. For this exercise of exploring my positionality and reflecting on it, I turned to a text on anti-oppressive research written by Potts and Brown, who began their chapter on the topic with an identification of their respective backgrounds and acknowledged their biases and motivations before continuing into their assessment (2005, pp. 256-257). This self-identification inspired me to do my own and outline my biases, identity, role, power dynamics, and other factors. While I do not have direct control over the structures that perpetuate the systematization of oppression and exclusion, I can acknowledge them and use my position to do everything I can to work toward solidarity, equality, and anti-oppression.

I was born on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations in what is now known by its settler-assigned name, Hamilton, Ontario (McMaster University, 2018). My location in Canada, a colonial country in the global North, significantly influenced my biases and understanding of the world. As a result of this geographical and cultural location, the broad terms I use in this research study, such as society and culture, refer to a context in what can be understood as “Western society,” the global north, or the imperial core, unless otherwise specified. As a white, Christian, temporarily-abled, and heterosexual male born to a middle-class family, I acknowledge that I have occupied and continue to occupy a particularly privileged space in society. This

privilege allowed me to grow up without facing exclusion and the barriers to success and safety to which many people do not have access. This access to food means that in my data collection process, for many of my participants who accessed the fridge out of a need for food, I was not an insider to their experience.

In addition to my basic needs being met, I have had the immense privilege of always having access to an abundance of fresh food and have been able to choose when, where, and what I eat. My privilege was apparent when I obtained my undergraduate degree from Redeemer University, a private Christian university, where I could live and study in ignorance of oppressive power structures and systemic inequalities that are daily realities for so many people. It was present as I majored in history, where I looked at the past mainly as a story of progress and something to be celebrated. After graduating, my privilege provided multiple job opportunities. I spent several years working in ignorance of my complicity in systems of oppression such as capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, and the patriarchy.

I mostly ignored my privilege until I was increasingly confronted with accounts of experiences that were different from my own. It was my realization that so many people do not have access to the opportunities that I do that helped me to acknowledge that I was and continue to be complicit in the oppression of people and dispossession of property and resources. I am not proud of this fact, and I feel angry, sad, and guilty of this reality while at the same time feeling thankful for the privilege and opportunities that have brought me to this point in my life. In light of this knowledge, I was faced with a decision. I can use this privilege to continue the status quo, or I can use it to

amplify the voices and make more space for those left behind. I feel an immense responsibility to stand in solidarity with oppressed people and pursue equity so that everyone can access the opportunities that I did. My desire for equality and for the voices of all people to be heard was a significant reason behind my choice of the theoretical framework for this project. I know that nothing will undo the actions of the past. However, with respect, community building, relationship, thought, actions, and accountability, I can use my privilege to contribute to broader collective efforts to build a more equitable and sustainable world and foster connections across classes that are based in solidarity. This process will take communication, constant reflection, and learning, and while I did this for this research study, it will need to continue for the rest of my life.

1.3 Overview of Research

As I have already discussed in this introduction, this qualitative research study utilized a case study approach. I conducted interviews, document analysis, and observations at a community fridge. I partnered with an organization that hosted the community fridge for this research project. The community fridge where I collected the data was shut down three months after I completed the interview portion of the data collection process. The closing of the fridge is explored in more detail in later chapters. Some incidents had occurred at the community fridge, resulting in those accessing it no longer feeling safe. The fridge's host decided to shut it down to ensure the safety of community members. However, they continue to operate an indoor fridge at the same location where they can more readily ensure the safety of those accessing it. The results of the interviews do reflect that there were challenges that took place at the fridge, but none of the interviewees had

any idea that the fridge would be shut down. Its shutdown ultimately impacted this project, but it also increased the importance of this data since this initiative, one of Ottawa's most well-established sites for food-sharing, can no longer be studied in operation.

The research questions and objectives for this study of the community fridge will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, but I will briefly outline them here. The main question that inspired my research asked whether community resource sharing had the potential for social transformation. The other questions that I was looking to answer centred around the impact of sharing and how it can be understood within a broader framework for social transformation, namely Wright's framework for emancipatory social transformation (2010; 2019). In answering these questions, I hope to understand the experiences of those using the fridge and connect these actions to a framework for social transformation that has been explicitly written for the twenty-first-century context. I want to explore whether interactions with this isolated community sharing initiative can inspire broader movement-building and collective action. Finally, I want to demonstrate the impact that local actions and involvement in alternatives can have in building a better world in the present. This project is significant because, as seen in my literature review, there have been no qualitative studies conducted in English in the Canadian context on sharing through a community fridge, which, as initiatives, have themselves not been studied extensively. Additionally, with the recency of Wright's framework (2019), not many studies have explored it in the context of lived experiences. These two factors make this project unique and will help inform strategies for social transformation in the twenty-first-century Canadian context and, more generally, for community fridges and other community sharing initiatives, whether they exist currently or not.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into six chapters that explore my research findings and the work that helped to inform its direction. After this introduction, the second chapter, the Literature Review, explores concepts around the research question and objectives. This chapter is broken up into three main concepts: the commons and sharing, beyond capitalism, and community-based initiatives. The third chapter, the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework, outlines the theoretical framework for emancipatory social transformation that Erik Olin Wright proposed in his books *Envisioning Real Utopias* and *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-first Century* (2010; 2019). This chapter also outlines the research question in greater detail, including its three sub-questions and the research objectives. The fourth chapter, Methodology and Results, describes the methodology used in this research and explores in detail the process and results of recruiting, interviewing, observation, and document analysis. This chapter concludes by discussing the decision made by the host to shut down the outdoor fridge. The fifth chapter, the Discussion, presents the analysis of the results using the theoretical framework and synthesizes it with the literature review findings. The sixth and final chapter, the Conclusion, explores how the community fridge could have integrated into a broader strategy for anticapitalist social transformation and how it could be more effective.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Commons and Sharing

2.1.1 *The Commons*

One of the places where sharing has historically taken place is the commons (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). The commons are resources everyone has in common such as natural resources, culture, and the rules and customs for managing these resources and they have become an essential topic of conversation in the capitalist era (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Marx et al., 1992). In addition to material resources, initiatives such as mutual aid groups have been conceptualized as a form of commons (Borkman, 1999, as cited in Huron, 2018). The enclosure and privatization of the commons, which Karl Marx called *primitive accumulation*, was necessary for the origin of capital and the displacement of feudalism in Europe (Marx et al., 1992). However, the privatization and enclosure of the commons was not a phenomenon that just took place to kickstart capitalism. David Harvey, a historian who has written extensively on Marxism and neoliberalism, builds on the work of previous thinkers such as Rosa Luxemburg, and proposes that privatization of common property is an ongoing process that continues today and has even accelerated during the neoliberal capitalist period when compared to the period prior to it (2007). This trend demonstrates the need for further exploration of the commons and shared resources and firmly links the continued development of capitalism to the demise of the commons and shared resources. This connection between resource sharing and

anticapitalism was explored in the work of George Monbiot, a British journalist and activist (2017). Monbiot argued that the commons, once more extensive than they are today, are crucial to any viable alternative to capitalism (2017).

Despite the necessity of the commons in social transformation, there has been opposition and critique of their use. An argument that was commonly used in the twentieth century to oppose the perspective on the commons put forward by Marx, Harvey, and Monbiot and defend the privatization of the commons was made by Garrett Hardin in his famously titled paper, *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). Hardin upholds privatization by arguing through the lens of classical economics that if everyone uses the commons, they will inevitably be used up as each individual user will pursue their own self-interests (1968). A classic example of the “tragedy of the commons” is a pasture shared amongst community members and only has the capacity for so many cattle. In this example, the individual farmer will always choose to maximize his returns by adding more cattle, and each farmer will make the same decision, ultimately resulting in the degradation and collapse of this common resource. The tragedy, according to Hardin, is that each person is compelled to continue pursuing their interests and growth at the expense of everyone else (1968, p. 1244). Hardin uses this tragedy to justify the ongoing privatization of the commons since if the farmers were to each own a piece of this pasture personally, they would not destroy it but instead take care of it while maximizing the possible returns through its use (Hardin, 1968, p. 1245). This paper became, and continues to be, a central justification used by capitalists for privatizing and enclosing many of the resources that were once held in common (Caffentzis, 2010).

Despite the prevalence of the argument proposed by Hardin, it has since been disproved by Elinor Ostrom (2015, pp. 2-7). Ostrom argued that there are times when those who share the commons will benefit most from agreeing to rules for appropriation and maximization of their yields (2015, pp. 15-18). This argument does not refute the claims that people will invariably pursue their self-interest (Ostrom, 2015, pp. 23-28). Instead, it proposes that rather than bringing about the tragedy of the commons, it is in individual actors' best interest to organize and manage their consumption communally (2015, pp. 15-18). Despite Ostrom's assertion that pursuing the interests of the collective over the individual results in the best outcome, there is still a possibility that individuals will not behave rationally with respect to the common good (2015, pp. 5-7). Ostrom argues that if members of a collective refuse to participate in the organization of the commons and choose to free-ride instead, then the benefit to all group members decreases and could potentially cease to exist (2015, pp. 6-7). This course of action, then, is not rational, but it does have to be factored into conversations about the commons and its governance (Ostrom, 2015, pp. 5-7).

The tragedy of the commons is referenced again in the book by Dardot and Laval about the commons (2019). This book references the tragedy of the commons by proposing that society is now facing a "tragedy of the non-commons," which is not characterized by ignorance of the problem but rather through the continued domination of society by private interests that are determined to maintain and grow their power (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 1-4). Unlike Hardin and Ostrom, Dardot and Laval go beyond an analysis of commons governance by exploring the relationship between the commons and capitalism (2019). They argue that anticapitalist social transformation requires an effective and viable politics of the common (Dardot & Laval, 2019, p.

29). The emergence of a politics of the common identifies it not as a new form of state communism but instead as a new paradigm that has risen out of the ongoing damaging effects brought about by the realization of privatization and the specific brand of freedom that the neoliberal order champions (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 4-8).

Dardot and Laval view the common as more than a form of ownership or a class of items, they expand on this understanding and include the acts of sharing items and continuing this sharing through collective actions in their definition of the common (2019, p. 159). For the authors, the common is a political principle that is birthed out of the deficiencies of capitalism and the privatization of the commons (Dardot & Laval, 2019, p. 311). The authors draw on the work of Karl Marx in the creation of a process they call *instituent praxis*, which is “neither a recognition of laws that already exist, nor a creation of laws from scratch, instituent praxis generates revolutionary social and political change on the basis of what exists” (Szeman, 2019, p. xiii). They expand on their discussion of the commons in the second and third sections of their book where they discuss what the commons looks like as an alternative to capitalism and private property. In these two sections, the authors argue that the commons have an existing legal and institutional history that has developed in opposition and alongside the legal and institutional history of private property (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 157-407). Dardot and Laval argue that a law of the commons needs to be democratically institutionalized both politically and economically. They explore the possibility of this institutionalization and the ways in which a law of the common would mitigate the issues that are caused by rampant private ownership (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 157-313).

With the case made for the institution of the common and their assertion that the common is a political principle the authors conclude their section on law and the common by stating that the common is a “principle of institutional transformation” that is realized through instituent praxis in which people have the capacity to create and improve political institutions voluntarily (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 311-312). After developing the theoretical framework and building a case for the institution of the common, Dardot and Laval make nine political propositions to invite further deliberation and discussion of the common and its realization (2019, pp. 311-408). These nine propositions expand on the concept of instituent praxis that was put forward in the last chapter of section two of the book (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 277-309). In addition to the definition already quoted, instituent praxis, for Dardot and Laval, builds on the laws and institutions that already exist to institute new rules of the common which in effect creates a new institution that will serve as the starting point for continued instituent praxis and emancipatory transformation (2019, p. 304). Finally, the book concludes with the assertion that continued instituent praxis can result in the institution of the unappropriability of the common and ensure its use for a social purpose (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 403-407).

Dardot and Laval also critique the analysis of the common that was proposed by Elinor Ostrom in her response to Garrett Hardin’s *Tragedy of the Commons*. They refute the argument made by Ostrom by stating that her analysis fails to effectively include the power structures and oppressive dynamics that exist within our capitalist society. The criticism goes further by positing that Ostrom’s analysis is intrinsically bound up in capitalist theories of private property that keep it from being effective in presenting the commons as an alternative to capitalism. Dardot and Laval

argue that Ostrom's theory emphasizes the idea of social capital and attempts to keep the commons within the neoliberal conception of consumption and political economy. Finally, the idea that individual interest is the modus operandi of every person at the heart of capitalist economics is still integral to Ostrom's analysis. This core concept is refuted by Dardot and Laval, who propose that the common as an alternative to capitalism will not utilize this existing logic and instead will be accompanied by a whole new logic of its own (2019, pp. 100-104).

Dardot and Laval are not alone in their critique that Ostrom's theory of commons governance enhances and works within the existing paradigms of the neoliberal capitalist order. George Caffentzis discusses the argument made by Ostrom and demonstrates how it is now being used to justify attempts to bring sharing and commoning into the neoliberal model (2010). For Caffentzis, the presence of the commons in pre-capitalist society and their continued use to the present day, along with the creation of new common spaces made possible through technological advancements serves to give hope to anticapitalist visions of a society organized around collective and non-exploitative values (2010, p. 24). However, despite their use by anticapitalist theorists and activists, the commons and spaces for sharing today exist in a tension between their identity as the original non-capitalist activities and their attempted subsumption by the neoliberal order (Caffentzis, 2010). This tension is better understood through the author's proposition that there are two different types of commons, the capitalist commons and the anticapitalist commons (Caffentzis, 2010, pp. 26-37). The popularization of the term social capital and the need for a concept of common interest are evidence of the use and cooption of the commons by capitalism and the ruling class. In addition, the integration of common property into the purview of the World

Bank further demonstrates the ways in which it is being absorbed into the neoliberal project. Through exploitation of the concept of common interest and the reliance on common property to create favourable conditions for the spread of neoliberalism, capitalism has adapted to the commons and integrated their own version of them into their framework (Caffentzis, 2010, pp. 26-33). In the face of this neoliberal opposition and their attempted semantic enclosure of the commons, anticapitalism faces a challenge to its assertion that the commons are in opposition to neoliberalism. The struggle for the commons between the capitalist and anticapitalist approaches proposed by Caffentzis helps to determine what material on sharing is relevant to social transformation and specifically to this research which takes on an anticapitalist perspective and will not be building on the capitalist conception of the commons and its attempt to enclose them (2010). However, with these two different ways of seeing the commons it is possible that many participants in this research project will not view the commons as anticapitalist at all, but will still participate in them for other reasons which will come out in data analysis.

2.1.2 Sharing and Mutual Aid

In addition to the commons, the areas of mutual aid and sharing have also been explored and talked about in a similar way. Similar to the way in which Garret Hardin's work was challenged by Elinor Ostrom, the authors Gauthier Chapelle and Pablo Servigne wrote a book, *Mutual Aid: The Other Law of the Jungle*, that challenges the concept that competition is at the heart of survival. They identify the primacy of the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest, as being responsible for environmental degradation, unhappiness, and the formation of a violent world (2022, p.4). Their book argues that mutual aid is the other law of the jungle and that it is and always has been essential

for animals and humans and their continued survival (2022, pp. 1-3). After asserting that mutual aid is the law of the jungle forgotten by our society, the authors state that the topic of mutual aid is becoming more popular and through this process it will inspire new ways of consuming, producing, and communicating (2022, p. 7). Finally, they conclude by stating that we need to relearn how to rely on each other despite the dominant narrative that the best will win that threatens our ability to be in community (2022, pp. 175-178).

One of the anthropologists that Gauthier and Servigne attribute the development of the field of mutual aid to is Marcel Mauss (2022, p. 6). Marcel Mauss explored at length the presence of mutual aid, sharing, and gift-giving in many different societal settings (2016). Mauss argued that gift giving is more than an individual action inspired by generosity but is a social activity that builds and strengthens relationships, social responsibilities, and ideals (2016, pp.194-198). Instead of the market, Mauss identified what he called the “triple obligation” to give, receive, and give back as the heart of social relations (Caillé, 2022, p. xxi). In addition to Marcel Mauss, others have also heralded sharing and gift-giving as foundational social interactions and discussed their importance in society. David Graeber, another prominent anthropologist, picks up on the work of Marcel Mauss in his book called *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001, pp. 151-228). Graeber argues that value is not an objective concept and that it varies by culture and society (2001, pp. 1-22). In a later book on debt he argues that sharing and gift giving are together the basis for exchange and the basis for the contract that has since become ubiquitous in capitalism (2014, pp. 21-41). This argument by Graeber is in opposition to the common assumption that humans have always trucked, bartered, and exchanged and proposes a different foundation for exchange.

Graeber, Marcel Mauss, and Servigne and Gauthier are not alone in their exploration of mutual aid. It was also a concept that was taken up by Dean Spade in his recent book on the subject and how it can be used to prepare for crises. This book was more practical than many of the other works on this topic, but before the author dove into the practical, he did provide a background on mutual aid and positioned it as being opposed to capitalism. The author argues that capitalism has atomized many elements of society and community to the point where engaging in activities such as sharing, gift giving, and caring for others is a radical action that opposes the dominant system (Spade, 2020, p. 16). The author proposes that mutual aid has three main elements. The first of these elements is that mutual aid initiatives should be concerned with helping to fulfill their needs while building a shared knowledge of the systemic failures and inequalities that cause the needs that are being filled to go unfilled in the first place (Spade, 2020, pp. 18-21). The second element is that mutual aid projects need to “mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements” (Spade, 2020, p. 22). For the author mutual aid is an essential component of building movements as people who need help will come to the movement, have their need fulfilled, and be exposed to the concept that there is something wrong with the system that needs to be addressed (Spade, 2020, pp. 22-25). The final element of mutual aid is that mutual aid initiatives are reliant on participation and solving problems as a group instead of relying on a savior to bring about the needed change (Spade, 2020, p. 25-30).

Despite the power of mutual aid discussed by Spade and the presence of non-monetary forms of exchange in most civilizations that was discussed by Mauss and Graeber, there are some cultures in which sharing specifically played a more significant role. In any conversation on sharing,

particularly within the context of this research project, attention must be paid to manifestations of sharing outside of the dominant capitalist system. Sharing was an integral value of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, the land now known by its settler-assigned name as North America (Hageman & Galoustian, 2020). In Indigenous culture, resources gathered or grown by individuals were expected to be shared with others (Hageman & Galoustian, 2020). The central role that sharing plays in Indigenous culture has been identified as something that can help teach settlers that there are existing forms of exchange that can be alternatives to capitalism (Wolfstone, 2019).

Irene Wolfstone explores this idea in her journal article on sharing and Indigenous matricultures (2019). In Indigenous culture, sharing and gifting were integral, and goods were not produced for the individual but for the collective first (Wolfstone, 2019, p. 13). Wolfstone's study of Indigenous sharing economies demonstrates the significant emphasis they placed on communities, the natural world, and all beings (2019, p. 16). Finally, Wolfstone identifies three sharing traditions from Indigenous matricultures and stresses that settler researchers must learn about these and other practices of the Indigenous sharing economy that were intentionally removed from the economy by Canadian colonizers (2019, p. 13). In addition to the Canadian context, similar research has been conducted in Papua New Guinea that demonstrated the need to embrace Indigenous alternatives such as gift-giving and sharing for increased human well-being (Curry, 2003). Engagement with Indigenous economies and systems of exchange, both in the past and present, demonstrate that there is an existing blueprint of what a sharing-based alternative to capitalism focused on human well-being could look like (Wolfstone, 2019, p. 13).

Russell Belk developed an understanding of sharing and its impact from a consumer behaviour perspective in two papers (2007; 2010). Belk proposes that sharing increases sustainability, decreases materialism, and strengthens community (2007). Unlike the work of Caffentzis, Belk suggests that sharing is an activity that is opposed to neoliberal modes of consumption and production (2007). This is a point highlighted by the title of his paper, *Why Not Share Rather than Own?* (Belk, 2007). The author argues that sharing faces several impediments, such as materialism, perceived and real scarcity, and individual possessiveness (Belk, 2007). Finally, the author concludes by confirming the similar statement made by Benkler through his proposal that sharing is increasingly possible as an alternative to consumption in the context of new and emerging technologies (2004; Belk, 2007). Sharing then has a deep history and, despite attempts to commoditize it through platforms, has been a community-based activity outside of and separate from capitalism (Belk, 2007; Belk, 2010).

When it comes to sharing in the capitalist society of the global north, the rapid development of new technologies has played a significant role in developing its potential and enabling it to take on many new and different forms (Benkler, 2004; Belk, 2007). It continues to open more spaces where sharing is a viable alternative to wasted capacity or traditional secondary markets such as yard sales or classifieds (Benkler, 2004; Belk, 2007). Yochai Benkler demonstrates the salience of sharing by exploring the use of carpools and the popularization of distributed computing through projects such as SETI@home (2004). Benkler's argument characterizes sharing as an activity such as carpooling, where the individual sharing their vehicle is not being paid to provide the service other than possibly splitting the cost of gas or any possible tolls (2004). This definition of sharing

is not agreed upon by all who write about it and notably does not fit the sharing that supports and serves to bolster neoliberal capitalism identified by Caffentzis, making it a type of non-capitalist sharing (2010).

The rise of sharing as an activity that can take place within the neoliberal and capitalist paradigm has been discussed at length (Caffentzis, 2010; Srnicek & De Sutter, 2017; Tremblay-Huet, 2018; Woodcock, 2021). The rise of applications like Airbnb, Deliveroo, Uber, and Skip the Dishes have enabled owners to share the excess capacity identified by Benkler (2004) and created a secondary marketplace to commodify and monetize sharing. The cooption of the terms sharing and sharing economy by capitalists has shifted the conversation away from non-capitalist sharing and toward online platforms (Tremblay-Huet, 2018). These applications have been heralded as platforms in the growing capitalist sharing economy and have inspired the creation of the term platform capitalism. Platform capitalism emerged as a response to the downturn of the 1970s and will become more common as its networks continue to grow (Srnicek & De Sutter, 2017). However, this capitalist appropriation of sharing is not a silver bullet solution to the problems that have historically plagued it. In many cases, the platforms' mistreatment of their workers has resulted in labour movements and increasing worker solidarity (Woodcock, 2021, pp. 70-75). Even though the platforms, with their application-based communications, seem responsible for the insularization of the individuals providing the services, the technology that has enabled the monetization of sharing has also encouraged the sharing of experiences and increased organization amongst the workers (Woodcock, 2021, pp. 88-91).

2.1.3 Gaps in the Sharing and Commons Literature

The literature on sharing and the commons demonstrates that they are critical areas where emancipatory social transformation can take place. The writing on the commons builds a case for their opposition to private property, a core tenet of the capitalist system. In addition, the political proposals for the common expounded by Dardot & Laval and their foundation in the principle of instituent praxis show that commoning and re-institutionalizing the rules and customs of the commons can lead us towards emancipatory social transformation (2019). The literature on sharing further reinforces the potentiality of it and the commons as alternatives to capitalist exchange while demonstrating that there are attempts by the neoliberal order to co-opt and enclose the common and sharing. Further, the literature demonstrates that both sharing, and the commons are supported by their histories and their existence pre-capitalism in the global North's colonial states and in Indigenous culture. The literature on sharing and the commons demonstrates a need for more exploration of them in the context of neoliberal capitalism. The argument made by George Caffentzis that the commons are at the center of a conflict between neoliberalism, which is attempting to subsume them, and anticapitalism, which is attempting to use them to transform society, points to the need for more discourse on this evolving struggle (2010). While the literature makes a compelling case for sharing as an alternative to capitalism, without building a full understanding of the lived experiences of those who are sharing there can be no way of knowing whether it is actually a viable alternative that improves the lives of those who participate in it. This research builds on the work that has been done to explore lived experiences to specifically understand the viability of a community fridge as a tool for social transformation in the Canadian context.

2.2 Beyond Capitalism

Many authors have proposed that it is impossible to bring about the social change needed to address the societal issues we face without looking beyond and outside of capitalism (Dash, 2016, p.1; Gorz, 2010, pp. 43-76; Monbiot, 2017; Wright, 2010; Wright, 2019). Anup Dash argues that capitalism is not only not equipped to address the pressing twenty-first-century issues of inclusion, morality, environmental degradation, well-being, and governance but is itself responsible for creating them in the first place (Dash, 2016). Andre Gorz argued that capitalism lacks a “norm of sufficiency” and as such is incapable of limiting itself to function sustainably and in a way that is compatible with the bounds of the natural world (2010, p. 69). If human flourishing now and in the future are the ultimate goals of society, then models of social change and transformation are only possible when the systems and structures that cause oppression and harm are adequately critiqued (Wright, 2010). Wright laid out the need to critique and diagnose structural problems as a critical step in bringing about social change in his “theory of emancipatory social transformation” (2007, p. 111). Since capitalism and the free market inform all areas of modern life, effective social change is anticapitalist and will need to either propose an alternative system or bring about changes that decrease or eliminate oppression and usher in an era of increased human flourishing (Wright, 2010).

2.2.1 Anticapitalism

One of the conversations that runs as an undercurrent through the discourse of social transformation and anticapitalism is the question of reform versus revolution. Rosa Luxemburg

discussed this question at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in her response to the German reformist, Eduard Bernstein (Luxemburg & Scott, 2008). Luxemburg argued that social transformation requires a revolution and that reforms are ineffective in bringing about systemic change (Luxemburg & Scott, 2008). Even though the conversation around these two paradigms often involves championing one over the other, just as Luxemburg did, some authors, such as Andre Gorz, have argued otherwise (1967). Gorz argued in favour of reform and revolution and proposed that although the society-wide adoption of socialism will ultimately require a revolution, widespread reforms can pave the way for and be essential for this coming revolution. However, the author makes a distinction between the reformist who just wants things like increased wages, and the socialist who wants to transform society through democratizing the means of production (Gorz, 1967, p. 124). Gorz's opposition to reformists and his support of reforms means that in his work he is not merely advocating for reform but is instead advocating for socialist reforms which can also be thought of as non-reformist reforms. Work time is one example of a non-reformist reform that Gorz uses. In this example the worker in the capitalist system works extremely long days, which leaves no time for emancipatory thoughts or actions (1967, p. 128). This example demonstrates the need for reforms that would give the worker more time that could then be used to think about or act on their liberation, but all while building towards the goal of revolution and socialism (Gorz, 1967).

In addition to the question of reform or revolution, anticapitalist authors and scholars continue to build on the existing body of work to develop and adapt theories and critiques. For my research, Erik Olin Wright most heavily influenced the anticapitalist framework that I will be using, which

he proposed in two of his books, *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-first Century* and *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2019; 2010). In addition to the texts by Wright, another recent book which focuses on capitalism's deficiencies and proposes the commons as an integral part of a viable alternative is *Out of the Wreckage*, written by George Monbiot (2017). Monbiot's case for the commons is a theme that is also present in the work of many prominent anticapitalist scholars, including Ivan Illich (1975), Andre Gorz (1999), and Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b, Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). The presence of the commons in anticapitalist literature further builds the case for the commons and sharing that was the focus of the work of Dardot & Laval (2019) and was a theme in the literature on the commons and sharing that was already explored.

In his work titled *Tools for Conviviality*, Ivan Illich explores the deficiencies of capitalism through its focus on mass production and the isolation of individuals. Although never explicitly using the term anticapitalism, Illich grapples with the impacts of what he calls the industrial age, characterized by the rise of consumption and corporations. As a part of his argument, he states that democratic management of the commons through a political process is one of the elements in combatting the dominant system (Illich, 1975, p. 116). Illich also argues that the pervasiveness of corporate capitalism has made it increasingly difficult to imagine a society not governed by industrial expectations. Despite the difficulty of thinking outside of the prevailing system, Illich proposes that it is through the creation of a "convivial society" where technologies and tools serve "politically interrelated individuals rather than managers" that we will be able to break from the dominance of capitalism (1975, p. 12). This work makes a case for conviviality and highlights the issues prevalent in the industrial society of its time. Many of the issues brought to light in this

work, including social isolation, poor management of scarce resources and the commons, industrial growth, and environmental degradation, are still prevalent in capitalist society today and can form the basis for opposition to it (Gorz, 2010; Illich, 1975; Monbiot, 2017).

Conceptions of anticapitalism and what constitutes anticapitalist activities are continuously evolving in response to changes in capitalism. These variations can be seen through the reform versus revolution conversation, but they can also be seen in more recent conceptualizations and reframings of anticapitalism itself. Paul Chatterton argues that anticapitalism cannot be defined with a single definition and is instead defined by the local everyday actions of activists (2010). Chatterton's focus on everyday actions and their role in anticapitalism becomes even more apparent when he states that anticapitalism is more than ruptural or revolutionary change on a large scale (2010). Anticapitalism is also the carrying out of everyday actions in ways that are outside of dominant capitalist relations (Chatterton, 2010). This everyday activism makes anticapitalism more accessible, relevant, and feasible (Chatterton, 2010). Chatterton argues that within this new understanding of anticapitalism as everyday activism, there is a certain multiplicity that the "anti" part of the term acquires (2010). This multiplicity is the simultaneous existence of "anti", "post", and "despite" in the carrying out of anticapitalist practices and, ultimately, in an understanding of the definition of anticapitalism itself (Chatterton, 2010, p. 1205). The crux of this argument centres on the premise that capitalism comes into being through everyday transactions and activities, and so too must anticapitalism come into being through everyday practices (Chatterton, 2010).

2.2.2 Diverse Economies and Postcapitalism

Often ways of thinking and concepts developed in other areas that focus on social transformation, emancipation, and anti-oppression have been introduced into the anticapitalist conversation. One example of this integration can be seen in the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Gibson-Graham specifically focus on anticapitalism through a post-structuralist feminist perspective that enables the re-imagination of capitalism in a way that is inspired by the feminist rethinking of gender binaries (2006b). In their book, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*, the authors argue that the language used to talk about the economy is capitalocentric and excludes the non-capitalist activities that make up a large part of human activity (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, pp. xi-xxxiv). The way in which society and also the left characterize the economy as “capitalist” creates what Gibson-Graham refer to as “hegemonic capitalism” (2006b, p. 5). The supremacy of this hegemony necessitates the development of language that reconceptualizes the economy on a local level while also placing it outside of the discursive dominance of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. x). This need for different political language is one of the core concepts of the theory put forward by Gibson-Graham in their work on postcapitalism and diverse economies (2006a; 2006b, p. x; 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

Gibson-Graham wrote two main books highlighting their critique of the political economy and the building of alternatives to capitalism (2006a; 2006b). In the introduction to their second book, they succinctly summarize the core purpose of each book by stating that *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* is focused on arguing that our economy is what “we discursively and practically make it” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xxii). In contrast to this book, their second book, *Postcapitalist Politics*, is focused on the need for strategies to enable the building of alternative spaces outside

of the capitalist economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xxii). In this second book, the authors propose and expand on their key concepts of diverse economies and community economies, which are both touted as alternatives (Gibson-Graham, 2006a). Diverse economies are at the heart of Gibson-Graham's strategy and can be understood as a new and expanded way of seeing and talking about the economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, pp. 59-60). Diverse economies reconceptualize the economy as being made up of the broader activities typically excluded from a strictly capitalist understanding, such as sharing, gift-giving, barter, and others (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, pp. 59-72).

The complement to the concept of diverse economies is community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 195). The authors argue that the language that follows from embracing the concept of diverse economies results in increased localization and more possible sites and activities for building community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 195). The building of community economies will, in turn, result in the decentering of capitalism and, ultimately, the overthrow of its hegemony (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, pp. 194-196). Interestingly, this theory of social transformation places significant emphasis on the impact of language, ideas, and initiatives, which traditionally have been discounted by many leftist thinkers as not changing enough or just working to reinforce the existing relations. Through their Diverse Economies Framework, Gibson-Graham provide a counterargument to the hopelessness that can often surface in the face of daunting systemic inequality and structural exploitation (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

2.2.3 Gaps in Beyond Capitalism Literature

With most of the anticapitalist conversation confined to the paradigms of reform or revolution, my integration of the theoretical framework of erosion proposed by Wright will help build on his recently proposed third way to oppose capitalism and analyze the effectiveness of prefigurative spaces for social change (2019). This approach will build on prefigurative literature by assessing the world that is desired and identifying any strategies that are being used to enact it in the present. Instead of the binaries of reform versus revolution and capitalist versus non-capitalist, my research will explore the broad spectrum between these paradigms which encompasses the strategies proposed by Gibson-Graham (Luxemburg & Scott, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). This research will focus on the real-world relationship that participants in a non-capitalist activity have with capitalism. This relationship which is informed by ideology, actions, and collectivity will indicate whether participation in diverse economic practices encourages the creation or embodiment of a critique of the hegemony of capitalism and the naturalization of the economy. Ultimately, the use of Wright's framework and Cooper's understanding that everyday actions can play a significant role in social change will enable this research to include and engage with perspectives that are postcapitalist or anticapitalist, reformist or revolutionary, or elsewhere on the spectrum of capitalist resistance and assess their ability to contribute to emancipatory social transformation.

Finally, another area where my research will be set apart from what comes before it stems from the recency of my theoretical framework (Wright, 2019). The rapid growth, proliferation, and adaptability of capitalism have resulted in many changes, such as automation and the popularization of platforms, that many authors writing less recently could not have predicted.

Today it is apparent that Andre Gorz's strategy of non-reformist reforms and others that are not based on the imminent collapse of capitalism are increasingly important. The changes to the capitalist paradigm that have occurred with the shift to neoliberalism and the growth of the platform economy require new ways of thinking about opposition to it. This task of analyzing anticapitalism in the twenty-first century is a gap in existing anticapitalist literature that Wright (2019) and, by extension, this research sets out to address.

2.3 Community-Based Initiatives

Given the need for movement away from our dominant economic system and the proposed frameworks for understanding and carrying out change amid the hegemony of capitalism, there have been several studies and articles that explore the role that community-based initiatives and alternatives play in social change (Cohen, 1994; Esteves, 2020; Igalla et al., 2019). Community-based actions and citizens' initiatives can vary drastically from country to country (Igalla et al., 2019). In Western countries, there has been a trend toward citizens taking over the solving of complex problems in their communities (Igalla et al., 2019). This topic was explored in a recent article by Ana Margarida Esteves, who demonstrates that grassroots community movements and bottom-up social initiatives have the potential for social transformation (2020, p. 235). Examples of these initiatives include non-capitalist economic activities, the social and solidarity economy, mutual aid, alternative economies, and temporary communities that grew in response to recent large-scale actions, such as the Occupy movement (Esteves, 2020, p. 235). Ultimately, the initiatives and examples used by Esteves show that sustainable social and cultural change can arise from non-capitalist initiatives carried out in communities (2020, pp. 234-235). The author's

emphasis on prefiguration affirms the need for local, collective, grassroots, and bottom-up action in anticapitalist and leftist organizing in the present (2020, pp. 233-235).

2.3.1 Prefiguration and Everyday Utopias

The need for community action and its role in social change that resists capitalism was also discussed by Dardot and Laval, who connected it with the commons (2019, p. 4). The authors state that there is a need for new forms of collective action and work to link the diverse actions together to form a vision of the future that can be brought into being (Dardot & Laval, 2019, p. 4). The need for ideation on what a better future can look like is not only covered by Dardot and Laval but is the very purpose of prefiguration. Prefigurative politics have been at the forefront of many new social movements, but it is not as new as many would think, with its first mention in a paper in 1977 (Yates, 2015, p. 2). In a paper by Janet Siltaanen, Fran Klodawsky, and Caroline Andrew, prefiguration is defined as “an effort to bring desired futures actively into being in the present” (2014, p. 263).

Marianne Maeckelbergh explored prefigurative politics in practice by studying the alterglobalization movement in Seattle in 1999 (2011, p. 1). The author highlights the perception in leftist thought that prefiguration is a strategic and is founded in anarchism, whereas more traditional leftist movements are strategically based in socialist or communist thought where there is one predetermined goal (Maeckelbergh, 2011, pp. 5-6). However, Maeckelbergh demonstrates that prefiguration and strategy are not mutually exclusive and can exist simultaneously in social movements such as the alterglobalization movement (2011, pp. 4-6). The author concludes the

article by stating that if the end goal of a social change is increased equality, diversity, and horizontality, then prefiguration becomes the strategy in which all can participate not only in the present actions of the movement but also in collectively shaping its goals and desired future (Maeckelbergh, 2011, pp. 11-15). Finally, Maeckelbergh identifies two activities that are key to prefigurative movements: the challenging of existing systems and the building of alternatives (2011, pp. 15-17). These two activities are also critical components of the framework proposed by Erik Olin Wright (2010; 2019).

Prefiguration is intrinsically connected to utopias and can be understood as the creation of *everyday utopias* that work to bring the desired future into the present (Cooper, 2009, as cited in Siltanen et al., 2014, p. 263). For social change, utopias are critical since, without them, only what already exists could ever be changed. As a subcategory of utopia, everyday utopias are not focused on political campaigning or influencing large-scale institutional change (Cooper, 2013, p. 2). Instead, “they work by creating the change they wish to encounter, building and forging new ways of experiencing social and political life” (Cooper, 2013, p. 2). Davina Cooper explores several case studies that are examples of everyday utopias in her book on the subject (2013). The author demonstrates that everyday utopias are paradoxical through their employment of the fantastical concept of utopias and their proximity to the mundanity of everyday life (Cooper, 2013, p. 2). They are important sites for social change while simultaneously disclosing the limitations and challenges posed by counter-normative practices in everyday life (Cooper, 2013, pp. 217-218). The author connects everyday utopias to theories of change by proposing, like Maeckelbergh, that they are not devoid of strategy and ambition, they go beyond merely change through reform by

proposing alternatives outside what is normative and what, in some cases, could be considered as the impossible (2011; Cooper, 2013, pp. 4-11).

2.3.2 Community-Based Initiatives - Praxis

In her work on everyday utopias, Davina Cooper explored several case studies that highlighted different forms of prefigurative action (2013). One of these examples was a local exchange trading scheme, also known as LETS in the UK (Cooper, 2013, pp. 129-131). LETS were focused on rebuilding neighbourhoods and strengthening communities through facilitating exchange without money (Cooper, 2013, p. 130). In some cases, as the author demonstrates LETS were successful in their mission, but ultimately, they did not garner enough support to remain viable long term (Cooper, 2013, p. 131). There are many reasons for the failure of LETS, with one of the foremost being that people who could potentially provide services through it were also providing services through the capitalist exchange as workers, which resulted in decreased community involvement (Cooper, 2013, p. 131). To demonstrate this, Cooper uses the example that lots of members of LETS joined them with the hope that they could trade for services like plumbing, automotive repair, and other trades, but instead, the individuals that had those skills were not participating in the LETS as their working time was taken up by their fully employed roles in the capitalist economy (2013, p. 134). Despite their ultimate failure, Cooper states that LETS have been the focus of extensive research since their inception and the lessons learned in their application can inform how everyday utopias are pursued through other initiatives in the future (Cooper, 2013, pp. 133-137).

Another study that explored an alternative and its real-world application was carried out by Tomas Träskman and Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, who assessed a time bank in Finland's potential for cultural and social change (2016, pp. 111-112). This text focused on the sharing economy and its "potential for cultural disruption" and explored how sharing can move communities towards utopias while resisting established norms and cultural institutions (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 115-116). In this study, the authors showed that the time bank could operate in a space outside of the societal norm and alter the consumption behaviours of those who used it (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 118-119). However, the novelty of the time bank and its transactions outside of the financial system did attract the attention of the tax authorities in Finland, which inspired changes to the Finnish tax policy that ultimately were instrumental in the demise of the time bank under study (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 116-118). Despite the unfortunate end of the time bank, the authors concluded that sharing could spark change, just as it had at the beginning of the time bank experiment, but the continuation of this social change requires that there is ongoing involvement and buy-in from the members of the sharing community even in the face of resistance (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 118-119).

In addition to the text by Träskman and Hyde-Clarke, a quantitative study by Lucie Ozanne and Paul Ballantine assessed community toy lending libraries in New Zealand and their role in anti-consumptionism (2010, pp. 485). The authors used a survey that asked questions about the motivations and reasons for their toy library use (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010, p. 490). The survey divided the possible motivations for toy library usage into nine categories which included friendship, sense of belonging, sense of duty, anti-consumption, frugality, parental mediation,

sharing, toy library efficacy, and materialism (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2019, p. 494). The results of the survey led the authors to divide the toy library members into four main groups. Two of the four types identified by the authors, totaling 52% of participants, aligned themselves with the ideology of anti-consumption. The study's results demonstrated that anti-consumption and a desire for social change could motivate sharing and function as market resistance. The authors concluded that if policymakers or individuals would like to move society towards more sustainable consumption patterns, sharing is a viable alternative (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010, pp. 495-496).

The example from Cooper's book and the papers on time banks and toy lending libraries demonstrate that new and innovative community-based sharing initiatives have the potential for social transformation (Cooper, 2013; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010; Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016). Whether or not the initiatives that were studied ultimately failed does not make them irrelevant for developing an understanding of community initiatives and their potential for social change. Failed initiatives can often result in individuals who are more aligned with future possibilities for community economy initiatives (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 191). These studies show how community-based initiatives that rethink consumption and attempt to relocate it outside of the established paradigm of our political economy can serve as meeting places for those who resonate with their ideals and drive social change through continued community involvement (Cooper, 2013, p. 131; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010, pp. 495-496; Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 118-119). The importance of community involvement like this and its role in the process of social change is discussed in a paper by Alex Khasnabish on radical imagination (Khasnabish, 2019, pp. 1718-1727). Khasnabish argues that social change is linked to a collective vision and

radical imagination (2019, pp. 1720-1723). This radical imagination and collective vision were a part of the creation of projects such as the time bank explored by Träskman and Hyde-Clarke, and the toy lending library that Ozanne & Ballantine wrote about which demonstrated the cultural impact of prefigurative politics (2016; 2010).

2.3.3 Alternative Food Networks and Postcapitalist Politics

Another area where radical imagination has birthed an initiative with potential for social change, other than time banks and toy lending, is in food systems. For this research, the area for food and social transformation is of particular interest since it is focused on studying a case where food sharing is taking place. Although food sharing will be my specific focus, food systems have been undergoing changes in response to capitalism and have inspired many initiatives including community fridges. The role that food systems play in social transformation was emphasized by Amanda Wilson who said that they are the sites where there is a conflict taking place between the established capitalist model and alternatives to it (2013). The importance of food as a location for social change is best summarized in the statement that, “food is at the nexus of so many contemporary concerns about what the future holds” (Cameron & Gordon, 2010, p.1). The significance of food has inspired the creation of alternatives to the conventional food system, which have become known as alternative food networks or AFNs (Wilson, 2013, pp. 719-721). There are many ways in which AFNs have been manifested, and not all of them have been strictly opposed to capitalism per se (Follett, 2009). However, the ever-increasing presence of neoliberal capitalism and the near total control of global food systems by a small number of multinational

corporations has inspired the rise of many AFNs that Peter Andree argues are focused on localism, environmental and social sustainability, and food sovereignty (Andree et al., 2014).

There have been several different perspectives on what AFNs are and how they can be best understood. This subject was explored by Jeffrey Follett, who discussed two different types of AFNs called strong AFNs, and weak AFNs (2009). Weak AFNs are characterized as being focused on environmentally friendly production or growing practices such as organic while still maintaining the social inequalities, labour standards, and capitalist business practices as the conventional food system (Follett, 2009, p. 31). In contrast, strong AFNs are local and focus on addressing the sustainability, animal welfare, health, labour, and social issues in the conventional food system (Follett, 2009, p. 31). Follett argues that the users of alternative food networks are looking for a change, but it is only through strong AFNs that this change is possible (2009, pp. 48-49). The presence of entities that are still capitalist and characterized as “weak” by Follett bring forward one of the features of AFNs. Not all AFNs are anticapitalist; many of them, even if they are more focused on political or social goals, would not be able to exist outside of capitalism (Dixon, 2011).

Peter Andree studied this phenomenon of AFNs and their relation to the capitalist order in a chapter on emerging alternative food networks in Australia (Andree et al., 2014, pp.141-166). Andree argues that the localization of food systems and the introduction of labelling standards such as organic, fair trade, and free-range (2014, pp. 163-167). At the same time, they do help small citizen-farmers carve out spaces where their food can be sold as an alternative to the hegemonic food-producing corporations, will not result in a wholesale change of the food system unless there

is a shift towards collective action (Andree et al., 2014, pp. 163-167). Ultimately just like the dualism of sharing proposed by Caffentzis, the author argues that the AFNs in Australia at the time of writing were both a response to neoliberalism and a manifestation of it (Andree et al., 2014, pp. 166-167). The importance of locality in AFNs has resulted in local becoming a commodity that can be exploited by capitalist businesses (Goodman, 2010). Although these networks operate within the dominant neoliberal capitalist system, they do introduce and stress the importance of the social and environmental values that are typically incompatible with profit-maximization and limitless growth (Andree et al., 2014, pp. 166-167).

Despite the incongruence between the values of AFNs and capitalist logic, the benefits of AFNs, which often include better support for farmers, healthier food, increased biodiversity, and sustainability, does not necessarily mean they are inclusive spaces (Trauger & Passidomo, 2012). Since their inception, AFNs have become more inequitable and ultimately more like the conventional model that they were meant to replace through the consumption of their food by an elite and wealthy consumer base (Goodman, 2010; Trauger & Passidomo, 2012). Amy Trauger and Catarina Passidomo argue that the barriers to access and the growing similarities between the conventional food system and AFNs require the creation of diverse economies and the use of Gibson-Graham's postcapitalist politics (2012). Using the theory of postcapitalist politics, the authors examine three case studies in which the AFNs build community economies (Trauger & Passidomo, 2012). Finally, the authors emphasize the importance of the commons and demonstrate that the cases of diverse economies under study did contribute to the strengthening and sustaining of their local and regional commons (Trauger & Passidomo, 2012).

Trauger and Passidomo are not alone in this assessment, the authors Cameron and Gordon also integrate the Diverse Economies Framework proposed by Gibson-Graham to explore AFNs and their role in creating ethical and sustainable economies that challenge society's capitalocentric conception of the economy (Cameron & Gordon, 2010). Cameron and Gordon argue that the alternative food economy is comprised of diverse activities and initiatives that include community gardens, farmer's markets, and community-supported agriculture (2010, p. 12). Through their study of these initiatives, the authors state that more researchers should work with food activists and communities that are participating in and piloting alternatives to develop a more thorough understanding of their application, strategies for specific contexts, and their potential for social change (Cameron & Gordon, 2010, p. 12).

Jane Dixon also argues that AFNs are best understood using the framework put forward by Gibson-Graham since they are focused on more than profit generation and are a part of what can be called the community economy (2011). Wilson also draws on the postcapitalist framework developed by Gibson-Graham in her discussion of AFNs and the potential for autonomous food spaces (2013). Wilson further explores the concept of alternatives and argues that it creates a problematic binary between convention and alternative and does not adequately foster the creation of non-capitalist activities or critique the power dynamics present in food supply networks (2013, pp. 723-725). The author advocates for a post-structuralist approach and proposes autonomous food spaces as places outside the false dichotomy between convention and alternative (Wilson, 2013, pp. 723-725).

One of the key themes of AFNs and diverse food economies is the importance that they place on localism and communities (Andree et al., 2014). Urban settings were the focus of the paper by Gordon and Cameron, and they offer many opportunities for AFNs, innovative, diverse economies, and community initiatives (2010). One initiative that is taking place in this dynamic setting is urban food sharing, which includes the creation and maintenance of spaces such as online food sharing, community gardens, community kitchens, and community fridges (Spring & Biddulph, 2020). Although wealthy food-secure individuals and households mainly use many AFNs and urban food initiatives, community food initiatives and programs have still become a part of many local responses to household food insecurity in Canada (Goodman, 2010; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). However, due to the precarity of many community initiatives, a recent study has shown that although they foster social inclusion, they do not remove the uncertainty of access to food (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). Ultimately, this uncertainty makes them an option for securing food but not a solution to food insecurity because they fail to address its root cause, poverty (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020).

Of all the urban food-sharing initiatives, community fridges have seen rapid growth and a result, have begun to be studied and featured in recent research conducted in the United Kingdom, where they are most popular (Visram & Brown, 2020; Carmen, 2021). However, of the published articles on them, there were none written on community fridges in Canada, partly because they are a relatively new phenomenon, with CBC reporting that they did not become common in Canada until the global COVID-19 pandemic (Purdon & Palleja, 2021). One study on community fridges was conducted in Britain, where they established the world's first network of community fridges

(Visram & Brown, 2020). This study, which involved a survey and a series of interviews, concluded that community fridges play a role in community building and social cohesion while also addressing food insecurity and the environmental impact of food waste (Visram & Brown, 2020). Unlike in the UK, there are small networks of community fridges in Canada that are mostly localized to municipalities such as Toronto, and Hamilton, but in Quebec there is a larger network that has more than 200 fridges spread across the province (Sauve ta bouffe, 2023).

2.3.4 Gaps in the Community-Based Initiatives Literature

Overall, no published articles utilizing qualitative research have been conducted in the Canadian context that assesses community resource sharing and its potential for anticapitalist social transformation. The need for research in the Canadian context becomes even more essential given the significance of place, spaces, and localism expounded by authors in texts on both AFNs and postcapitalist politics (Andree et al., 2014; Chatterton, 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020; Wilson, 2013). Qualitative research that explores the everyday experiences of individuals in spaces that are operating outside of the norms of capitalism is also needed as it becomes abundantly clear that our current model of economics and patterns of consumption are not sustainable. Much of the research that has been conducted situates sharing and the sharing economy inside the bounds of the neoliberal and capitalist paradigm (Caffentzis, 2010). In contrast to this work within the capitalist paradigm, the work that has been done that extolls the virtues of sharing as an alternative to capitalism does not thoroughly explore the lived experiences of those who actively participate in sharing initiatives (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Monbiot, 2017). These lived experiences are critical to understanding not

only what motivates sharing but also how sharing can shape patterns of thinking and, ultimately, activities that challenge capitalism. This research project will focus on these lived experiences and how they manifest themselves in a local space by concentrating on one local community fridge where community resource sharing occurs.

The lack of qualitative research on sharing and the lived experiences of sharers can also be seen in some of the studies on community initiatives. The time bank studied by Träskman and Hyde-Clarke and the LETS explored by Davina Cooper both highlight the importance of individual buy-in, ideology, and perceptions since both initiatives failed to be viable in the long term (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 111-120; Cooper, 2013). Just like the broader studies on the commons, the papers on community resource sharing and its role in social change do very little to explore the lived experiences of sharing and the nuances of the thought processes, perceptions, and ideologies that are behind the actions of the individual participants (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010, pp. 485-498; Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016, pp. 111-120). The literature shows that buy-in is critical to the survival of community initiatives and played a role in the demise of both the time bank and LETS. This research addressed this buy-in by exploring the ideologies, and motivations behind the use of the community fridge. Finally, this research, unlike these examples of community initiatives also employed a specifically anticapitalist framework and used it to assess the real-world potential for social transformation through this lens.

My case study's focus on social change through a community fridge contributed to the research on the experiences of their users and their social impact, gaps identified in the study on them by Visram and Brown (2020). This research filled some of the gaps left by these studies through its

qualitative methodology and theoretical framework. These two key components enabled the exploration of the evolving experiences of community resource sharers and positioned them within a framework for anticapitalist and emancipatory social change. It also helped to add to the growing discourse on community fridges, particularly in the Canadian context where they are not as common as others and built a case for their continued use by assessing their ability to change society through the everyday activity of acquiring food.

In contrast to the lack of an explicit framework for change in the articles on the toy lending library and the time banks, there have been several articles that have been written on AFNs that utilize the postcapitalist framework put forward by Gibson-Graham (Cameron & Gordon, 2010; Dixon, 2011; Wilson, 2013). This project answered the call made by Cameron and Gordon in their paper on AFNs for more researchers to engage with alternatives and learn about their application, strategies, and context (2010). In addition to the Cameron and Gordon paper, the rest of the literature on AFNs that utilizes Gibson-Graham's framework also recognizes the deficiencies of capitalism and acknowledges the need for diverse economies by challenging the hegemony of capitalism and employing a post-structuralist perspective. This research built on this tradition to examine community fridges as a specific site for community action, while including more capitalocentric forms of resistance like anticapitalism in addition to the theories put forward by Gibson-Graham. Ultimately, using the argument put forward by Chatterton and his proposition that resistance to capitalism can be against, outside, and despite it, this research looked for the seeds of any resistance which included but were not limited to just a postcapitalist framework (2010, p. 1205).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Wright and Emancipatory Social Science

The theoretical framework I will be using for this research is derived from the work of Erik Olin Wright, with a primary focus on his theories of social transformation that he proposed in his books *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010) and *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century* (2019). *Envisioning Real Utopias*, the earlier of these two books, laid the ideological foundation for *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century*, which was more of a manifesto and practical guide than its theoretically focused forerunner. In these books, Wright proposes a framework for social transformation and developing alternative systems. Wright's approach is rooted in the broader field of emancipatory social science (2010, p. 10). Although it is an already existing approach, Wright lays out his own process with three steps for conducting emancipatory social science in *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010, pp. 10-11).

The first step Wright identifies for building this emancipatory social science is the process of diagnosis and critique, which involves looking for the different ways the structures and institutions that make up our society inflict and perpetuate harms on people (2010, p. 11). Since it is primarily concerned with the identification of harms, which can be hard to define and requires an engagement with morality. The specific critique of social structures and institutions that Wright conducts in his work is rooted in a moral framework that he explains in detail and refers to as "radical democratic egalitarian understanding" (2010, p. 12). This moral framework is rooted in

the two core concepts of social and political justice (Wright, 2010, pp. 12-20). In this case social justice is comprised of three key features, which are (1) human flourishing, (2) “necessary material and social means,” and (3) broadly equal access (2010, pp. 13-18). The concept of political justice that is used in conjunction with the concept of social justice is based on Wright’s core belief that everyone should have autonomy whenever possible over any choices and resolutions that impact their lives (Wright, 2010, p. 18). In this research, the concept of human flourishing that Wright ties to social justice and emancipatory social science is critical in laying the foundation for analysis of my case and answering my research questions.

Human flourishing can be understood in many ways. However, since it is a core piece of his framework, Wright establishes what he means by the concept and explores the intricacies of his definition. For Wright, human flourishing will only occur when everyone has equal access to basic needs that are essential to human functioning (2010, p. 13). However, human flourishing does not just include fulfilling basic physical needs such as food, shelter, and health care. Human flourishing, in a broader sense, also includes the ability to develop and master “intellectual, artistic, physical, social, moral, or spiritual” capacities (Wright, 2010, p. 14). Initiatives and projects that address basic human needs are not limited to only contributing to this specific realm of human flourishing. They can also contribute to human flourishing in the broader sense and help to develop the capacities that Wright identified. In addition, the ability for people to have autonomy is also intrinsically connected to human flourishing in the broader sense, which also connects it to political justice as it is defined by Wright (2010, p. 18).

After critique and diagnosis, Wright's second step in emancipatory social science is at the heart of the real utopias project. This step involves the development of alternatives to the existing structures that can mitigate or eliminate the harms perpetuated and enacted by the current system (2010, pp. 20-25). For the effective development of alternatives, Wright proposes three essential criteria: "desirability, viability, and achievability" (2010, p. 20). The first of these criteria, desirability, involves using the moral framework and system critique to determine a desirable direction or future. Desirability, on its own, tends towards utopian thinking as the institutions and structures it requires rarely exist and there is often little to no possibility of actually building the institutional structures that could support or facilitate the desired future (Wright, 2010, p. 21). However, this does not mean that thinking only of desirable alternatives is a useless endeavour; it can help us gain a better understanding of our values and help to motivate social change in the present (Wright, 2010, pp. 20-21). The second criterion, viability, follows from the first and focuses more on existing social structures and institutions (Wright, 2010, pp. 21-24). Viability is concerned with assessing the desirable future and exploring whether it is viable (Wright, 2010, pp. 21-24). The third and final criterion for developing an alternative is achievability, which Wright identifies as the main task of strategies of social change and activism (2010, pp. 24-25). Achievability is where the desirable and viable alternatives are put into practice and the details of their enactment are assessed. These three criteria all follow from each other and there is lot of interplay between them in practice.

In Wright's framework, the three criteria for alternatives are chronological, with the first being a necessary condition for the next and so on (2010, pp. 20-25). This sequence is obvious regarding

the criteria of desirability, as we would not be attempting to see if something is viable that we did not desire to achieve. However, it gets significantly more complicated in the space between viability and achievability since viability is partially subjective, and what is viable will, in turn, ultimately determine what is achievable (Wright, 2010, pp. 21-24). This confusion is mainly because viability can often be rooted in individual beliefs or social understandings of possibility (Wright, 2010, p. 23). The subjectivity of viability is addressed by Wright when he says that “developing systemic, compelling accounts of viable alternatives to existing social structures and institutions of power and privilege, therefore, is one component of the social process through which the social limits on achievable alternatives can themselves be changed” (Wright, 2010, p. 23). This approach to viability is reminiscent of the non-capitalist strategy proposed by Gibson-Graham, where if we perceive that the domination of capitalism is so complete that nothing can be done about it, then our options for change are limited. In contrast, if we challenge the hegemony of capitalism and focus on non-capitalist spaces, social change becomes increasingly achievable (2006b). Attitudes of fatalism or the internalization of the values of the system can impede or limit the viability of emancipatory projects before they even reach the stage of implementation or achievability and can move on to Wright’s third step in emancipatory social science.

Wright’s third and final step of emancipatory social science is developing a theory of social transformation (2010, p. 25). Wright argues that theories of social transformation should comprise four main theoretical components. These components are: “a theory of social transformation,” “a theory of the gaps and contradictions within the process of reproduction,” “a theory of the underlying dynamics and the trajectory of unintended social change,” and “a theory of collective

actors, strategies, and struggles” (Wright, 2010, pp. 26-29). In other words, these theories help us understand what will get in the way of social change and the opportunities for social change despite the historical and social barriers. It also will help to understand the long-term effects of the proposed social change and how it will change over time. Wright revisits many of the elements of this approach to social transformation in his later work (2019). With the knowledge of the barriers and opportunities for social transformation, we can develop strategies for collective action that moves us toward our emancipatory goal and decrease or remove the harms that are perpetuated by the oppressive system (Wright, 2010, pp. 28-29).

3.2 Critique of Capitalism

3.2.1 Equality

With the basic building blocks for emancipatory social science in place, we can turn to the oppressive system that is the focus of much of Wright’s work, capitalism. In the critique and diagnosis phase of his assessment of capitalism, Wright identifies that it is a system that imposes harms on people (2010, pp. 33-85). Wright proposes three main areas for his critique of capitalism where the harms it creates are most apparent: “equality, democracy, and community” (2019, p. 23). The first of these reasons, equality, stems from the unbalanced social relations that are integral to the functioning and continuation of capitalism. These relations are most apparent in Wright’s definition of capitalism, which states that it is:

An economic structure within which the means of production are privately owned and the allocation and use of resources for different social purposes is accomplished through the

use of economic power. Investments and the control of production are the results of economic power being utilized by the owners of capital (2010, p. 120).

Wright expands on this definition of capitalism by arguing that it fundamentally requires competition and the pursuit of growth and accumulation of profits over all else (2010, pp. 33-36). The relentless pursuit of profits, self-interest and exchange-based interactions are at the core of capitalism (Wright, 2010, pp. 33-36). These core values make the class relations between the workers and the capitalists, who own the means of production and pay the workers to use it, fundamental to the system and the dominant social relations within it (Wright, 2010, pp. 33-36). This analysis means that inequality and restricted access to resources are integral to the logic of capitalism and that it will harm those who participate in it or live in capitalist societies.

3.2.2 Community

Although capitalism may be the dominant economic system today, this does not mean that all social relations are fundamentally class relations (Wright, 2010). As it manifests itself in real-world settings, capitalism is not in its purest form and will take on different shapes depending on where and when it is implemented (Wright, 2010, pp. 35-36). This means that:

All varieties of capitalism also contain a significant domain of economic activity that occurs outside the market and state regulation, especially economic activities within households and kin networks, but also within broader social settings often referred to as “community” (Wright, 2010, p. 36).

With this presence of community and its role alongside capitalism, it is essential to define community and examine its relationship with capitalism. Wright argues that capitalism breaks down community by focusing on competition and self-interest, which creates increased inequality as there are always winners and losers (2010, pp. 79-81). In his framework, Wright defines community as “any social unit in which people are concerned about the well-being of other people and feel solidarity and obligation towards others” (2010, p. 79). For my research, I use this definition of community and in keeping with Wright’s work will be looking at community and the activities within it that take place outside of capitalism.

Capitalism’s inherent focus on self-interest and its relentless pursuit of growth causes heightened inequality and increased fear and greed. These attitudes of fear and greed caused foster activities that are opposed to community and solidarity. Wright, in his analysis, expands on fear and greed and reclassifies them broadly as *privatized consumerism* and *competitive individualism* (Wright, 2019, p. 32). In his analysis, competitive individualism refers to the belief within capitalism that individuals need to “hustle” and “grind” to achieve success and that this success ultimately comes at the expense of others. The idea of meritocracy embodies the values of this belief. Competitive individualism results in constant comparisons with everyone around us as people become competitors first and community members last. This value is embodied in the capitalist virtue of independence and the social stigma that any form of dependency engenders. Ultimately, the values proposed in competitive individualism contradict some cultural values of caring for others that are still present and exist alongside capitalism. However, Wright addresses the existence of both capitalist and more communitarian cultural values by pointing to the relegation of communitarian

values to increasingly confined scenarios. This shift in communitarian values has resulted in a culture where competitive individualism has increasingly swallowed up the parts of our lives that were historically more communitarian, resulting in shrinking pockets of solidarity primarily organized around families and close friendships (Wright, 2019, pp. 32-35).

In addition to competitive individualism, Wright identifies a second set of values, privatized consumerism, that are also inherent to capitalism and ultimately opposed to community. Privatized consumerism is the incessant drive to personally consume goods and commodities. In capitalism, goods and services have become increasingly private, and these individually owned commodities are pitted against public commodities (Wright, 2019, pp. 33-35). This can be seen in conversation where the car is elevated over transit, or when people would rather buy a book than get it from the local library. Wright states, “this preoccupation with personal, private consumption reinforces the relative indifference to the well-being of others connected to competitive individualism” (2019, p. 34). Privatized consumerism, then, opposes community and collective ownership while reinforcing competitive individualism and is thus in opposition to the commons and sharing. Along with competitive individualism, private consumption illuminates how capitalism is responsible for the decline of community and hinders human flourishing while furthering inequality and environmental degradation (Wright, 2019, pp. 32-35).

3.2.3 Democracy

In addition to inequality and community, democracy is the third set of values on which Wright’s critique of capitalism is founded. In his description of democracy, Wright connects it to freedom.

Both democracy and freedom have often been conflated with capitalism and the free market; however, in Wright's analysis, capitalism impedes the full realization of freedom. There are five main reasons that Wright uses to back up this claim. The first of these reasons is the concentration of power in the hands of those with capital who can decide where to invest. The second reason is the pressure that private control puts on the state to make decisions that are favourable to capitalists. The third reason is the increased access that the rich have to positions of political power. This access could be through monetary donations, lobbying, cash-for-access fundraisers, or networking. The fourth reason is the structure of corporations which function as dictatorships that can choose whether their employees can exercise autonomy, an integral part of both democracy and freedom. The fifth and final reason is the removal of self-determination and the ability to say no, which is a direct result of wealth inequality (Wright, 2019, pp. 28-30). Although many of these undemocratic features can be improved through reforms to the system, capitalism, by nature, will always seek to fundamentally override freedom and limit democracy. As a result of the restrictive nature of capitalism, total freedom and democracy cannot be truly realized as long as it is the dominant system (Wright, 2019, pp. 30-31).

3.3 Anticapitalism; Alternatives and Social Transformation

3.3.1 Foundational Concepts for Establishing an Alternative

After Wright conducts his critique and diagnosis of capitalism, the next step in his process of emancipatory social science is to think about alternatives to it (2010, pp. 20-25). In his exploration of alternatives, Wright establishes that an alternative to capitalism must use a *socialist compass* to

guide its direction toward human flourishing, freedom, and community (Wright, 2010, p. 109). The term socialism has been applied in a wide variety of settings both historically and in our current settings. Its use by some as a synonym for repressive government regimes has resulted in a vague understanding of it and often meant that it has a negative reputation in many circles. For Wright, a definition of socialism is only possible with an understanding of the concepts of power, ownership, the state, civil society, and the economy (2010, pp. 110-111). The first of these concepts, power, is the “capacity to accomplish things in the world” (Wright, 2010, p. 111). More specifically, Wright divides power into three different spheres. The first of these spheres is economic power, or the capacity to control economic resources. The second is state power, or the capacity to make rules and govern a defined geographically bounded territory. Social power is the third and final sphere, or “power rooted in the capacity of people to form associations to advance their collective goals” (Wright, 2010, p. 145). This power centers around organizing, rallying, and taking voluntary actions together (Wright, 2010, p. 12).

After establishing his definition of power, Wright discusses what ownership means in his framework. Ownership can be broadly defined as a “bundle of different kinds of enforceable rights (i.e. effective powers) over things” (Wright, 2010, p. 113). Wright pulls out three dimensions of ownership. The first dimension of ownership is the agent of ownership, or the individual, organization, collective, group, corporation, government, and other entities that hold enforceable ownership rights. The second dimension is the objects of ownership themselves. This dimension also involves the rules that govern and who is allowed, or in some cases not allowed, to own them. Society’s classification of objects limits the types of agents that can own them. The third dimension

of ownership is the rights of ownership. This dimension refers to how the object of ownership can be used and includes restrictions on its use, disposal, and the ability to resell, share, or gift it (2010, pp. 113-118). This type of ownership can be seen when corporations who own factories cannot dump toxic waste on the factory property or make their own decisions on things like worker health and safety that are regulated. If the rules of using the object are broken, then the right of ownership comes into question. Finally, Wright divides ownership into three main categories which echo his division of power: private, state, and societal (2010, pp. 115-118). In his framework, Wright focuses mainly on “the right to transfer property and the rights over the surplus” regarding ownership (2010, p. 115). This focus, along with his other groundwork, sets the stage for engagement with many of the ideals of socialism and the opportunity it presents as an alternative to the capitalist system under which we now live.

3.3.2 Socialism and Wright’s Socialist Compass

With his definitions of power and ownership established, Wright can begin to piece together the navigational principles that make up his socialist framework. Wright argues that historical expressions of socialism have, in practice, been statism, where the state holds power. Instead of this statist misappropriation of socialism, Wright emphasizes the social aspect of socialism. With this increased emphasis in mind, he defines socialism as:

An economic structure within which the means of production are socially owned, and the allocation and use of resources for different social purposes is accomplished through the exercise of what can be termed “social power.” “Social power” is power rooted in the capacity to mobilize

people for cooperative, voluntary collective actions of various sorts in civil society. This implies that civil society should not be viewed simply as an arena of activity, sociability, and communication but also of real power (2010, p. 121).

This definition is born out of the need for a separation between the state and social spheres, and more specifically, Wright's distinction between social and state power. With this definition in mind the easiest way to understand the difference between statism, capitalism, and socialism is the different types of power they utilize. It is also important to note that at any given time, a society will be made up of a combination of the three spheres of power. A capitalist society, like the one found in the global North in the twenty-first century, still has some state and social power amidst the economic power. However, economic power is the dominant type and is used to control the allocation of most of the resources in our society (Wright, 2010, pp. 123-128). This dominance of economic power can be seen in the creeping of economic logic into the realms of government and personal life with the rise of public/private partnerships and the degradation of the community at the expense of competition and consumption.

With this definition of socialism, Wright more fully lays out what the socialist compass that directs his alternative looks like and the necessary conditions it should meet. These conditions include the need for social empowerment of the other spheres of power, the state and the economy. This socialization can be imagined to be comparable to the current presence of economic power in the social and state spheres of power under capitalism (Wright, 2010, pp. 128-129). With his focus on social empowerment, Wright proposes seven different forms this could take and calls them "pathways to social empowerment" (2010, pp. 128-149).

Once he is finished proposing and explaining his “pathways to social empowerment,” Wright addresses several potential criticisms and reasons for skepticism that his argument inspires. In response to these criticisms, Wright lays out three more conditions for his socialist compass that will need to be present to move away from capitalism and towards an alternative with increased human flourishing. The first of these three conditions is that civil society must have diverse, active, and lucid collective associations from which social power can be used to influence action. The second of these conditions is that institutional apparatuses must exist to facilitate the direction and implementation of social power. The third and final condition is that these institutional apparatuses need to be able to counter the power that will be mobilized by those opposed to the change they are trying to enact. This condition means that social power must be able to beat capitalism as it defends itself with everything that it has (Wright, 2010, pp. 144-149). The condition of social empowerment and the three conditions just reviewed make up the foundation of an alternative and the direction that emancipatory projects should pursue to alleviate and remove the inequalities and the ongoing harms inflicted by capitalism.

3.3.3 Strategies for Social Transformation

In *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Wright outlines the conditions for a theory of social transformation as he moves from ideating on alternatives to the third step of emancipatory social science, developing a theory for social transformation (2010, p. 25). A piece that is critical in exploring social transformation is social reproduction. Wright defines social reproduction as “the processes that reproduce the underlying structure of social relations and institutions of society” (2010, p. 274). Social reproduction poses a particular and significant challenge to emancipatory projects for

anticapitalist social transformation. Understanding how capitalism can actively and passively reproduce itself and continue to function is critical for forming a theory of social transformation that will move us beyond it and keep us there. In Wright's analysis, social reproduction is carried out in four main ways. The first way is through coercion, which makes it more difficult to mount a collective resistance. The second way is through institutional rules, such as voting rules and organizational regulations, which can limit participation and even the structures of organizations (Wright, 2010, pp. 274-282). The third way is through ideology and culture. These two concepts can be challenging to quantify and separate. However, Wright establishes definitions for each of them. He defines ideology as "the *conscious* aspects of subjectivity: beliefs, ideas, values, doctrines, theories, and so on" (Wright, 2010, p. 283). In contrast to ideology, culture is the "nonconscious aspects of subjectivity: dispositions, habits, tastes, and skills" (Wright, 2010, p. 283). The fourth apparatus for social reproduction is material interest, which binds people's well-being to the capitalist system and its continued growth and promulgation. Through the employment of these four mechanisms or methods for social reproduction, the hegemony of the capitalist system is maintained in society (Wright, 2010, pp. 283-290).

With a knowledge of the four methods of social reproduction, pathways to interrupting the system's continued hegemony can be devised and applied to bring about social transformation. Wright explores the potential for change that this understanding of social reproduction creates by examining the "limits, gaps, and contradictions" present in its real-world enactment (2010, pp. 290-291). For the most part, the limitations in the process of social reproduction have not resulted in any significant disruptions to the status quo, as any significant changes will still have to face the

four mechanisms of social reproduction. However, since institutions and society are complex and constantly changing, and there are many unpredictable outcomes, there are always some opportunities for transformation amidst the seemingly everlasting process of capitalist social reproduction (Wright, 2010, pp. 291-297). According to Wright's assessment, the recent changes that have resulted from COVID-19 and other crises like it that have happened since his death further open gaps in social reproduction and present an opportunity for anticapitalist social transformation.

3.3.4 Anticapitalist Strategies

After demonstrating that the processes of social reproduction are not impermeable, Wright turns to the actual theories of social transformation. He does this in different ways in his two books. In *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*, he walks through five strategies that have historically been used and referenced as ways to resist capitalism (Wright, 2019, pp. 38-53). The first of these five "strategic logics" is smashing capitalism, which assumes that the system is unreformable and needs to be destroyed and then replaced through revolution (Wright, 2019, pp. 38-42). The second strategy, dismantling capitalism, also assumes that capitalism needs to be replaced. However, in this strategy, instead of violent revolution, attempts to dismantle capitalism and replace it with alternatives would be carried out through the state. In this strategy, there is the assumption that electoral democracies could elect parties that could create alternative institutions and structures (Wright, 2019, pp. 42-44). The third strategy, taming capitalism, is not focused on replacing capitalism, but instead, it is focused on neutralizing the harms caused by capitalism. Examples of this strategy can be found in expressions of what is commonly called social

democracy (Wright, 2019, pp. 44-49). The fourth strategy, resisting capitalism, does not aspire to take over the state but instead attempts to operate outside capitalism. This strategy utilizes social power through movement building, solidarity, and collective action to raise the cost of the harms caused by capitalism (Wright, 2019, pp. 49-51). The fifth and final strategy, escaping capitalism, assumes that we cannot overcome capitalism, so we must leave it. This strategy can manifest itself in groups such as intentional communities. However, it is often seen being enacted by individuals who have the means to leave the system and opt out of its harms (Wright, 2019, pp. 51-53).

These five historical strategies for anticapitalism can be reduced to the “three basic logics of transformation” that Wright discusses in detail in his book, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010, pp. 303-307). These basic logics radically differ in the processes and pathways they envision for social transformation. The first of these basic logics is rupture. According to Wright, “The central idea is that through direct confrontation and political struggles, it is possible to create a radical disjuncture in institutional structures in which existing institutions are destroyed and new ones built fairly rapidly. Smash first, build second” (2010, p. 303). The logic of rupture would contain the historical strategy of smashing capitalism that Wright proposed in *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century* (2019, pp. 38-42). Wright questions the viability of rupture as a strategy for social transformation. The biggest impediment to rupture in our current system is related to material conditions. For ruptures, such as revolutions, to be possible, they would have to have widespread support. Because the ruptural strategy relies on popular support, if society’s material conditions were worse after the revolution than they had been under the previous system, it would no longer have the support to continue. Despite the lack of viability in the present, Wright

identifies reasons for still exploring this strategy. One of these reasons is the possibility that ruptural trajectories of transformation, although they are not effective for wholesale system change, can be utilized in specific cases. In addition, if the material conditions under capitalism become much worse through crises, then rupture could become more viable. As more crises, such as COVID-19 and the climate emergency, occur, one of them could create the conditions for rupture. Finally, through the use of other strategies and approaches, the conditions of capitalism can also be changed to make a rupture more possible while also facilitating a smoother transition than what would occur if the system were to be overthrown in the present (Wright, 2010, pp. 308-320).

One way of getting to the point of rupture becomes apparent after exploring the next basic logic that Wright proposes, which is interstitial metamorphosis (2010, pp. 303-305). The interstitial logic would contain the strategies of resisting and escaping capitalism (Wright, 2019, pp. 49-53).

On this strategy, Wright states:

Interstitial transformations seek to build new forms of social empowerment in the niches and margins of capitalist society, often where they do not seem to pose any immediate threat to dominant classes and elites. This is the strategy of building institutions of social empowerment that is most deeply embedded in civil society, and which often falls below the radar screen of radical critics of capitalism (2010, pp. 303-305).

Interstitial actions can include many anarchist activities, social movements and organizing, and building alternatives that are not within the state (Wright, 2010, p. 304). Interstitial activities may

be focused on the goal of social transformation, or they may just be focused on changing one specific area of civic society or social life. Despite the diversity of interstitial activities, they all have in common the desire to build alternatives and their pursuit of emancipatory ideals through direct action (Wright, 2010, p. 345).

Interstitial activities and movements face significant criticism from scholars and activists who ascribe to the more classical Marxist tradition of social transformation. The reason for this criticism is rooted in the fact that interstitial activities, which take place in the cracks and interstices neglected by the dominant system, can only exist if they are allowed by capitalism (Wright, 2010, pp. 321-328). In response to this criticism against this strategy and its apparent reliance on capitalism, Wright proposes two ways to transcend this limitation and bring about social transformation. Wright calls the first of these paths to social transformation the “*revolutionary anarchist*,” which he summarizes as “altering the conditions for eventual rupture” (2010, p. 328). Wright refers to the second way as “*evolutionary anarchist*” and characterizes this path as the gradual expansion of “the effective scope and depth of their operations so that capitalist constraints cease to impose binding limits” (Wright, 2010, p. 328). Both pathways are anarchist since they look for solutions outside the state. They also demonstrate that an interstitial transformation is possible in capitalism since it does not inherently disallow these strategies from existing. However, due to the state’s role in society and social reproduction, the only pathway for interstitial strategies to be effective is through a rupture with the state (Wright, 2010, pp. 334-336).

The third and final basic logic for social transformation is symbiotic metamorphosis, which proposes an alternative way of contending with the state and its role in the project of social

transformation (Wright, 2010, p. 305). This logic contains the two historical strategies of taming and dismantling capitalism that Wright discusses in *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century* (2019, pp. 42-49). Symbiotic transformation involves “strategies in which extending and deepening the institutional forms of popular social empowerment simultaneously helps solve certain practical problems faced by dominant classes and elites” (Wright, 2010, p. 305). Effective symbiotic activities have often manifested as class compromise and reforms and have been embodied in the implementation of democracy and the labour movement. Like the criticism that theories of reform have faced when they are proposed for social transformation, symbiotic strategies also paradoxically strengthen the position of the elites while shoring up the strength and influence of the working class. This contradiction does bring their effectiveness into question and challenges whether they can enact substantive change. However, symbiotic strategies can expand the places where interstitial activities can be conducted, improving the conditions for an eventual rupture (Wright, 2010, pp. 336-365).

Ultimately, all three basic logics for emancipatory social transformation; ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic, have a place in the anticapitalist project. Each of these strategies will help to increase the possibilities for change for the others. The social empowerment project at the heart of symbiotic transformation will not only enable more space for interstitial activities but it will also build up support in the event of a rupture, whether through planning or because of an external crisis. In addition, the interstitial strategies can remind people that a better world is possible and that there are different ways to do things, which will, in turn, increase potential involvement in civic society while also preparing the conditions for rupture and building organizations and movements that are

alternatives to capitalism and will ensure that the material conditions once capitalism does fall will remain stable enough that support for the project will continue (Wright, 2010, pp. 364-365). So then, considering the possible interplay, we should use all three logics to pursue the project of social transformation. With this strategic configuration, if we pursue what is currently achievable with these strategic logics, other emancipatory initiatives previously considered impossible will become viable and ultimately achievable.

3.3.5 Erosion of Capitalism

In *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*, Wright proposes a new strategic idea for anticapitalism that considers the need for ruptural, symbiotic, and interstitial logics and the interplay between them. This new strategy also encompasses the five historical strategies for anticapitalism. Wright calls this strategy *erosion* and defines it as the way “to build more democratic, egalitarian, participatory economic relations where possible in the spaces and cracks within this complex system” (2019, p. 58). Eroding capitalism is the “central organizing principle” for all the possible anticapitalist activities in this strategy (Wright, 2019, p. 59). So then, when it comes to the potential for social transformation, the strategy of erosion holistically includes a broad spectrum of possible activities and posits that they can all play a role in social change (Wright, 2019, pp. 37-64). The strategy of erosion combines four of the legacy anticapitalist strategies: escaping capitalism, taming capitalism, resisting capitalism, and dismantling capitalism (Wright, 2019, p. 120). The only historical anticapitalist strategy that does not fit into erosion directly is the ruptural strategy of smashing capitalism (Wright, 2019, pp. 37-64).

At its core, the strategy of erosion is based on the principle that our economic system is not purely capitalist. Instead, modern economies combine capitalist principles with other ways of organizing economic activities, such as the state, non-profits, or even democratic organizations like worker's co-ops. Some of the ways of organizing the economy in this complex system are capitalist, non-capitalist, and even anticapitalist. They all exist and operate within the same constantly changing complex system that is our economy and society. In the context of this mixed economy, erosion, as an anticapitalist strategy, is attempting to replace capitalism with more democratic and egalitarian alternatives that will become the foundation of a more just system (Wright, 2019, pp. 59-64). The strategy of erosion proposes that work can be done in the present against capitalism, as pervasive, adaptable, and persistent as it may seem, and serves as a refreshing take on social transformation that encourages prefigurative action. It is a response to the age-old question of reform or revolution. It proposes a third way to oppose and resist capitalism that does not just require future action or changing conditions but calls for action and initiatives in the present (2019).

Similarly, to the utopian optimism that comes with building pieces of our desired future in the interstices of capitalism, the strategy can inspire skepticism since it appears somewhat fantastical and far-fetched. Erosion's seeming reliance on capitalism for its continued existence is one reason that could be used to challenge its effectiveness in bringing about actual transformation (Wright, 2019, pp. 62-64). Wright tackles this skepticism using three points which are (1) focusing on the alternative to capitalism, (2) the role of the state, and (3) the collective actors who will be participating in the strategy (2019, p. 64). For all three of the areas that Wright identifies to dispel

skepticism around erosion, he revisits many of the principles that he laid out for his socialist compass in *Envisioning Real Utopias*, such as power, state, economy, and civil society while contextualizing them with the introduction of practical, real-world examples of what changes could look like (2010, pp. 128-149; 2019, pp. 65-94).

For his first area of focus, which is on alternatives outside of capitalism, Wright demonstrates that universal basic income, worker-run cooperatives, public banking, and the knowledge commons could all be “building blocks” for a future sustainable socialist economy (2019, pp. 63-92). However, despite the existence of some of these building blocks in the present and the potential for more in the future, there still is the matter of the state to contend with, which is the second area that Wright focuses on to address the skepticism around this strategy. For the state, Wright revisits the logic of symbiotic metamorphosis that he proposed in *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010, pp. 336-365). The overarching argument is that if “the democratic processes of the capitalist state were revitalized and deepened, then there would be a significant possibility of using the capitalist state to gradually erode the dominance of capitalism” (Wright, 2019, p. 117). With this outlook on the state, Wright turns to the agents of social transformation, the third area he uses to address skepticism of the erosion of capitalism. This area has a lot in common with the theory of collective actors that Wright identified as a necessary part of his theory of social transformation in *Envisioning Real Utopias* (Wright, 2010, pp. 26-29). For any strategies for social transformation to occur, people must become agents for transformation and demonstrate a desire to see change manifesting itself in their collective actions. Because the strategy of erosion combines four of the five historical logics identified by Wright, it also requires diverse collective actors to enact these

logics. These actors can be involved in one or several of these anticapitalist strategies simultaneously (Wright, 2019, pp. 120-122).

Identifying the critical role that collective actors will play in social transformation inspires us to ask where they will come from and whether they can be created through organizing or planning. This is the question that Wright turns to in the final chapter of *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century* (2019, pp. 119-145). At the core of this question, Wright identifies three concepts that can be explored to understand it better: identities, interests, and values (2019, p. 124). People with identities rooted in and most heavily impacted by societal inequalities are most likely to become collective actors in emancipation. According to Wright, this is especially true of identities containing many intersections of exclusion from society (2019, p. 128). Wright identifies interests as another core concept to understanding collective actors. Interests are different from identities because they “are anchored in the solutions to the problems people encounter in their lives,” whereas “identities are anchored in the lived experiences generated in part by those problems” (2019, p. 129). The complexity of society and the diversity of roles that individuals can play in it means that they have many different interests, which can sometimes even conflict with each other (Wright, 2019, pp. 129-131). Values are the third and final concept for understanding collective actors and their motivation. In discussing values, Wright defines them as “the beliefs people hold about what is good, both in terms of how people should behave in the world and how our social institutions should function” (2019, p. 131). Values, like identity and interests, motivate many individuals and are called upon by the state, businesses, and organizations to encourage or discourage activities. These three core concepts can account for much of the motivation of the

actions of individuals and how they behave more generally in civil society, and understanding them is critical in making social transformation possible (Wright, 2019, pp. 131-132).

Using the three main areas of motivation that Wright identifies, he lays out general rules that should be followed to raise collective actors for the erosion of capitalism. The first of these rules emphasizes the need to focus on emancipatory values. This rule recalls the importance of equality, democracy, and community in Wright's initial analysis of capitalism (2019, p. 23). Second, he states that these three values should be not only at the heart of any progressive movement but should be shared and used to connect classes and socially oppressed groups. Third, the value of democracy should be particularly emphasized at this point since democratic strengthening is a project that more people can be motivated to address rather than specifically focusing on anticapitalist activities. The fourth and final rule is that eroding capitalism also requires actions outside the state (Wright, 2019, pp. 139-145). This rule includes any potential manifestations of resisting and escaping capitalism, which can also be thought of as non-capitalist activities that hope to challenge the hegemony of capitalism using Gibson-Graham's framework (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, pp. 1-15). With these four rules for collective actors, there is a roadmap for the process of erosion in both the state and the economy. Whether or not the progressive emancipatory change is realized depends on the activists and individuals who realize that we are not stuck in capitalism and take up the task of eroding it and moving towards an emancipatory future (Wright, 2019, p. 145).

3.4 Community Resource Sharing Research and Wright's Framework

Wright's anticapitalist framework is well suited to be used in the analysis of community resource sharing, and more specifically community fridges, which is the case study that this research explores. The first reason that this framework is compatible with my case study is Wright's emphasis on human flourishing, which implies that initiatives that are concerned with encouraging this flourishing through providing resources or encouraging creativity are part of the project of emancipatory social transformation. The second reason is Wright's emphasis on democracy, community, and equality which are all elements that are not just present in alternative food networks and urban food sharing initiatives but are specifically integral to how community fridges are meant to operate. The resonance between the community fridge and this framework is most clearly understood because of its reliance on community to provide equal access to food so that everyone can be closer to flourishing.

This research operates under the understanding, just like Wright and many others as seen in the literature review, that capitalism is a barrier to flourishing. However, although it uses Wright's framework it is not limited to just referencing anticapitalism as it is discussed by Wright. The definitions I used drew on the work of Chatterton that was discussed in the literature review where he discussed the multiplicity that is embodied in the concept of anticapitalism when used as a tool for everyday activism (2010). This multiplicity means that many actions, such as sharing at the community fridge, can be both anticapitalist as seen through Wright's strategic logics, but can also be post-capitalist or non-capitalist as seen when examined through the work of Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b). While all of these can be present in activities and initiatives the emphasis does vary between them. For the purposes of my research, I was not attempting to decenter the

hegemony of capitalism and so I did not abandon the concept of anticapitalism since I found the emphasis on opposition to capitalism was potentially a point of solidarity and mutual aid that has a stronger emphasis in an anticapitalist conception than in post or non-capitalist framings. In the discussion of the findings for this research and the conclusion that follows it, this emphasis on the anticapitalism is employed and used as it pertains to Wright's framework, but the understanding of anticapitalism that I used includes non and post capitalism since they do play a role in the creation of alternatives and resisting capitalism.

In addition to the emphasis on flourishing and anticapitalism, Wright's moral framework and definition of social justice matches up with the general vision for community fridges which are focused on providing barrier-free access to food. In addition, Wright's definition of human flourishing further highlights the emancipatory nature of food sharing and community fridges. Community fridges are excellent candidates for the application of Wright's framework because of their barrier-free approach to food, a basic need that Wright identifies as critical in enabling normal human functioning and a precondition for further human flourishing. In addition, Wright's analysis of collective actors and their motivations will help to explore the role that the users of the fridge play and the impact of their values, interests, and identities. Finally, as a non-capitalist activity, food sharing fits into the strategy of erosion and, more specifically, into the interstitial logics of resisting or escaping capitalism embodied in it. The community fridge, then, presents an excellent opportunity to explore the lived experiences of people participating in a non-capitalist space and the impact this activity can have.

3.4.1 Research Questions and Objectives

Using the framework proposed by Wright, this research will seek to answer one central question and three sub-questions. My main research question asks whether community sharing of resources has the potential for social transformation. This question relies on an understanding of community resource sharing. I have developed a definition of it and established that it is when community members facilitate and encourage the sharing or gifting of items that one person or group owns so that other individuals do not have to buy them. In this form, community resource sharing can happen online, in local communities, or between community groups. Examples of these groups in action include localized buy-nothing groups on social media, carpooling, community fridges, and free groups. This research is focused on answering this question by examining food sharing and, even more specifically, community fridges, as sites for social transformation. In addition to understanding community resource sharing, this research will utilize Wright's definition of social transformation and draw on the breadth of his exploration of this topic that was summarized in the previous sections of this chapter. This framework did inspire the main question, but it also inspired a more thorough exploration of the nuances of social transformation.

I have developed three sub-questions following the main question to further explore the potential of food-sharing as a site for emancipatory social transformation. The first of these sub-questions asks whether community resource sharing erodes capitalism. This question draws on Wright's strategy of erosion and approach to emancipatory social science that I explored in detail in this section. The second sub-question asks whether community resource sharing encourages thinking or ideas outside or beyond capitalism. This question looks for the presence of ideological seeds of anticapitalism in those who participate in what can be characterized as non-capitalist activities

(Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, pp. 1-15). In addition, it addresses one of the main themes that Wright explores at length in his works: collective actors and their motivations (2010, pp. 26-29; 2019, pp. 120-122). The third and final sub-question will more specifically address the impact of resource sharing on the community and ask whether it has improved the well-being of its members. This question is inspired by Wright, who proposes in his work on anticapitalism that human flourishing must be one of the goals of any viable alternative to capitalism (2010, pp. 13-18; 2019, pp. 9-20). With these three sub-questions and the main question, my research objectives will become possible.

The objectives for this research build off these research questions. I intend to understand better the role community resource sharing and the expansion of the commons can play in anticapitalism. I would also like to connect these actions with the anticapitalist strategy of erosion described in *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century* and contribute to the body of work on this strategy in hopes that it will help to encourage conversation about it and the adoption of it in the future (Wright, 2019). With this strategy in mind, I would like to better understand the significance of community and sharing in the erosion of capitalism with a focus on its ideological effect on its participants. More generally, I am hopeful that this research can begin to prefigure a more equitable world driven by human and ecological flourishing rather than profit by presenting the impact of local sharing, an action fundamentally opposed to the individualistic consumerism championed by neoliberal capitalism. Finally, on a practical level, I would like to verify the local role that everyday activities play in the erosion of capitalism. I hope that this offers a path toward future social

transformation that can be taken by many who have been under the impression that their local actions will not make a difference.

Wright's theoretical framework is uniquely equipped to assist in answering my research questions and resonates with my objectives. For my main research question, Wright's theory will help to address the concept of social transformation, which seeks to bring about change that leads to increased human flourishing and a reduction or elimination of the harms caused by capitalism (2019, pp. 9-20). In addition to social transformation, Wright's theory enables a different outlook on what actions or activities have the potential for change (2019, pp. 119-145). The relationship between what is achievable and what is viable that Wright proposes and expands on in *Envisioning Real Utopias* will further help to explore the potential and efficacy of alternatives and activities, such as sharing, more fully (2010, p. 23). This outlook on transformative activities expands the breadth of what can contribute to the strategy of erosion. Activities like activism, reform, revolution, community organizing, discussions, ideas, and a wide variety of non-capitalist activities can all play a role in this framework, enabling it to include things that generally would not have fit well into any one historical framework. The broad spectrum of activities and motivations that can play a role in erosion, coupled with Wright's emphasis on human flourishing, make it an excellent fit for answering my research questions and achieving my objectives.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.1 Methodology

For this research project, I used a case study approach with an embedded analysis (Creswell, 2013, p. 100). Elements of both the ethnographic approach and grounded theory made them appealing options for answering parts of my research questions. Still, the inductive nature of grounded theory and the comprehensive and cultural focus of the ethnographic approach meant that the case study approach was the most viable and effective methodology for this research (Creswell, 2013, pp. 67-110). Overall, the case study approach best fit my research questions since it enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the community group under study that would not be possible with other methodologies (Creswell, 2013, p. 200). The diverse experiences and concepts that my research questions address, such as ideology, erosion of capitalism, and human flourishing, fit within the bounds of my case and centre around a defined community activity, resource sharing. The experiential and humanistic underpinnings of my research and the topic of social change further reinforce that this methodology is the best to answer my research questions (Stake, 2009).

Aside from the case study method's ability to best answer my research questions, other factors further reinforce its use for my research. The first of these factors is the diversity of data collection methods available in this approach, including "interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 104). The depth of this data collection facilitated a better understanding of the case and enabled the integration of data collection methods used in both ethnographic and

grounded theory approaches. This methodology also helped me achieve my research objectives, which included integrating a framework developed for the twenty-first century (Wright, 2019) and my desire to address the Canadian context specifically. These temporal and geographical bounds, in addition to the activity of community resource sharing, helped to set the parameters for the definition of the case (Creswell, 2013, pp. 96-97).

4.1.1 Case Study Details

For my case study, I partnered with an organization that introduced and hosts a community fridge and is also devoted to developing new ways to work toward food security outside the established food charity model and food banking. As an organization, their initiatives would fit the description of urban food sharing and working outside the traditional food bank model, as discussed by Spring and Biddulph (2020). I wanted to work with a sharing initiative that is as decentralized as possible and this community fridge, although it is managed by the organization, was still said to belong to the community. In examining the community's potential for social transformation, a well-established and centralized organization would have a more clearly defined mission and purpose, whether anticapitalist or not, that would impact the individuals and the reason for their involvement in the community. The mission and purpose of the fridge, as communicated by its host organization, will be discussed further in this chapter to establish the baseline for it. Finally, as a condition for being able to conduct this research and to protect the anonymity of the research participants, the organization will not be named in this research. In addition, I will not be able to provide citations to any documents that could potentially reveal the organization's identity such as news articles, websites, and other media.

The basic idea of the community fridge is for the community members and neighbours to “take what they need and leave what they can.” The specific fridge that I will be focused on is located outdoors just off of the public sidewalk, so it is, for the most part, accessible and has fewer barriers than some other community fridges in Ottawa that are located inside. Because it is outdoors, this fridge has also been accessed more consistently since its introduction in 2021, given that the COVID-19 pandemic did, in many cases, result in at least intermittent periods where any indoor community fridges were shut down. However, despite the resiliency in the face of COVID-19, this outdoor fridge is not immune to setbacks and has experienced some interruptions and challenges which are explored in greater detail in later chapters. The fridge I studied has been set up using communication in several languages and accessed by a diverse group. For this research, a large enough portion of the fridge users could communicate in English that theoretical saturation could be reached without needing a translator. This omission does potentially limit the results of this research since the experiences of some fridge users were not explored. The observations that I did for this research were an attempt to consider these omitted experiences as they were shared in the community and with the host organization. Another factor that could be a challenge is the location of the fridge outdoors. Although the location of the fridge enables better all-hours accessibility and decreases barriers to acquiring food, it also means that the fridge is more susceptible to theft and vandalism. Since it has been operating, the fridge under study has been stolen, vandalized, and even lit on fire. All of these incidents, plus mechanical issues with the fridge, have resulted in the fridge being closed for short periods while the issues are solved. These facts about the case were

considered during the data collection period and, whenever relevant, were discussed with participants.

4.1.2 Data Collection

I gathered several forms of data while conducting this research. Most of this data was qualitative and collected through interviews with those involved with the community fridge, including volunteers, people who take from the fridge, and people who leave items in the fridge. Saint Paul University's Research Ethics Board approved my recruitment and data collection protocol, and I was issued the REB Protocol number 1360.10/22. Under this protocol, I indicated that all of the research participants had to be eighteen years or older at the time of the interview and they also all had to be able to communicate in English. In addition to these criteria, participants had to regularly access the fridge. Due to the location of the outdoor community fridge and its focus on providing barrier-free food to all people, members of the participant group were potentially food insecure and came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. All fridge users were invited to participate in this research. The eligibility of potential participants was assessed through communication after the first contact was made by email or phone.

4.2 Document Analysis

Before the interviews, I used document analysis to set the background for them. The first set of documents that I analyzed were those released and produced by the fridge's host organization. This set included social media communications, website content, and promotional material such as brochures. These documents were gathered through communication with the organizers and

analysis of their online activity. The second set of documents I analyzed are those created by people who were not participating in the community and included traditional news media, social media, and online chatrooms. In analyzing these external documents, I hoped to determine how the community is perceived to be associated with anticapitalism, sharing, and social transformation by those outside of it but still local to it.

For the internally produced documents, the fridge's host organization pitches the fridge as a community-based initiative, and a means to provide anyone with barrier-free, fresh, and culturally appropriate food. In addition, the fridge is referred to as a form of mutual aid. Much of the emphasis in communications is placed on community and the coming together through sharing that is supposed to occur at the fridge. All fridge users are encouraged to follow simple rules posted at the fridge location and communicated to potential users on social media and relevant websites. The rules for use are (1) leave what you can, (2) take what you need, and (3) no expired or mouldy items. In addition, the fridge's host states that there should be no policing at the fridge. There are also limitations on what can be donated to the fridge. The list of prohibited items includes raw meat, home-cooked meals, leftovers, opened packages, expired foods, and unlabeled meals. Finally, the community fridge's host organization does not propose the fridge as an alternative to capitalism or as an activity outside of it. Instead, the fridge is proposed as an alternative to traditional food charity and the food banking model. It is a piece of a broader mission based on the principle that food is a basic human right and everyone deserves access to fresh good food.

The community fridge, partly because of its novelty, has been the subject of several online conversations and has been discussed by media outlets. In light of the inflation that occurred in

2022 and is continuing in 2023, a recent media article proposes the community fridge as a way to combat high food prices. Earlier articles on it pitched it as a way to combat food insecurity by helping neighbours in need. It is also proposed as a response to COVID-19 and a way of continuing to provide access to food during the pandemic. In online chatrooms and on social media, the fridge is spoken of mostly in a positive light, and many people have expressed interest in the project and its innovation. The fridge's expressed goal to provide an alternative to food banking and the food charity model is echoed by those who have engaged online in discussing it. In my analysis of Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts, there was no notable perception that the fridge is anticapitalist. The consensus is that the community fridge is about addressing the needs of people in the community, providing barrier-free access to food, as well as decreasing food waste.

4.3 Observation

In addition to document analysis and interviews, I made some observations of the fridge and the community built around it by its host. I examined the physical artifacts that play a role in the community fridge initiative. This analysis included the fridge, enclosure, and adjoining community pantry. The barrier-free mission of the outdoor community fridge under study makes many other forms of observation not an option for data collection. This limitation is because directly observing the fridge could negatively impact fridge usage and introduce a barrier where there cannot be one. However, I could check on the fridge regularly and monitor what was left in it. I also attended a community consultation where its use was discussed. This participation in using the fridge and the community more broadly as an observer helped better inform my understanding of the realities of

its usage. This knowledge of how it is used provided background to help me prepare for the interviews and engage more fully with the data I collected through them.

For five months, I checked in on the community fridge whenever I could. Most times, when I accessed the community fridge, there was very little in it. In the summer and early fall, there was much more produce than in the winter months. This change was because produce is donated by community members who grow it and have extra or are directed to the community fridge through their local community gardens. Despite the rules that no mouldy or expired food should be donated, there were occasions when there were rotten vegetables or fruit in the fridge. The fridge was fairly clean and well-maintained for the most part. However, I did visit it on a long weekend, and there was garbage and packaging left beside it, and the contents were not as organized as usual. This particular occurrence pointed to the host organization's and its volunteers' involvement in maintaining the fridge. Since they were not staffed or open on the weekend in question, the fridge's state declined and was not addressed by community members. In addition, the fridge was often stocked with food that was put in it by the host organization. I saw more food in it that had been provided by them than what was supplied by neighbours, although it is difficult to know for sure what was supplied by whom since basic canned goods and produce could have been put there by community members or the host. Overall, in accessing the fridge, I felt that seeing how little food there was in it could often be discouraging. It also caused me to reflect on the experiences of those accessing it and experiencing food insecurity. With this experience, I could formulate my questions better, understand the context and references to the physical location, and analyze the data I collected in my interviews.

In addition to accessing the community fridge, I also had the opportunity to attend a community consultation where community members were assembled to discuss respectful communication and guidelines for its use. I discussed my attendance at this event with the host organization and participated as a community member. The event was organized to address issues in the use of the fridge that had been expressed to its host. Many of the issues being addressed at the consultation had also come up in my interviews and were the cause of a lot of frustration for fridge users. The primary issue was that some community members were waiting by the fridge for it to be filled and then taking everything in it. This behaviour is not in keeping with the vision for the fridge and has caused some verbal confrontations, despite the no-policing policy. Given the disregard for others that this behaviour caused, the host received requests to review the fridge guidelines and determine how it could prevent this from occurring. The consultations were a response to this request and were a result of the approach that the host has taken that the fridge is a community initiative and, as such, the community should be involved in determining any changes to its direction and rules. This event was the second of two. I could not attend the first, but I received a summary of it that stated that community members had expressed the need for more guidelines for the use of the fridge and more clarity over who should be using it. The first session also outlined the purpose of the fridge, which was discussed in my document analysis, and an overview of scarcity culture and how it can cause people to act.

At the beginning of the community consultation, the host organization outlined a group agreement that established the ground rules for interacting with each other as a community. These rules include; (1) no using names while sharing experiences, (2) no them versus us because we are all

us, (3) respect the space of other individuals, (4) only one person can speak at a time, (5) introduce yourself if possible, (6) use inclusive and non-discriminatory language, (7) there is no right or wrong answer, and (8) do not laugh at other people's ideas. The contents of this group agreement, which was created collectively at the first community meeting, were shared with the community members so that everyone was on the same page and to maintain a productive, respectful, and safe environment for discussion where everyone could participate since they are all members of the community and should be involved in discussions around the fridge. During the course of the consultation these rules were respected and the conversations were mostly respectful and participation was welcomed.

The host organization also shared a little about the initial vision for the community fridge and the current challenges that it is facing. They highlighted three main pieces of the initial vision for the fridge, which had largely emerged out of their belief that food is a basic human right. The first of these was that the fridge would provide an interactive barrier and stigma-free access to food. The second piece of the initial vision was that it would complement the organization's own community meals and grocery program. The third component of the vision was that the community fridge would be predominantly supported by the community and local businesses. After discussing the vision, the fridge's host turned to the challenges that they identified. Many of these challenges had come up in several of the interviews I had conducted prior to this meeting and included; (1) the need for the Community fridge is extremely high, (2) food access through the fridge is inconsistent, (3) it is mainly accessed by neighbours who live or are close by (used heavily by a select few neighbours), (4) it is not seeing as many donations as they had originally hoped, (5) staff and

donors filling the fridge have felt overwhelmed by neighbours waiting by the community fridge, (6) neighbours have felt intimidated by groups that gather close to the fridge, (7) there is an overall sense of clique-ness and racism at times. The challenges were the main things that the second community consultation and its discussion about establishing new guidelines for the fridge were attempting to address.

In addition to the current challenges, the host highlighted the initiative's main strengths based on what they had heard from community members and witnessed themselves during the first two years since its implementation. These strengths were also based on what they had heard in the previous community consultation. Just like with the challenges, many of the strengths had also come up in my interviews, and they included: (1) the friendships that have formed around the fridge, (2) the way that neighbours have informed and encouraged each other to use the fridge, (3) the recipes that have been shared by volunteers, staff, and neighbours for different items that have been left in the fridge, (4) the people who have been bringing food items to share with others, (5) the way that neighbours have volunteered to help with the fridge by cleaning and filling it, as well as labelling food items, and finally, (6) the amount of fresh good produce that has been shared through it.

After sharing the vision, challenges, and strengths, the meeting approached the topic of solutions. The community had identified in the previous consultation that they would like to establish more guidelines for those using the fridge. To establish these guidelines, the community was asked to answer a series of questions on a handout and then discuss them as a group. There was an emphasis in this process on the importance of hearing all of the voices of the fridge users, even if they were

not willing to speak publicly at the consultation. Although I do not have access to the results recorded on the forms, generally, a public consensus was reached throughout the discussions. The first question to attendees was, “How often should neighbours be using the community fridge? Daily, weekly, or monthly?”. After discussing, the community generally seemed to agree that people should be able to access the fridge daily if needed. The subsequent questions asked about what should happen when people fill the fridge, how much fridge users should be taking, and whether the fridge should serve a specific catchment area. One of the questions I wanted to highlight from this consultation asked what should happen to people not following the guidelines. Given the barrier-free mandate of the fridge and the insistence that there should be no policing, this question was difficult to address. It yielded interesting responses from the community, including being told they could not access the fridge for a week and being referred to someone who could help them get support if needed. After the discussion, the host gathered the attendees’ notes and told them there would be another one in the future to discuss the findings from this one further. In an email update to the broader community about this meeting, the organization addressed the complexity of the community member’s desire for guidelines by saying, “While we established that guidelines are needed, putting the guidelines into practice will take a lot of trust and empathy.”

4.4 Interview Results

4.4.1 Recruitment and Participants

In my data collection period, I conducted eight interviews, each approximately one hour long. The semi-structured interviews contained questions about the participant's involvement in community resource sharing, their experience with it, and whether it has changed how they participate in or think about consumption and exchange. Because the interviews focused on lived experiences, perceptions, and ideology, I used an interview guide to direct the questions. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and to accommodate people who were not comfortable or able to meet in person, participants were provided with the option to conduct the interview in person or online. If the participant preferred to meet in person, the interview was conducted in an office provided by the host organization but not located inside of it. Online interviews were conducted on Zoom unless the participant requested a different platform or technology. In two cases, participants declined video chats and requested that the interview be conducted over the phone instead. In all cases, the participants consented to the interview being recorded. For the sample size, I followed the process outlined in grounded theory and conducted interviews to the point of theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2013, p. 87).

The participants were invited to the interviews through a variety of different channels depending on their respective roles in the community. However, all of the participants I recruited reached out because of a poster that I hung on the inside door of the fridge and pantry enclosures or through being referred by another participant. The poster briefly outlined the research project details with short summaries of the project, eligibility criteria, participation, and compensation. I also added my email address and phone number to the bottom of the poster with a QR code that started the process of emailing me when scanned. In addition to the posters on the fridge enclosure, I gave

some posters to the fridge's host organization's staff to distribute to community members that used the fridge or volunteers involved with it. All participants were compensated with twenty dollars given to them via cash or electronic transfer, depending on whether the interview was conducted online or in person. In total, I interviewed three people who used the fridge primarily by leaving food in it, four who used the fridge primarily as a source of food, and one who was a volunteer and helped with the stocking and upkeep of the fridge. Several of the participants in all groups volunteer with the fridge's host organization and also both take and leave food. However, after my interviews, I assigned the roles to them as a reflection of the majority of their interactions with the community fridge. Finally, to effectively discuss the results I assigned numbers to each of the participants. Participants one through three all accessed the fridge to leave food, whereas numbers four through seven accessed the fridge to get food. Participant number eight was a volunteer and left food in the fridge as well.

After conducting the interviews, I listened to all the recordings and analyzed them for themes and quotes. Using the data from this process, I determined a series of themes that emerged from them, and I will be going through these themes in the coming sections of this chapter. The same question guide was used as a starting point for each interview, but I would often change, remove, or adapt questions to address the experiences of individual participants more specifically. Often, many of the questions were addressed organically throughout the conversation and then were not revisited when they were reached in the guide. The main themes that I will be focusing on in the description of my results are motivation and personal experiences, community, crisis, consumption, impact, and social change. Many of these themes were specifically addressed in my questions, so they

were anticipated. However, the theme of crisis was not anticipated and came up in all of the interviews in some form or another, so it is definitely critical to explore the ways that it was talked about in this context. In the next sections, I will go through these themes and explore the different responses I received for them.

4.4.2 Motivation and Personal Experiences

At the beginning of each interview, I asked my participants to tell me about themselves. Sometimes these conversations brought up elements or themes that we explored further. After the introduction questions, the first line of questioning that I had about the fridge asked about their reason for using it and explored their personal experiences with it. Ultimately, some themes did emerge from these questions. The conversations about the motivation for fridge use often highlighted the complexity of accessing food and the roles it can play for many people. Participant number 5 who regularly checked the fridge drove this point home when they said:

Food is such an everyday thing. It is a basic need, but we can manipulate it in ways that are not right. We use food for many purposes aside from caloric intake and survival. As a result, the community fridge becomes a way to cope, which is not always about caloric intake. It is about health in more than one way; mental health, physical health, societal health, and emotional health, but you still need to eat, so it gets really complicated.

This statement was something that I considered when I analyzed and thought about the responses that I had been given. The complexity surrounding food emerged in conversations about

motivations and personal experiences and became apparent in the subsequent conversations about community, social change, impact, and crisis.

For all of the people who were taking food out of the fridge, their main motivation was that they needed food. However, two of the four fridge users in this category also expressed a desire to put food in the fridge with participant seven saying “I hope to one day fill the community fridge or pantry and watch everyone leave something for someone else” and participant five saying “I am always looking for opportunities to share, it is part of my nature. This is why it has been so hard being a fridge user instead of a giver.” Both of these participants reminisced about past experiences when they could share food with their neighbours and discussed how they would want to do this again if they could through the community fridge. For those leaving food in the fridge, the reasons for their involvement were ultimately more diverse. Three of the four participants who left food in the fridge or volunteered to help it out were not located in the same geographic neighbourhood as the fridge, but they had instead found out about the fridge and were going out of their way to put food in it. All of these users echoed the sentiment of the host organization that food should be a basic human right. However, these users were also motivated by different things, with participants one and two being very concerned with reducing food waste and building alternatives and participant three saying that they “like to think about someone opening the cupboard or fridge and seeing something in it. When I open it and see that it is empty, I think wow I am so glad that I decided to come today.”

In addition to the motivations for using the fridge, many participants referenced feelings they experienced when using it. The experiences indicated that the community fridge is being viewed

by many who use it as less than a meeting place for sharing but more as a barrier-free 24/7 extension of the food bank. This classification meant that many participants had experiences similar to their experiences or understandings of food banks or other more traditional charities that address food security. Participant one, who primarily left food in the fridge, talked about their experiences taking food from fridges and said, “We would feel like we are going to be taking away from someone or going to be accessing a service that we should not be.” However, that same participant challenged this feeling when they said, “There is always going to be someone who is worse off, but that does not mean that you don’t deserve to eat and that you don’t deserve to access those basic things.” Participant two also experienced a similar conflict even though they said it was increasingly difficult to afford food. This participant identified an internalized sense of charity in society and called for a changing that mindset into one where we think about what people need instead “and if you are hungry, you should take something rather than asking if they can afford it first.” Both participant one and participant two highlighted their hesitancy to take food from the fridge and referred to their internalized charitable mindset that was a response to systemic structures and legacy models of addressing poverty and food insecurity.

In addition to the sentiment expressed by participants one and two who were leaving food in the fridge, the experiences of those primarily taking food from the fridge further illuminated the intricacies and details of using the community fridge. While all the participants in this group acknowledged that they would rather not rely on the fridge for food, participant five talked about using the community fridge and the shame that goes along with it. They said that “having to use the community fridge is not cool stuff” and that their “pride is in free fall and that you could not

lower the bar faster than it is falling.” Participant six also expressed this feeling and said “I would rather buy my food. It doesn’t feel good to have to rely on the community fridge.” My discussions with the participants who took food from the fridge mostly echoed these sentiments, but they also all highlighted a lack of food in the fridge. Although there are times, such as weekends, when the fridge is better stocked, for the most part, those who use it find it is mostly empty. Despite the fridge’s emptiness, participant five and participant seven explicitly discussed the sense of hope that it can inspire. Participant five highlighted this and talked about how “there are a lot of times when, depending on my frame of mind, I will not open the fridge. I would rather imagine that there is shrimp scampi, fillet mignon, and the best almond milk in it. But I am usually disappointed, and there is just wilted parsley and a shitty eggplant in there”. However, the discouragement of going to an empty fridge does not mean that the fridge is not improving access to food. All the fridge users I talked to said that the community fridge is not a perfect system, but it does make a difference in their access to food, with one even saying that they were not sure what they would do if it were no longer there.

4.4.3 Community

The next theme, community, overlaps with personal experiences and motivations. However, it expanded on both of them by specifically exploring the interactions with others around the fridge, whether it is other fridge users, volunteers, or neighbours. However, the experiences with the community at large were quite varied, and the individuals were often referencing the existence of cliques and other groups that used the fridge together, but they were not necessarily a part of them. My questions about community also often highlighted the most significant challenges that the

community fridge faces. The four participants taking food from the fridge answered that there was community, while those leaving food or helping with the fridge were not as certain. Participant six, who regularly checks the fridge for food stated, “It kind of makes me feel like I have friends, you know, people who are interested in what you are doing and want to know what you are eating.” Participant four also talked about community around the fridge and said, “I think that there is a community around the fridge, but it doesn’t involve me. Other people are friends and use it together, but I don’t really talk to anybody else myself.” The desire to access the fridge alone was expressed by three of the four participants in this group. This desire was for many reasons, but one of them was explained by participant five when they said:

There are people who hang out there, and it sometimes feels like a gang. They are a pretty tight little group, and sometimes it is kind of dicey since you are dealing with people who, for all sorts of reasons, need this fridge. It is not comfortable accessing it, and I will mainly check it when no one else is around.

Participant seven also expressed frustration with how the fridge was used, saying, “Nobody leaves anything for anyone else. This breaks my heart”. However, despite the sometimes negative experiences with the people who were also accessing the fridge, three of the four fridge users taking food from the fridge specifically expressed that they believed community members were doing their best and that it was impossible to know what they were going through or whom they were taking food for. This response can be seen in the statement made by participant five who said, “I do believe in my heart of hearts that everyone is doing the best that they can. We don’t know the reason that people are doing things. We don’t know what they have been through.”

The experience with the community for the people I interviewed who primarily left food at the fridge or were volunteers differed from those who took food from the fridge. Overall, this group had significantly less frequent interactions with the fridge. Many fridge users check it daily or at least every two days, while all of these participants went to the fridge weekly at the most. All participants who leave food in the fridge confirmed that people are almost always by it when they dropped off food. However, most of the people who left food did identify that there often was not much engagement with fridge users. Participant three said, “They will say hello back, but they mostly don’t really want to engage,” and with participant one saying, “we’ll try to hang back a bit when we get there.” When asked about community, participant two stated that the fridge “is a good way to break through class divides and have relationships that you otherwise would not.” Participant one also said that it is a relationship-building experience looking at the food together. Despite the presence of community that had been identified and discussed by participants four through seven, participant one thought there was a lack of community and engagement at the fridge. They said the fridge is isolated and that “this is maybe one of the weaknesses of the fridge when compared to other food-sharing initiatives where you can go and make or eat meals together.” Finally, on the topic of people misusing the fridge or hoarding food, the participants mostly also held the same views as those who take food. Participant two summarized this view that food insecurity triggers a scarcity response, and people try to ensure that they will get their part. Those, who left food, even though they were not as regularly accessing the fridge, did just like those taking food, reference the presence of a community around it and talked about both negative and positive experiences interacting in this community.

Participant eight, the volunteer I interviewed did not feel that community members did much to maintain the fridge and keep it clean. However, the other research participants felt that the fridge was well respected. A couple of them did identify that it was impossible to know whether it was volunteers, community members, or a combination of both taking care of it. Participant four identified a link between a sense of inclusion and using the fridge when they said, “I feel like I am part of the community enough to be respectful of the fridge and stuff like that.” This sentiment was also expressed by others who, maybe, did not actively clean the fridge, but did acknowledge that people who left it a mess or violated the usage guidelines were not respecting the community or its members. The area where dissatisfaction was most prevalent was regarding the misuse of the fridge. Despite its no policing policy, all of the fridge users and the volunteer discussed at length, problems with people taking more than they should, leaving expired or inedible items, and even stories of business owners taking food and reselling it. The stories of business owners taking food are not verified, but they inspired further questioning of why businesses would do this and what they could stand to gain. The fact that individuals were leaving food that was inedible or past its best-before date was a particular affront to many fridge users, with most of my participants stating that it made them feel as though they were being treated as sub-human with participant five even saying that it made them think of “slopping the pigs.” Overall, there was a sense that people, whether by leaving improper food or hoarding it, were not respecting the community and its members.

4.4.4 Crisis

One somewhat unanticipated theme that emerged in my interviews involved crises. This theme resulted from what was occurring in society during the interviews. The escalation of the climate crisis, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and global inflation were all sub-themes in this category that kept reoccurring and helped spark conversations around consumption, greed, and social change. In disseminating my results, I have included the relevant observations about inflation and the climate crises in my section on the theme of consumption. However, the pandemic was a topic that continued to come up. In some cases, it was referred to as a catalyst for getting involved in sharing initiatives and looking for alternative ways of addressing inequality and food insecurity. When I asked participant one what the primary catalyst for involvement with the community fridge was, they asserted that COVID-19 gave them more time to think about how we do things. Their use of the fridge was a result of this pause. Participant three identified the pandemic as the reason for “an increase in poverty in my neighbourhood that we have to respond to.” In this case, just like the other case, the pandemic has been a catalyst for inspiring action.

In addition to the experiences that those who leave food in the fridge had with the pandemic, two of the participants who access the fridge to get food also looked at the pandemic as a catalyst for their use of the fridge. Participant seven who takes food from the fridge and also volunteers with the host organization said, “I use the fridge every day now. We have all lost our jobs because of the pandemic, and it is still very hard to find a job.” Similarly, participant five also identified the pandemic as one of the main reasons for their need to use the fridge. Participant seven also flagged the pandemic as being a factor in some of the issues with improper use of the and people’s behaviour when they said:

Going without during the pandemic when everything was closed, money was not there, jobs were not there, and food banks were at their limits. I think that just made people, I don't want to say this, and there probably is a better word, but greedy.

This particular comment was also echoed by participant three who leaves food in the fridge and thinks that many people are now consuming more because they “have a kind of revenge mindset where they feel that they need to catch up on what the pandemic took away.” Despite the variations in the area that the pandemic impacted, almost all of the participants identified it as a major inflection point in their lives and talked about it at some point in their conversation even though there were no questions that specifically asked about it.

4.4.5 Consumption

Overall, all of the participants expressed that businesses are greedy, waste too much, and overall encourage people to consume more than they should. On waste, participant two said:

The amount of garbage that I produce in a week is nothing compared to the amount of garbage that is put out behind a Weston owned grocery store. The personal responsibility stuff reminds you of the work we have to do as a society, but that is not where the problem lies. It is the economic system that is currently imposed on us that is the issue.

Participant four also talked about waste and said that “there is too much waste from food stores and restaurants that throw out perfectly edible food.” On greed, participant seven said that “problems with food are driven by greed” and participant four said that “People are wanting to

make too much money selling food, because the prices are crazy.” Participant seven talked about the relentless drive to consume saying that “there is just a vicious cycle of purchasing things we don’t need.” This point on consumption was also taken up by participant eight who connected it with the concept of excess waste when he said, “manufacturers have encouraged the rise of disposable products because if they can’t fix them or trade them in, they will buy new things from them.”

All the participants also expressed in some way that food should be more accessible, which resonates with the fridge’s host organization’s mandate for it and their focus on food as a basic human right. Participant three spoke on this and said, “We are not treating food as a human right.” Participant seven also talked about this and said, “There is no need for people to go hungry. There is so much food going to waste that nobody should be going hungry.” All the participants who left food in the fridge were concerned with sustainability and looked for alternative ways to acquire items such as sharing, borrowing, or purchasing second-hand. Participant eight said “I look to borrow or share items. It doesn’t make sense to throw things out and buy new ones if people can still use the items.” Participants one and two cited environmental and labour concerns as their primary reasons for avoiding purchasing items from Amazon, Weston-owned grocery stores, and other big box stores. Participants three and eight both identified unsustainable consumption as their main reason for avoiding purchasing whenever they could. This view was summarized by participant three who said, “We must reduce our consumption. That has to be a commandment.” Overall, the participants who left food in the fridge were concerned about consumption and

identified that the way we consume goods as a society is not sustainable and harms both the planet and the people on it.

In addition to a concern for the planet, all the participants who left food in the fridge expressed a dislike for the drive to consume, a distrust of prominent corporations, and critiqued the consumption levels encouraged in our society. There were several different ways in which the participants approached this topic. Participant three approached food consumption from the perspective of the farmers and growers with criticism of industrialized agriculture and the consolidation of farmland that has taken place under it. This critique ultimately led them to say, “we have moved to food monopolies and industrial food. At this point, it is about food sovereignty.” However, this critique also branched out into a critique of commercial grocery chains and the windfall profits they made during the pandemic and in the face of inflation. Another way this topic was approached by participant eight was through a discussion about the transition from a society where “we made our own things and shared and traded them to a throw-away society where you can just buy things and discard them.” When asked what drove this change, they responded, “human stupidity is the biggest driver.” However, when asked about the role of businesses in this process, participant eight responded that “the commercial world, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers are probably more responsible for this lack of reusing and the urge to buy new things. People who are in marketing are also to blame for a lot of it.” This participant also stated that this is all motivated by the ethic of business, which is simply that “they are there to make money.” The negative sentiments towards big businesses and consumption were echoed by participants one and two whose primary approach to this topic of overconsumption, other than for

environmental reasons, was equity and equal access. All of the reasons cited as a critique for consumption by these participants demonstrated that these fridge users are critical of consumption and businesses as drivers of it. In addition, they demonstrated a cynicism towards business and a definite distrust for big businesses such as corporate grocery chains.

For the participants who primarily take food from the fridge, their consumption patterns were not the same. For the most part, if a participant were struggling with food insecurity, I would not ask as many questions about how they consumed items as I did to those in a position where they could regularly leave food in the fridge. These participants all agreed that businesses were charging too much for food and wasting it. The sentiments towards business, particularly food networks, were more diverse and apathetic than the participants leaving food in the fridge. Participant four, although they described the current inflation crisis as “price gouging,” still had no opinion on selling food as a commodity. This stance can be seen when they said;

If people have food and want to sell it, then that is their right. If I don't have money to buy it, then I don't have money to buy it, but I don't see that as wrong. I don't see it as right, but I also don't see it as wrong.

This attitude was also echoed by participant five who was hesitant to answer any questions on this topic and said they were not political and did not see the point in finger-pointing. However, participant seven from this group did criticize businesses and stated that “problems with access to food are driven by greed which causes people to act in ways that they normally wouldn't. The

greed of the stores and their owners definitely causes a lot of this.” This view identified business as the origin of greed, which then influences others to be greedy and shift their behaviours.

The theme of the consumption patterns of others was referenced several times by the participants who take food from the fridge. It was covered partially in my discussion on community and in the instances of expired food being left in the fridge. However, I did not cover how these individuals’ motivations were perceived. Three of the four participants who used the fridge to get food specifically called out the people leaving food that they said was inedible. On this subject, they said that it often seemed as though the fridge was being used as a place for people to get rid of food without feeling bad about throwing it out. The participants talked about how it seemed as though they used the community fridge as an excuse to replace food, they had at home by purchasing more for themselves and donating their old food. Participant five said, “Someone is patting themselves on the back when this is food that is already way past its prime, and they are donating it because it is spoiled and not to feed people.” However, despite those who regularly checked the fridge all talking about this occurring, they quickly acknowledged that this was not all people who left food in the fridge.

4.4.6 Impact

On the subject of impact, all the participants agreed that the community fridge had made a difference in the community where it is located. However, the extent of its impact was a more contentious issue. Overall, the participants reflected that there is no real way to know how many people leave and take food from the fridge. One participant suggested that the only way this would

be possible would be through setting up a CCTV camera at the site, but also acknowledged that this would be impossible to do if the fridge's barrier-free and no policing mandates were to be upheld. With this lack of hard evidence identified, the participants turned to their own experiences to paint a picture of the impact of the fridge on the community. The experiences varied, but from these conversations and earlier conversations around the theme of community, it became clear that the need for food in the community far exceeds what is available or given in the fridge.

On the topic of the fridge's effectiveness, many of the participants used phrases like "in an ideal world" and "it is a great idea, but" in their analyses. Participant eight, in particular, questioned the effectiveness of the fridge by challenging the premise of sharing and arguing that it is not working in its current iteration due to the hoarding of food and emptying of the fridge by a small group of individuals. They said that the fridge "is idealistic, especially if there is a greater need in the community. It seems that the greater the need for food in the community the more it is going to just disappear into a smaller number of individual's homes." This participant also was concerned that able people can most readily access the community fridge, and it excludes those unable to leave their homes or with limited mobility. However, most of the participants who took food from the fridge were disappointed with people who "hoarded" food, as many of them put it, but not as critical of the initiative. On this point, one participant said, "I don't know how you solve this problem. I think that you just have to keep throwing paint at the canvas." Other participants were also unsure of how to solve the problems, but they were all mostly gracious towards those who were emptying the fridge and "hoarding" food. Both those who left food in the fridge and those who took food from the fridge cited scarcity and scarcity culture as a significant motivator for the

behaviour causing this problem with the fridge. However, despite the challenges, all of the participants believed that the community fridge does make a difference, but the need for food is very great and is not adequately met by those who share food in it. One participant summarized their thoughts on its impact in a statement when they said, “the fridge serves a huge purpose for a very small community, and currently, it is not even really able to fully serve that community.”

4.4.7 Social Change

For all of my questions on the final theme of social change, I avoided using terms like anticapitalism unless the participant first used them. Instead, I asked more general questions and then probed to find out whether there was a critique of capitalism or the system present. Participants one and two were both involved in anticapitalist activism. When questioned whether fridge use had inspired them to change their thoughts, they both acknowledged that although it had not inspired them to get more involved in social change, it had served as a point of hope. Participant one identified the tension between “anarchist actions” of creating alternative systems and organizing to put pressure on the government and existing systems. On this tension, they said that the “community fridge was a good space for me to say yes to alternatives and see how they could directly meet peoples’ needs.” This participant elaborated on this further by explaining how their experience with movement-based organizing has mainly been “starting from a place of cold-petitioning or cold-calling and trying to engage with a stranger before you have a connection,” where it can be hard to see the effects of their actions.

Participant two also expressed that the fridge was a way to integrate their values with actions that are actually making a difference. They said:

It is good to see potential alternatives. It is inspiring to see because, in activism, it is sometimes tough even to imagine what it would be like. The fridge gives you a taste. If we are just focusing on a future idea and never helping people now, then who knows if we are going to get there. If we are only just quickly trying to help everyone around us without trying to change the system, then that will also be ineffective. We need to be doing both of those things at once.

Finally, and in addition to the way that the fridge enabled them to live their values and inspired them to continue pushing for social change, these two participants both pointed to the fact that the fridge is always empty and that there are people around it constantly as a demonstration that people will engage with alternatives to what is offered by the system if they are made available and accessible. However, participant two also articulated a theory for change that included mutual aid and addressed some of the issues that have come up with the community fridge when they said:

I think we want to have as much mutual aid as possible. I am not sure as a horizon I see this as something that would work entirely on its own. The fridges are empty a lot of the time. A lot of that is because the need is so high. This kind of system does leave itself open to potential for abuse or misuse. Mutual aid will need support from the state. I don't think that on its own it can become a big enough threat to the system.

Outside of the participants one and two, none of the other participants mentioned anticapitalism specifically in their responses. The participants who took food from the fridge were generally not as politically motivated, which is understandable given that they mostly accessed the fridge to get food. Participant four articulated this when they said, “I am not looking for more ways to get involved in sharing, but if there are more ways to get food, I would use them. I am not seeking out ways to get more involved or organize. It is more about the food.” However, I also asked this participant about what they thought should be done about what they identified as “price-gouging” at the grocery store. They replied that the “government should step in and take a role in limiting how much they can charge since everyone does have to eat.” The role of the government was also mentioned by participant six who attribute high food prices to the government, saying that “the government is maybe letting the stores set such high prices because they will get more money from people who go shopping a lot.”

Participants seven and five would not get political and said they were more interested in doing what they could to help people in the present and not worrying about things outside their control. Both of these participants were excited about sharing food in the fridge in the future and stated that they would be more involved with the community fridge if they could since it helps many people in tough positions. Participant seven succinctly expressed this desire when they said, “seeing the fridge full makes my heart full. I can’t wait until I can fill it up with what I can grow in my garden this year.” Participant three echoed the sentiments expressed by many others that businesses are greedy and raking in excess profits and that they should be limited from doing this by the government. They also had a similar mindset to the last two participants who took food

from the fridge that I talked about already in this paragraph when it came to making change. They were very focused on what they could do and were motivated by hopefully improving the lives of others and helping them in any way they could.

When they were asked whether the community fridge had changed their way of thinking or acting, participant eight was more skeptical about the project. This participant referenced the abuses of the fridge and stated that the behaviours that they witnessed in the use of the fridge demonstrated that what is happening at the community fridge is not actually in line with the principles of sharing since some are hoarding the food at the expense of the rest of the community who also need it. This participant accompanied this view with a statement demonstrating that they understood that scarcity can make people take more than they should when they said, “I would probably be like that too if I were in need of food.” This participant said that “there is both good and bad when it comes to the community fridge. The discouraging aspects of the fridge have made me think of starting up something else to address the need for food in the community.” Finally, on the question of whether change is possible that will make food more accessible, they identified two ways in which they thought the necessary change could be brought about. The first of these ways was through government legislation “because businesses are not going to change otherwise since it is not their reason for being.” Participant eight had previously identified that businesses were driven by profit and that concerns for people and planet were distant from this primary concern. The second way they identified change could take place was through “the grassroots shaming of companies that are not participating in what needs to be done for our climate. If they see that they will lose money if they don’t do anything about it, they will change.”

4.5 Developments after Data Collection

All of the data I gathered, whether in observations, document analysis, or interviews, helped to build a fuller understanding of the community fridge, the realities of its usage, and its involvement in inspiring further thoughts or actions. The diverse voices and opinions expressed by fridge users demonstrated the complexities and challenges inherent in accessing food and dealing with scarcity while also illuminating the motivations for the behaviours. The data that I gathered showed that there were some elements of the community fridge experience that were not working. These challenges became too great and resulted in the fridge's host making the difficult decision to shut down the community fridge three months after I completed my data interviews and a month after the second community consultation. They made a statement on social media summarizing the reasons for this decision. This update identified that there had been an increasing number of incidents that had made the fridge less safe and inclusive. The fridge's host reiterated that the safety of community members must be protected, and their community was no place for hate.

After identifying that there were incidents where fridge users and community members felt unsafe, the fridge's host organization turned to the underlying reasons for the incidents. They wrote that:

The realities of poverty are impacting people across the city, reflected in increased tensions and competition for food. All too often blame, and attention is on individuals accessing services and not on the larger systems that have created scarcity and fuelled desperate behaviours. The reason people are food insecure is due to low-wages, inadequate social assistance, and the rising cost of living. Neighbours have shared with us that all of their

money goes towards bills, and they remain in deficit each month. This leaves Neighbours reliant on community services, meal programs, and fridges. Community fridges are a strategy, but they are not a solution. We need to continue to advocate for conditions in which everyone can thrive.

However, despite the closure of the fridge, the fridge's host has not abandoned the community fridge project. There is still an indoor fridge that they have at the same location as the outdoor fridge. This indoor fridge does not as fully fulfill the barrier-free mandate since it is only accessible when the organization is open and staffed. Now that the outdoor community fridge has been closed the data that I gathered and have explored in this section are the only insights that we can gather at this point for this specific initiative. This data then will help to understand what happened at the community fridge and more fully understand the impact that it had.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 The Community Fridge and the Viability of Alternatives to Capitalism

Wright's work and several of the books and papers explored in my literature review demonstrated that a significant body of literature has been written on non-capitalist or anticapitalist activities. All of this literature showed that we need to move beyond capitalism if humanity is going to survive and flourish. With the necessity of this transition established, a review of the literature on the topic, and the results of my research, we can use these tools to determine whether the community fridge is itself a non-capitalist or anticapitalist activity. As a space for sharing, the community fridge becomes a case study where the assertion that the commons are opposed to capitalism made in my literature review can be assessed and explored. When thought about in light of the dichotomy proposed by George Caffentzis on the commons, the community fridge I studied was clearly on the side of opposing capitalism rather than the one that was trying to be absorbed by or had already been co-opted by neoliberalism (2010). It also fit into the understanding of sharing that was put forward as a way to move towards more sustainable consumption patterns in the paper that Ozanne and Ballantine wrote on toy lending libraries (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010, pp. 495-496). Although I never specifically asked the question of whether the fridge was anticapitalist in my interviews, the responses that I received did show that not many of those who were accessing the fridge identified it as an initiative that significantly differed from the way things are already done. As discussed in my literature review, this novelty, and the concept that it was an

initiative based in the commons make a case for it being an non-capitalist initiative and cement its place as an example of the commons and exchange outside of the capitalist market.

5.1.1 Mutual Aid and Anticapitalism

In addition to its role as an implementation of the commons, the community fridge can also be seen as a mutual aid initiative. This can be seen in the statement made by the fridge's host organization when they announced the fridge was closing. This statement was the closest the host got to identifying their approach as opposing the prevailing system and aligning with what the literature on mutual aid would demonstrate as challenging capitalism. Their assertion that individuals are not to blame for what happened with the outdoor community fridge is reminiscent of the work of Dean Spade on mutual aid (2020). This similarity can be seen in the book when Spade stated that "under capitalism, social problems resulting from exploitation and the maldistribution of resources are understood as individual moral failings, not systemic problems" (2020, p. 22). This same sentiment can be seen the statement made by the fridge's host after its closing. Many participants also expressed similar sentiments about the problems not being the result of individual moral failings, even when it came to those who were misusing the fridge and violating its guidelines. This way of talking about the issues at the fridge can be seen in the responses given by participants four, five, and seven from the group that took food from the fridge and all of the participants who left food in the fridge. These statements all showed that the participants did not view the people taking too much as the problem, but instead pinned it on the fact that food is not considered to be a basic human right. Overall, these expressions of the principles of mutual aid, as defined by Spade, in the interactions around the community fridge

further build the case for its opposition to capitalism, as the principles of mutual aid fundamentally oppose the values on which capitalism is based.

Despite how analysis of the commons and an understanding of mutual aid illuminate the anticapitalist nature of the community fridge, only participants one and two identified the fridge as an anticapitalist activity and talked specifically about mutual aid as an alternative to capitalism. These same two participants were also involved in anticapitalist organizing before accessing the fridge. The other participants talked about the fridge as an extension of the existing food charity system, which is understandable considering that the fridge's host also runs a food bank. However, even the participants who connected the fridge to food banking still articulated that they had never seen anything else like it before and expressed that they thought it was a good idea and were impressed by the concept. The fact that only two of the eight participants identified the fridge as anticapitalist, and a mutual aid initiative does not mean that it is not challenging the dominance of capitalism. The host organization said the fridge was a strategy but not a solution to food insecurity. They argued that food insecurity results from systemic issues, including "low wages, inadequate social assistance, and the rising cost of living." This statement still is not explicitly anticapitalist, but it does show that the community fridge was positioned as a strategy for combatting inequality, which was identified as being one of the problems, along with restricted access to resources that are inherently part of capitalism by Wright (2010, pp. 33-36). While the project may not be fundamentally anticapitalist and pursuing a goal to overthrow capitalism, it certainly does challenge the dominant capitalist narrative centred around individualism and competition while also opposing the values of private access and inequality.

5.1.2 Prefigurative Politics

As we saw in the literature review, prefiguration and prefigurative politics are powerful tools that should be used to transform society and move towards emancipatory social transformation. Marianne Maeckelbergh showed how prefigurative politics can be integral in change-making strategies. She outlined two activities critical to prefigurative movements: challenging existing systems and building alternatives (2011, pp. 15-17). These activities were present at the community fridge, but as my interviews showed, they were not readily apparent to many who accessed it. The community fridge did challenge the existing food retail system and food charity models by offering an alternative way to acquire food. Participant six highlighted the tension between the fridge and food retail when they said they would often check the fridge before purchasing a food item. Participant five brought the challenging of the food charity model into light when they talked about how there were people who were in need of food accessing the fridge who would not access foodbanks.

On the second theme for prefiguration which is building alternatives, the fridge was an alternative to a part of the capitalist market. However, its role as an alternative was not articulated directly by any participants in the group who took food from the fridge. The closest any of the participants in this group got to identifying it as an alternative can be seen in a statement made by participant six, which was already discussed in this section that demonstrated the tension between the fridge and capitalist food networks. This lack of identifying the fridge as an alternative to capitalism was because those who do not have money to buy food would not otherwise go to grocery stores to buy their food. This fact is another reason, in addition to the fridge's association with food charity

through its host organization, that the fridge was often talked about as an extension of food banking rather than an alternative to capitalist businesses. In contrast to those who took food from the fridge, the group who left food in it identified that it was an alternative to businesses and stores. This was possibly because of how the members of this group acquired food, which was primarily from grocery retailers. As seen in my results section, participants one, two, and three all indicated this in their responses on consumption and food. So then, despite not all of the users necessarily identifying the fridge as an alternative, it was an alternative to capitalism that did also challenge the system, which means it does fulfill the critical components of prefigurative politics as identified by Maeckelbergh and reinforced through the work of Davina Cooper (2011, pp. 15-17; 2013, pp. 4-11).

5.1.3 Non-Capitalism and the Community Fridge

The characteristics of non-capitalist activities and diverse economies were laid out exhaustively in the works of Gibson-Graham, which I explored in my literature review. Their argument hinges on what they identify as the hegemony of capitalism, which is so complete that it has become naturalized in our society (2006a; 2006b). The novelty of the community fridge and statements like the one made by participant four, who said that when they first saw it, he was impressed and thought, “Wow, that is a great idea,” speak to the primacy of the capitalist paradigm and the rarity of seeing anything that challenges the capitalist modes of production and consumption. By creating a space for sharing resources, the fridge contributes to developing a more diverse economy where activities can occur beyond or outside the market. In addition, when participants discussed how the shared space was maintained, for the most part, they said it was clean or at least had been

cleaned. They highlighted work outside capitalism since volunteers and community members maintain the fridge. However, as participant eight indicated, the host organization stocked the community fridge a lot. As the community consultation showed, the host organization and its staff did devote significant time and effort to the fridge. In the original conception of the fridge, there was a hope that it could rely on community support more heavily. If it could rely entirely on volunteer labour and community donations, the fridge would have been an economic activity based on social relations and solidarity. Despite this reliance on the host organization, the community fridge is still outside the capitalist markets and fits the definition of a non-capitalist activity because it disrupts the dominant logic of capitalism and promotes alternative economic relationships.

The users of the community fridge that I interviewed did not immediately become anticapitalists and want to seize the means of production upon accessing the fridge. If there were changes in their thinking about capitalism and our current system, they were more subtle and nuanced. The subtle thoughts and shifts in behaviour that I was looking for in my data collection were anything that fit into Wright's framework of emancipatory social transformation. Ultimately, I was interested in engaging with the spectrum between the viable and achievable at the heart of developing alternatives (Wright, 2010). Since the community fridge for all but two of my research participants was a novel idea, they could not answer whether they knew anything else like it. This novelty indicates that for many who accessed it, the community fridge was their first foray into community sharing. Its existence could and did challenge the concept of what was viable and achievable. Participant two succinctly summarized this effect when they were questioned on social change and responded by saying that the fact that the community fridge is being accessed shows that further

initiatives like it are possible. The new potentialities inspired by their first interactions with community fridges and their continued use showed that more initiatives like it are possible and achievable. The questions I asked about why participants thought there were no more spaces for sharing, like the fridge, showed that all of them thought that there should be more, with participant seven saying that there should be one on every street corner. This desire to see more spaces like the fridge was despite the challenges that ultimately led to the fridge being shut down. This shift in what was considered as possible affirms Wright's assertion that new initiatives will change what is possible, and this has the potential to bring new alternatives into being (2010, pp. 21-24). This demonstrates that the community fridge does have the potential to spread sharing and instances of the commons despite the challenges that it experienced in implementation.

The viability of community resource sharing, a non-capitalist activity that inherently defies the methods of exchange and consumption in capitalism, also changed, as Wright predicted in the face of crisis (2010, pp. 364-365). Although the COVID-19 pandemic did not suddenly make ruptural change or a complete break from capitalism possible, it did significantly influence my participants to get involved in a non-capitalist activity. The reasons for ultimately accessing the fridge included food insecurity, a desire to help those impacted by the pandemic, or the pause during the pandemic that inspired questions about how things are done in our current system. However, regardless of the reasons, all the participants were now accessing and interacting with an initiative outside the capitalist markets which did mean that it had grown in the face of capitalism. The experiences of my research participants and the reasons they were accessing the fridge showed that the pandemic further revealed cracks in the system and that the community fridge was attempting to fill one of

those cracks. As seen in the responses I received, these cracks were prevalent in access to food, consumption, and profit-driven economics as seen through pandemic profiteering and the inflation crisis of 2022 and 2023. When combined with the introduction of the community fridge and the way it had introduced new possibilities for those who accessed it, the pandemic also, in keeping with Wright's thoughts on crises, revealed more cracks in the capitalist hegemony that need to be filled with something outside of it, like the community fridge, if we are going to move towards a more egalitarian society where human flourishing is increasingly possible.

5.1.4 Equality

Wright identified three areas to build his critique of capitalism and inform the socialist compass he used to guide his development of alternatives (2019, p. 23). The first of these areas is equality. The community fridge attempted to address this area in its implementation, and it was also a driving force behind its conception. The exploration of my results showed that the idea that food should be considered a basic human right was one of the only beliefs that all of my participants shared. This was demonstrated by statements made by several participants, including participant one, who said that "we all deserve access to food," and participant two, who said that anyone who is hungry should have access to food no matter what. This ideal is rooted in a concept of equality. If we recall Wright's definition of this concept, it directly fits since it concerns equal access to food, a basic need that is a precondition for human flourishing. Despite this fit with Wright's definition of equality, there is also another understanding of equality common in liberal society that it also fits with. The prevalence of the idea that food is a basic human right does not necessarily reflect just an anticapitalist mindset. Equal access is an ideal that is also a core part of liberalism

and the values of equality and opportunity that capitalism is purportedly based on. The focus on this specific value on the part of the community fridge's host organization does inspire a resonance with the values of liberalism while also offering partial resonance with the value of equality as it is used in my theoretical framework.

The idea that everyone should have the right to access food that is present within liberal capitalist societies and seen at the community fridge then seems to challenge the notion that capitalism is fundamentally based on inequality. On its own though, this ideal is not enough to inspire social transformation, because when it is isolated, it relies too heavily on the individual. The liberal ideal that everyone deserves equal access to food when paired with the capitalist logic of competitive individualism can result in people hoarding food and not considering others and even can provide a justification for these actions. Wright's assessment, on the other hand, includes equality and pairs it with other necessary traits (2019, p. 23). Where liberalism in capitalist society only pairs equality and opportunity, Wright proposes that ideals of equality are not enough and there must also be community and democracy present (2010, pp. 50-56). However, in the case of the community fridge, its most foundational ideal, is one that those who access it have heard before in liberal society and as a result the non-capitalist nature of the fridge is not readily apparent. This was seen in the interviews and the responses from the participants who all resonated with the ideal, but mostly did not expand the idea of equality towards emancipation or social change.

Despite the focus of the fridge on equality and providing access to all, it was not perfect in eliminating it and sometimes even highlighted inequality for some of those who accessed it. There were two ways that inequality was referenced by participants in their answers. The first of these

was in the issue of a select set of community members hoarding food since they could spend their days hanging out by the fridge and emptying it as soon as someone put food in it. The second way that was identified was in the donations. Participants six, four, seven, and five specifically talked about this in their responses when they mentioned instances of food that was inedible being left in the fridge by people they identified as being well-off. This occurrence, understandably, made those reliant on the fridge feel like they were being treated as sub-human. The vivid imagery that participant five used to describe this occurrence made a comparison to the “slopping of pigs.” However, the presence of inequality in realizing the initiative does not change the fact that the project itself is based on the principle that everyone deserves access to good, culturally appropriate food.

5.1.5 Democracy

As seen in my framework chapter, democracy was another area in addition to equality that Wright had identified as necessary for any emancipatory alternative to capitalism. For the community fridge, there is a measure of democracy, but ultimately, the host organization establishes decisions and guidelines around how it can be used and accessed. The host organization is structured as a charity with a board that is composed of volunteers. The day to day is overseen by the organization’s director and managed by employees with help from volunteers. The community consultation demonstrated a desire to hear from those accessing the fridge and implement their inputs whenever possible. The concepts and ideas expressed at that community consultation further cemented the presence of this desire. The host wanted to let the community shape and take ownership of the fridge, but this is not what happened in practice despite the actions of several of

my participants who did help to maintain and keep the fridge clean. Ultimately, although those who used the fridge were consulted on what was needed to improve the initiative, the fridge is still on the host's property and maintained and stocked partly by them. This location on the host's property means that the initiative is only democratic to the extent the host can or wants to allow. The extent of democracy was seen when the outdoor fridge was shut down, despite the sentiments expressed by my research participants and the community members at the consultation that the fridge has helped them access food.

The extent of democracy, in this case, is connected to the concepts of power and ownership that Wright used to develop his definition of socialism (2010, pp. 110 - 113). Under our current capitalist system, there are rules and regulations that accompany ownership. These rules mean the host organization is liable as long as the community fridge is located on property they own or rent. The structure of the ownership rights enforced onto the host by the legal system means that even if they would want the fridge to be democratic and controlled by social power, they would always have to act within the confines of their ownership rights and state power. The way that the state and ownership limit the democratic capacity of the initiative affirms the need for regulations and laws that allow and govern common spaces that Dardot and Laval identified in their book *Common* (2019). This limitation was seen in my initial discussions with the fridge's host when they notified me of resistance from the state. The municipal government had shut down attempts to implement the initiative years earlier. The state would not allow a community fridge to be on property that was technically public or municipal, which includes right next to the sidewalk or a certain distance from it. This meant that the fridge had to be on private property and, due to ownership rights tied

to this property, lost part of its capacity for democracy. In addition, the paper written by Träskman and Hyde-Clarke from my literature review also demonstrated the restrictions that the state can impose on alternatives. Although the restrictions did not directly cause the closure of the fridge like they did with the time bank in Finland, the rules of the capitalist state still played a role in limiting the initiative but just to a lesser direct extent than they had at the time bank (Träskman & Hyde-Clarke 2016, pp. 118-119).

In addition to my conversation with the fridge's host, my conversation with participant one, who had had experience with the community fridge network in Toronto where one fridge was shut down, shed light on how susceptible they are to state interventions. In this case, violent incidences at this specific fridge in Toronto resulted in the police being called. After several instances of this happening, the fridge was shut down out of fear that the state would intervene and shut down the whole network, which included several other locations. This tension between democracy, state power, and ownership highlights the challenges of implementing and enacting social power in a capitalist system. This challenge was discussed in the framework section on the topic of interstitial transformation and how ultimately, initiatives that use this strategy have to be allowed to operate by the capitalist system. In the case of the community fridge in Ottawa there is even more tension than what comes from the property rights because the services of the fridge's host organization are in part funded by the government. The tension for the fridge that I studied puts the fridge's host organization in a contradictory position where they need to follow state rules to be allowed to function and also to have the necessary funding to continue operating. This highlights the limitations that privatization, the state, and property rights put on democracy. These limitations

are a direct result of the rights of ownership that liberal society identifies as being integral to opportunity. However, the case of the community fridge, shows how these rights and the state can actually limit the potential for democracy and as a result elevates the ideal of equality that the fridge is based on and that is more compatible with the values of liberal society.

5.1.6 Community

In addition to equality and democracy, community is the last of the three characteristics that Wright characterized as being necessary for emancipatory social transformation and human flourishing. However, in addition to its role in an alternative, he also points to the importance of community in his exploration of collective action and its role in social change (Wright, 2010, p. 121). This importance of community and the integral role that it plays in sharing was also a theme that was written about by Gibson-Graham and featured so heavily in their description of non-capitalist activities that they used the term community economies and argued that their strengthening would decentre the hegemony of capitalism (2006a, pp. 194-196). The community fridge as an initiative follows a trend towards communities trying to solve their problems themselves that was identified in my literature review (Igalla et al., 2019). However, even though the community fridge is following that trend, the responses on the theme of community in my interview results were mixed. While some of the participants identified a sense of community, they all also talked about how other fridge users were misusing the fridge, hoarding food, and leaving expired food in violation of the fridge's usage guidelines. With this mixed bag of experiences, it becomes critical to determine whether there was a community in Wright's usage of the concept where people are concerned about the well-being of each other (2010, pp. 128-149).

Wright made it very clear how important community is in the conditions he outlined for his compass to guide the development of alternatives. The first of these conditions is that civil society must have diverse, active, and coherent collective associations from which social power can be used to influence action. This condition underscores the importance of collective association and community in the project of social transformation, and determining whether it was present in the case of the community fridge is a critical step in assessing its potential. My participants' complicated and varied experiences with other fridge users often challenged the strength of the community present around the community fridge. In my results, all of my participants were concerned with the well-being of other community members to some extent. However, my eight conversations with people who were invested enough that they were willing to participate in this research do not indicate that all the fridge users were part of a community and were concerned for others. The experiences shared with me show that, amongst my participants, there was a shared concern about food security and access to food, which was often backed up by actions. All of the participants who left food in the fridge, participants five and seven who wanted to leave food in the fridge if they could, and participants four and six both talked about how they helped people at the fridge and were concerned with making sure they kept it clean were all meeting this definition of community to an extent since their actions were in some ways considering other people's needs.

Wright's definition of community requires there to be several items present. The first of these is the presence of solidarity and consideration for the well-being of others. Second, the group members must have a shared sense of identity or a common goal, which can be developed through shared values or experiences. Finally, members must have regular communication and interactions

to maintain and continue building their shared identity and encourage social connections. Under these conditions, a sense of belonging grows and motivates the group to work together to achieve common goals and improve the welfare of its members (Wright, 2010, p.79). I already discussed this definition and how it fits into Wright's general theory for social transformation in the section exploring my theoretical framework. However, after defining community, Wright did delve into some more nuances of it and said that in addition to its definition as a concept, we could also talk about the "degree of community in a particular setting" (2010, p. 79). The degree of community and whether it is substantial, and people are looking out for each other above themselves, or it is weak, and people are individually focused, easily influences the potential for human flourishing and emancipatory social transformation.

The fridge's host and the community consultations they organized further revealed the strength and the extent of the community around the fridge. The organization's focus on food as a basic human right was affirmed by all of my interview participants. This focus can be seen as the common goal that Wright identifies as necessary for strengthening and building community (2010, p. 79). The resonance of this goal can be seen in the responses I received from participants five and seven, who both wanted to put food in the fridge so that others could have it and from participants one, two, three, and eight, who all actively were involved with leaving food in the fridge. The community consultations attempted to further communicate this goal to those who accessed the fridge and encourage more interactions to strengthen the community. The guidelines established for interacting at this event also aimed to strengthen the community and centre it around the ideal of equality. However, as my framework and the work of Wright demonstrated,

despite a common goal, the values of competition and private ownership inherent to capitalism are at odds with community. Ultimately, this was seen at the community fridge where the community was only as strong as its foundation on non-competitive and cooperative values and its ability to resist encroachments from individualism.

Using Wright's idea that community can be considered an extent or spectrum, the pressing question concerning community, in the case of the community fridge, becomes not whether it is present but rather how strong it is. Despite the presence of a common goal, the different types of fridge users, those who took from the fridge, those who left food in the fridge, and the participant who volunteered to help out with the fridge all identified differing experiences with the community that reflected the strength of the community differently. These differing experiences were the most prevalent along the boundaries of the group types that are defined by the majority of the participants interactions with the fridge. These differences highlight that different users interacting with the same object can have drastically different experiences depending on their role and reason for accessing it. As was seen in the interview results, all of the users who primarily took food from the fridge identified a greater extent of community than those who were leaving food in the fridge, and the volunteer I interviewed identified the weakest sense of community out of all the groups interviewed.

In addition to the roles of the fridge users and their influence on perceptions, the strength of the community can also be seen by looking at whether the ties to the community and attitudes of solidarity take a backseat to the drive to compete and actions based on self-interest. This new question draws on Wright's identification of the primacy of privatized consumerism and

competitive individualism in capitalism at the expense of the community (Wright, 2019, p. 32). In *Envisioning Real Utopias* and his discussion on community, Wright does state that community and “cooperation can be built on a foundation of pure self-interest, but such cooperation is more fragile and requires more sanctions and monitoring than cooperation that grows out of a sense of reciprocity, obligation, and solidarity” (2010, p. 78). Despite the clear presence of a community motivated by a common goal, the need for sanctions, monitoring, and guidelines became apparent in my interviews and the community consultation. This need for rules highlighted the weaknesses of the community and resulted in the fridge being shut down even amidst the strengths that had been identified by the participants and host. The need for rules and regulations also shows that the community fridge ended up recreating the restrictions that the state imposes on a smaller scale, which also contributed to a weaker sense of community.

Another reason that the community consultation was necessary can be seen in the work of Dardot and Laval, who also explored at length the tense connection between community and individualism in their study of the commons (2019). Their analysis provides another way to understand the occurrence of food hoarding that was taking place at the outdoor community fridge. The hoarding of food, in this case, can be understood as a manifestation of individualism and the prioritization of the private needs of the individual over the community. In Dardot and Laval’s framework, just like Wright’s, this behaviour is because of our capitalist system’s emphasis on competition and the personal accumulation of resources. The solution proposed by Dardot and Laval was a more community-based approach to managing resources where the community sets the rules for the commons that would enable them to be shared equitably (2019). Following this line of thinking

leads us to believe that the adoption of a communal approach to these resources would enable the community around the fridge to build a more equitable society and achieve its goal. This is further justification for the community consultation, which was not just to establish rules as seen in the previous paragraph but also had the potential to unite the community and demonstrate how the best way to reach equality in resource distribution was through communally determining a way to manage and distribute resources. However, the community consultation was just that, a consultation, it stopped short of allowing the level of democracy required for the community to institute their own rules for the common. The purely consultative nature of the way in which the community was involved in the decision making process falls short of the requirements for the governance of the common where the community sets the rules that were proposed by Dardot and Laval (2019). In this case, how the situation played out points to the challenges that attempting to re-institutionalize the rules and customs of the commons will face in implementation alongside capitalist rules and customs such as the bundle that comes along with the concept of private property. Ultimately, these limitations will have to be overcome despite the strength and pervasiveness of the capitalist rules if the commons are going to become an achievable and democratic alternative to capitalism.

Although there was a common goal that many community members shared, the actions of what participant five referred to as a “small group” of individuals who were participating in the community only out of self-interest ultimately resulted in its demise. In addition, on the topic of people who were leaving food that was inedible in the fridge, participants five, six, and seven all talked about how for some people leaving their food in the fridge would make them feel good

about themselves when in reality they were attempting to make themselves feel better about throwing away food. In doing this, this action was discouraging for those accessing the fridge in need of food, but it also was making the food waste someone else's problem since a volunteer or fridge user had to get rid of it. Interestingly, with the outdoor community fridge's no-policing mandate, and guidelines for access, there was no real path to introduce monitoring and enforce rules without compromising its mission. The community fridge and the community surrounding it were one site of the constant conflict between individualism and cooperation. This conflict could not be solved in the typical way of addressing actions in a community motivated by individualism since the entire initiative was based on the idea that everyone should be able to take what they need and leave what they can. After the shutdown of the outdoor community fridge it may appear as though individualism has won out over solidarity but this is not necessarily the case. Although the outdoor community fridge has been shut down, the host organization still has a community fridge on site that is now indoors. This site, unlike the outdoor fridge, is not accessible at all hours, but its location in a space that is always staffed discourages many of the individualistic behaviours while still keeping the initiative alive and addressing the common goal of the community. However, this need for more rules and policing through the presence of volunteers and staff does indicate that there are members of the community who are motivated out of self-interest in the community around the fridge. Although the indoor fridge shows that the fridge's host is committed to continuing to provide food it ultimately shows that the value of solidarity in the community was not as strong as self-interest and that the extent of the community is so weak that it needs rules and policing to be functional.

This section has demonstrated that my data does indicate that there was a community present around the outdoor fridge. However, to conclude this section, it is important to note that just because individualism appears to have won out over the elements of the community that were more rooted in solidarity and cooperation, we need to step back from a purely critical perspective and remember that the whole experience of the community fridge is complicated because it is in constant interaction with liberal society, and it deals with food. Experiences with food insecurity trigger responses that the fridge's host organization summarized when they said:

The realities of poverty are impacting people across the city, reflected in increased tensions and competition for food. All too often, blame and attention is on individuals accessing services and not on the larger systems that have created scarcity and fuelled desperate behaviours.

As many of the participants in this research stated in their responses to questions on this topic, we do not know what people are going through and it is not helpful to blame individuals. Participant five summarized this particularly well when they said that although people might be taking more than they should, they are struggling and need help. The fridge's host also embodied this response in their announcement of the outdoor fridge's shutdown, which refused to comment on any specific incidents that had occurred at the fridge and instead in resonance with the principles of mutual aid pointed to the larger systemic issues.

5.2 Consumption and Differing Perspectives on Capitalism

One of the strengths of Wright's framework for emancipatory social transformation is how there is space for anything from shifts in thinking to attempting to overthrow the system. This broad spectrum of possible activities means that even changes in the way of thinking about consumption and the challenging of norms can play a role in the strategy of erosion. This was seen already in my exploration of the concepts of achievability and viability. The responses that my participants gave on their perceptions of consumption built on this discourse. As seen in my interview results, there were not any participants who were specifically inspired to change the way they were acting or consuming because of their use of the fridge. Instead, the use of the fridge was motivated mainly by a need to address food insecurity rather than engage in an activity outside of capitalism. However, although the motivation is not anticapitalist, discussions about the community fridge with the participants still offered insights into how they consumed and interacted with the capitalist system more generally. The results of this exploration affirmed the argument made in the work of Gibson-Graham. They showed that the dominance of capitalism is not as total and indomitable as we have often come to believe. This was seen in the statement made by participant two when they said that the fridge demonstrates that alternatives can work and that the community fridge is a source of hope for further organizing, which was a sentiment that was also expressed by participant one, the other anticapitalist that I interviewed. The prevalence of activities outside of capitalism that were more focused on mutual aid also helps to build the case made by Chappelle and Servigne that challenges the primacy of competition, a concept at the very heart of capitalism (2019). So then, the community fridge did help to modify the perception of capitalism and enabled fridge users to see and interact outside of the market while inspiring new potentialities.

The fact that many of the participants were very skeptical of profit-oriented businesses and that even those who had the financial means to purchase items were pursuing alternatives such as borrowing, sharing, or purchasing second-hand demonstrates the presence of a vibrant, diverse economy. However, the reason for these actions and the involvement in non-capitalist activities is not necessarily rooted in a desire to bring a desired future into being in the present or, in other words, in prefiguration. Six of my eight participants indicated that shifts in their consumption were reactions to rising costs, loss of a job, financial stress, and increasing poverty. The only participants who specifically talked about a vision of a better world and modified their consumption patterns accordingly were the two who were engaged in anticapitalist activities, movements, and organizing. The other participants were all reacting to the effects of the capitalist system, such as the climate crisis, waste, and greed-flation in their consumption, but they did not connect these effects to the system at large and identify a central goal or unified vision that they were moving towards to remedy them.

5.3 Assessing Potential for Social Transformation and Moving Beyond Capitalism

5.3.1 Research Participants as Collective Actors

Based on the data I collected, we have established that the community fridge is an activity that takes place outside of capitalism and possesses, to some extent, the three necessary characteristics for an emancipatory alternative: community, equality, and democracy. The responses I received around the theme of social change provided much of the information needed to determine whether the community fridge has the potential for social transformation and when combined with my

framework, illuminated how this potential could be strengthened. One of the most interesting components of Wright's theories is his use of concepts that are not bound but instead are more fluid and on a spectrum. This can be seen in his understanding of community not as a static concept but as something that can exist as a range. This way of thinking was also evident in his categorization of what is achievable and viable, which also speaks to potential, a concept at the heart of this research project. Potential is not a static concept; it also exists on a range or spectrum that can be measured and increased or decreased based on different factors. With this understanding, the easy answer to my main research question would be to say that community resource sharing does have the potential for emancipatory social transformation, but it would be missing the point of Wright's framework to stop there and not explore in greater detail the extent of this potential and what would help it to become stronger.

As Wright identified in the later sections of *How to Be an Anticapitalist*, collective actors are critical for social transformation. The actors that Wright discussed could be involved in multiple anticapitalist actions at once and could be employing a series of different strategies in the carrying out of these actions. They could even just be involved in a single activity, such as accessing one community fridge (Wright, 2019, pp. 120-122). The three characteristics that Wright used to assess the motivations of the collective actors were identities, interests, and values (2019, p. 124). For the community fridge specifically, the responses that I received from the participants helped to understand their identities, interests, and values and how these factors, in turn, shaped their motivation for getting involved with the fridge. Although Wright identified that people who are typically excluded from capitalist societies are more likely to become collective actors, all of the

participants I interviewed who would fit in this category were only involved in one activity that could be classified as anticapitalist or contributing to the strategy of erosion. This sole sharing activity was the community fridge which they accessed out of a personal need for food. As I indicated in my results, the other participants were all involved with the fridge because of their values, which varied from being motivated by anticapitalism to being driven by a desire to care or some combination of the two. Overall, a combination of these three areas determined how my participants behaved in society.

5.3.2 Raising up Collective Actors

After talking about the possible motivations for collective actors, we should do as Wright did and turn towards the rules for raising up collective actors to carry out the strategy of erosion (2019, pp. 139-145). The first of the rules that Wright identifies for raising up collective actors is the need to focus on his emancipatory values of community, democracy, and equality (2019, p. 142). As we have already seen, all of these elements were at the foundation of the community fridge project and influenced the communication of the fridge's host organization with those who accessed it. Some of these emancipatory values had even been taken up or resonated by my participants, with the most prevalent being the belief that all who participated in the research shared that everyone deserves access to good food. However, on this rule, one of the critical statements that Wright makes is that all of these values should be "made explicit and explained" (2019, p. 142). With this requirement established, the participants did talk about equality when it came to food access, which could have also been a result of liberal society, but they rarely talked about equality more generally or extended it to a critique of the system.

In the interviews, an overall sense of fairness emerged and was the topic of conversation when we talked about profiteering by corporations amidst food price inflation and the pandemic. However, this fairness, only in the case of the two anticapitalist participants, was discussed concerning the inequality that is inherently a part of capitalism. In the introductory questions I asked, three participants talked about the fact that they lived in rentals and that it was difficult to find a place they could afford. Participant four talked about how their landlord had “renovicted” everyone but had kept them and how gentrification had pushed people out of their neighbourhood. Participant five talked about how they had applied to several places and that this process was brutal and very discouraging. However, despite this talk about landlords and the housing system, these participants did not indicate this was because of inequality or offer any critique of the systemic issues that play a role in this process. In the same way, when it came to democracy and community, there were also no unifying ideals like there was with food. The closest thing to a unifying ideal in the realm of community was the ideal held by almost all participants: everyone is doing their best amidst what could be very challenging circumstances. While there was a unifying ideal that food should be accessible to everyone, there was not the same ideal when it came to housing and many other aspects of the human experience under capitalism. This lack of resonance with the broader values of emancipatory social transformation did play a role in limiting the fridge’s potential for raising up collective actors.

All of this showed that the community fridge itself only sparked conversations around narrow or more focused on aspects of the three emancipatory values, which is understandable since the fridge is an initiative that is about providing food. However, in other ways, there is an opportunity for a

broader system analysis as food is so important, and it could incite conversations that extend further into the heart of the deficiencies of capitalism. This opportunity can be seen in Dean Spade's exploration of mutual aid, which argued that people coming to the initiative for help and then receiving it along with knowledge of how the system was deficient motivated mutual aid initiatives (2020). So then, this opportunity for illuminating systemic issues and rallying around collective values based in equality could have been more fully seized in the implementation of the fridge if it wanted to raise collective actors to erode capitalism. The literature on food I explored in my literature review demonstrated how food networks and food systems could spark conversations that inspired broader conversations about systemic inequality and reveal the hegemony of the capitalist values that oppose community, equality, and democracy. The lack of these broader conversations became apparent through the interviews and the observations that I made. Upon examining the data, it is not entirely fair to say that there was no awareness being spread of broader systemic issues. One of the possible reasons for the narrowness of the emancipatory values could also be the lack of time that the organization was running the fridge. Another reason is because the organization was not distributing materials on the broader issues. Although there were some mentions of there being a broader systemic issue these were mostly communicated in social media posts or in the organization's monthly newsletter. For the most part the biggest chance for spreading awareness took place at this fridge in conversations between organization staff or volunteers and community members. Despite these reasons, the outdoor fridge was only running for two years, and the project had limited time to challenge a lifetime under capitalism. It would be interesting to have been able to do more interviews further down the

line to see if the values of equality and access to food that had made their way to all the fridge users had widened in scope to encompass more areas of life and a broader conception of systemic inequalities.

The second rule for raising collective actors is that these values should not only motivate progressive movements but also make connections between classes and marginalized groups (Wright, 2019, p. 142). As I explored in my results section, participant two did identify that one of the biggest strengths of the community fridge was the connections that took place around it when they said it “is a good way to break through class divides and have relationships that you otherwise would not.” However, not all of the participants echoed this sentiment. While the three participants, including participant two, who left food in the fridge, talked about interactions with others fondly, those who accessed the fridge to get food all talked about how they were more comfortable accessing the fridge when they were alone. For many of these users, the fridge was a place they were ashamed of being seen. This was apparent in the comment made by participant six, who said they did not want to use the fridge, and participant five, who said their pride could not have fallen further. Although many of these interactions were not specifically focused on emancipatory values and were instead more focused on getting or giving food, they were all opportunities for motivation to raise collective actors that were missed because of the stigma around fridge access and the fact that the fridge did not become a meeting place where the connections necessary for raising collective actors regularly were taking place.

The third rule, which states that initiatives should be mainly focused on the value of democracy as a means of motivation, was not as readily apparent amongst the participants I interviewed or at the

community fridge more generally (Wright, 2019, p. 143). The fridge's host talked about policy and the state, particularly in regard to their complicity in the increasing cost of living, lack of funding, and policies around food access. However, the participants who took food from the fridge were mostly uninterested in the democratic process. Participant four showed this when they said they were not interested in participating in any movement that would increase access. This was followed by an assertion that if there were an actual way to get more food, they would participate in that. This statement speaks to a fact that came up in many of my interviews that if someone's basic needs are not being met, they cannot get involved in the project of social transformation. Participants five and seven also specifically said that they did not want to get political and wanted to change the subject whenever something remotely political was discussed in the course of our interviews. Even if the scarcity and their lack of access to food could hypothetically be fixed through political organizing, movement building, protesting, or building alternatives, when it is unknown where their next meal is coming from the need for food would naturally prevent long term political organizing as it would not help in the moment. This rule demonstrated how the community fridge in its instantiation in this case was not inherently political and was instead focused on addressing needs in the present which ultimately will never be addressed if there is no political change.

The fourth rule for raising up collective actors who will participate in the strategy of erosion is that there must also be actions and initiatives that take place outside of the state and politics. This rule is still concerned with the erosion of capitalism, but instead of including all of the strategic logics that fits under the umbrella of erosion, it is more concerned with resisting and escaping capitalism

(Wright, 2019, p. 143). The community fridge fits perfectly into this category, focusing on these two logics instead of more state-centred actions and movement building. For this rule, Wright argues that new technologies could potentially play a significant role in the spread of non-capitalist activities and diverse economies (2019, p. 143). There are real-world examples of technology facilitating non-capitalist activities that came up during my interviews, such as participants talking about how they used second-hand online marketplaces and Facebook groups like Buy Nothing groups. The community fridge did not use technology to facilitate its process and, as such, was in competition with local Buy Nothing groups where there were fewer rules around what could be given away. For example, items that were forbidden at the community fridge like raw meat, home cooked meals, expired but still edible food, and opened containers of food can all be given away through the Buy Nothing group. The rules for using the community fridge were a point of frustration expressed by four of the participants. This group represented members who received food from the fridge, participants six and four, and participants one and two who left food in the fridge. In addition, the feelings of intimidation that were experienced by many of my participants and cited by the host organization as one of the challenges faced by the fridge also were a reason that many would prefer sharing through a technologically mediated process.

Although Wright does argue that technology can expedite the proliferation of non-capitalist activities, on the flip side, the reliance on technology for these initiatives would exclude all those who do not have access to technology. In my local Buy Nothing Group, this is a common problem since even non-constant access to the group through internet connection or on a mobile device does result in missing out on items that are being gifted and could potentially be desperately

needed. This means that many of my participants, like participant four, who could not afford a phone plan and instead relied on local Wi-Fi networks for access to the internet, would potentially be excluded from non-capitalist activities and from accessing much-needed food. The community fridge then, through its focus on barrier-free access and its location as a common resource to be accessed by all, meets the criteria for raising up collective actors under this fourth rule but also competes with other technology-based solutions that also meet these same criteria and that are part of the broader concept of diverse economies.

5.3.3 The Community Fridge and Human Flourishing

Although the community fridge did help people access food outside of the restrictions of the market, whether or not it contributed to human flourishing is another question. This was one of the questions that I set out to answer in this project. The answer to this question is not readily apparent on first look at the data that I gathered. On the one hand, the fridge did help people get food and encouraged connections, but on the other hand, it did little to help ensure that its benefits would be lasting. All of the participants acknowledged that the fridge made a difference, participant four even said that they did not know what they would do without it. But, the fridge, as an isolated initiative did not present a way to address the systemic inequality that led to the need to access it in the first place. This highlights the need for system change amidst the use of alternatives. If alternatives are meant to alleviate or respond to unmet needs or inequalities but have no way to change the system in which they necessarily have to exist, then system change itself becomes increasingly important as a project. The community fridge then, did meet some of the basic needs temporarily that are a pre-condition for human flourishing, but on its own it would not be able to

bring about human flourishing. This fact points to the importance of a strategy that has multiple approaches to making change, such as the strategy of erosion.

5.3.4 The Community Fridge and Eroding Capitalism

After analyzing the experiences of my research participants and their motivations for participating in this non-capitalist activity, the community fridge, we see that they are collective actors. Despite the lack of focus on all three areas needed for emancipatory social transformation, the presence of some of these values, namely the conception of equality along with perceptions of community, when paired with the fact that the fridge is an initiative outside of capitalism place those who are involved in it on the spectrum of being collective actors. However, Wright's rules for raising up collective actors demonstrate that there is more that could be done to motivate them so that they can better contribute to the strategy of erosion. However, collective actors are just one of the necessary pieces for the effective deployment of this strategy. Now that I have established the non-capitalist or anticapitalist nature of the fridge and its roots as an alternative to capitalism and built a case for the participants as collective actors, it is time to turn to another of my research questions, which asked whether the community fridge and community resource sharing erode capitalism. Considering the definition of erosion that was provided by Wright and explored in the description of my framework, the fridge's role as a non-capitalist activity also means that plays a role in the strategy of erosion. As seen in the previous section on collective actors and particularly the fourth rule for raising up collective actors, there have to be initiatives in the strategy of erosion, like the community fridge, that have a focus outside of the state and a more anarchical vision of creating alternatives outside of capitalism rather than just working within the current system to change it.

Wright's identification of the importance of initiatives that both escape and resist capitalism affirms the work of Davina Cooper and her emphasis on everyday utopias while building on the principles of prefiguration more generally as seen already (2013). The fridge's role as an activity outside of political organizing was highlighted by participants one and two, who were involved in initiatives focused on the state such as protests and campaigns and also on activities outside of it such as the community fridge. These participants talked about how the community fridge gave them a sense of hope and gave a taste of what a world outside of capitalism could be like. This hint of a world beyond capitalism inspired these two participants to stay involved and keep organizing in their other initiatives that they identified as being more thankless and grueling. Their continued use of the fridge then, encouraged their activities that involved exercising their social power to participate in initiatives that are more focused on dismantling and taming capitalism. This highlights a reciprocal relationship between the strategic logics of dismantling, taming, escaping, and resisting capitalism in which the creation and use of alternatives outside of capitalism can influence and inspire organizing and movements that use social power to advocate for system change on a political level. However, based on the responses of my participants, this relationship did not appear to go the other way. It was only the participants who were involved in initiatives that were focused on the state, and located outside of it who identified this relationship. The other participants who started using the fridge out of necessity or out of a desire to help out still were using a non-capitalist activity and contributing to the viability of an alternative food network, but they did not see political, or system change as being connected to the community fridge initiative. It did, as we already have seen, increase their perception of the potentialities of non-capitalist

activities but it stopped short of inspiring them to get involved in other initiatives like it or other actions that utilized different logics under the strategy of erosion.

The connection between the community fridge and its role in social transformation was not made by six out of the eight participants, which limited its potential for eroding capitalism. The strategy of erosion is predicated on its combination of different anticapitalist logics and only will stand a chance against capitalism if all of these strategies are used to build social power and effectively fill the cracks in the current system. Although many of the participants identified that they did participate in other non-capitalist activities like borrowing, sharing, and acquiring items second-hand, six out of eight did not connect these activities to the community fridge and instead talked about them separately while also not linking them to a goal or a desired vision of the future. The spread of non-capitalist activities that were identified by the participants did affirm to an extent Gibson-Graham's assertion that capitalism does not dominate all aspects of our lives, but the lack of a central goal and the identification of a "real utopia" is where the community fridge's potential ran up against limitations. Instead of identifying opposition to capitalism as the reason for engaging in non-capitalist activities, the reasons that my participants were accessing the fridge were rooted in a need for food and a desire to help others. The reasons cited by my participants still motivated the use of the fridge, which ultimately contributed to the growth of diverse economies to the point that it was able to fill one crack left in the capitalist system more fully, but the involvement in this specific activity, unless motivated by a broader mission or emancipatory vision did not inspire further involvement in anticapitalist initiatives and as such did not contribute to a full enactment of the strategy of erosion.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The biggest motivator for this research project was to understand how sharing resources in a community impacts people's perception of consumption and prompts them to be more open to the practices outside or beyond capitalism that were talked about by Wright and others, including Gibson-Graham. The research results, including the interviews and document analysis, outlined the experiences of community fridge users and illuminated the challenges and realities faced by this initiative and its host organization. The experiences shared with me by the research participants and others involved with the fridge demonstrated that the community fridge was helping improve the lives of those who accessed it and providing much-needed food while also playing the role of an initiative outside of capitalism. I was honoured to have participants share difficult life experiences and think about issues directly influencing their everyday lives. The weight of many of the stories that were shared with me inspired me to reflect more fully on my own experience and be more cognizant of my own privilege and my role as a researcher. I was also thankful for the cooperation of the fridge's host to allow me to conduct my interviews and attend the community consultation. The results I gathered and synthesized helped me answer my research questions, including my main question, which asked whether community resource sharing has the potential for social transformation.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The data collected and analyzed for this qualitative case research demonstrated that different roles in accessing the community fridge significantly impacted the outlook on the initiative's effectiveness and the role that the initiative played in the world. While there were some commonalities between participants and all their responses could be explored through the themes of motivations and experiences, community, crisis, consumption, impact, and social change, the differences were what provided the most insight into the fridge's potential for social transformation and the challenges that it faced. The motivations and personal experiences for using the fridge were varied but broadly fit into three categories: a need for food, a desire to help people who are food insecure, and a desire to build alternatives to capitalism. These different motivations and experiences often defined how the participants would view the fridge. This was seen in the group that took food from the fridge and did not view the fridge as anything other than a place to get food. The participants, who were already anticapitalists, saw the fridge as the enactment of an alternative and viewed their involvement with it through this lens. There was no central or key reason for accessing the fridge other than a broad resonance with the ideal that everyone deserves access to good food. Even after accessing the fridge for a longer period of time, there was no increase in motivations rooted in the values of community, democracy, and equality. Similarly to motivations, the way that the participants understood the concept of community in the context of the fridge varied drastically along the boundaries of their respective roles in accessing the fridge. The lack of both a common motivation and an identification of the fridge as a community-building initiative contributed to its ineffectiveness as an initiative that inspires anticapitalist social transformation.

Despite the differing experiences on community, experiences, and motivations, the themes of crisis, consumption, and impact had more in common across the whole participant group. The theme of crisis highlighted the profound impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on all the participants. The pandemic altered how the participants saw the world, and the changes that came from it had effects they are still experiencing. More than half of the research participants cited the pandemic influencing their use of the community fridge. In addition to crisis, the theme of consumption also highlighted common ground between the participants. Broadly, there was a consensus that grocery chains are profiteering off of the pandemic and inflation crisis. There also was a shared belief that, as a society, we consume too much and throw away way more than we should. Some briefly mentioned concern for the environment, while others made it more central to their analysis of consumption and indicated that it was a driving force behind their consumption patterns.

The final theme where there was a broad resonance among the participants was on the impact of the fridge. All the participants identified that the fridge was making a difference in helping people access food. However, in this category, those who accessed the fridge to get food and the volunteer identified that the fridge was being misused, and certain people were accessing it who were hoarding food and generally not following the rules the host organization had outlined for its use. On the final theme of social change, the outlook of the participants reflected how they thought about social change. This theme also received diverse responses that reflected a lack of any strategy for change or conversations about broader change more generally. Those already involved in

activism viewed the fridge through the lens of how it fits in with their other activities. However, everyone else did not connect it to making any change other than enabling better access to food.

When it came to the data analysis, synthesizing it with the framework for emancipatory social transformation and the literature explored in Chapter Two showed that the community fridge was a non-capitalist activity that challenged the dominance of capitalism by providing an alternative outside of the market. As a community initiative, analyzing the role of the fridge showed that, in addition to being a non-capitalist initiative, it was also both a mutual aid initiative and an instantiation of the commons. When analyzed specifically through the framework for emancipatory social transformation, the community fridge did not immediately trigger an anticapitalist response. However, because it is a novel concept in Canada and specifically in Ottawa, it did inspire new potentialities for alternatives to the capitalist behaviours that are so often considered the only option. The responses from the participants demonstrated that this one fridge had inspired those who accessed it to think that more initiatives like it were possible and desirable. This showed that the community fridge, before it was shut down, was playing a role in inspiring more sharing initiatives.

On Wright's framework specifically, I analyzed the data I had gathered using the three areas of democracy, community, and equality that Wright identified as critical to any emancipatory alternative to capitalism. My data showed that the participants shared no broader ideal of equality beyond the value that everyone has a right to good food. However, even this shared value did not necessarily reflect the beginnings of a critique of capitalism since it also fits into a liberal understanding of human rights. The limited understanding of equality expressed at the community

fridge reflected a lack of democracy and community which are necessary accompanying components for ideals rooted in the sense of equality if it is going to oppose the domination of capitalism.

On the value of democracy, the community consultation I observed showed that the fridge's host organization, while consulting the community about the fridge, was not able to democratically manage it. This was partly due to limitations of the system imposed by the state on the organization that ultimately meant that the community could not be democratic. The limitations on democracy because of the state and the ownership structures under capitalism resulted in this area being difficult to realize, while the ideal that everyone has the right to food that was more compatible with liberal society was much easier to spread.

For the third area necessary for social transformation, community, the analysis showed that the extent of community at the fridge was limited. As demonstrated in the results of the interviews, the experiences with the community around the fridge varied drastically. However, despite the varied experiences, the data unequivocally indicated that there were issues with people misusing the fridge and hoarding food for themselves at the expense of community members. These occurrences resulted in the identification of a need for more rules that triggered the assembly of the community consultation and demonstrated the community's weakness and how some who participated in it were putting themselves before others. The efficacy of the indoor fridge and its continued use in the face of the outdoor fridge being shut down further demonstrates the weakness of the community and the need for rules which Wright attributed to communities whose members behaved out of individualism rather than solidarity.

Additionally, on the sub-questions, the data showed that the fridge could contribute to erosion. However, just like the idea of social transformation, the fridge could do much more to effectively enact this strategy, whether through prefiguration or the motivation of collective actors. For the second sub-question, the data shows that community resource sharing can encourage thinking outside of capitalism for those already critical of it. The responses from the research participants who were not already critical of capitalism indicated that it had not encouraged them to change their thinking or behaviours beyond introducing a new form of exchange that they had previously not participated in. Finally, for the third sub-question on human flourishing, the community fridge does help to address a physical need that is a precondition for flourishing. In addition, for those who accessed the fridge and identified a sense of community where they felt belonging, it helped to meet the need for community and connection. However, the fridge as an isolated initiative would not result in human flourishing since it just meets a basic need and does not have a broader vision or strategy for change that could enable human flourishing, as it was articulated by Wright and described in Chapter 4.

6.2.1 Research Questions and the Findings

When it comes to answering my research questions, the data did indicate that the community fridge does have the potential to change things. The change could be as small as introducing a new way of consuming food that opens up new potentialities for exchange. The change could also stem from the relationship between activism and the community fridge identified by participants one and two, who found the fridge encouraged them and inspired them to continue using other long-term strategies to tame or dismantle capitalism. The community fridge does have the potential for social

transformation, but this potential could be more fully realized in the context of a more explicit strategy for change or in the context of a broader strategy that includes initiatives outside of it.

Additionally, on the sub-questions, the data showed that the fridge could contribute to erosion. However, just like the idea of social transformation the fridge could do much more to effectively enact this strategy whether through prefiguration, or the motivation of collective actors. For the second sub-question the data shows that community resource can encourage thinking outside of capitalism for those who are already critical of it. The responses from the research participants who were not already critical of capitalism indicated that it had not encouraged them to change their thinking or behaviours beyond introducing a new form of exchange that they had previously not participated in. Finally, for the third sub-question on human flourishing, the community fridge does help to address a physical need that is a precondition for flourishing. In addition, for those who accessed the fridge an identified a sense of community where they felt belonging it helped to meet the need for community and connection. However, the fridge as an isolated initiative would not result in human flourishing since it just meets a basic need and doesn't not have a broader vision or strategy for change that could enable human flourishing as it was articulated by Wright and described in Chapter 4.

6.3 Recommendations for Sharing and a Broader Strategy of Social Transformation

One of the objectives of this research project was to explore the difference that can be made through conducting everyday actions outside of capitalism and by returning to simpler forms of exchange like sharing. In light of this broader project, the findings of this research seem to indicate

that accessing the community fridge, while helping to address an immediate need, did not contribute to a broader push for social transformation through the erosion of capitalism. However, while the findings of this research do show where the initiative fell short of inspiring system change, it also provides insights into what was missing for those who would like to build and implement an effective larger strategy to advance a radical perspective. As an isolated tactic in the context of liberal society, the community fridge did very little to change the thinking of the participants. As was already alluded to at points in the discussion chapter, a lot more could be done for any organization or collective that would like to build movements and increase the role and effectiveness of alternatives.

The first major area that would have to be addressed to make an initiative like the community fridge more effective would be a clearer articulation of the values of emancipatory social transformation. As we saw in the exploration of my case study, there was not a lot of communication about these concepts. The need for clear communication on these values was abundantly clear in Spade's work on mutual aid and Wright's first rule for raising collective actors (Spade, 2020, pp. 18-21; Wright, 2019, p. 142). Distribution of materials, community meetings, and mobilizing are potential ways to spread and reinforce these values. The need for food should be a reason to bring systemic inequalities to light and start a conversation that helps to mobilize collective actors that will begin to participate in the other strategies under erosion in addition to their participation in an alternative. Part of this approach would also require enacting these values as well. This enactment could include intentional community building that bridges typical class

divides and makes connections that were not there before and introducing truly democratic processes for governance and management that go beyond consultations.

The second area that would help make the community fridge a part of a broader strategy for emancipatory social transformation is articulating or identifying a utopian vision and a belief that change is possible. The belief that radical change is possible can enable progressive changes. As Wright demonstrated in his framework, identifying a goal or utopia, and then breaking down what is viable or achievable is a critical step in emancipatory social transformation. As seen with the case of the community fridge, introducing alternatives to capitalism can challenge what is possible. This was seen in the statement made by participant seven when they said that they would like to see a fridge on every corner which was only possible for them to propose because of the initial fridge they had accessed. However, unlike the community fridge that enacted a novel idea without a clearly articulated utopian vision such as putting a fridge on every corner, if a community sharing initiative were to keep introducing initiatives and changes that challenged what was possible, this would, in turn, enable more change. This approach would necessitate an end goal and prefiguration to ensure that the goal was enacted as best as it could be in the present. This utopian vision would also, like the emancipatory values, have to be communicated to those being mobilized to drive social change.

Politics is a third area that would enable community resource sharing initiatives to increase their potential for social transformation. Politics and the state were often a topic of discussion with my participants, and the system, including wages and social security, were identified as reasons for food insecurity by the fridge's host organization. In addition, the current rules around ownership

and health and safety make it challenging to introduce alternatives. This dilemma is reminiscent of both LETS, as explored by Davina Cooper, and the time bank explored by Träskman and Hyde-Clarke, where both these initiatives were not achievable within the current bounds defined by legislation and the state (Cooper, 2013, pp. 129-137; Träskman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016). This need for change in what is achievable on a state level underscores Wright's third rule for raising collective actors and highlights the importance of motivating collective actors that move from escaping capitalism to other logics more focused on action against or within the state. If a community fridge were to be a part of a broader strategy for social transformation, it would have to mobilize those to whom it had communicated emancipatory values and a utopian vision, to participate in movements and organizing that push for changes to legislation that allow the expansion of sharing and that enable genuinely democratic management of the commons and increase the potentialities of a system that is not based on market exchange.

6.4 Recommendations for Research

Just as the literature review revealed gaps in the subject of community resource sharing and its role in social transformation, this study has also revealed areas that would benefit from further study and exploration. While this study builds on the body of work exploring the impact of community fridges, there is still much work to be done exploring their implementation and impact. The fridge that I studied was hosted by a central organization, and there are other ways that community fridges have been organized that could be explored and assessed for their potential to transform society. In addition, a few of my participants talked about Buy Nothing groups, which have more recently become possible due to technological advancements. Due to the unique nature

of activities that take place online, more research into the phenomenon of technologically mediated sharing would help to build on this research and illuminate more tools and potentialities for social transformation. In addition to technology and community fridges, another area that would benefit from more research would be studying the impact of organizations or groups that attempt to explicitly implement Wright's strategy for emancipatory social transformation. Because it is so recent, it will be a little while until this exploration of implementation is possible, but it will need to be explored more fully to understand its impact on participants and society. Finally, the impacts of COVID-19 have been widespread and global in scope. Further research is needed on the impact of this crisis and whether it resulted in a significant shift toward or away from radical thinking and progressive movement building.

Finally, another area that needs more research and further exploration is the role that oppression, power, and privilege play in sharing initiatives like the community fridge. The safety issues that ended up shutting down the community fridge were often racially motivated and many of the participants identified instances where there were racist slurs or other actions taken against minorities at the fridge site. The racialization of poverty and the structural inequalities that perpetuate oppression are topics that need to be explored more in contexts like the community fridge. For my research, Wright's framework was not well equipped to handle this exploration. Although the concept of equality is intrinsic to his work he does not build out a robust understanding or framing for conversations about intersectionality or diving into the interconnectedness of racial oppression and capitalism. This weakness of the framework illuminates the opportunity for further study using a framework that is better equipped to explore

intersectionality and the role of power and privilege in the creation of non-capitalist or anticapitalist spaces.

6.5 Conclusion

There is a dire need for initiatives that address basic needs, such as the community fridge. However, these initiatives do not need to focus only on the problem at hand. They can mobilize collective actors, contribute to a broader strategy of social transformation, and move towards a better world. Implementing initiatives outside of capitalism that follow the recommendations made in this chapter can meet needs in the present while also prefiguring a better world. As the COVID-19 pandemic and my exploration of the theme of crisis in chapters 4 and 5 showed us, there are unforeseen events that can occur and that profoundly impact the way that we live and see the world. As I write this thesis, we are experiencing a cost of living crisis, increasing wealth inequality, an economic recession, and we are hurtling toward climate catastrophe that threatens the continuation of life as we know it on the planet we call home. While the COVID-19 pandemic did change what was possible and inspired involvement with the community fridge, the next crisis will also change what is possible and inspire alternatives that could potentially build on what has already been done.

Capitalism is not sustainable, and there will be more crises as this becomes clearer. The inevitability of crisis under capitalism means we must start building alternatives to fill the gaping holes left by these crises. We need to use all of the tools we have to fill the gaps in capitalism in the present if we stand a chance of building momentum and increasing what is achievable. We

need to participate in mobilizing, organizing, and creating alternatives whenever possible. It is only when all of the strategic logics for anticapitalism are employed that erosion can occur. Many of our everyday actions can take place outside of capitalism, as seen through the example of the fridge that challenges how food is accessed. Community fridges and sharing, when implemented strategically to increase their potential for change, can play a role in transforming our society and emancipating us from the hegemony of capitalism. If we are going to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis, they are one tool for change that we have in the present that will open the door to others that we currently would never imagine are possible.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – Interview Guide



Interview Guide - Stuart Germain

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and discuss your experience with the community fridge. I am a MA student at Saint Paul University studying social innovation My research project is focused on exploring the potential that sharing resources by communities has for social transformation and the disruption and erosion of capitalism. This research will be carried out by focusing on the lived experiences of community fridge users. These experiences will be collected through semi-structured interviews with people such as yourself. The results of this interview will be anonymized and disseminated in a written thesis project. With your written consent the interview will be recorded however, this can be opted out at any time. At any point during this interview, you can choose to opt-out, which will result in the halting of the interview and the deletion of all data that has been collected and recorded. In addition, if there is a question that you do not want to answer we can skip it.

Questions

1. Tell me about yourself (This will be very loosely scripted, and more questions will be added in response to answers to determine the participant's background and assess their ideology).
 - a. Follow up: What do you do?
 - i. If you have a job - Do you like it?
 - b. Follow up: What are your hobbies/interests?
 - c. Follow up: Where do you live?
2. Why are you using the community fridge?
 - a. Follow up – How long have you been using the community fridge?
 - b. Follow up – How do you use the fridge? Do take/leave food?
 - i. Probe - How often do you use the fridge?
 - c. How would your actions change if there were no community fridge?
3. Other than the community fridge, what other examples of sharing are there in your neighbourhood?
 - a. Follow up: Do you use any of them?
 - b. Follow up – Why do you think people do not share more? Are they not generous?
Are they greedy?
 - i. Probe – Did using the fridge make you more open to sharing?
 - c. Follow up - Have you told your neighbours about the fridge?
 - i. Probe – What was their response?
 - d. Follow up - Do you think that people consume too much?

excludes any sensitive information. The key to this code will be stored in a separate and secure location. When the research is completed, the community will be notified, and it will be made available to all those who participated. My hope is that this research explores the impact of the sharing economy on a community level. Participation is greatly appreciated and will help contribute to the growing body of research that challenges capitalism and pursues sustainability, and well-being for individuals and communities.