(Re)Organizing Toronto Households during COVID-19 Lockdown:

A case study on an Imposed Degrowth Scenario

by

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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

By design or by disaster, the growth-oriented capitalist economy must come to terms with the biophysical limits of our finite planet. Many ecological economists make the intentional contraction – or *degrowth* – of total material and energy use in the global economy a precondition to an environmentally sustainable low-carbon alternative. However, in the context of increasing and concurrent social and environmental upheaval, degrowth "by design" should not be the only avenue explored – nor should a smooth economic transition be presumed. Degrowth research and practice must confront the devastating implications of extreme events, and be ready to counter capitalism's exploitation of such occurrences as they increase in scale and intensity over time.

Situating the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures as an imposed degrowth scenario, my thesis explores the possibilities and challenges of mobilizing economic alternatives during times of disruption. Through an exploratory case study, I investigate the experience of 42 Toronto, Canada households as they rapidly respond to an ongoing public health crisis to illuminate strategies for, and barriers to, engaging in degrowth politics and practice. First, I examine parallels between the pandemic lockdown and the degrowth imperative to establish the novel concept of an imposed degrowth. Second, I identify potential subjects, sites and tactics of a degrowth revolution, as well as barriers to realization, at the household scale. Third, building on the experiences of my participants, I enhance degrowth policy recommendations for a more robust response to an increasingly unstable climate future. My research aims to underscore the value of the degrowth imperative for responding to disruptive events while actively mobilizing sustainable economic alternatives.

Following Latouche's "Eight R's of Degrowth", my study demonstrates the role of households in cultivating a multiplicity of degrowth politics and practices. This includes re-evaluating personal and professional priorities, strengthening social networks, and calling for the public provisioning of universal basic needs. Participating households also faced a number of barriers to action, including the exacerbation of social harms, the loss of crucial services, and conflicting public health guidelines. The outcomes of this study make visible the labours, tensions and contradictions at play in the process of the everyday degrowth revolution. The realities of the pandemic further serve to expose the limits of an economic system predicated on growth, and underscore the importance of developing alternatives in the face of a climate uncertain future. The question becomes whether this crisis builds the impetus needed to mobilize such alternatives, or whether an even greater crisis will incapacitate entire economies before alternatives can be implemented.

Acknowledgements

Land acknowledgements serve as an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we work, live and play on, and create awareness about the unique and enduring relationships between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. I conducted this entire research study on the unceded traditional territory of the Attawandron (Neutral), Anishnawbe, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is located on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Six Nations including ten kilometers on either side of the Grand River. My research participants and study focus took place on the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. I acknowledge that through these research activities, I contribute to and benefit from the expulsion, assimilation, and genocide of Indigenous Peoples. I also recognize that the education system in Canada has played a critical role in colonialism across Turtle Island. As educators, we have a unique obligation to the land and to Indigenous communities in Canada support and amplify Indigenous calls for reclamation, sovereignty and #LANDBACK.

I could not have survived the pandemic lockdown without access to land. My physical health depended on having secure housing where I could safely isolate and care for myself. My mental health during this time depended on my ability to go on walks, visit local parks and green spaces, and gather safely when regulations permitted. Regular walks to Waterloo Park were essential to my sanity and wellbeing during the lockdown. Access to such opportunities was indeed a privilege during this turbulent time, and I am deeply grateful for the peaceful and respectful approaches taken by the original caretakers of the Waterloo area. I aim to reorient and inform my relations to these lands through the Two Row Wampum Treaty as the Haudenosaunee intended.

To move beyond what some consider an “empty” or “token” gesture, a meaningful acknowledgement practice requires active reflections of my participation in perpetuating or unsettling colonial institutions. An important step in this process is to listen to what Indigenous Peoples have to say. I am grateful to the many Indigenous collaborators I have developed relationships and facilitated dialogues with regarding a sustainable and equitable low-carbon transition in Canada. This largely occurred through my time as a Board member of the Canadian Society for Ecological Economics (CANSEE). Lila Bruyere, an Ojibway woman from Couchiching First Nation who, with 15 years of counselling experience, offered support to CANSEE conference delegates during many difficult conversations. To Kelly Fran Davis, and her son Jacob, members of the Cayuga Nation, Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Six Nations territory, thank you for giving a conference opening which featured an

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***

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To my incredible group of research participants: this thesis could not have happened without you. Your excitement about the research topic and your investment in the success of this work was something I had never anticipated. I was so elated to hear from each of you, learn from your experience,

and push myself to meet the complex demands of synthesizing the deeply personal stories you shared. You reached out to me as experts and allies in this tumultuous time, knowing just how important of a learning opportunity the lockdown would be for present and future generations. I greatly appreciate the time you took to speak with me in the midst of surviving a genuine disaster. Thank you, and best wishes.

This research, and my motivation to complete this thesis, could not have taken place without the unrivalled spirit to change the world integral to the Ecological Economics (EE) research community. To Economics for the Anthropocene (E4A), you were my first introduction to EE and the first time I felt like change for the better was actually possible. Thank you for the friendships and unconditional love that I am confident will last a lifetime. You shaped me into the scholar-activist I am proud to have become. Thank you especially to Dr. Peter Victor, my mentor and cheerleader since my time in EE began. Your encouragement and confidence in my abilities has led to so many open doors. I could not have accomplished the many milestones of my professional career without your support. Thank you for appreciating my passion for change.

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Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to all the lives lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.
May we continue to dream of something different.

The story of who we are in relation to one another and the myriad other beings and processes with whom we mutually constitute the conditions of life on earth is an evolutionary anachronism that has now become the single most destructive force in the history of life.

This is the story of the atomistic self of Descartes, the self-centred, instrumental rationality of neoclassical economics, the skin-encapsulated ego of the western philosophical tradition. This is the story of a self-conscious social organism in the throes of a cultural delusion in which the individual is paramount and the sum of selfish desires expressed through consumer preference in the market place is thought to constitute a reasonable proxy for enlightened democracy.

This is the story of the belief that all values have a price. It is the story of an economic system premised on unconstrained growth embedded in a finite, encompassing ecosystem. It is the story of the loss of community, and the evolutionary-adaptive checks and balances that successful community must create and encode in ethical norms to constrain, in dynamic tension, the predispositions of its constituents with respect to the biocapacity of its ecological milieu.

This is a story that must be rewritten.

- N. Pelletier, 2010: 1893

When you're lovers in a dangerous time,
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime
Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight
You gotta kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight

- Bruce Cockburn | *Stealing Fire* (1984)

Table of Contents

Examining Committee Membership ii
Author's Declaration iii
Abstract iv
Acknowledgements v
Dedication ix
List of Figures xv
List of Tables xvi
Chapter 1 . Introduction 1
1.1 Research Question & Objectives 2
1.2 Summary of Case Study Results 3
1.3 Epistemology & Positionality 4
1.3.1 Constructivism 4
1.3.2 Abductive Reasoning 5
1.3.3 Intersectionality 5
1.3.4 Reflexivity & Positionality 6
1.3.5 Transdisciplinarity 8
1.4 Research Design 9
1.4.1 Qualifying the Case Study Approach 10
1.4.2 Case Study Dimensions 10
1.4.3 Participant Recruitment 16
1.4.4 Online Survey 18
1.4.5 Semi-Structured Interviews 19
1.4.6 Data Analysis 21
1.4.7 Strengths of Research Design 23
1.4.8 Limitations of Research Methods 24
1.5 Thesis Structure 26
Chapter 2 . Design, Disaster, Degrowth 27
2.1 Ecological Economics & The Degrowth Imperative 27
2.1.1 The Growth Paradigm 27
2.1.2 Towards a Steady-State 29
2.1.3 The Degrowth Imperative 31
2.1.4 Credit Where Credit Is Due 33
2.2 A Feminist Critique 37
2.2.1 Acknowledging Limits 38
2.2.2 Ecofeminist Political Economy 39
2.2.3 Reproduction within the Doughnut 40
2.3 Articulating a Degrowth Politics 42
2.3.1 Home is where the Doughnut is 43
2.4 Catalyzing Disasters 44
2.5 Concluding Remarks 47
Chapter 3 . Examining the 'Imposed Degrowth' Scenario 48
3.1 A Fair Comparison? 48

3.2 Lockdown as Disaster 50
3.3 Lockdown as a Window to Other Worlds 51
3.3.1 An “Anthropause” 53
3.4 Lockdown as Proof that Alternative Economies & Values are Possible 56
3.5 Outcomes of Lockdown in Toronto, ON 57
3.6 Participant Profiles 59
3.6.1 Changes to Household Membership 63
3.6.2 Recruitment Limitations 63
3.7 Defining Degrowth Politics and Practice 65
3.7.1 The Eight R’s of Degrowth 65
3.7.2 Coding for Degrowth 66
3.8 Concluding Remarks 69
Chapter 4 . Practicing Degrowth 70
4.1 Divisions of a Domestic Degrowth 70
4.1.1 Evolving Household Roles 74
4.1.2 Towards a Care-Full Degrowth 80
4.2 Degrowth Uptake and Outcomes 82
4.2.1 Changing Priorities 82
4.2.2 Spending Time Differently 84
4.2.3 Conscious Consumption 86
4.2.4 From Consumer to Practitioner 91
4.2.5 Strengthening Social Bonds 94
4.2.6 Attachment to Place 96
4.2.7 Political Engagement 99
4.2.8 Keeping with the Change 104
4.3 Concluding Remarks 105
Chapter 5 . Degrowth Barriers 108
5.1 Identifying Barriers 108
5.2 Barriers to Degrowth Politics & Practice 109
5.2.1 Pandemic Safety 109
5.3 Drop in Sustainability Habits 115
5.3.1 Public Transportation 116
5.3.2 Experimenting with Food Gardens 118
5.3.3 Consumption Habits 121
5.3.4 Social Justice Protest Participation 123
5.4 Blurring Personal & Professional Priorities 125
5.4.1 Personal and Professional Identities 127
5.4.2 Personal and Professional Spaces 129
5.5 Compounding Mental Health Issues 131
5.6 Loss of Critical Services 134
5.7 Childcare Demands 136
5.8 Unreliable Community 139
5.9 Poor Confidence in Government Leadership 142
5.9.1 Conflicting Guidelines 143

5.9.2 Profit over People.... 144
5.9.3 Limited Target Audience.... 146
5.9.4 Mismanaged Resources.... 147
5.10 Concluding Remarks.... 149
Chapter 6 . Degrowth Policy Implications.... 153
6.1 Responding to an Imposed Degrowth.... 154
6.2 Policy Recommendations.... 155
6.2.1 Universal Provisioning of Fundamental Human Needs.... 156
6.2.2 Transformative Justice.... 174
6.2.3 Curbing Consumption.... 184
6.2.4 Shifting Paid Work Regimes.... 187
6.2.5 Participatory Democracy.... 189
6.3 An Ecofascist Agenda?.... 196
6.4 Concluding Remarks.... 198
Chapter 7 . Thesis Conclusions.... 200
7.1 Thesis Contributions.... 200
7.2 A Good Life.... 204
7.3 A Good Death.... 206
7.4 Study Limitations & Future Research.... 207
7.5 The Future is Public.... 211
References.... 213
Appendix A . Participant Recruitment Materials.... 279
Appendix B . Letter of Information.... 280
Appendix C . Survey Questions.... 283
Appendix D . Interview Guide.... 292
Appendix E . COVID-19 Timeline in Toronto.... 295
Appendix F . Public Companies with Wage Subsidy & Dividend Payouts (Ferreira & Carmichael, 2020).... 299

List of Figures

Figure 1. Growth in global material footprint (billions of tons) from 1990-2016 (Hickel, 2021: 100) 28
Figure 2. Ecological economy as a sub-system of the global biosphere (Boehnert, 2018: 364) 30
Figure 3. The Circular Flow of Output of Goods and Services (Elson, 1998: 203)........ 39
Figure 4. Doughnut Economics Model (Raworth, 2017: 38)........ 41
Figure 5. Historical global economic recessions (Horsley, 2020)........ 52
Figure 6. Historical Earth Overshoot 1970-2000 (Earth Overshoot Day, 2020)........ 54
Figure 7. Annual PM2.5 level changes in 2020 compared to 2019 (IQAir, 2020: 8) 54
Figure 8. Participant Household Locations, Toronto ON 62
Figure 9. Uptake of Degrowth Principles & Practice in Imposed Degrowth Context........ 106
Figure 10. Transit (bus & metro) ridership in major global cities during COVID-19 pandemic (Jan 2020-2021) (Sengupta, Abdul, Andreoni, & Penney, 2021) 118
Figure 11. Heat map of Toronto residents with no home internet service (Andrey et al., 2021) 159
Figure 12. Proposed extended model of social determinants of health by Benda et al. (2020: 1124) 160
Figure 13. Major domains of harm linking climate change and mental illness (Berry et al., 2018: 286) 167
Figure 14. Degrowth Policy Recommendations for a Climate Uncertain Future 199

List of Tables

Table 1. Target Facebook Groups for Participant Recruitment 17
Table 2. Breakdown of Participant Demographics... 59
Table 3. Research Codes 67
Table 4. Summary of Degrowth Barriers & Implications.. 150

Chapter 1. Introduction

The present growth-oriented economic system relies on fundamentally unsustainable demands from our shared social and natural systems. Collectively, human activity now moves more sediment, occupies more land, and cultivates more domesticated animals than the planet's natural processes (Bar-On, Phillips, & Milo, 2018; Ceballos, Ehrlich, & Dirzo, 2017; Cooper, Brown, Price, Ford, & Waters, 2018; Díaz et al., 2019; Kemp, Sadler, & Vanacker, 2020). Global economic activity has pushed the planet into a functionally and stratigraphically distinct human-driven geological epoch known as the Anthropocene (Cooper et al., 2018; Head, 2015; Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2011). These unprecedented impacts have caused humans to breach key planetary thresholds that provide a safe operating space for humanity and most of life today. As a result, the globalized economy is encroaching on major irreversible social and environmental catastrophes unfolding in parallel (Harvey, 2014; Max-Neef, 2014).

According to ecological economists, by design or disaster, the global economy must come to terms with the biophysical realities of our finite planet (Jackson, 2017; Jackson & Victor, 2016; Victor, 2019). Ecological Economics (EE) challenges the hegemonic growth paradigm of mainstream economics by observing that maintaining the order of the global economy has imposed increasingly rapid disorder on the biosphere (Daly, 2017). To reconcile this, EE advocates re-embedding the economy within the environment towards a 'steady-state', balancing the flow of material use with the carrying capacity of the planet (Costanza et al., 2012; Daly, 1968; Lawn, 2010; Victor, 2016). From this perspective, the intentional contraction, or degrowth, of the economy is a precondition to ecologically sustainable low-carbon economic alternatives (Fournier, 2008; Hickel & Kallis, 2019; Kallis, 2017a; Kallis et al., 2018).

Degrowth signifies the radical reorganization – or revolution – of the global political economy through an equitable and democratic downscaling of production and consumption to enhance social and environmental health and well-being in the short and long term (Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010). Degrowth stems from the mobilization of European activists in the early 2000s who organized direct actions against consumerism and advertising, and promoted alternatives such as car-free cities and food cooperatives (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013; Kallis et al., 2018). Since 2008, scholar-activists have gathered at biannual international conferences resulting in research and special journal issues to further expand this critical discourse, with an emphasis on real-world community application. To achieve degrowth by design, many policy proposals have been put forth including salary caps, comprehensive tax reforms, advertising regulations, incentives for local

production and consumption, taxing environmental externalities, and promoting ecosystem restoration (Cosme, Santos, O'Neill, 2017; Kallis et al., 2018). Rather than incremental reforms, degrowth advocates assert that nothing short of an economic revolution can address the systemic nature of a changing climate.

Despite enthusiastic confidence in the body politic for a collaborative and controlled economic contraction in response to growing climate instability, there is little research on the 'by disaster' avenue of the degrowth imperative. While scholars situate degrowth as a collective choice and democratizing process, there is a high probability of an "imposed" low-carbon shift that takes place in response to external drivers such as an economic or environmental crisis (Park et al., 2012; Francois Schneider et al., 2010). Following Gibson et al. (2015), this research seeks to disrupt normative framings of sustainability transitions in the face of climate, economic and socio-political uncertainty in the twenty-first century. Rather than assuming stable periods for controlled and incremental change, there is a strong likelihood of unpredictable and catastrophic events associated with an increasingly unstable climate future (O'Neill & Handmer, 2012; Park et al., 2012). Without embracing the complex and dynamic nature of biospheres and climate processes, sustainability scholars risk over-estimating society's control of or participation in low-carbon transformations.

It is also a major and unexplored research imperative to understand the disproportionate impacts and burdens of responsibility that occur during externally imposed crises as climate instability, wealth inequality, and societal unrest continue to increase. The entrenchment and normalization of destructive practices make necessary – and difficult – radical reorganization and disruption if there is to be any chance of meeting climate targets. Further, since socially reproductive labour such as food, energy and shelter provisioning take place in the feminized domestic sphere, it is of critical importance to observe the equity implications of low-carbon transformations (McMahon, 1997; Pelletier, 2010; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019; Spencer, Perkins, & Erickson, 2018). This research addresses the deep lacunae left by degrowth advocates – and sustainability scholarship more broadly – by problematizing the notion of an assumed 'smooth' transition, and examining potential impacts and outcomes of a disaster-imposed shift to low-carbon alternatives.

1.1 Research Question & Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a disaster-imposed shift. Global lockdown measures forced many of the world's workers, employers, service providers, educators and students to 'stay home', withdrawing their formal participation from the economy to focus time and energy on the reproduction of the social good (Mezzadri, 2020). The abstaining or altering of normalized high-carbon

household practices have led sustainability researchers to argue that coping strategies implemented by household members during the pandemic offer promising potential for larger socio-economic transformations (Boons et al., 2020). Many of the demands of lockdown, including changes to mobility, food provisioning and shopping, offer intriguing implications for the goals of sustainability.

Situating the COVID-19 lockdown as an imposed degrowth scenario allows me to examine household strategies for, and barriers to adaptation to an imposed degrowth, and to discuss the implications for a low-growth future in Canada and beyond. This thesis addresses the following research question: **What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?** This work aims to contribute to a more robust degrowth agenda with more flexible and adaptive policy proposals that can respond to an increasingly unstable climate future.

I address this question through a case study analysis of household experiences in Toronto, Canada during the first major wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 (March – June). A total of 42 households participated in this study, with one member of each household speaking to their own and their broader households' experiences. I recruited participants online via mutual aid Facebook groups, and asked them to complete a short online survey and an in-depth semi-structured interview that lasted one hour on average. Participants were asked for a detailed account of their experience during the stay-home order, including the ways their personal and professional priorities were reorganized, as well as the impacts of lockdown measures on household expenses, social relationships, and personal well-being. This population is of interest to degrowth scholars because, by virtue of mutual aid group membership, they have indicated a desire to participate in alternative economic practices. This sample is thus particularly relevant for a case study on degrowth values and behaviours, as they are the prime candidates for having both the knowledge and interest in socially- or environmentally-conscious activities.

1.2 Summary of Case Study Results

This exploratory case study offers a unique contribution to the sustainability discourse broadly, and to the everyday household implications of the degrowth imperative more specifically. My thesis exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies of present economic approaches by demonstrating the promises and possibilities of a society without growth. During the imposed degrowth scenario, study participants advanced many of the values, politics and practices necessary for mobilizing a low-carbon future, including changes to consumption patterns, building community, and expressing support for state intervention (Chapter 4). The lockdown measures did present significant barriers to degrowth

engagement for participants, including exacerbating many societal inequalities, compounding mental health issues, and losing access to essential services (Chapter 5). Through these everyday household experiences, the imposed degrowth scenario offers intriguing contributions to a more robust degrowth policy imperative that can better support communities through increasingly disruptive and climate uncertain futures (Chapter 6). Participant experiences demonstrate the importance of state-level intervention to create, manage and facilitate public goods and services for a low-carbon society.

1.3 Epistemology & Positionality

Research is comprised of a sequence of three elements: philosophical worldview (epistemology), research design, and methods (Creswell, 2014). Before exploring the methodological approach, the epistemological foundations of the researcher must be brought to the fore. My epistemology is informed by the complex nature of systems change demanded by low-carbon sustainability transitions. Acknowledging the equally social, political, cultural and environmental dimensions of the degrowth imperative, understanding the approach to knowledge collection and transformation is paramount. The epistemology of this research is thus centred on five main principles: (1) constructivism; (2) abductive reasoning; (3) intersectionality; (4) reflexivity & positionality; and (5) transdisciplinarity. These five principles, discussed below, provide the foundation for my perspective on the production of knowledge in this research study.

1.3.1 Constructivism

Social constructivists see knowledge as the subjective construction of meanings based on experience (Creswell, 2014). Typically found in qualitative research, the constructivist worldview stems from a legacy of social science research that understands the generation of meaning as a social practice and experience, interpreting and generating significance from collected data based on a set of interactions (Berger & Luekmann, 1967; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2010).

This dissertation relies heavily on the views and interpretations of participant experiences, thus requiring broad and general questions so that participants can construct their own meaning (Crotty, 1998). This process is negotiated both socially (via social interaction) and historically (via historical and cultural norms) (Creswell, 2014). Research outcomes also depend on the researchers' own role in the process, in their shaping the study focus, questions and interpretations. I shall return to researcher reflexivity in principle #5 below. In summary, the constructivist approach requires researchers to embrace complexity, variability and multiplicity in participant interpretations, meanings and experience.

1.3.2 Abductive Reasoning

Research epistemologies fall within one of two categories. At one end of the continuum is the inductive approach, where research questions and theories are generated in a bottom-up approach that is informed directly by the data. On the other end, deductive approaches test hypotheses and theories based on existing understandings about the topic. One approach creates theory, the other tests it. Yet by acknowledging that prior knowledge, social experiences and historical contexts inevitably influence the research process, "it is impossible to go theory-free into any study" (Richards, 1993: 40). Further, a purely inductive approach fails to benefit the research from existing theory that could augment and better contextualize the approach (Perry, 1998). More realistically, prior *and* emerging theory are simultaneously involved in the research process (Crotty, 1998; Richards, 1993).

This research study embraces LaRossa's (2005) interpretation of a *dialectic* between inductive and deductive approaches, highlighting the importance of a constructivist approach. Through abductive reasoning, the research process acknowledges the iterative nature of induction and deduction for a more holistic and in-depth outcome (Blaikie, 2009; Bryman, 2012). As an exploratory research study, my thesis examines participant experiences and gathers insights to answer what, why and how questions, and to contribute new ideas that come from the findings. Themes identified in the research findings may expand present scientific understanding. Concurrently, this research embraces deductive analysis by applying existing theories, such as degrowth practices, to the data gathered in order to validate or challenge extant sustainability literature. In this case, the emphasis is on theory development rather than theory generation, refining existing scholarship and making room to modify the original research framework, thereby creating "fruitful cross-fertilization where new combinations are developed through a mixture of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from the confrontation with reality" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002: 559).

1.3.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a legal term coined by Crenshaw (1989) to understand the complex interactions between various compounding dimensions of identity, including gender, ethnicity or age. Intersectionality understands oppression and exploitation as systemic, and as experienced in differing degrees of intensity (Clement, Harcourt, Joshi, & Sato, 2019; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Pelletier, 2010; Warren, 1998). Crenshaw's work as a legal scholar originated out of the failure of academic discourses, including feminism and anti-racism, to capture the unique discrimination experienced by Black women in the United States. Embracing multiplicity and complexity, Crenshaw underscores how

various factors of identity can interact and exacerbate marginalization, including class, gender and race. These power structures simultaneously inform and are informed by intersections of identity, creating the resulting participant experience in this study.

In this thesis, I used intersectionality as a pillar of my epistemology, meaning that the way that I co-create situated knowledge through the research (i.e., constructivism) with the research participants takes as a fundamental assumption that we are all experiencing, knowing, and being as intersectional subjects. In other words, the experience of any participant is simultaneously impacted by the intersection of gender, class, age, ability and race, among many other aspects of their identity. By using intersectionality as part of my epistemology (i.e., philosophy of knowledge), I am arguing that any knowledge that does not account for the complex and emergent interactions of axes of identity is incomplete. The oversight of intersectionality can wrongfully interpret one's experience, the conditions of their experience, and how they interact with systems/structures of power.

As such, I am also sensitive to the ongoing tension between ways of knowing (i.e., epistemology) and ways of being (i.e., ontology), as present structures of power dictate the ways certain identities are enabled to participate in the world. An intersectional epistemology thus requires an active appreciation for complexity, acknowledging that no dimension of identity can be mutually exclusive from another (Crenshaw, 1989).

1.3.4 Reflexivity & Positionality

For Barnes (2001), every research approach and interpretation is a view from somewhere. Thus, research as a process can never truly be removed from the identities, contexts or interests of the theorizer (Gregory, 1978). As an increasingly recognized strategy for generating knowledge in qualitative research, reflexivity is the "process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (Berger, 2015: 2). Reflexivity is key to creating greater awareness about the ways in which a researcher advances or obstructs the co-construction of meaning alongside their participants (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

The foundational principle behind this thesis is that the personal is always political[1]. How we spend our day, the choices and opportunities we can access, and the spaces we occupy are all simultaneously produced by and express political realities. As researchers, our role is to conduct science

[1] This term was popularized in a 1970 essay by the civil rights worker and feminist activist Carol Hanisch, though Hanisch later clarified in 2006 that the title was proposed by *Notes of the Second Year* editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt (Hanisch, 2006).

that is in service of society and to transform complex knowledge into public value (Sarewitz, 2013). While scientific endeavours are certainly shaped by institutional and financial interests, the subject one chooses to research, and how the research is conducted, is also a political decision. In the face of ecological and social collapse, it is an imperative that members of the scientific community dedicate their work to understanding and resolving the impending crisis.

While these demands of the research community are extensive, it is important to acknowledge that my identity has deeply influenced my research process and participation in the academy (Vanner, 2015). I am a Canadian feminist and climate justice advocate that has over ten years of experience as a scholar-activist. As an able-bodied, white, cisgender woman with familial class privilege, I am embedded in systems of white privilege, European settler culture, as well as the imperial culture of academia. While this social positioning can certainly impede my research approach, the role of the intellectual is to both define and change the present political context. For me, this has meant choosing to work collaboratively (not competitively) to respond to community needs.

Throughout this research journey, my political orientation has been to leverage my positionality to shift power dynamics, empower people with knowledge and skills, and mobilize material change for my research community and beyond. This has included: coordinating two national ecological economics conferences and two student research academies; launching a unionization drive for graduate student workers at the University of Waterloo; spearheading a PhD Student Handbook effort at the Faculty level; representing my student community as an elected member of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) Council and the Senate Graduate & Research Council; offering peer-to-peer mentorship through the Women Leading Academia initiative; serving as the GSA's first Labour Coordinator; co-facilitating the first-ever Indigenous Ecological Economics conference in Canada with Indigenous Climate Action and CANSEE; volunteering with the Waterloo Walking School Bus, and fostering rescue cats. As a member of the scientific community, it is essential that my work remain grounded in and applicable to the needs of pressing societal issues.

Focusing in on the study itself, being born and raised in Toronto gave me the particular advantage of being familiar with the city's diverse geographies, cultures and politics. This situated me as an "insider" by having some awareness of my participants' contextual experiences and references (Berger, 2015). For example, participants didn't have to explain "along Lakeshore" or "the Beaches". Secondly, enduring a global pandemic is a uniquely shared experience that allowed me to express empathy, compassion and relatability during this time of turmoil. Further, having personal knowledge and experience of such a sensitive topic helped to inform relevant interview questions. That being said, I remained diligent about the influence of my perspective in the research process, prioritizing my

participants' own narratives. Reflexivity enhances credibility and trust, and employs non-exploitative research that better manages the "tension between involvement and detachment of the researcher and the researched as a means to enhance the rigor of the study and its ethics" (Berger, 2015: 3).

1.3.5 Transdisciplinarity

A transdisciplinary approach to research understands the inherently complex nature of reality, and that truths are revealed by a multiplicity of perspectives – of which science is just one (Albrecht, Freeman, & Higginbotham, 1998). Transdisciplinarity is the interconnection of science and society, necessitating the use of factual knowledge (i.e., biophysical limits) in addition to value and normative judgments to inform sustainability research approaches (Hirsch Hadorn, Bradley, Pohl, Rist, & Wiesmann, 2006; Lubchenco, 1998). Decisions must be made about what should be sustained, to what extent, and for what reasons, bridging objective scientific realities with descriptive and normative ethics (Baumgärtner, Becker, Frank, Müller, & Quaas, 2008).

The goal of transdisciplinary thinkers is to articulate a meta-theory which weaves the multiplicity of perspectives into a coherent whole, whereby divergences in perspective are complementary rather than contradictory (Albrecht et al., 1998). This is relevant for addressing the lack of meta-studies that make transdisciplinary sustainability research more accessible to scholars and practitioners (Asara, Otero, Demaria, & Corbera, 2015), and politically prudent for challenging the idea that academics have a monopoly on knowledge (Albrecht et al., 1998). A fundamental challenge of transdisciplinary research is "legitimating normative claims so as to turn analysis and critique into social action" (Wironen, Bartlett, & Erickson, 2019: 11). Acknowledging the political significance – and urgency – of sustainable economic alternatives, this research recognizes the vital role of critical scholarship as a fundamentally ethical praxis that assumes collective responsibility for exploring and performing alternatives (Zanoni, Contu, Healy, & Mir, 2017).

Through the five epistemological principles listed above, this work commits to fostering critical research contributions that advance relevant alternatives in the face of an unstable climate future. The case study embraces complexity by making meaning from individual experience, remains sensitive to both theory creation and validating existing scholarship, recognizes the emancipatory potential of post-growth economic alternatives, acknowledges the power held by the position of researcher, and contributes to the articulation of a meta-theory for sustainable economic alternatives.

1.4 Research Design

By situating the COVID-19 lockdown as an imposed degrowth, this thesis can consider its participating households as a small-scale "lab" to explore possibilities, challenges, and outcomes for the larger degrowth transition. In this way, my dissertation addresses three main gaps in the sustainability literature. The first gap is the assumption of a smooth and incremental low-carbon transition by exploring an imposed and disaster-related degrowth context. The second gap is the under-theorized role of the household scale, and socially reproductive labour, in mobilizing the degrowth transition. The final gap is the limited exploration of the adaptive capacity of overdeveloped regions, particularly since these regions must take the lead in such low-carbon transitions due to their predominant role in climate change. To address these gaps, this thesis explores the following research question and consequent objectives:

What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?

1. *Examine parallels between COVID-19 lockdown measures and the degrowth imperative*
2. *Identify potential sites, subjects and tactics of a degrowth revolution, and barriers to realization*
3. *Propose policy recommendations to enhance the degrowth agenda for a climate uncertain context*

To address the first research objective, I review academic and grey literature to examine parallels between degrowth research claims and COVID-19 lockdown policies and outcomes. This yields the first novel contribution of this research, informing the concept of an 'imposed degrowth' and further situating global lockdown measures as a degrowth scenario. The literature review is also critical for identifying research gaps that could be addressed by this study, as well as complementing study findings. Moreover, drawing from both scholarly and grey literatures, this method is key for triangulating research findings, which largely rely on participant claims (Cope, 2014; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Establishing the efficacy of an imposed degrowth through a literature review creates the opportunity to substantiate participant experiences with an existing framework.

To address the second and third research objective, this thesis implements an exploratory case study approach (Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014; Gorman-Murray, 2011; Hann & Hart, 2011; Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011). Following the tradition of economic anthropology and critical cultural geography, case studies are a method of inquiry designed for in-depth analysis of a group, event or process, often bounded by time and activity (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Intensive case studies allow the exploration of causal connections under different local contingencies (James, 2006; Sayer, 1984) while retaining meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2012). Exploratory case studies are of

particular pertinence to situations where there is no clear outcome or experimental control (Yin, 2003). They typically use multiple data sources, converging documentation, interviews, direct observations and survey data to bolster findings (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Case studies are particularly appropriate for asking "what" and "how" questions, taking into consideration how the observed phenomenon is influenced by contextual factors such as time and space (James, 2006). It is relevant to note that due to global lockdown measures, other traditional forms of social science research methods such as in-person interviews and participant observation were inaccessible.

1.4.1 Qualifying the Case Study Approach

Debates range about the rigour, appropriateness and relevance of case study research approaches (Markusen, 1999; Martin & Sunley, 2001). The prioritization or imposition of certain topics, subjects or places by the researcher concerns some scholars about the "thin empirics" being implemented (James, 2006). For example, case studies tend to rely on overly selective population samples via open-ended interview questions leading to vague or anecdotal information (Rodriguez-Pose, 2001). Further, there is hesitancy around the representativeness of case studies and the lack of policy relevance that may result from this research approach due to the focus on culturally and contextually inspired questions (Dorling & Shaw, 2002; Markusen, 1999).

In a pivotal publication on rigorous and relevant cultural economic geographies, James asks, "against which external and independent reality is it actually *possible* to judge the comprehensiveness and accuracy of a particular theory?" (2006: 299). James furthers this argument, asserting that the traditional scientific "yardsticks" of replicability, representativeness and generalizability are "epistemologically inappropriate to cultural economic geography" (ibid: 303). James argues that the bounded case study is actually better positioned to tease out local specificities from the more general situation through relations and processes, increasing the potential for transferability. Lastly, the selectivity of the subject or respondents rests critically on a researchers' ability to gain access to relevant populations. For junior researchers with limited research funds, timelines, experience and status, deliberate and focused cases are critical to academic success (James, 2006). Moreover, due to the flexible nature of the method, case studies incorporate all available evidence and interpretations, examining findings that may challenge persisting theoretical positions (Yin, 2012).

1.4.2 Case Study Dimensions

For a successful case study, it is important to "bind" the case by time, place, or activity (P. Baxter & Jack, 2015). As Lane (2001) argues, imposing boundaries on case studies is an inevitable part

of all critical geography studies. This is consistent with Rittel & Webber's (1973) assertion that every wicked problem[2] is distinctively situated in time and place. A case study approach seemed prudent for this research due to the complex set of real-life phenomena being analyzed in-depth. Case studies are also importantly both theory-building and theory-affirming, incorporating existing theoretical framings while leaving room for emergent trends and findings (P. Baxter & Jack, 2015; James, 2006; Yin, 2012). This was a key factor in determining research design due to the abductive epistemology of this work. Following Baster and Jack (2015), the present case study focuses on Toronto household experiences during the pandemic lockdown, bounding the case by scales of time, place, and activity. Each of these scales offer helpful guides to scope the study for the purposes of the dissertation.

1.4.2.1 Time

The scope of this study is limited to household experiences during the first and second initial phases of Toronto's pandemic lockdown, which occurred in March and July 2020 respectively. Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, Ontario remained in a state of emergency, but implemented various reopening plans throughout. Thus, while participants were under lockdown from March 2020 onwards, various sectors, amenities and regions began to reopen and allow for public participation. The majority of the findings reported in this thesis are focused on the initial lockdown initiated in March, 2020. This time scale was chosen precisely because of the significant changes that took place to the consumer economy, particularly during the second quarter of 2020. I will elaborate on this further in Chapter 3, where I discuss the parallels between global lockdown and degrowth.

1.4.2.2 Place

The geographic scope of this study is limited to the City of Toronto, Canada. All study participants were required to be residing in Toronto during the pandemic lockdown. Significant change to and retention of sustainable household practices is prudent for high-income countries such as Canada, which has the third largest proven oil reserve in the world, and whose current climate commitments put the nation on track for 5.1^{O}C of warming by the year 2100 (du Pont & Meinshausen, 2018). Further, degrowth advocates assert that high-consumption regions must necessarily shrink their economies if

[2] The term "wicked problem" was coined by Rittel and Webber (1973) to describe complex problems in social planning and policy that may be difficult or impossible to solve due to contradictory or changing requirements. There can thus be no definitive definitions or solutions to such problems compared to "tame" problems such as puzzles or mathematics. Efforts to address one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal additional challenges that then must be incorporated into the solution. An example of a wicked problem is climate change due to its physical and temporal scope.

other areas of the world are to access a decent and dignified well-being (Demaria, Kallis, & Bakker, 2019; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Fanning, O'Neill, & Büchs, 2020; O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb, & Steinberger, 2018).

Known as the most multicultural city on the planet[3], Toronto is home to nearly 3 million people representing at least 250 distinct ethnic origins. Over half of Toronto's population was born outside Canada, and over 170 languages and dialects are spoken in the city (Ryan, 2019). As Canada's most populous city, nearly one quarter of the nation's entire population lives within a 160-kilometre radius of Toronto (Population Stat, 2021). Over half of Toronto's workforce has a university degree or college diploma, and the city features five universities and six colleges. Toronto is also home to 38% of Canada's business headquarters, and contributes nearly 20% of Canada's GDP (Toronto Global, 2021).

Situated on the northwestern shore of Lake Ontario, Toronto's shoreline stretches 43 kilometers – and up to 138km if bays and islands are included (Lake Ontario WaterKeeper, 2021). The city welcomes 30 million visitors annually as a leading tourist destination for Canada, as well as nearly 100,000 new immigrants (City of Toronto, 2021c; UReach Toronto, 2021). Toronto is divided into 158 distinct neighbourhoods based on Statistics Canada Census Tract boundaries. These neighbourhoods are comprised of two to five Census Tracts each (City of Toronto, 2021b). While Toronto's birth rate is in decline, net migration remains the main source of population growth. The city's largest population groups as of 2016 were aged 15-34, and persons aged 50-69 (Toronto City Planning, 2019).

As of 2016, there were 1,112,930 privately occupied dwellings in the City of Toronto, with an average occupancy of 2.42 people (Toronto City Planning, 2019). While both renter and owner households are increasing in Toronto, owner households overtook renters in 2001 and have grown three times as much as renter households in the 20-year period (Toronto City Planning, 2019). Housing ownership in Toronto is consistently being driven by households aged 50 years and over. In 2016, 36.6% of all Toronto households were considered to be living in unaffordable housing, whereby households spend 30% or more of their income on shelter costs. Almost half of renters (46.8%) are spending more than 30% on shelter, compared to 27.4% of household owners (Toronto City Planning, 2019). For households that spend more than 50% of their income on shelter, the proportion of renters (23.3%) is double that of owners (12.3%). Interestingly, the proportion of renter income spent on shelter has changed minimally between 1996 and 2016.

[3] BBC Radio named Toronto, Canada the most diverse city in the world in 2017 based on census data including its foreign-born population and diverse representation of ethnicities https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03v1r1p

1.4.2.3 Activity

My primary data collection focused on the experience of Toronto households during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. I looked in particular at the ways in which households adapted to externally imposed changes such as lockdown measures, pandemic safety, and other new regulations. I asked households about changes to personal and professional routines, impacts on mental health and coping mechanisms, changes to consumption habits, and community engagement. How were responsibilities negotiated and divided among household members? What did households do for entertainment during a pandemic lockdown? How did household activities change their use of space within and beyond the home during these times? What might this tell us about adaptive capacity for a climate uncertain future?

Outbreaks of infectious disease have been an integral part of the human story for time immemorial. Pandemics have had a monumental influence on human history including the population decline of entire regions, political and economic instability, and tipping the outcome of world wars (Price-Smith, 2008). The Black Death, originating in China and arriving in Europe by 1347 following the Silk Road trading route, is estimated to have claimed up to 60% of Europe's population. It is even argued that the outbreak imposed a selection pressure that changed the course of human evolution (Christakis, 2020). Despite the profound and lasting impacts of pandemics on human society, shockingly little research in the social sciences explores the implications of these phenomena (Huremović, 2019).

1.4.2.4 Case Study Context: Global

On January 23, 2020, Wuhan, China announced it would impose a lockdown in an attempt to contain the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) originating in the city. The surrounding Hubei Province followed almost immediately. By January 25, only two days later, nearly all of China had shut down. The scale of lockdown in China was "the largest imposition of public health measures in human history" (Christakis, 2020: 9). The COVID-19 outbreak has since devastated global markets, eliminated businesses and industries, shut down regional and national borders and trade routes, exacerbated social inequities, and imposed unprecedented demands on households around the world. By May 1, 2020, COVID-19 was the leading cause of death in the United States, surpassing deaths caused by the flu, heart disease and cancer (Christakis, 2020). At the time of writing, there have been 6.5 million deaths worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 virus outbreak (World Health Organization, 2022).

Due to unrelenting processes of globalization and development, there has been an increasing threat of pandemics since the end of the 20th century (Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020). With over half of the world's population residing in urban centres, increased density has threatened an increase in the potential for rapid spread (Connolly, Keil, & Ali, 2021; Devaux, Mediannikov, Medkour, & Raoult, 2019; Myers et al., 2013). The interconnected nature of trade and transport through air, sea, rail and road, coupled with land-use change, rising meat consumption and more fraught interactions between humans, wildlife and livestock around the world contribute to and accelerate the virus outbreak (T. Allen et al., 2017; Kogan et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2018).

Yet the coronavirus outbreak "met a scientific and medical environment wholly different from those of prior pandemics" (Christakis, 2020: 85). From genome sequencing and spread tracking to genetic tests, mobile phone data for tracking human movement, Intensive Care Units and ventilators, antiviral drugs and an unprecedented scientific understanding of biology, the global public health system was well prepared for managing an outbreak. Despite these advances, however, as physician and sociologist Nicholas Christakis writes: "it's humbling and shocking to think how little things have changed" as the world struggled to contain the outbreak and agree on best practices (2020: 86). As late as April 2020, the World Health Organization discouraged the use of face masks in desperate efforts to conserve supplies for health-care workers, ultimately misleading the public about the efficacy of masks (World Health Organization, 2020a).

For Christakis, the asymptomatic transmission of the COVID-19 virus was one of the most "bedeviling aspects of the infection" (2020: 13), making detection and quarantine extremely difficult to implement. Further, compared to the SARS-1 virus from 2003, the COVID-19 virus is ten times less fatal but more transmissible, making it a more challenging epidemic because of the larger numbers of survivors that can carry the virus. COVID-19 infections spread on average two to four days before patients even show symptoms, and the virus seems most contagious one to two days before symptoms manifest. Christakis (2020) estimates that between 40-60% of the world's population will be infected by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to the 0.00013% attack rate of the SARS-1 virus.

According to the International Labour Organization, 93% of the world's workers were residing in countries with workplace closure measures in January 2021 (International Labour Organization, 2021). Over the course of 2020, there was an unprecedented loss of 114 million jobs, with a decline in labour income of 8.3% or $3.7 trillion USD, with the pandemic affecting 80-85% of workers worldwide (ibid). Christakis highlights the critical interdependence of economic activity and social interaction, lamenting that "plagues are a time of loss not just in our lives, but of livelihoods – and of routines, connections, liberty, and much else" (2020: 136). He highlights the role of grief in the process of a

pandemic, not only for the millions of lives lost, but for the loss of a way of life, the loss of jobs, incomes, educations, scientific progress, friendships and personal growth. This shift in forms of livelihood is critical to the following section which further explores the COVID-19 pandemic through a degrowth lens.

1.4.2.5 Case Studies at the Household Scale

Case studies are an effective method to investigate the division of household labour among members, with a particular emphasis on sustainable behaviour (Head, Farbotko, Gibson, Gill, & Waitt, 2013; Horne, Maller & Lane, 2011; Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011; Lane & Watson, 2012; Waitt et al., 2012). They have been implemented to examine the nuances of household behaviour and responsibilities among genders and sexualities more specifically (Brewster, 2017; Gorman-Murray, 2011, 2013; Organo, Head, & Waitt, 2013; Parker & Morrow, 2017; Tornello, 2020; Tornello, Sonnenberg, & Patterson, 2015). They have also been critical to the exploration of household approaches to adaptation in response to environmental or economic disaster (Prior & Eriksen, 2013; Sartore, Kelly, Stain, Albrecht, & Higginbotham, 2008; Sherman, 2009; Sofoulis, 2015; Whittle, Walker, Medd, & Mort, 2012).

There are, however, major research gaps in household sustainability studies. Firstly, there is an overwhelming focus on the Majority World[4]. Since overdeveloped regions such as Canada are presumed to have advanced institutional, financial or technological capacities that provide a competitive advantage in disaster mitigation, they have remained excluded from the research (Toole, Klocker, & Head, 2016). Despite perceived advantages, adaptive capacity is never a given, especially under multiple degrees of warming and non-linear systems change. Yet the extent to which households in overdeveloped regions can adapt to climate change remains unclear (Porter, Dessai, & Tompkins, 2014). Further, several studies have challenged the notion that high incomes and high levels of education lead to pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Klockner & Head, 2013; Waitt et al., 2012). Indeed, the concept of vulnerability itself may need to be rethought (Toole et al., 2016).

Eriksen et al. (2015) argue that this research gap is also due to dominant framings of ‘adaptation’ as rational and planned responses to actual or predicted external stimuli (financial, environmental, etc.). Complexity, non-linear changes, and indirect effects remain at the margin of adaptation literature, leaving a particularly pronounced research gap in the adaptive capacities of

[4] I use the term ‘Majority World’ following Mezzadri (2019) among others to better encapsulate the reality of labour relations for the majority of people globally, and ‘overdeveloped regions’ to articulate the difference in power, wealth and development as an alternative to Global North and Global South (Barry, 2012).

households in overdeveloped regions (Eriksen et al., 2015; Toole et al., 2016). Despite a call over two decades ago for a more focused consideration of the household in disaster research (Fordham, 1998), household vulnerability and preparedness have only more recently explored intersections with political and cultural inquiries of emotions and gender (Gorman-Murray, 2013; Meth, 2009; Thorne, 2010; Whittle et al., 2012). More recent critical geography is embracing such complexities, incorporating political, ecological and cultural dimensions of household research (Gibson et al., 2015).

And so, adaptability and vulnerability are up for critique and in need of context. For example, a survey of Australian households found that the least affluent households were most adept and committed to improving efficiencies in energy, transport, water and food consumption (Waitt et al., 2012). Ethnic minority and migrant households also tend to demonstrate more sustainable practices including the use of public transport and saving water (Toole et al., 2016). Pre-migration experiences of resource scarcity and service disruption equipped migrant populations with practical skills in water capture, laundry and cooking practices that were particularly advantageous during challenges such as a drought and water restrictions (Strengers & Maller, 2012). It is important to recognize that "[h]ouseholds with strong internal and external social relations, frugal practices and high levels of pedestrian mobility may ultimately prove less vulnerable to a range of more-than-climate impacts than isolated but wealthy households, whose everyday lives are dependent on energy-intensive and less flexible modes of operation" (Toole et al., 2016: 2017).

1.4.3 Participant Recruitment

Recruitment for the case study took place between September 30 and December 9, 2020. I recruited research participants via informal or sharing economy Facebook groups using both descriptive text and a recruitment poster (see Appendix A). Initially, I chose the Toronto-wide 'Caremongering-TO' group as the primary source of participant recruitment due to its strong ties to the research focus and the large group membership of 25,000 people (at the time). Unfortunately, there were limited responses in the first few weeks of recruitment posting, so I expanded my sample to a total of 16 Facebook groups. I posted recruitment materials in each group every two weeks until a minimum of 40 participants was achieved. Since many of these groups required membership before publishing a post, I joined each group at the time of ethics review (August 2020) and thus needed no further permissions for posting recruitment materials.

As per the recruitment notice, interested candidates were instructed to contact me directly via the email address listed. If people expressed interest in a comment on the Facebook recruitment post, I provided my email again and encouraged they follow up with me directly. Table 1 below lists the

various Facebook groups chosen for recruitment, and the total group membership at the time of recruitment.

Table 1. Target Facebook Groups for Participant Recruitment

Facebook Group Name	Membership as of Dec 2020
CareMongering-Scarborough, ON	610
Caremongering TO	25,000
Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association Community Forum	2,100
Forest Hill Friends & Neighbours Toronto	894
Friends of Leslieville	4,900
PALZ Junction/ Triangle Zone	2,200
PALZ Trading Zone	65,000
Queer Exchange	8,200
Roncy/ Parkdale Friendly Neighbours	6,000
South Etobicoke Community Group	8,900
St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Marketplace	2,800
The Beaches Toronto Facebook Group	9,600
The Danforth – EastYork – Woodbine Community	13,500
Toronto GTA Swap & Shop Sales and Free Stuff!	6,200
Toronto Free Stuff Only	17,800
Zero Waste Toronto	10,900

I focused on the above groups because they organize local Toronto and community neighbourhoods at a grassroots level, and because they see their role as involving the redistribution of resources beyond the formal market while minimizing waste and maximizing social impact. For example, some of the groups insist on the trade of goods and services only; the use of monetary exchange is strictly prohibited. In brief, the above group interests aligned with the study objectives (i.e., informal sharing economy). This particular sample of participants is thus of great interest to degrowth scholars, as they are prime candidates for mobilizing the degrowth politics and practices needed to achieve the steady-state economy. Participants recruited from mutual aid groups have indicated a desire to engage in alternative economic practices. Therefore, the findings from participant experience will

provide many lessons learned from the opportunities, but especially the challenges faced by individuals that are likely morally driven by degrowth principles.

The abovementioned groups were also an ideal platform for recruiting interview participants due to the difficulty of physical recruitment during the pandemic, (i.e., door-to-door). Participants were initially offered a chance to win one of ten $100 VISA gift cards as per the recruitment poster. After learning about the extra expenses of gift card purchasing and postage, I provided Interac e-transfers to the ten draw winners instead to minimize waste and COVID-19 risk. I limited the study target population to adult (18 years and older) residents of the City of Toronto who were living in Toronto at the time of the first major pandemic lockdown (March 2020). There were no characteristics besides age that excluded participants – all abilities, genders and household sizes were welcome.

Following each emailed expression of interest, I provided a standard response with the letter of information attached, featuring a detailed description of the study including purpose, risks, benefits and assurance that the participant could choose to end their involvement at any time. In addition to the letter of information (Appendix B) I explained via email the two steps involved in research participation: completing a short online survey followed by an in-depth interview. The survey was linked directly to the email, and my instructions requested three preferred dates and times from the participant that they would be available to meet over a two-hour block. A total of 42 people completed the survey and interview portion of the study. All aspects of the study took place remotely to limit COVID-19 risk exposure. All participants received a letter of thanks via email once they completed the two-step research process. I will send them the thesis abstract as well as web links to relevant publications as they become available. Participants were assured anonymity for all aspects of the study.

1.4.4 Online Survey

Surveys are a quick and reliable method for collecting data due to their convenience, low cost and the ability to access wide and remote populations, especially when administered online (Creswell, 2014; Sue & Ritter, 2012). I used an online survey to obtain participant consent and gather demographic data and other details on participant households, including postal code, number of children, sexual orientation, relationship status, place of birth, long-term health conditions and languages spoken at home. All demographic information listed may have a specific impact on a participant's ability to adapt to lockdown measures – hence, my principle of intersectionality; see chapter 1.

For example, research shows that race and gender directly shaped unemployment probability during COVID-19 lockdown (Gezici & Ozay, 2020). Long-term health conditions may further exacerbate already inequitable capacities to adapt to times of crisis. Both gender and sexual orientation

were expected to be key factors in the distribution of household responsibilities among household members based on outcomes of past studies (Gorman-Murray, 2008a, 2011; Organo et al., 2013). Further, more recent scholarship on housework theories argue that a respondent's sexual identity should be a standard practice in survey design to capture self-perception and gender expression (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018).

My survey was designed to give me baseline information from which to draw for the more in-depth interviews. In the survey, participants identified the daily chores they were responsible for, and outlined the hours spent on paid and unpaid work, leisure time and sleep within a 24-hour time period. They completed this for a typical day before lockdown, during lockdown, and when Toronto entered Stage 2 of the Recovery plan in late June (see Appendix C for the full list of survey questions). Using the Qualtrics survey software through the University of Waterloo's license, I was able to create individual survey links for every participant to enhance privacy and simplify response tracking. The survey also served as a second reminder to participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

1.4.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

To give more depth to the survey data, I also asked participants to complete a semi-structured interview. This flexible qualitative method allowed for follow-up questions that enriched survey findings by providing an opportunity to collect information about the lockdown experience from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2014; James, 2006; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). While the questions on the interview guide are preformulated, with semi-structured interviews participants can provide open-ended responses that can be explored at the discretion of the interviewer, and enhanced upon by both interviewer and interviewee. Further, participants can express areas of interest to them that can further expand the interview guide. Interviews are a key tool in exploratory research to confirm existing theories as well as offer innovative insights from new perspectives (Schensul et al., 1999).

Pilot studies are an excellent way to test the quality of an interview protocol and revealing researcher bias (Chenail, 2011). I conducted pilot interviews in June and July of 2020 with my friends, family and colleagues to observe question timing, content overlap and get a feel for the general interview experience. Leaning on my personal network was appropriate because they shared key features of my target participants: living in the Greater Toronto Area and experiencing the complex and all-encompassing changes to daily life in the early stages of the global pandemic. I completed three full interviews with a multi-generational household, a household with adolescent children, and a household

with a newborn infant. Piloting resulted in exposing repetition in questions and answers, clarified the need to reorganize the interview guide structure, and inspired ideas for alternative topics and themes to address. Once piloting was completed, I submitted my application for ethics review. I received ethics clearance (ORE #42372) on September 30, 2020.

Study participants were given the choice via email between phone or video interviews. Most equivocated, so I prioritized phone calls to minimize service and audio interruptions. With participants' consent, I recorded interview audio so I could be fully present in the conversation and rather than taking detailed notes (Charmaz, 2006a). On average, the interviews took about 1.5 hours. The shortest interview was 32 minutes, while the longest interview took two hours and 45 minutes. Participants were encouraged to share as much or as little of their lockdown experience as they were comfortable with. The interview guide was divided into three main sections, and I made a point to pause at the end of each section to check in with the participant and see if they had the time and patience to continue with the conversation or preferred to take a break. Participants were assured at the start of the interview that they could end their involvement in the study at any time and, further, that they could choose not to answer any questions they were not comfortable answering. I transcribed the audio recording of the interviews using the advanced speech recognition software[5] Temi (temi.com).

The interviews allowed for a deep dive into each participants' experience during lockdown including: changes to personal and professional roles and responsibilities; lockdown impacts on household finances, expenses and services; inquiries into maintaining social relationships; sharing information; negotiating responsibilities; coping methods and conflict management; as well as changes to priorities as a result of changes to lockdown measures (see Appendix D for the interview guide). The interview guide was organized temporally as well as thematically. Two thirds of the interview were spent discussing participant experiences during the initial lockdown from March-June, 2020, and the final third was used to discuss any changes made during the Stage 2 transition of lockdown. Interviews occurred between October 5, 2020 and January 27, 2021 based on participant availability. As such, some participants were able to discuss larger lockdown timeframes, but the two main timeframes remained distinguished between initial March 2020 lockdown and changes to lockdown from June onwards.

Due to the extremely sensitive, traumatic and ongoing nature of the global pandemic, I took extra precautions preparing for emotional responses during the interview (Cope, 2014). To establish

[5] Once interviews were transcribed by the software, I reviewed each transcript in detail along with the audio recording to check for accuracy. The speech-to-text accuracy was very high, and I only needed to review each transcript once.

credibility, I took time to build rapport with each of my participants by providing some information on my own professional and personal background. Multiple participants inquired about the purpose of the study, and I enthusiastically provided information on the broader research context. This also helped establish confirmability, as I was able to describe how specific participants' responses were applicable to the study focus, as well as research topic transferability, by discussing the broader nature of disaster-related research in the context of sustainability (Cope, 2014). That being said, I never mentioned the term "degrowth" or "imposed degrowth" to study participants. Their responses were based on experiences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown measures.

Due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, there was ample opportunity for participants to express the topics and issues they felt were most relevant for discussion. I took care to ask more sensitive questions about mental health and coping practices in the middle of the interview to allow for trust and confidence to build over the short time period. I was particularly cognizant of participants' energy levels, interview performance and emotional exhaustion throughout the interview. Further, if participants expressed discomfort in answering certain questions, I did not hesitate to reassure them before moving forward in the interview guide. Lastly, at the end of each interview I invited participants to ask me follow-up questions and add to the interview guide, creating space for participants to express any other items of relevance that may have been neglected by the guide.

1.4.6 Data Analysis

I merged, or "transformed", survey or interview data to congregate relevant categorical data in one place (Creswell, 2014). For example, in the survey some participants selected the option 'Other' for home ownership, but indicated in the survey comments that they rented their home which was an existing survey option. Some participants indicated both 'No' and 'Other' for access to private green space, so further inquiry was needed. 'Other' sexual orientations and ethnicities were added as independent categories to ensure an adequate and autonymic representation of identity in this thesis.

For the purposes of clarity, coherence and organization in analysis, I updated survey data to best reflect and synthesize participant responses and merged this information with qualitative interview responses where appropriate. Categorical data extracted from the survey include: lockdown's impact on the household budget; growing food during lockdown; participating in informal goods or services exchange; perceptions of fair divisions of household labour; access to mental health supports during lockdown; and, positive or negative reactions to spending more time at home. I used pivot tables in Microsoft Excel software to collate the data.

Analyzing interview data is an iterative process that requires multiple stages (Charmaz, 2006b; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; LaRossa, 2005; Wicks, 2017). Coding interviews is a common step in this process, whereby 'codes' or labels are assigned to particular sections of the data such as a sentence, a phrase, or entire paragraphs. Currently, there is no universally agreed upon approach for coding procedures in qualitative research, but the use of a codebook has been identified as one of the most critical aspects of the analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Codes can either be *theory-driven*, imposing concepts from existing research on the data; *data-driven*, where concepts emerge from the raw data; or *structural*, where they are drawn from a project's research goals. As an iterative and circular process, coding data allows the researcher to simplify and condense the data, as well as transform, expand or reconceptualize certain understandings of the raw data or existing scholarship (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

I used NVivo 11 software by QSR to systematically code the interview data. I completed an online training module in March 2021 on NVivo core skills offered by the software developers. Code development for this analysis was both theory- and data-driven, since I applied pre-existing understandings about household sustainability and low-carbon transitions to shape many of the codes, while simultaneously paying attention to patterns emerging from participant experiences. For example, the code 'degrowth practice' was assigned to activities described by participants that contributed to low-carbon economic alternatives such as sharing and repairing material goods, or prioritizing local businesses. A code like 'technology' was an emergent phenomenon that resulted from multiple participants claiming to utilize electronic devices to stay in touch during lockdown. Thus, the codebook was informed by both theory and the raw data. Appendix E offers a detailed description of the codebook used for this thesis, along with a brief definition and examples.

Following Corbin & Strauss (2008), I applied a two-stage coding process for the interview analysis. In the initial cycle of coding, while reviewing transcripts alongside the audio recordings to check for errors and items of clarification I "openly" coded the data where descriptive codes were initially assigned in an exploratory manner to begin sorting and comparing the data. This included creating, editing and removing codes as I determined the most appropriate codebook for analysis. Next, I employed "axial" coding where the codes were compared, reorganized and focused into hierarchical categories to develop central themes, finalizing the codebook (Wicks, 2017). See section 3.4.2 for a more detailed explanation of the codes developed.

Due to the subjective nature of the coding process, there are differing perspectives on the credibility of coding as analysis. It is important to situate a code as "a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of

pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes" (Wicks, 2017: 4). A confounding aspect of the coding process is that it is not always possible to finitely bound qualitative data, and thus creativity and flexibility are core tenets to the coding process. Drawing on the social constructivist epistemological foundations of this study, my analysis strove to pay attention to my own predispositions and their influence on the study focus, research and interview questions, and data interpretations (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). This approach also aligns with a rejection of the artificial divide between the 'observer' and the 'observed', since the research process is a mutual project where all parties are involved simultaneously (James, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, critics of qualitative research are concerned about the pitfalls of "superficially thin" empirics because samples could be construed as overly selective and narrow (Markusen, 1999). Their concerns have therefore focused on how this research approach involves "a few selected interview quotations, frequently from just a handful of individuals in a very specific setting, and usually without any sustained attempt to interrogate such evidence critically" (Martin, 2001: 197). James (2006) addresses these concerns through a fourfold approach: following the participants' lead about prevalent topics; including quotations (i.e. 'anecdotes') from as many participants as possible; including the positionality of the quoted speaker to support the readers' interpretation; and, comparing and contrasting quotations to emphasize contradiction, complexity and avoid overgeneralization. The messy and complex properties of a qualitative study demand nuanced understandings based in participant experience and demonstrated by verbatim quotations in order to gain descriptive richness as well as resist the trend toward essentializing cultural economic geography (James, 2006). I strove to implement this fourfold approach with care in my analysis.

1.4.7 Strengths of Research Design

My two methods of choice (online survey and in-depth interview) have a credible track record. Both methods have an extensive history of proven success in application, offering much confidence in the reliability and efficacy of these methods (Creswell, 2014; Schensul et al., 1999; Yin, 2012). Each method also allowed for completely remote employment – a necessity during the global pandemic lockdown. The choice in methods offer a diverse and robust analysis for an individual case study, creating much confidence in the resulting outputs (Baxter & Jack, 2015; James, 2006). Conducting a case study of a global-scale event (COVID-19 pandemic) also offers an opportunity for external validation via international news, which can be consulted to substantiate participant claims and experiences and minimize bias in study results.

Most importantly, the responsiveness and flexibility of semi-structured interviews enacts and allows for the building of trust and relationships with participants – major deterrents to participants giving researchers the answers they think the researcher wants to hear (Krefting, 1991). Combining the survey with an interview also allowed participants to elaborate on their survey responses and share their own experiences *in their own words* (James, 2006). Of enormous significance was my sense that these interviews as human connection – as conversation at a time of isolation – seemed to offer some kind of catharsis. Participants shared their personal struggles, failures and accomplishments during an extremely unique and vulnerable time. Since lockdown measures are ongoing, participants may not have had much opportunity to share their experiences in such an in-depth and engaging way. Further, upon reflection, participants may be able to utilize some personal realizations to improve their household's lockdown experience in the future.

From a scholar-activist perspective, my research goes beyond questions of *how* people coped during an imposed degrowth scenario. By engaging in conversation with everyday households about their experiences, this research also *enacts* the very ethos of collaboration and sharing aspired by the degrowth imperative, which seeks to undo the systematic alienation perpetuated by capitalism. Speaking with people about their experiences surviving difficult circumstances such as disasters, intimate partner violence, or genocide creates an opportunity for these survivors to give and have a voice, and for their lives to be documented (Dominey-Howes, 2015; Government of Canada, 2021b; Motivational Interviewing and Intimate Partner Violence Workgroup, 2010; Purkey, Patel, & Phillips, 2018). In this way, survivors' needs can be better identified and understood so that government resources can be more effectively distributed (van Zijll de Jong et al., 2011). Thus, there can be both emotional and material outcomes as a result of disaster-based research.

1.4.8 Limitations of Research Methods

A number of factors limited the research approach and outcomes of this thesis. The most apparent limitation to the data and findings was participation recruitment because my use of topic-focused Facebook groups restricted the research population to participants with a predisposition to the ethics, values and activities that promote a sharing economy. This also restricted my recruitment pool to those with secure internet access, computer and internet literacy, and a Facebook account. This had obvious impacts on research outcomes by limiting findings to a select populations' perspective and experience. On a positive note, these limitations of the recruitment pool also created the focus needed for this dissertation to explore and challenge the presumptions of a smooth low-carbon transition, which is a weakness of degrowth scholarship.

The remote nature of data collection during the world's second-ever global pandemic was another major limitation to the study. It made conducting rigorous research extremely difficult. For example, I had little to no access to non-verbal cues because most interviews took place over the phone. This was due to the poor quality of video conferencing which often froze and interrupted audio recordings. Unlike video calls, phone calls were clear and did not get disrupted. Furthermore, the medium compromised the quality of and exacerbated the problems associated with participant observation. For example, I was completely reliant on the participants' interpretation of their experience, which often risks the perpetuation of socially acceptable responses and limits verifiability (Dorling & Shaw, 2002; Krefting, 1991; Rodriguez-Pose, 2001).

Obversely, the distance ran the risk of skewing power differentials between researcher and participant further in my favour: my perspective could dominate interviews given that I set the agenda of the conversation, knew the direction I wanted to take things from the outset, and could have my views frame the narrative of the findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Kvale, 1994). Further, I could impose internalized assumptions on a participants' characteristics or values based on preconceived notions of their demographic background that could result in disregarding or discounting a participants' response (Chenail, 2011; Kvale, 1994). Lastly, while the interview required participants to be particularly vulnerable and share intimate details about their struggles through lockdown, I the interviewer did not have to reciprocate with that level of vulnerability. James (2006) offers some compelling solutions to these problems, which I explore later in this thesis.

While there is much investment in the ethical implications of research for study participants (i.e., ethics review, consent, right to withdraw), there is only a recent emergent discussion on the emotional toll of research on researchers themselves (Dominey-Howes, 2015; Drozdzewski & Dominey-Howes, 2015). This is particularly prudent for disaster researchers who risk vicarious trauma by suffering negative emotional or psychological reactions to their participants' traumatic experiences. This can have extremely harmful mental and material impacts on the researcher including disruption to sleep, loss of appetite, increased anxiety and stress, and a disruption to the research process (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Further, for junior researchers such as PhD students, emotional dimensions of the research process are largely ignored by institutions of higher education compared to ontological or epistemological challenges (Cotterall, 2013).

But this case study was not an isolated incident in a particular geographic region experienced by a specific population. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon that threatens well-being, health and safety for all. As such, it was a personal struggle to maintain motivation and commitment to this research during a time of global crisis when the priority was personal safety and

security, and the well-being of my family and friends. After engaging in over 50 hours of emotionally intense story-telling about pandemic hardships, it was important to practice self-care and create boundaries and structure to support this work. Unfortunately, there were multiple times during interviews where I was not able to engage as adequately as I had hoped in the interview. Moreover, the emotional and energetic toll of the pandemic made it too difficult to keep up written observations or journal entries throughout the research journey, despite the supplementary role observations can play in triangulating findings for case studies (Creswell, 2014; Phondej, 2011).

These struggles were amplified by the fact that the University of Waterloo, among many other Canadian universities, was not willing to extend doctoral students' guaranteed research funding timeline. Graduate students were granted merely one additional semester to their program timeline, while the pandemic lasted two years (and is still ongoing). This created immense pressure to carry on despite genuine global despair. While the University provides four years of guaranteed funding at the doctoral level, the average Canadian PhD takes approximately 5.5 years, with research in the humanities taking upwards of seven to eight years (Institute for the Public Life of Arts and Ideas & McGill University, 2013). Thus, the University provided minimal support for this work overall, setting unrealistic expectations and timelines, and remained causing more stress during a global pandemic.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 (current) provided an overview of the case study research design including participant recruitment, methods and limitations to the study approach. Chapter 2 outlines and critiques degrowth scholarship using an ecofeminist framing with an emphasis on the significance of social reproduction, political subjectivity and catalyzing disasters. Chapter 3 examines the parallels between the March 2020 pandemic lockdown and the degrowth imperative, situating the COVID-19 lockdown as an imposed degrowth scenario. Chapter 4 and 5 report on the empirical outcomes of this study. Chapter 4 investigates the ways in which the lockdown created opportunities for households to engage in degrowth politics and practice to mobilize low-carbon and anti-capitalist alternatives. Chapter 5 presents the barriers to participating in such alternatives as a result of lockdown measures. Chapter 6 uses the lived experiences of my participants to propose policy for a more robust degrowth agenda that can better support households through times of unplanned disruptions expected in an uncertain climate future. Chapter 7 offers concluding remarks and future research opportunities.

Chapter 2. Design, Disaster, Degrowth

This chapter provides an overview of degrowth scholarship and its limitations in its response to the growth imperative of capitalism. It expands degrowth literature by exploring research contributions from ecofeminist political economy, and contributes to the humble beginnings of a social reproduction theory for degrowth with an emphasis on the household scale. This chapter then explains why we need to understand global lockdown measures of the COVID-19 pandemic as an imposed degrowth scenario. Focusing on the everyday practices of the household, this chapter sets the stage for the primary data analysis in the remaining thesis sections.

2.1 Ecological Economics & The Degrowth Imperative

As one of the most comprehensive challenges to unsustainable growth economics, Ecological Economics (EE) recognizes the irreducible material and energetic dimensions of the economy by acknowledging the finite properties of natural resources as both sources (i.e., forests, water) and sinks (i.e., atmosphere's capacity to absorb carbon). EE challenges the hegemonic growth paradigm of capitalist economics by observing that maintaining the order of the global economy has imposed increasingly rapid disorder on the biosphere (Daly, 2017). Further, continued growth remains uneconomic in high-consumption countries, because the social and environmental costs of economic expansion outstrip any economic benefits (Daly, 2008).

2.1.1 The Growth Paradigm

Growth as a policy priority is the most globally pervasive economic idea today, shaping the very "architecture of the modern economy" (Jackson, 2017: 37). The globalized capitalist economy is structurally reliant on growth to facilitate employment, income, and social and political stability (T. Jackson, 2017b; Victor, 2019). To this day, intergovernmental bodies across the globe work under the assumption that continued economic growth is essential to achieve humanitarian and environmental goals (FAO, 2011; OECD, 2017; The World Bank, 2018; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2017). Even environmental discourses identify economic growth as a precondition to sustainable development (Gomez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015).

Initially introduced as an employment measure in the aftermath of World War II, growth became a policy of political primacy around the world (Victor, 2019). Based in the school of neoclassical economics, the globalized capitalist system is driven by a profit motive to continuously accumulate capital for the purposes of production (Friedman, 1962; Hayek, 1948). The economy is conceptualized

as an abstract flow of exchange value between firms, governments, and households. It is the size of money flows, in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is prioritzed in the growth paradigm (Ekins, 2017). But the economy is anything but abstract – in just over one century raw material consumption increased 13 times from seven billion tons per year to over ninety billion tons, exceeding the sustainable footprint of the planet twice over (Figure 1).

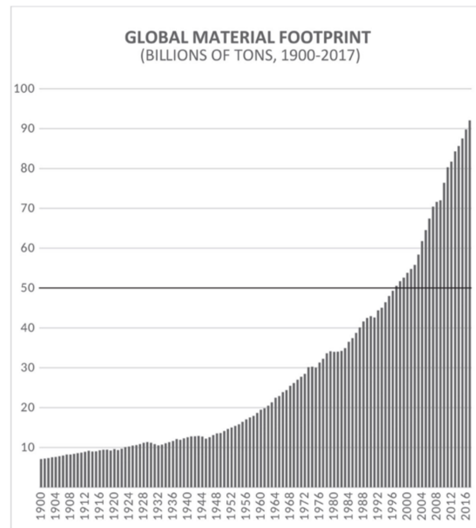

Figure 1. Growth in global material footprint (billions of tons) from 1990-2016 **(Hickel, 2021: 100)**

Further, production for exchange is seen as *the* driving force of all social and economic relationships (Luxton, 2018). In this context, the human being is framed as a self-interested, utility-maximizing economic 'agent' with unlimited 'wants' and static preferences. This economic model characterizes humans as primarily and inherently selfish, such that self-interest is theorized as *the best way* to lead society towards the greater good (Jackson, 2017a; Pelletier, 2010). The priority of economic activity for individuals is maximizing utility, while the larger society aims to efficiently allocate various factors of production (labour, land, capital) based on competitive markets (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010).

In this regard, the economy is framed as a self-contained, self-correcting and autonomous system that operates separate from the state or human intervention. This economic model creates the illusory assumption that extractivism is the primary input of economic activity, actively creating barriers to the allocation of resources to the reproduction of the environment or society as it disrupts market output in the short-term (Floro, 2012). Further, economic growth has become an 'incontestable dictum' that strategically evades political dimensions of economic decisions such as equality or distribution by

turning these politically-charged conflicts into technical questions about market allocation (Schmelzer, 2015).

Scholars have categorized different phases for capitalism over the last few centuries, but they have noted how it has gained particular momentum since the 1950s during the 'neoliberal turn' (Elias & Roberts, 2018; Federici, 2014). This involved the state's withdrawal from economic regulation, the privatization of public services, and the reduction of public goods to commodities and citizens to consumers (Fournier, 2008; Mellor, 1997; Schmelzer, 2015). It also naturalized the market as the source of individual well-being and political legitimacy (Brodie, 2007). These pervasive market logics attempt to embed themselves into the socio-cultural phenomena of the everyday, justifying cost-benefit analysis of governmental institutions and public policy. We are thus now situated in a 'financialized neoliberal capitalism', henceforth referred to as capitalism (Federici, 2018; Fraser, 2016).

Capitalism takes as its primary measure of success growth in GDP. But empirical evidence points to the possibility of qualitative human development without high levels of GDP (Fanning & O'Neill, 2019; Hickel, 2021). Further, the continued pursuit of growth in high-income regions has become "uneconomic". Inequality, pollution, depression, addiction, overwork, and many other societal ailments are exacerbated by increased GDP (Brown, 2016; Daly & Cobb Jr., 1989; Hickel, 2021). Indeed, since 1995 the top 1% have captured 19 times more wealth than the bottom 50% of the global population (Chancel, Picketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2022). Growth is structurally eroding the basis of a fair and just society. While unprecedented rates of economic growth have taken place over the last few decades, continuous material expansion is ecologically unsustainable, socially undesirable, and must be questioned in the face of social-ecological collapse.

2.1.2 Towards a Steady-State

To this end, EE advocates re-embedding the economy within the environment towards a 'steady-state' to ensure economic activity remains consistent with the biophysical limits of the planet (Costanza et al., 2012; Daly, 1968; Lawn, 2010; Victor, 2016). Following the laws of thermodynamics, the concept of the steady-state economy is guided by two main principles: (1) the economy should not use natural resources at a rate faster than can be replenished; and (2) the economy should not create waste faster than can be absorbed by the planet (Boehnert, 2018). EE scholars view the economy as an open sub-system of a materially-closed finite global ecosystem (Figure 2). As such, maintaining a steady state would require a stable flow of materials in and out of the economic system to remain sustainable.

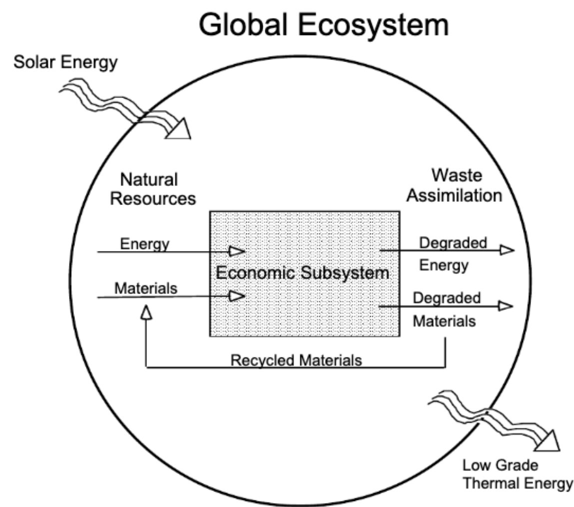

Figure 2. Ecological economy as a sub-system of the global biosphere (Boehnert, 2018: 364)

Presently, environmental sources and sinks, such as forests or the atmosphere, are viewed as infinite and exploitable by an ever-expanding economy, with no policy instruments in place to account for the biophysical scale of the economy (Daly, 1992). Yet as the image above demonstrates, there are clear material realities and consequences to all economic activity. Most importantly, the biophysical capacities of the earth deplete over time into waste heat and energy. The concept of an infinite growth model on a finite planet is thus a biophysical impossibility. This is why many EE scholars make the intentional contraction – or '*degrowth'* – of total material and energy use (and waste) remains a precondition to an environmentally sustainable steady-state economy (Buch-hansen, 2018; D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2015; Farley & Washington, 2018; Kallis, 2017; Kallis et al., 2018; Kerschner, 2010; Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010).

Present consumption rates are not only environmentally sustainable, they are not socially beneficial after a certain point. A study conducted by Fanning and O'Neill (2019) investigated the relationship between carbon-intensive consumption and human wellbeing (physical health and happiness specifically) for approximately 120 countries over a 10-year period (2005-2015). It was found that, materially speaking, wellbeing and consumption correlate only up to a certain point, after which increased consumption has a minimal impact on wellbeing. No statistically significant relationship was found between income growth and happiness specifically, as wellbeing was found not to increase with either GDP per capita or carbon footprint per capita over the long-term. These findings apply to both rich and poor nations and account for various social factors such as autonomy and social

support[6] (Fanning & O'Neill, 2019). Degrowth is not simply a political practice of thermodynamics, but an emphasis on the ontological – that we are affective and somatic beings, that capitalism wreaks ontological havoc, and that degrowth allows for the possibility of being, and being well.

2.1.3 The Degrowth Imperative

Degrowth stems from the mobilization in the early 2000s of European activists who, inspired by a collection of essays by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's (1975) thermodynamic theory of economic processes, advocated for the voluntary shrinking of production and consumption. Activists in France, Italy, Spain and elsewhere used the slogan *décroissance* (degrowth), a French word meaning reduction. They organized direct actions against consumerism and advertising, including protests for car-free cities and food cooperatives (Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis et al., 2018). Since 2008, scholar-activists have gathered at biannual international conferences resulting in research and special journal issues to further expand this critical discourse, with an emphasis on real-world community application.

By design or by disaster (Victor, 2019), ecological economists stress that the global rates of production and consumption, which currently overshoot the Earth's planetary boundaries, must be reconciled with the natural environmental conditions and limitations of the biosphere (Daly, 2017; Kallis et al., 2018; O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb, & Steinberger, 2018; Steffen et al., 2015). From a strictly materials accounting perspective, no country currently satisfies the basic needs of its citizens while staying within a globally sustainable level of resource use (O'Neill et al., 2018). Further, research shows that international climate targets are unlikely to be achieved if there is GDP growth in all countries (Antal & Van Den Bergh, 2014). Thus, EE proponents conclude that radical shifts in provisioning and distribution systems are necessary to align the global economy within planetary boundaries, such as rates of production, consumption or hours worked. To achieve degrowth by design, many policy proposals have been put forth in the literature including salary caps, comprehensive tax reforms, advertising regulations, incentives for local production and consumption, taxing environmental externalities, and promoting ecosystem restoration (Cosme, Santos, & O'Neill, 2017; Fitzpatrick, Parrique, & Cosme, 2022).

These ideas, furthermore, pay attention to the unequal exchanges and extractions between the Majority World and overdeveloped regions. Forcibly appropriated resources, minerals, labour and energy sources from the Majority World to these overdeveloped regions directly financed industrial

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[6] Autonomy is considered as the percentage of people satisfied with their freedom to make life choices, values and commitments. Social support is the percentage of people who report they have someone to ask for help in times of need (Fanning & O'Neill, 2019).

expansion and colonization, draining an estimated $242 trillion (2010 USD) between 1990 and 2015 alone – equivalent to one quarter of the overdeveloped world's GDP (Hickel, Dorninger, Wieland, & Suwandi, 2022). These losses are thirty times larger than the total aid given in the same period. Power imbalances are further maintained by structural inequalities including patent ownership, trade agreements, tax evasion and economic policy control that ensure the resource and labour drain can continue (ibid). It is thus the net appropriation and extraction of resources by "advanced economies" that have driven excess consumption and ecological breakdown (Hickel, 2020). Degrowth then becomes a decolonial imperative for the Majority World to gain economic sovereignty and become self-sufficient. It provides a way for poorer regions to finally have access to resources and ecological space so that they could adequately meet their society's needs within biophysical conditions (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Schneider et al., 2010).

Beyond material applications, then, a degrowth imperative has a multiplicity of ideological implications. Degrowth challenges the presumed inevitability of the market and its designated role as the sole provider of wealth creation. By challenging the profit motive outright, degrowth demands the economy be reclaimed as a public domain occupied by citizens, rather than a private realm consisting of utility-maximizing consumers (Kallis et al., 2018). Degrowth proposals emphasize an alternative paradigm of self-provisioning and shared responsibility that both localizes and de-materializes production and consumption processes, strengthening social bonds through needs-based rather than wants-creating initiatives (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015; Nierling, 2012; Schor, 2015). Low-impact activities such as craft, community and care are time-intensive which can facilitate more sustainable lifestyles on environmental and social scales. EE scholars place a particular emphasis on leisure time due to a reduction in working hours, leaving more time for civic engagement, family, and community life (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis et al., 2018).

This is what Latouche (2015) refers to as a "decolonization of the imaginary", a profound cultural change that abandons the economic ideologies of development and growth that have defined modern society, and challenges the naturalization, inevitability and desirability of economic growth as a social and political priority. Fournier elaborates on this, arguing that:

> the main culprit is not growth itself but the ideology of growth, a system of representation that translates everything into a reified and autonomous economic reality inhabited by self-interested consumers. It follows that to challenge the 'tyranny of growth', it is not sufficient to call for lesser, slower or greener growth for this would leave us trapped within the same economic logic; rather we need to escape from the economy as a system of representation. This means re-imagining economic relations, identities, activities in different terms; and it is to this end that the degrowth movement puts forward the notions of democracy and citizenship (Fournier, 2008: 529).

The path to a degrowth society offers an opportunity to escape from the economy, as Fournier describes, by conceptualizing alternative forms of social organizing, re-claiming and re-defining democracy, rethinking the role of humans beyond economic relations and exchange, and re-inscribing the market within local contexts of embedded time and space. The localization of production, consumption and exchange is considered "the most important strategic means" of degrowth according to Latouche (2006).

2.1.4 Credit Where Credit Is Due

While the concept of an anti-capitalist economy that prioritizes human and planetary well-being is revolutionary, it is certainly not new. Ideas celebrated in degrowth scholarship echo a long history of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and decolonial movements. Such efforts span generations of resistance against the capitalist growth paradigm, demanding justice, equity, and security for all. Degrowth is merely the latest iteration of a series of anti-capitalist movements. I will focus on three – Marxism, the Situationist International, and Indigenous Ecologies – discussed below.

2.1.4.1 Marxism

Degrowth draws on Marx's apprehension of capitalism as a mode of overexploitation of human labour and nature. The Marxist critique of capitalism links the market imperative for competition with the overexploitation of labour and nature. Though there are ecological implications, Marxist thought remains fixated on historical materialism as the social implications of the capitalist institution on human agency as determined by class struggle and analysis (Vergara-Camus, 2019). While Marx and Marxism explore contradictions between capital accumulation and labour, degrowth prioritizes contradictions between accumulation and living conditions. Both approaches struggle against capital – one towards a sustainable mode of production (Marx), the other a sustainable mode of ecological reproduction (degrowth) (Akbulut, Demaria, Gerber, & Martínez-alier, 2019).

However, not enough effort has taken place in degrowth scholarship to adequately embrace class struggle in its analysis. Some degrowth foundations, such as the environmentalism of the poor, strongly influence degrowth scholarship (Martinez-Alier, Temper, Del Bene, & Scheidel, 2016). But commentary on power relations, agency, diversity in the degrowth literature remains underappreciated (Akbulut, 2019; Barca, 2017; Kolinjivadi, 2019; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). Marxist analysis makes explicit the processes of alienation that actively estrange humans from each other, from their labour, and from nature. Rather than slowing economic growth, a Marxist perspective prioritizes healing

relationships through processes of de-alienation to overcome capitalist relations and recovers control and agency over labour and production towards collective stewardship:

> De-alienation, then, needs both the degrowthers' "economistic" reclaiming of the products and processes of production (re-appropriating land, storming the factories), but also the de-alienaters' cultural, spiritual, and social re-integration of people with their own and others' common humanity and with nature, the defense of the rights of which are a precondition of human species' survival (Brownhill, Turner, & Kaara, 2012: 101).

In other words, a degrowth revolution requires understanding the mechanisms of both alienation and class antagonism in order to resist and overturn capitalism (Brownhill et al., 2012; Leonardi, 2019). My study addresses these themes by examining the challenges of balancing the priorities of a public health crisis with employer demands. Interests of economism are advanced as private domains are transformed into work spaces, and challenged as household priorities reconsider the role of paid work in life satisfaction.

2.1.4.2 Situationist International

One such example of Marxist-informed resistance is the Situationist International, a radical organization of artists and poets that critiqued the "spectacle" of capitalist consumer society between 1957-1972. The notion of the spectacle is considered "capital accumulated to image", whereby all aspects of the human experience are mediated through mass media and advertising (Debord, 1995). The spectacle of commodity production is said to consume and corrupt everyday life, activities and consciousness, ensuring people are removed not only from the goods they consume, but also from opportunities of autonomy, authenticity and from society itself (Plant, 1992).

The Situationists developed strategic practices that combined food, acoustics, cinema, architecture and poetry to highlight the spectacle's dominance, enrich everyday life, and present alternative ways to thrive in urban environments that prioritize human needs. The organization challenged the persisting consumerist narrative with "situations" such as garden projects, murals, or locally made clothing. Alternative forms of participation such as play and gift giving - and alternative values such as self-realization – informed a larger political shift towards more equitable power relations and democratic systems.

Opposing consumer culture, efforts of the Situationist International are some of the first to experiment with localized economy, slow food, and environmental impact (Barnard, 2004). These small-scale efforts remain subversive and relevant, informing a larger resistance to contemporary globalization as a shift towards local and independent producers also resists the corporate institutions that have instigated exploitative labour practices. This parallel between the Situationists and anti-

globalization is described in detail in Naomi Klein's (1999) book *No Logo,* where she credits inspiration for 'adbusting' and 'culture jamming' to the Situationists original movement against mass media branding. While being one of the latest iterations of anti-capitalist resistance, degrowth scholarship does not draw on the work of the Situationist International as a form of inspiration, nor does it credit these efforts in the beginnings of such a critical cultural movement. In my study, household engagement with degrowth politics and practices can be considered "situations" that inform alternative values and shape alternative economic futures.

2.1.4.3 Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Despite the degrowth imperative's call for a "decolonization of the imaginary" (Demaria et al., 2019; Latouche, 2010, 2015; Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019), the approach of ecological economics remains very much colonial in nature. The very ideas that inform the scientific principles of this field have been "rediscovered" and in fact originate from peoples and ways of life that have been erased, assumed or ignored by the Euro-Western academy (Todd, 2014). Ancient narratives and political systems cultivated by and for Indigenous Peoples for centuries focus on inclusive conceptions of society (i.e., relations with water, plants, even fossil fuels) that require trust, accountability, consent and reciprocity in the face of seasonal, interannual and environmental changes (King & Yesno, 2019; Mcgregor, 2014; Peacock & Wisuri, 2009). Ecological economics has yet again appropriated and displaced Indigenous beliefs and lived experience away from its cultural roots and towards the credit of white European scholars and Western science, despite the fact that this ecologically-informed "steady-state" dynamic has been thriving for millennia.

Further, many Indigenous scholars resist the idea of an "ecological crisis" fixed in time and space, and instead refer to the historical and ongoing enslavement, decimation and genocide of Indigenous peoples and colonies as core drivers of continual ecological and social collapse (Davis & Todd, 2017; Waziyatawin, 2012). More recent critiques of the so-called 'Anthropocene' argue against universalizing the experience of a changing climate and to pay close attention to differences between lived experience, geographies and governments that necessarily inform complicity in the processes of colonization:

> the forced displacement that many tribal communities suffered involved adaptation to entirely new environments, to new climates, new ecosystems, new plants and animals. These processes of environmental transformation and forced displacement can be understood as climate change, or more broadly, a preview of what it is like to live under the conditions of the Anthropocene (Davis & Todd, 2017: 771).

In order to address the changing climate, ecological economists must work to dismantle the harmful ongoing colonial legacies that oppress Indigenous knowledge systems, and work to legitimize these systems as legal orders through which Indigenous peoples can seek sovereignty and self-determination (Gobby & Ivey, 2020; King & Yesno, 2019).

Taking a ‘kincentric’ perspective on climate change, Whyte (2019) describes how relational qualities such as trust, consent, accountability and reciprocity are pivotal foundations to Indigenous philosophical traditions and conceptions of society. These relational qualities are essential for collective action at all scales, including trade systems, flood control or migration. Despite taking significant time and dedication to foster, Whyte argues it is these qualities that are needed to mobilize the solidarity and commitment needed globally to address climate change. Without prioritizing relational qualities, the implementation of climate solutions will inevitably perpetuate the very harms – displacement, dispossession, exclusion, denial – that drive climate change in the first place. Much can be learned by the ecological economics research community by listening to the voices and learning about the experiences of Indigenous Peoples. My study observes a hopeful shift in household member priorities that embody these very qualities.

2.1.4.4 Filling the Gaps

Each of the above-mentioned missed opportunities point directly at persisting gaps in the degrowth literature. A poor consideration of class analysis and equity implications in the context of the degrowth imperative demonstrates the need for a more thorough foundation in Marxist theory. In particular, workers movements that resist the exploitation of their labour are the very revolutionary struggles that can bring about autonomy and democracy to systems of production. Further, the lack of public uptake on degrowth politics speaks to the failure to credit or inform such efforts with past successful anti-capitalist mobilizations, such as the Situationist International. This citizen-led movement aimed to disrupt the everyday functioning of capitalism with momentary acts of resistance. Both Marxist and Situationist approaches aim to heal the alienation of workers caused by the growth-based economy.

Lastly, the lack of participation, leadership and acknowledgement of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in ecological economics keeps the field both narrow and blind to broader colonial contexts pivotal to understanding the climate crisis. Moreover, the resulting lack of relational foundations in EE research including trust and reciprocity will inevitably erode any efforts to mobilize a sustainable movement. It is essential that the EE community reflect on how to better integrate and amplify

Indigenous expertise in this field. We are at our humble beginnings through the efforts of the CANSEE-ICA partnership, amongst others.

2.2 A Feminist Critique

While the above gaps are essential to address for the broader EE field, they exceed the scope my thesis. My work instead narrows its approach by employing a feminist critique of the degrowth imperative (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Perkins, 2007; Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017) with a focus on the implications of economic contraction at the level of the household (Buzar et al., 2005; Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011; Sofoulis, 2015). A feminist frame allows for women, workers, children, and other subordinated groups to be seen as subjects and as as degrowth activists. Further, this framing expands the focus of degrowth scholarship from the conditions of production to the conditions of reproduction and existence (Akbulut et al., 2019; Barca, 2017).

In addition to the critical role of ecological services provided by the planet, the *caring* capacity of society is another vital service to the global economy. Just like nature's free labour which regulates a stable planet, socially reproductive labour – conducted around the world for free by (mostly) women – essentially subsidizes the economy by creating and maintaining a willing and healthy workforce (Federici, 2012; Floro, 2012; Katz, 2001; Pietilä, 1997). Feminist Economics (FE) was initially founded in the early 1990s to expose and counter the neglect by neoclassical economic analysis of women's experiences in both the formal labour market and the informal domestic household (Benería, 1995; Katz, 2001; Nelson, 1992, 2008; Perkins, 2007). Paralleling the critiques from EE, FE scholarship has been pivotal in investigating the ways women have historically been subordinated, marginalized and exploited by capitalism (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Elias & Rai, 2019; Gaard, 2001).

Drawing on FE scholarship, the daily provisioning of socially reproductive labour has been recognized by many as a crucial avenue for anti-capitalist struggle and political mobilization (Akbulut, 2019; Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Floro, 2012; Katz, 2001; Luxton, 2018). The mundane and routine labour of everyday reproduction is in itself a site of struggle as to where or how life under global capitalism is organized, valued, regulated and performed, and thus represents great potential for transforming the very power relations that exploit this labour (Bakker, 2007; Katz, 2001; Montgomerie & Tepe-belfrage, 2016). More recent literature points to the analytical and empirical value of everyday experiences as critical to a robust international political economy (Buzar et al., 2005; Gibson et al., 2015; Safri & Graham, 2010).

Concerning the material conditions of human existence, Bakker (2007) identifies three main aspects of social reproduction: *biological* reproduction of the species and the social constructions and

conditions of parenthood; reproduction of the *labour force* through various institutions of education or training; and, provisioning *caring needs* through privatized or socialized networks. This work – though greatly undervalued and often unpaid – remains critical to the daily and intergenerational reproduction of people as workers, citizens, community members and environmental stewards (Adger et al., 2009; Elias & Rai, 2019; Federici, 2012; Mezzadri, 2019). Social reproduction also intersects critically with demands for a low-carbon transition at the household scale specifically, since it includes the collection and preparation of food, conservation of water and energy, and the emotional labour of supporting household members through uncertainty. Most significant is the fact that these tasks are disproportionately managed and conducted by women (International Labour Organization, 2018). If degrowth ignores the gendered nature of unpaid care labour, it risks normalizing and further entrenching harmful and inequitable divisions of responsibility (Braun and Traore, 2015; Wheeler & Glucksmann, 2015).

Many FE scholars insist that the root of women's exploitation can be found in the gendered division of labour between the productive (i.e., public, male-dominated market economy) and reproductive (i.e., private, female-dominated domestic household) economic spheres (Federici, 2009; Gaard, 2001; Katz, 2001; Mies, 1998). The unpaid reproductive labour (i.e., food, love, support) performed by women is viewed by FE as being as critical to the rise of capitalism as was the waged worker in the factory, since reproductive labour subsidizes both waged work and the processes of capital accumulation (Bakker, 2007; Federici, 2009; Luxton, 2018; Mies, 1998). The maintenance and performance of the production/ reproduction dualism is seen as the main catalyst of the capitalist crisis. As such, un-performing the dualism remains a key practice in addressing and overcoming the capitalist economic regime (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2009; Mellor, 1997; Mies, 2007).

2.2.1 Acknowledging Limits

The above framings help to tease apart some of the harmful and incorrect assumptions in conventional economic thought. From a mainstream macroeconomic perspective, paid workers contribute their time and energy to the workplace in exchange for income, which is spent on taxes and life's necessities. In this view neither the household nor the government are viewed as producers; the capacity to produce is "the monopoly of firms" (Elson, 1998). The quality and availability of labour power as well as other social assets such as establishing and maintaining societal norms, ethics and citizenship, are either ignored, assumed, or taken for granted.

Taking a gender-aware analysis of the macro view, Elson (1998) argues that the domestic sector (i.e., households) is a key component to the functioning of the global economy by playing a

foundational role in the production of people with a capacity to work, a sense of ethics and citizenship, and the skills to communicate build lasting relationships. Households establish the moral codes that inform society, determine the quality of the economy's labour power, and build foundational relationships essential to the functioning of global politics.

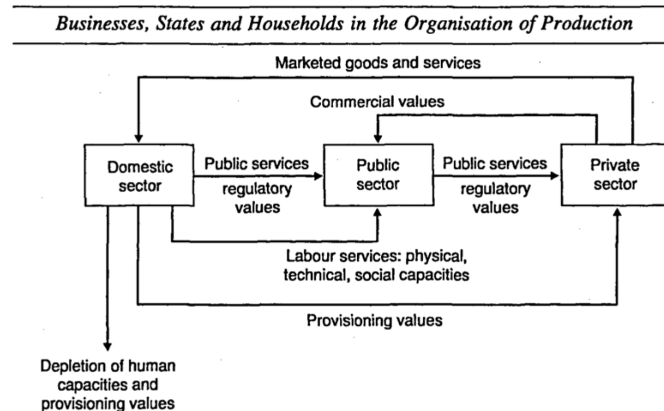

Figure 3. The Circular Flow of Output of Goods and Services (Elson, 1998: 203)

Elson sees the domestic sphere, and more specifically the upbringing of children, as the primary site of production for social assets fundamental to the functioning of the economic system. As such, Elson proposes a circular flow of output and values between the domestic, public and private sector, whereby public and labour services are produced including physical, technical and social capacities of the population (Figure 3). The moral order of society can be considered a social asset produced from within the domestic sector that informs both private and public sector values and practices. Of particular note is Elson's argument that human capacities in the domestic sector deplete over time, and so they are another aspect of the economy that should *not* be assumed as infinite or constant. This echoes EE analyses of waste heat and matter as draining the ecological foundations of our economy over time. Sustainability scholars must be sensitive to this material limitation of socially reproductive labour, and allocate responsibilities accordingly.

2.2.2 Ecofeminist Political Economy

Ecofeminism was initially inspired by a feminist-activist who recognized the capacity of women to bring about an ecological revolution (D'Eaubonne, 1974). It was founded in the idea that the treatment and position of nature in mainstream economics is inextricably linked historically, symbolically, politically and economically to how women are treated (Gaard & Gruen, 1993). One example of their intersection is with the provisioning of water, an essential resource for life, hydration

and sanitation. Water, as a utility in a pipeline, is valued economically. In contrast, water gathered and carried for many hours across long distances by women in the Majority World has no economic value, and yet remains a critical resource and deciding factor for whether the communities of these women can grow food and survive. Ecofeminism has prompted multiple debates, publications and conferences that expand diverse historical, linguistic, spiritual, epistemological, political and ethical perspectives on these topics (Warren, 2000).

Employing an historical-material analysis, an ecofeminist approach to economics unites the spheres of ecological and feminist approaches to expose the parallels between the exploitation of women, nature and other marginalized groups in the functioning of capitalism (Gaard & Gruen, 1993; Mellor, 2006; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). Labours of both ecological and social reproduction are systematically diverted away from maintaining the necessities of life and towards the stimulation of economic growth in the productive sphere at unsustainable rates. By acknowledging this parallel phenomenon, rather than a climate, environmental or social crisis, ecofeminism proposes the capitalist economy is causing a *crisis in reproduction* (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Floro, 2012; Fraser, 2016).

An ecofeminist frame draws parallels between the reproductive dynamics of social and ecological labour, acknowledging these resources remain critical but assumed factors of production in mainstream economics. While these labours are structurally externalized (i.e., largely unpaid) from formal economic accounts, they remain crucial to the functioning of any economy (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2009; Merchant, 2006; Mies, 1998; Plumwood, 1993). Ecofeminist analysis reveals the value-producing properties of reproductive labour, such that both social and ecological reproduction absorb the various costs of capital and thus subsidize the process of capital accumulation (Mezzadri, 2019).

2.2.3 Reproduction within the Doughnut

Acknowledging the critical social foundations identified in feminist economics, Raworth's "Doughnut Economics" (2017) concept offers an integrative framework that merges the social and ecological dimensions of the global economy identified in FE and EE critiques. Building on humanity's basic needs identified by the Rio+20 meetings and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, sufficient food, water, housing and education are among twelve of the basics that provide a social foundation of the world's economy (Figure 4). This framing highlights the necessity of both ecological *and* social foundations for inclusive and sustainable economies.

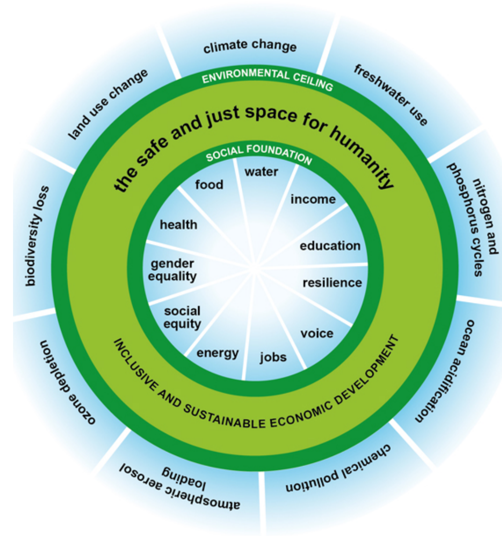

Figure 4. Doughnut Economics Model (Raworth, 2017: 38)

The doughnut framework "changes the goal" from economies that grow, whether or not people and the planet thrive, to economies that make us thrive whether or not there is quantitative economic growth (Raworth, 2017). Mixing her metaphors, Raworth sees the doughnut framework as a twenty-first century compass that can guide global society into a safe and just operating space on our shared planetary home. In her view, the goal is to reduce economic activity within the bounds of the outer ecological limits, but maintain social foundations that meet humanity's basic needs.

To shift successfully into this safe and just space, Raworth identifies five main factors: stabilizing the population through access to basic needs; the equitable distribution of resources; redefining the "good life"; technological capacities; and governance structures at multiple scales. Raworth contends that while ongoing policy debates on the above issues are certainly significant for shaping humanity's prospects for safe and just economic future, transforming mindsets away from conventional economic thinking and towards alternative possibilities is just as critical to success (Raworth, 2017). As such, developing the political will and desire for such policy changes remains a key aspect of mobilizing a degrowth future. This echoes the call by Latouche (2015) for a "decolonization of the imaginary", and what others conceptualize as an escape from the economy or economism (Akbulut, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Fournier, 2008). Fostering transformative alternatives requires breaching the binary of capitalist vs non-capitalist, and embracing the diversity of existing experiments, practices and subjects that serve to expand conventional notions of economy (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2011; Schmid & Smith, 2020; Turker & Murphy, 2021).

2.3 Articulating a Degrowth Politics

While ecological economics was founded on both scientific *and* ethical critiques of growth economics, a dedicated emphasis on equity and justice remains unforgivably absent (Bauhardt, 2014; Perkins et al., 2005; Perkins, 2007; Spencer, Perkins, & Erickson, 2018). Although the field analyzes the ecological dimensions of economic activity extensively, it field fails to adequately define who constitutes a social subject or what constitutes the place of labour in the politics of a society without growth (Akbulut, 2019; Barca, 2017). An ecofeminist political economy framing has never been more urgent.

EE remains blind to how class, ability, race, age or gender affect the distribution of risk, responsibility and labour hours for a degrowth transition. The necessity of contracting the physical size of the economy in the face of ecological overshoot is well established, but EE research fails to address how the labour for this contraction will be divided (Barca, 2017; Brownhill et al., 2012). Further, it overlooks the unequal access to resources or information because it disregards the relationships between capitalism, sexism and racism (Hanaček, Roy, Avila, & Kallis, 2020; Nelson, 1997; Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). Consequently, EE takes for granted, and regards as infinite, the unpaid labour of socially reproducing a degrowth transition (Bauhardt, 2014; Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Floro, 2012).

In addition, degrowth scholars pay little attention to the process involved in mobilizing degrowth solutions (Buch-Hansen, 2018; Joutsenvirta, 2016). In other words, degrowth research risks perpetuating an elitist culture of purity through what Romano (2012) calls “voluntary simplicity” by making the movement exclusive to those with the means and time to implement degrowth visions and values (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Romano, 2012; Shotwell, 2016). If it is not careful, the degrowth imperative could serve to reinforce class divisions rather than eradicate them if it does not take care to distinguish scale and culpability in its critique of “consumers” or “polluters”. Degrowth proposals fail to account for broader socio-economic conditions that may constrain participation in the movement, creating an exclusive and elite form of activism that rewards a privileged few for their capacity to distance themselves voluntarily from extractivist economies. It further fails to incorporate activities and actors that may not self-declare to be sustainability- or degrowth-inspired. It is crucial for degrowth research to embrace a more inclusive vision of participation and a better understanding of the barriers preventing such participation.

The question of who is demanding degrowth, how, and with what resources, is a fundamental issue. Barca (2017) warns, for example, that obscuring the white and middle-class nature of the

movement narrows the possibilities for political action and weakens the degrowth imperative politically. Barca asks, "*What is the political subject of a degrowth revolution?*", observing that personal commitments to reducing consumption or work hours, or participating in direct action are not the only avenues. Akbulut (2019) complements this criticism, arguing that the degrowth imperative would remain limited without effectively disrupting, or "dethroning" economic growth as a societal goal, and "re-orienting" economic relations along different principles. Akbulut concludes that "a politics of degrowth can only be effective to the extent that it can organise the material bases of social (re)production… in ways that articulate new bases of livelihood as well as new values not colonised by economism" (Akbulut, 2019: 2). Having a better understanding of how the labours of social reproduction are negotiated and organized, and what prevents participation in degrowth activism or policies, is essential to facilitating a successful degrowth transformation. This is what my thesis aims to provide.

2.3.1 Home is where the Doughnut is

This thesis draws from ecofeminist political economy because it unites the spheres of ecological and feminist approaches to expose the parallels between the exploitation of women, nature and other marginalized groups in the functioning of capitalism (Gaard & Gruen, 1993; Mellor, 2006; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000). Labours of both ecological *and* social reproduction identified in Raworth's doughnut model are systematically diverted away from maintaining the necessities of life and towards the stimulation of economic growth in the productive sphere at unsustainable rates. Ecofeminist analysis reveals how social and ecological reproduction absorb the various costs of capital, thereby subsidizing capital accumulation "for free" (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; M. S. Floro, 2012; Mezzadri, 2019).

While acknowledging that processes of reproductive labour are constructed at the intersections of age, gender, race, class and nation, little research engages specifically with the concept of the *everyday* due to a macro-level bias in the political economy field (Elias & Rai, 2019). But a focus on the domestic sphere has never been more prudent, particularly in the context of climate or economic instability (Buzar et al., 2005; Fordham, 1998; Gibson et al., 2015). As the primary site of embodied demands for shelter, food, clothing and community, households offer a critical scale of analysis for investigating the material, emotional, and socio-economic dimensions of provisioning reproductive labour within and beyond capitalism (Elias & Rai, 2019; Gibson, Head, & Carr, 2015; Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011). Though pivotal for understanding the embodied and embedded practices of everyday life, the household remains an undertheorized scale of analysis for sustainability research – particularly

in overdeveloped nations, which are assumed to have more sophisticated adaptive capacities (Buzar et al., 2005; Lane & Watson, 2012; Organo et al., 2013).

As such, the above subtitle – *home is where the doughnut is* – should be taken as both figurative and literal. Figuratively, this phrase asks us to consider the ideal conditions whereby household members can gather and enjoy warm baked goods together. They are food secure, have a considerable work-life balance, are empowered by the knowledge and curiosity to endeavor in a baking project, have access to and skills for the necessary tools and appliances, and maintain the social ties to make it a fruitful and memorable experience. Literally, the household plays a fundamental role in fostering the reproductive labours of Raworth's doughnut model. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the domestic sphere produces critical social assets such as quality workers and informed citizens that build the social foundations of the inner doughnut ring.

The everyday acts of reproduction are thus crucial avenues for anti-capitalist struggle, de-alienating the labour process, and reclaiming decision-making power over the allocation of surplus value (Barca, 2017; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Elias & Rai, 2019; Mezzadri & Majumder, 2020). In mobilizing a shift towards an "emancipatory ecological class consciousness" and the reconceptualization of work (Barca, 2017), a degrowth politics can reclaim the economy as a public domain occupied and democratically managed by citizens (Fournier, 2008). The pivotal and ongoing role of social reproduction in this regard is best elucidated below:

> within the practice of everyday life inheres the possibility for rupture breakdown, crisis, reconstruction and renewal. Social reproduction is not ensured, for neither the mundane practices of everyday life nor the hegemonic practices of capital guarantee its outcome. The critical importance of social reproduction and everyday life in both theory and practice is that they are grounds for struggle in which active historical subjects reproduce themselves, their labor power, and the contradictory social relations on which production depends. Reproduction is a conscious and often contested process, change is immanent and ongoing (Katz & Kirby, 1991).

It is thus the processes of everyday household reproduction specifically that can give way to a politics of degrowth. As Demaria observes: "degrowth is not the alternative, but rather a matrix of alternatives that opens the human adventure to a plurality of destinies and spaces for creativity, while removing the lead blanket of economic totalitarianism" (Demaria, 2019).

2.4 Catalyzing Disasters

Following Gibson et al. (2015), this thesis seeks to disrupt normative framings of sustainability transitions in the face of climate, economic and socio-political uncertainty in the twenty-first century. Rather than assuming stable periods for controlled and incremental change, degrowth researchers need

to face up to the reality of unpredictable and catastrophic events given an increasingly unstable climate future (O'Neill & Handmer, 2012; Park et al., 2012). Further, the degrowth movement must prepare for the pushback from political elites whose interests are threatened by change to provisioning systems (Vogel, Steinberger, O'Neill, Lamb, & Krishnakumar, 2021). In such a context of increasing and concurrent environmental, social or political upheaval, degrowth "by design" should not be the only avenue explored – nor should a smooth transition to low-carbon alternatives be presumed. Degrowth research and practice have to confront the devastating implications of extreme events and be ready to counter capitalism's exploitation of such occurrences as they increase in scale and intensity over time.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases are now at levels unseen in at least the last 800,000 years and are expected to continue to intensify, threatening a global mean surface temperature increase by 2100 of 5.7^{oC} when accounting for climate uncertainty (IPCC, 2021). Present estimates expect a 1.5 degree increase in temperature by 2050. Increased temperatures will exacerbate climate-related risks to public health, food and water security, biodiversity and political stability by an increasing number of people and regions around the world (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018).

A hotter and more unstable climate future brings the additional feature of increased systemic shocks that can result from rapid change in complex adaptive systems (Gibson et al., 2015). Such shocks will have profound and far-reaching somatic, affective and psychological consequences. Research on situations of extreme flooding (Whittle et al., 2012), drought (Sartore et al., 2008) and the global financial crisis (Demantas & Myers, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2011) has already underlined how extreme events shake conceptualizations of gender, personal identity and belonging, threaten mental health, and demand ample time, commitment and emotional intelligence and resources to manage. From the perspective of a political ecologies of disasters, it is less important to foster cultural change and more crucial to learn how to "survive" forced and imposed circumstances (Gibson et al., 2015).

On larger scales such as cities, regions or nations, disruptive events can be catastrophic not only in the short term but in the longer recovery process. By leveraging times of turmoil, market imperatives are often further imposed on populations that may have had greater capacity for resistance in the past. Naomi Klein's (2007) *Shock Doctrine* labels this process "disaster capitalism" whereby corporate and government elites take advantage of moments of upheaval to advance market agendas, minimize public welfare and maximize privatization. The use of (electric) shock therapy and sensory deprivation during prisoner interrogation has been found to make prisoners more likely to comply to demands. In the same vein, the sheer shock to the system brought about by disruptive environmental or

economic events can temporarily incapacitate populations from thinking critically, organizing collective demands and advocating for their needs effectively (Zaman, 2010).

While the population is focused on the emergency at hand, a "systematic raiding" of the public sphere takes place by corporate elite imperatives (Klein, 2007). Following the shock of the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, the Department of Homeland Security added $130 billion to the private sector between 2001 and 2006, becoming a larger industry than the American film and music industry combined. Disaster capitalism effectively reformed the education system[7] in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina; resulted in the building of luxury beachfront hotels in Sri Lanka; and infrastructure contracting in Iraq (Klein, 2007). Following national, economic or political disasters, disaster capitalism takes advantage of a brief moment where the public is unable to protect their interests.

Though disturbing, the process of 'systemic raiding' is not new for a many people whose lifeways were necessarily altered or dismantled to make way for capitalism (Todd, 2014). Indigenous communities around the world have been expending their labour, bodies and spirits to resist colonial dispossession for generations. Colonial occupation has led to unprecedented biodiversity loss, the poisoning of land and water resources, and the assimilation and genocide of Indigenous lifeways (Waziyatawin, 2012). Surviving Indigenous populations have had no choice but to increase their reliance on colonial government systems that worked systematically to dispossess Indigenous Peoples from their lands, with the ultimate goal of extermination (Freeman, 2010). The everyday realities of Indigenous communities stand in dark contrast to the narratives of an impending climate disaster, as Armageddon has already happened. The question becomes which crises will service to finally instigate change in the face of a burning planet?

Such turbulent or "unsettled times" can also create opportunities for innovation, adaptation and change (Elrick-Barr, Preston, Thomsen, & Smith, 2014; Eriksen et al., 2015; Gibson-Graham, 2011; C. Gibson et al., 2015; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010). The process of adapting to crisis both constitutes and contests persisting authorities, subjectivities and knowledges, highlighting the fundamentally political nature of adaptation and its distributional implications (Eriksen et al., 2015). Embracing the likelihood of forced and unstable futures, Gibson et al. (2015: 420) situate sustainability practices in the home as "a catalog of resources for survival", emphasizing the critical role of social and community capacity in

[7] Following Hurricane Katrina, locally controlled public schools were replaced with charter schools run by private organizations but remained publicly funded. While one of the most cited examples of educational reform, many argue that this celebration fails to take into account the demographic shift in the student body, artificially low staffing expenses, and other structural factors that insidiously leveraged the so-called "opportunity" of the Hurricane (Strauss, 2018).

disaster response. Temporary shifts and coping strategies in response to disruptive events thus offer possible pathways to facilitate a low-carbon transition (Boons et al., 2020).

For example, Meah (2014) argues that domestic responsibilities offer an opportunity to exercise agency and resistance – particularly by members of the non-dominant class or race. Research on people's experiences in the kitchen show that, rather than a place of drudgery and oppression, cooking 'at home' can enable a sense of status and power among migrants and ethnic minorities, instill feelings of influence, authority and achievement, and celebrate skill, knowledge and identity (Meah, 2014). The household was again framed as a space to foster resistance to the demands of capitalist production in a study with Jamaican data-entry operators (Mullings, 2010). Household coping strategies such as the pooling of incomes and the informal exchange of unpaid labour created the conditions to resist the low-pay and high productivity demands of industry. Understanding these modes of resistance, agency and authority are key to mobilizing public support for alternative economic futures.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

A review of degrowth research reveals that the socially reproductive labour politics of a degrowth transition are largely ignored in the literature. This leaves a major gap in the policy implications of the degrowth imperative by making sweeping assumptions about the availability (and willingness) of the everyday person to mobilize and sustain a low-carbon transition. This is why I have applied an ecofeminist political economy lens to degrowth analysis: to better encapsulate the ecological *and* social labours necessary for a sustainable economy. Such a framing is critical due to the limited research of household climate adaptation in overdeveloped regions, and the increasing need to instigate change in the midst of compounding crises. Understanding the responses to such disruptive events will be essential to informing a more robust degrowth agenda. The following chapter outlines a degrowth-by-disaster scenario to explore these questions further and set the context for the case study in this thesis.

Chapter 3. Examining the 'Imposed Degrowth' Scenario

What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?

1. *Examine parallels between COVID-19 lockdown measures and the degrowth imperative*

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of March 2020 was a devastating wake up call to all sustainability scholars and activists about the challenges ahead in mobilizing a low-carbon transition. While the degrowth imperative is seen as a necessary precondition to the steady-state economy, the intentional "by design" pathway for change is not guaranteed. In fact, my thesis argues that with increasing climate instability, such intentional and equitable futures may not be accessible at all. It is therefore a critical task for ecological economists to conceptualize lockdown as an imposed degrowth scenario to understand the devastations and possible opportunities if society shifts toward a steady-state. The following chapter outlines this very argument by examining a series of parallels observed between lockdown and the degrowth imperative. Moreover, it is through an understanding of the everyday household's experience that we can begin to comprehend the emergent subjectivities and consequences of unplanned change. As such, this chapter also provides a geographic focus for my thesis case study, introduces the demographic profiles of study participants, and draws on the literature to define the actions and politics associated of a degrowth transition

3.1 A Fair Comparison?

Degrowth by design requires a long-term downscaling of production and consumption systems at a pace that allows alternative lifeways to thrive as priorities shift to qualitative development rather than quantitative growth. In contrast, during the imposed degrowth of lockdown, governments struggled with two conflicting priorities: public health and economic growth. Governments around the world frequently delayed economic shut-downs or compromised public health in order to maintain sporadic growth. Billions of dollars were spent rescuing unsustainable industries such as airlines (due to their dependence on fossil fuels) with public funds rather than kick-starting robust economic alternatives. Societal well-being and millions of lives were sacrificed in order to maintain some semblance of a growing economy.

One of the major differences between lockdown and degrowth is the reactive – rather than proactive – response measures. In a degrowth by design scenario, economic and social priorities are researched and planned thoroughly before implementation (Daly, 2017; Victor, 2019). Further, they

are constructed in consultation with local community contexts to ensure needs are met (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Hanaček et al., 2020; Kallis, 2019). Lockdown measures largely consisted of emergency measures that attempted to intervene in an ongoing crisis, and mitigate the impacts of this crisis rather than the core crisis drivers. For example, accelerating biodiversity loss, hyper-mobility, urban density and industrial supply chains typical of capitalism all contributed to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Industry bailouts, short-term financial benefits, and contradictory lockdown measures were some of the core aspects of government response. Emergency measures responded to combat the emergent outcomes of the pandemic on society, rather than implementing policies to eliminate the threats of an inefficient socio-economic system.

Global lockdown measures also failed to uphold key ethical considerations that are at the core of the degrowth imperative. Unlike degrowth by design, lockdown disproportionately disadvantaged the most vulnerable members of society. Gender, race and class minorities were thrust into frontline roles without being afforded sick leave or protective equipment (DegrowthInfo, 2020; Kolinjivadi, 2020). Communities without access to basic sanitation measures struggled to keep themselves safe from the spread of the virus (Silva et al., 2021). Individuals experiencing homelessness were at an increased risk of infection as they faced additional barriers to public health directives while critical services such as food banks were shut down (Perri, Dosani, & Hwang, 2020). The unintentional and harmful outcomes of global lockdown measures do not compare to the objectives of a justice-informed and intentional degrowth of the global economy.

Many degrowth advocates remain adamant that experiences and outcomes of the COVID-19 lockdown should <u>not</u> be compared or equated to the goals of the degrowth imperative (Paulson, D'Alisa, Demaria, Kallis, & Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance, 2020). They argue that, although there were significant decreases in natural resource use, waste generation and economic growth as a result of lockdown, "unevenly-suffered trauma, impoverishment, and death are not features of degrowth; on the contrary, these are precisely the kind of phenomena that planned degrowth aims to avoid" (ibid: 1). But it is precisely through these failures of the present economic system that the sudden and chaotic responses to a global pandemic underscore the need for a more sustainable alternative. Moreover, lockdown measures definitively demonstrated that degrowth at the global scale is possible. Most importantly, the challenges faced by everyday households reorganizing in response to the pandemic illustrate that the low-carbon transition will be anything but easy.

Despite enthusiastic confidence in a collaborative and controlled economic contraction by design, there is little research on the 'by disaster' avenue of the degrowth imperative. This dissertation uses COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures as a case study for an imposed, by disaster, degrowth

scenario whereby the economic contraction takes place in response to external events, rather than being mobilized intentionally through policy and activism. Degrowth by disaster is a particularly pronounced research gap in the degrowth literature. In the face of increasing climate and political instability, understanding the implications of a degrowth by disaster scenario grows more urgent than ever. It is also a major and unexplored research imperative to understand the disproportionate social impacts and burdens of responsibility that occur during externally imposed crises as climate instability, wealth inequality and societal unrest continue to increase in frequency and impact. This research contributes to the deep lacunae left by degrowth advocates, and sustainability scholarship more broadly, by problematizing the notion of an assumed 'smooth' transition and examining potential outcomes of a disaster-imposed shift to low-carbon alternatives.

Embracing the "degrowth by disaster" avenue, we can acknowledge that climate instability, biodiversity loss and many other changing planetary forces are leading to a greater probability of society-wide disruption and collapse (Herrington, 2021). This is not new, as many scholars assert that capitalism is a system designed in disruption and recovery, rather than stability (Harvey, 2014; Zanoni et al., 2017). However, the disruptions continue to increase in severity and impact, resulting in much cause for concern and attention to strategies for crisis management and recovery. It is a moral and scientific imperative that sustainability research specifically, but the academic institution more broadly, take seriously the notion of assumed environmental, economic or even political stability in its outputs. This is part of the reason one of the goals of this thesis is to emphasize the unstable nature of our shared climate uncertain future, and identify avenues of preparedness and collaboration in response to planetary instability.

3.2 Lockdown as Disaster

Rivalling 2016 as the warmest year on record, 2020 was also record-breaking for the total number of wildfires and acres burned in Northern America (IQAir, 2020). Between 7-33% of COVID-19 deaths were attributable to long-term air pollution exposure from anthropogenic emissions, and could have been prevented by improving air quality – devastating proof of how we are suffocating ourselves and the planet (Pozzer et al., 2020). Due to the global scale of the pandemic, countries around the world saw a dramatic increase in biomedical and healthcare waste of 300-400% and up to 600% in China (Asian Development Bank, 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2021). Majority World countries in particular struggled greatly with biomedical waste management. Global food waste reached obscene levels as lockdown restricted the movement of workers and disrupted supply chains. Dairy Farmers of America estimated that farmers were dumping 3.7 million gallons of milk each day by April 2020, and

a single chicken processer was destroying 750,000 unhatched eggs every week (Yaffe-Bellany & Corkery, 2020). While many industries ground to a halt, logging and illegal mining saw a spike in activity. The Amazon rainforest experienced a 50% increase in forest loss in the first four months of 2020 compared to 2019, making it one of the worst years on record (Fair, 2020).

The social consequences of the global lockdown were also devastating. People lost jobs and livelihoods at alarming rates. By April 2020, unemployment claims in the United States alone exceeded 26 million, a rate ten times faster than employment loss during the 2008/9 financial crisis (IEA, 2020). The International Monetary Fund claimed that close to 95 million people fell below the threshold of extreme poverty in 2020, reversing a two-decade-long trend of global poverty reduction (IMF, 2021). Lockdown measures also exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and precariousness. In Jingzhou, China, a city in Hubei Province where the COVID-19 virus originated, domestic violence reports at a local police station in February 2020 were triple those of the year before (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2020). Reports of domestic abuse jumped 36% in Paris, France and 25% in the United Kingdom, with a UK-wide helpline website receiving 150% more visits than February 2019 (Al Jazeera Media Network, 2020; Kelly & Morgan, 2020). Domestic violence searches on Google also increased 75% in Australia (Poate, 2020).

These statistics point to the mental health toll of lockdown, isolation, and the pandemic more broadly. The pandemic exposed and also exacerbated persisting gaps in mental health services, reduced accessibility to these services, and devastated the capacity of the mental health workforce. Risk factors including economic and job insecurity, social isolation, barriers to mental health support, and decreased community support have only increased as a result of the pandemic. Mental health conditions including anxiety, mood and disorders relating to stress and trauma continue to be leading contributors to disability worldwide (Whiteford, Ferrari, & Degenhardt, 2016). U.S. adults reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression jumped 30% in December 2020 compared to the previous year (Abbott, 2021), and research suggests that job losses as a result of the pandemic may result in over 9,500 additional suicides per year worldwide (Kawohl & Nordt, 2020). Moreover, these impacts are particularly severe in the most impoverished and vulnerable regions of the world (Kola et al., 2021). The uncertainty, stigma, and fear of the COVID-19 virus, coupled with strict measures such as lockdown and isolation, have had unprecedented effects on mental well-being.

3.3 Lockdown as a Window to Other Worlds

There are several parallels between the degrowth imperative and global lockdown measures. The most immediately obvious lies between the degrowth call to slow the growth rates of the global

economy, and lockdown's internationally coordinated effort to 'flatten the curve', to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This included cancelling large gatherings (i.e., festivals, conferences), imposing regional and international travel and mobility restrictions, and encouraging physical distancing where possible (Roberts, 2020). As a pandemic mitigation effort, this creates a window of opportunity for vaccine development while minimizing caseloads on hospitals and essential workers (Christakis, 2020). Slowing the spread of the virus required slowing the economy, as non-essential workers were instructed to stay home resulting in major disruptions to pivotal aspects of the global market. By mid-March (2020), over 80 countries closed had their borders to countries with known infections, shut down non-essential businesses and schools, and imposed stay-at-home orders and quarantine regulations (The Economist, 2020). This parallels the degrowth imperative to slow and essentially halt many aspects of the global market economy in order to better align systems of production and consumption with planetary limits.

Indeed, in a matter of mere months, the world witnessed the greatest disruption to the global economy to date. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 37% between February and March 2020, with a 10% quarter over quarter contraction in April – equivalent to a 33% annual rate of decline (Casselman, 2020). Put into historical context, this contraction was more than three times as sharp as the Recession of 1958, which followed 13 years of post-war growth, and four times the size of the worst quarters of both the 1980 and 2008 recessions (Figure 5).

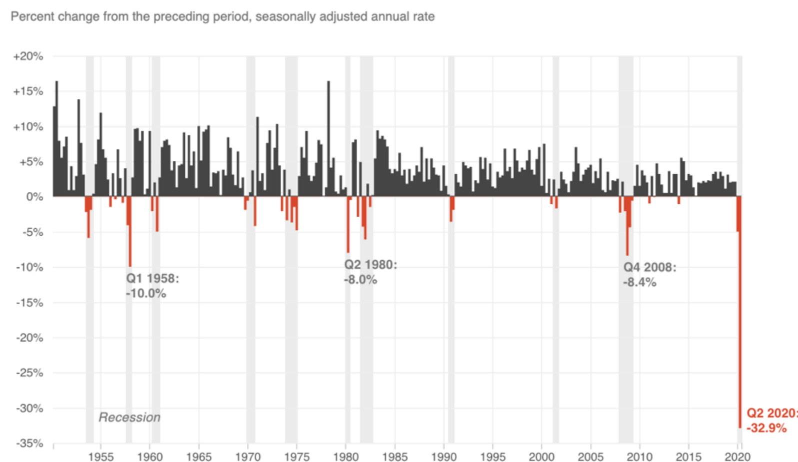

Figure 5. Historical global economic recessions (Horsley, 2020)

A number of global industries responded to this disruption in kind. According to Airports Council International, the world saw a 64.6% decline in global air passenger traffic, equivalent to removing one billion passengers from airplanes for the entire year of 2020 (Airports Council

International, 2021). International tourism came to a near halt in April 2020, and inbound tourist arrivals declined by 74% between January and December, 2020 (Vanzetti & Peters, 2021). Global merchandise trade experienced a 14.3% decline in the second quarter of 2020, the sharpest one-period drop in world trade history (World Trade Organization, 2020). As a consequence, the worldwide collapse in demand for oil and a surge in oil inventories also caused the largest one-month fall of oil prices in history, dropping 85% between January and April 2020 (Wheeler et al., 2020). Global energy demand fell 6% at the start of the pandemic, which is equivalent to India's national energy market and seven times the decline of the 2008 financial crisis (IEA, 2020).

3.3.1 An "Anthropause"

The massive scale of a global economic contraction was a boon to the health of local and global ecosystems (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Here was dramatic proof that economic contraction creates room for ecosystem health and recovery. Global lockdown produced the biggest carbon crash ever recorded – beyond any other internationally coordinated climate efforts or unplanned economic disruptions (McGrath, 2020). Global carbon dioxide emissions fell by nearly 7% or 2.4 billion tons in 2020 as a result of worldwide lockdown, the largest relative emissions fall since World War II (McSweeny & Tandon, 2020). This was also the first clear drop in global emissions since a 1.3% drop driven by the 2008/09 financial crisis.

The global stall in human activity had major implications for the planet itself, including a months-long reduction in seismic noise of up to 50% around the globe (Lecocq et al., 2020). Worldwide lockdown changed the way the Earth moved, as seismologists were able to detect the rushing of rivers, ocean waves, and many other activities previously drowned out by human activity. According to the Global Footprint Network (2020), energy consumption dropped by 9.5% and industrial logging saw an 8.4% reduction in the footprint of forest products. This led the Network to move the date of Overshoot Day, the annual date humanity consumes a year's worth of earth's resources that can be renewed, to August 22 – three weeks later than in 2019 (see Figure 6 below). With the global ecological footprint falling as a direct consequence of lockdown measures, the Network reflected on lockdown's short-term shifts in consumption, the swift government regulations and responses, and the importance of ecological regeneration in recovery efforts (Earth Overshoot Day, 2020).

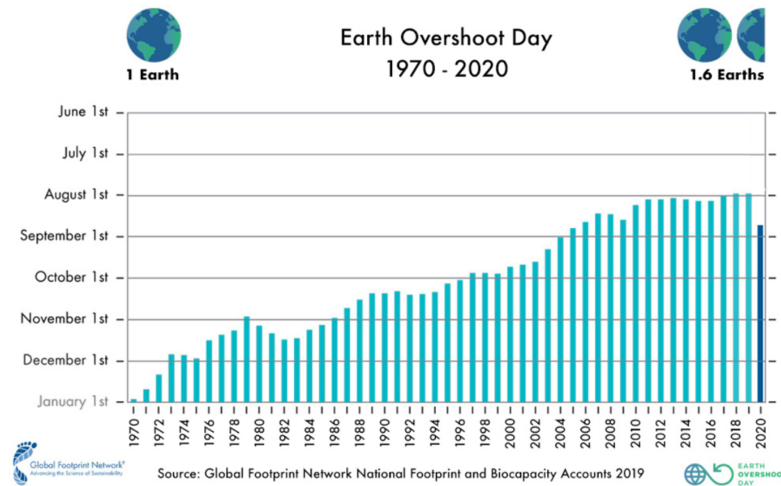

Figure 6. Historical Earth Overshoot 1970-2000 (Earth Overshoot Day, 2020)

A number of other environmental outcomes took place in response to lockdown measures (Chowdhury et al., 2021). According to the IQAir (2020) world air quality report, lockdown measures were a major and exceptional factor in global air quality during 2020, dubbing the experience the "largest-scale experiment ever" in air quality due to the temporary reduction in fossil fuel consumption. Of the 106 countries analyzed, 84% saw air quality improvements compared to 2019, and 65% of global cities also experienced air quality improvements as a direct result of lockdown measures (see Figure 7 below).

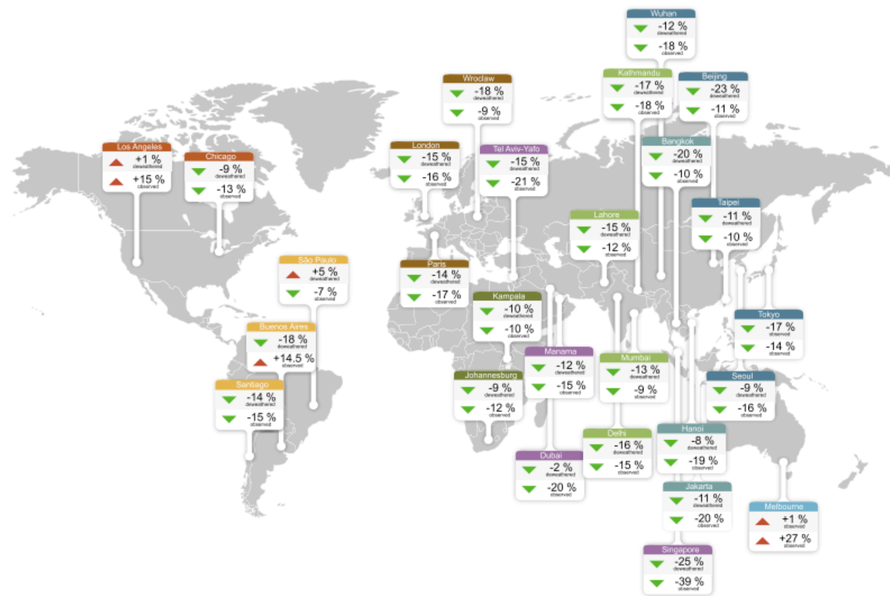

Figure 7. Annual PM2.5 level changes in 2020 compared to 2019 (IQAir, 2020: 8)

Improvements to air quality were predominantly experienced in the first major lockdown period (March 2020), but as industry and transport rebounded during the latter half of 2020 annual increases in air quality shrunk. Improvements were also offset by extreme air pollution events, including wildfires and dust storms.

Just as the air grew sweeter during lockdown, so did the water. Canals in Venice, Italy experienced a major reduction in turbidity and total suspended matter (Braga, Scarpa, Brando, Manfe, & Zaggia, 2020; Niroumand-Jadidi, Bovolo, Bruzzone, & Gege, 2020). The Yamuna River, India's longest tributary and one of the most polluted rivers in the world, saw a 40% decline in faecal coliform, biological oxygen demand and chemical oxygen demand, three common indices of water quality parameters (Patel, Mondal, & Ghosh, 2020). The stay-at-home order in Manhattan massively reduced pollutants, decreased turbidity by 40% in a section of the Hudson River (Bates, 2020).

Many other environmentally harmful activities were disrupted and improved as a result of lockdown, including noise intensity, municipal waste generation and traffic congestion (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Mousazadeh et al., 2021). More frequently reported observations of wildlife via field data and social media in 2020 also demonstrated improved ecosystem health as a result of reduced human interference. Traffic and collision data from three U.S. states estimated that road killing of large mammals decreased up to 58% due to traffic reduction between March and April 2020 (Nguyen et al., 2020). The mass nesting and breeding of many species including some endangered animals were also reported around the globe (Chowdhury et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also underscored the dangers of global wildlife poaching and trade, resulting in the adoption of legislation against wildlife consumption and trade in China (Koh, Li, & Lee, 2021).

All of these examples of decreases in environmental harms and consequent improvements to environmental health (Chowdhury et al., 2021) led to some scholars calling lockdown an "Anthropause", a demonstration of a nearly impossible global experiment of human confinement and downsizing of the consumer economy (Bates, Primack, Moraga, & Duarte, 2020; Cohen, 2020; Rutz et al., 2020). Following the Paris climate pledges (2015), the United Nations Environment Programme set the annual reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions at 7.6% between 2020 and 2030 in order to meet the 1.5ºC warming limit (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020). Lockdown got the world closest to international targets like this. Of greatest significance, global lockdown measures showed the possibilities of international co-operation in and of itself – and international coordination to achieve an economic slow-down – despite decades of resistance from the political and financial elite.

3.4 Lockdown as Proof that Alternative Economies & Values are Possible

While the socioeconomic and environmental consequences of lockdown measures remain vast and complex in nature, there are many parallels to observe between the degrowth imperative and global lockdown. First, the internationally coordinated effort to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 virus spread rivals the coordination needed to meet climate targets. Moreover, there is strong promise in the rapid mobilization of governments at a global scale to tackle a common problem, like that which took place for the Montreal Protocol to address the hole in the ozone layer (Kuttippurath & Nair, 2017).

Another parallel is the identification of *essential* life-sustaining services during a time of crisis. "Non-essential" businesses, activities and services were quickly closed down in order to minimize the spread of the virus. "Essential" services such as grocery stores and hospitals remained open, and it became a priority to provide these "essential" workers with the protective equipment against the virus. These dichotomous categories, "essential" and "non-essential" inverted social processes of status and value ascription. The very work that is traditionally under-appreciated and under-valued by neoliberal narratives, and disregarded by the conventional market, became pivotal to the future functioning of the global economy.

Degrowth advocates have long emphasized the importance of sufficiency, and of minimizing economic activity to essential services and labours that reproduce life. From this perspective, economics is about provisioning for the sustaining and flourishing of life (Hanaček, Roy, Avila, & Kallis, 2020; Jackson, 2017; Kosoy et al., 2012). Through the principles of voluntary simplicity and frugal abundance, degrowth calls for a minimally sufficient material standard of living to minimize human impact on the planet and maximize other pursuits, such as building community and culture, creating art and ideas, political participation, spiritual exploration and other pleasure-seeking pursuits that do not rely on the exchange of money. Gallant (2020) observes:

> The pandemic lockdown has taught us about the parts of our society we'd give up willingly and the parts that are more difficult to have taken away… It's certainly not what the advocates of degrowth have in mind, though many degrowthers have seen our current crisis as an ideal time to start the conversation about what exactly we can live without.

To further Gallant's comments, lockdown forced global society to prioritize the "essential", instigating hard conversations at the local level and beyond about what is truly necessary for a healthy society. The COVID-19 pandemic also instigated a deep recognition of the interconnections of our global society, demonstrated by the rapid transmission of the virus across the world and the impetus of non-essential workers to stay home and keep themselves, and each other, safe.

The COVID-19 pandemic also inspired businesses around the world to re-tool their operations and help fight the spread of the virus. Nordstrom, the largest employer of tailors in the United States,

partnered with one of the largest hospital networks in the nation and pledged to sew one million medical masks to be distributed to frontline workers (Nordstrom, 2020). Automakers Ford and GM re-tooled their facilities to produce vital medical equipment including ventilators and respirators (Casey, 2020; Wayland, 2020). Bacardi-owned manufacturing sites in the U.S., U.K., France, Italy and Mexico diverted global production systems to produce hand sanitizers, donating some of these products to local organizations and emergency responders as well as its own employees and contractors (Bacardi Limited, 2020).

These actions demonstrate that the many long-standing barriers to transitioning various production-intensive sectors are factors of mere political will, and highlight the quick timeline in which global-scale distribution and consumption networks can reorganize. The flexibility of conventional systems was also clearly demonstrated by the novelty and speed with which public health legislation was passed worldwide. Governments restricted mobility, mandated mask-wearing and physical-distancing, set out protective equipment requirements, and the cancelled mass gatherings to limit virus spread (World Health Organization, 2020b). The permeability of protocol was demonstrated at all scales, such as in the United States where cross-state licensure regulations for doctors were relaxed due to the pandemic's urgency (Christakis, 2020).

An unsettling event such as a global pandemic "upends our belief that the world should be predictable, ordered, or even comprehensible. It threatens the idea that things happen for reasons and that we might, by using science, be able to discern those reasons, however obscure they might be. It threatens the idea that we can make rational predictions and plans" (Christakis, 2020: 32-3). All systems, including ecological, economic and social systems, can be as unstable as the daily weather and subject to non-linear change. The following section explores just what this kind of upending looked like at the level of a major city, setting the geographical context for this thesis.

3.5 Outcomes of Lockdown in Toronto, ON

At the time of writing, there are nearly 2200 active COVID-19 cases in the City of Toronto, and the virus has killed 4,455 of the city's residents (City of Toronto, 2022a). The share of vaccinated Toronto residents (18+) is 92% for one dose, 90% for two doses, 60% for three doses and 17% for four (City of Toronto, 2022c). While the majority of deaths in Toronto have been people over the age of 80 years old, largely due to outbreaks in the city's underfunded long-term care facilities, the pandemic has systematically exacerbated persisting socioeconomic inequities causing detrimental outcomes (Toronto Foundation, 2020). For example, citizens earning less than $30,000 annually were 5.3 times more likely to be affected by the COVID-19 virus than those with incomes above $150,000 (ibid). Further, by May

2020 the most racialized parts of Toronto had ten times more cases than the least racialized areas (ibid). Despite the narratives of togetherness, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the harsh realities of an unequal society. Appendix E provides a detailed description of the timeline of lockdown measures imposed in Toronto by various levels of government between March 2020 and April 2021.

In September 2020, Toronto had the highest unemployment rate in the entire country, sitting between 10 and 14% during the course of the year (Toronto Foundation, 2020). Crucially, racialized workers, women with children and youth were the most severely impacted by pandemic-related job loss. For example, the unemployment rate among Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) youth is 32.3% compared to 18% for white youth, making BIPOC employment rates nearly twice as high as white Canadians. Non-white workers were also more likely to be classified as essential due to the nature of the job, forcing these workers onto the frontlines of the pandemic. Approximately 30% of Toronto citizens struggled to pay for essentials like rent, food and utilities in the last year. Interestingly, the CERB $2,000 monthly benefit payments were significantly higher than the Ontario Disability Support Program ($1,169) and Ontario Works ($733) demonstrating the challenges of relying on social assistance programs (Toronto Foundation, 2020).

By April 3, 2020 ridership of the GO Transit system dropped 90% compared to the same time in 2019 (Westoll, 2020a). The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) also saw a ridership drop of 85%, as well as a loss of $90 million in monthly revenue (City News Toronto, 2020e). Of the proportion of transit users that halted uptake during the pandemic, 37% reported they were not prepared to use public transit again until they are vaccinated or the pandemic ends. Interestingly, transit usage during the pandemic was tied closely to income such that 41% of those with less than $40,000 household income were still using transit compared to 14% of people with $125,000 or more in household income (Toronto Foundation, 2020). Three-quarters of public transit users who stopped uptake during the pandemic shifted to personal cars (Savage & Turcotte, 2020). Park usage in Toronto doubled over the summer of 2020, though facilities and accessibility remain unequal across the city.

Between July 2019 and July 2020, 50,375 people left Toronto for more affordable and less dense areas such as the suburbs and rural areas (Agecoutay & Andersen, 2021). The urban-to-suburban trend was particularly accelerated by the pandemic due to the shift to work-from-home and the unaffordable housing market. Indeed, prices for new houses rose 0.9% in Toronto and 1.3% across Canada between February and August, 2020 (Verma & Husain, 2020). Interestingly, New York City's population declined by 4-5% overall, but some of the wealthiest neighbourhoods saw a decline of more than 50% (Coven, Gupta, & Yao, 2020). More research is needed to better understand the wealth

dynamics at play for migration to and from Toronto. Focusing locally, the next section describes the demographic details of study participants to further contextualize my thesis case study.

3.6 Participant Profiles

A total of 42 participants volunteered to take part in this study, all of whom were 18 years of age or older, and resided in the City of Toronto during the initial COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Of the 42 participants, 34 identified as women, five as men, two as non-binary or third-gender, and one remained undisclosed. See Table 2 below for a breakdown of participant demographics. Interestingly, 20 of the participants were born outside of Canada representing five continents and over ten nations.

Nineteen of the households had children at the time of lockdown, and 19 were managing mental or physical long-term conditions or impairments. Half of the participants owned their homes. Nearly three quarters of the participants were employed part- or full-time at the time of the interview, and 40% were able to work from home during lockdown. Employed participants were largely working in healthcare, public service, or research. Other sectors include sports, arts, finance, legal, retail and food services. Three participants were on paid maternity leave, all of whom were in the healthcare industry. Just over half of the participants accessed government benefits or services during lockdown, including the CERB benefit among others, and 30% of participants had no access to private green space such as a balcony, backyard, or rooftop patio.

Table 2. Breakdown of Participant Demographics

Characteristics	N	%
Age		
18-34	14	33%
35-54	23	55%
55-74	3	7%
75 +	2	5%
Ability		
No long-term conditions	23	54%
Mental or psychological condition(s) or impairment(s)	7	16%
Physical condition(s) or impairment(s)	4	9%
Mental and physical conditions or impairments	7	16%
Other – various chronic health conditions	1	2%
Gender Identity		
Women	34	81%
Men	5	12%

Non-binary or third-gender	2	5%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	28	66%
Bisexual	7	16%
Gay	1	2%
Lesbian	1	2%
Queer	2	5%
Ace/Demi-Sexual	1	2%
Prefer not to disclose	2	5%
Ethnicity		
Afro-Indigenous	1	2%
Asian	9	21%
Black/African	2	4%
Caucasian/White	25	60%
First Nations, Inuit or Metis	1	2%
Jewish	1	2%
Mixed Race	2	5%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2%
Country of Origin		
Canada	22	52%
Bangladesh	1	2%
China	1	2%
Caribbean	1	2%
Colombia	1	2%
France	1	2%
Germany	1	2%
Hong Kong	1	2%
Laos	1	2%
Pakistan	1	2%
Saudi Arabia	1	2%
Sri Lanka	1	2%
United Kingdom	3	7%
USA	5	12%
Annual Household Income		
Less than $25,000	4	9%
$25-50,000	7	16%

$50-75,000	13	31%
$75-100,000	8	19%
$100-150,000	3	7%
$150-200,000	4	9%
$200,000 +	3	7%
Education		
High School Diploma	1	2%
College	2	4%
Bachelor's Degree	16	38%
Master's Degree	16	38%
PhD or Higher	4	9%
High School – no diploma	1	2%
Some college or university	2	5%
Employment Status (at time of survey)		
Employed full-time	20	48%
Employed part-time	11	26%
Retired	2	5%
Other – self-employed	1	2%
Not currently employed	8	19%
Home Ownership		
Own home	21	50%
Rent home	20	48%
Living with family or friends (rent free)	1	2%
Number of Children		
1-3	18	43%
4-6	1	2%
None	23	55%

The geographic range of participants reached all corners of the City of Toronto, depicted below (Figure 8) in a map detailing the approximate location of the 42 participants.

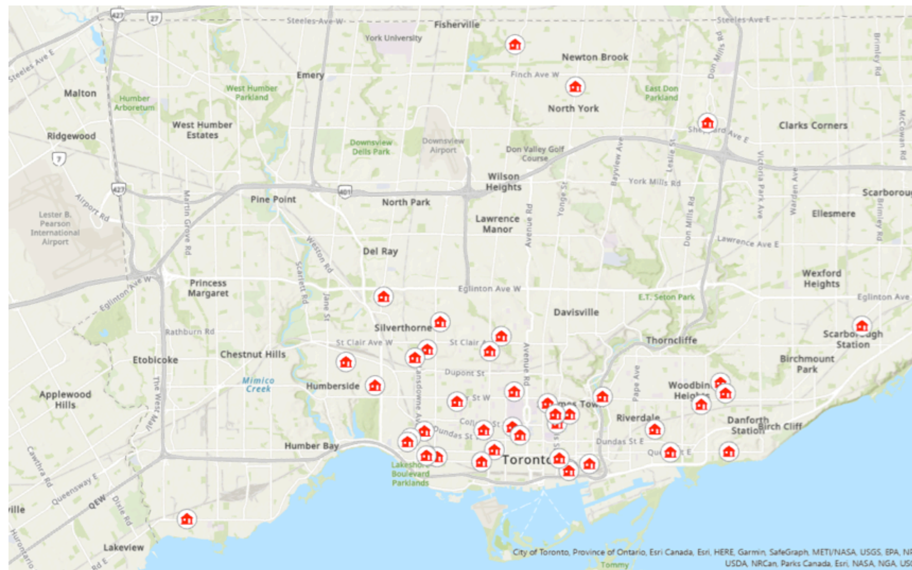

Figure 8. Participant Household Locations, Toronto ON

The majority of participants born outside of Canada had no children in their households (n=12), while participants born in Canada had an equal division of households with (n=11) and without (n=11) children. The majority of participants renting their home were renting apartment buildings (48%) while the majority of home owners were tied between apartments and houses (66%). The majority of home owners (n=7) had an annual household income of $50-75,000, while the majority of renters (n=7) had an income of $25-50,000. Interestingly, the majority of home owners (n=14) had no long-term mental or physical conditions or impairments. By comparison, the majority of renters (n=7) were managing both mental and physical conditions or impairments expected to last longer than six months.

Of the participants working during the pandemic, 10 domestic and seven international participants had their employment directly impacted by lockdown measures. This was also split quite evenly among participants with (n=9) and without (n=8) children. The majority of participants claimed that lockdown had no impact on their household budget (n=30). Of those who saw a change, four international and one domestic participant saw a substantial negative impact on their household finances as a result of lockdown, while four domestic and three international participants saw a substantial improvement in household savings.

Of the participants that disclosed having accessed mental health supports during lockdown, eight were domestic and seven were international. Interestingly, only five of these participants had children at home, while the majority (n=10) who accessed mental health services had no children. Of the participants that accessed government grants and benefits during lockdown (inclusive of CERB) (n=22), 15 had no children in the home, and seven did. However, between domestic (n=10) and

international (n=12) participants, access to government benefits were quite evenly divided. The majority of participants that accessed government benefits were renting their home (n=13).

3.6.1 Changes to Household Membership

There were a number of households that experienced major changes to household membership as a result of lockdown. This was one of the initial interview questions, asking who the participant spent lockdown with and whether their living situation changed as a result of lockdown measures. Participant 1, a single mother of three, invited three additional children into her home during lockdown to support a family friend. P18 spent the first months of lockdown providing end-of-life care to his cousin who was losing their battle with cancer. P25 brought a friend battling homelessness into their home. Participant 12 also took in a friend at the start of lockdown to keep them from being isolated alone or stuck with random roommates. P37 lost one of two sublets during lockdown, jeopardizing their financial security.

A few participants chose to move in with their significant other at the start of lockdown (i.e., P10, 13, 17). Others, like P13, maintained their own home space and commuted to see their partner. Participant 34's mother came to Canada to acquire her permanent residence, and ended up moving in for the lockdown period due to the safety risk of flying internationally. After the loss of her father, Participant 35 and her partner moved into their family home, joining their adult daughter.

3.6.2 Recruitment Limitations

As discussed in the limitations section of the research design chapter, it should be noted that the majority of study participants have a predisposition to low-carbon initiatives and lifestyles due to their membership in mutual aid and waste-conscious community Facebook Groups. For example, Participant #6 lives in a household that barters with bulk food supplies from their family business on a weekly basis. Participant #4 considered herself a "textile activist", viewing her body and time as a resource to others. Participant #21 was proud to pass down and reuse their own childhood toys and books for her own kids. Many of the trade and exchange groups emphasize the role of these initiatives in minimizing carbon footprints as well as minimizing the exchange of money, keeping the trade of material goods within social circles. As such, the results reported in this study should be interpreted with caution, as household members outside of these Facebook community groups may have differing perspectives and experiences.

It is also of note that the majority of participants are highly educated white women. Over 90% of participants had completed at least one post-secondary degree, and nearly half (45%) had a Masters

or PhD degree. While this sample population hinders the applicability of my research, there are a number of considerations to appreciate. The first is that those without access to higher education are likely serving on the front lines of the pandemic and it is therefore possible they could not find the time to participate in a time-intensive research study. More broadly, the global pandemic was a time of devastation for all, and participation in this study asked households to turn their attention away from important needs – not all households can afford (emotionally; financially) to do this.

The fact that the majority of respondents were women points to the ways in which not just physical or mental workloads, but in this particular case, the burdens of research and communication fell disproportionately on women as participants volunteered their time to report on the well-being of their household during a pandemic. In this way, case study participation served to entrench traditional gender norms and flags to degrowth scholarship to pay more attention to the feminized domestic space and what the voices of those spaces have to say about their everyday experience. The willingness and interest of women in this study should underscore to degrowth scholars the relevance of a gender analysis in this work.

Lastly, while it is certainly important to understand the needs and experiences of households representing a diversity of income and education levels, my research population carries the responsibility to fundamentally shift routines and leverage their privilege for a degrowth transition to a steady-state. Therefore, my case study sample gives degrowth scholarship strategic insight into the leverage points for significant change among the populations at which degrowth is targeted. It is through the drastic reduction of consumption in high-income regions that creates the ecological space for the rest of the world to flourish. Understanding the opportunities and challenges faced by this population is key to informing effective policy measures.

Moreover, the trends of my research sample should not take away from the individual experiences shared by each participant. It is not necessarily accurate to draw conclusions about participant experience based on one factor of their identity. Calling upon the intersectionality principle of my research, it is important to acknowledge the complex ways various aspects of identity interact to inform experience. More broadly, it is crucial to embrace the emergent trends and outcomes of participant experience which can serve to eradicate assumptions based on demographics alone. Indeed, as future chapters will discuss, income and employment status did not necessarily depict household experimentation with degrowth politics and practices.

3.7 Defining Degrowth Politics and Practice

Over the years, a number of scholars have developed "road maps" for a successful degrowth transition. These have been outlined in detail in Parrique 's (2019) brilliant PhD thesis on the Political Economy of Degrowth. Degrowth transition pathways include: Latouche's (2010) 'Eight R's; Demaria et al.'s (2013) six sources; Kallis' (2018) nine principles; and, the Degrowth Vocabulary (D'Alisa et al., 2015). In a book on how to socially mobilize a "quiet contraction", Latouche (2010) proposed eight interdependent "R's" that could "trigger a process of de-growth that will be serene, convivial and sustainable" (ibid: 33). For the purpose of this dissertation, the principles outlined by Latouche will be the primary roadmap to degrowth followed. This aligns with many other scholars who have adopted Latouche's conceptual framework to structure their research on the intersections of degrowth and urbanism, technology, tourism and more (Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe, & Boluk, 2019; March, 2018; O. Romano, 2019).

3.7.1 The Eight R's of Degrowth

The first principle is **re-evaluate** (RD1), where values and priorities are reconsidered to reject harm and embrace well-being. This includes altruism over egotism, pleasure and play over work, local over global, social over material, and quality over quantity. The second principle is to **reconceptualize** (RD2) or deconstruct current concepts that maintain the present growth paradigm. This includes the concepts of wealth, poverty, scarcity and abundance, upon which "the economic imaginary is based" (ibid: 35). The third principle involves **restructuring** (RD3) existing material and socio-political institutions and relations to adapt to the abovementioned changing values in efforts to destabilize dominant economic paradigms. The fourth principle follows the third, **redistributing** (RD4) wealth and access between individuals, classes and generations. Redistribution is key to undermining the power and wealth of the consumer class, and also indirectly removes incentives for conspicuous consumption (Latouche, 2010).

The fifth principle is **relocalizing** (RD5) production systems on a local basis. This would create great emphasis on meeting a population's needs with local factories and resources, financed with local savings. Further, the emphasis on local would also apply to issues of politics, culture and social life such that decisions on these facets of life are made at the local level by the local population. The sixth principle is **reducing** (RD6) the impact of consumption and production systems on the biosphere, reducing waste as well as mass tourism and health risks. This requires operating in a 'precauvention (prevention/precaution)' to minimize potentially adverse health impacts. Reducing also relates to the working week, implementing policies such as job-sharing, emphasizing transferable skills and

employment, and reducing our reliance on work as personal fulfillment. This requires a re-engagement with life as a citizen, with leisure time, pleasure and play-based activities that are low-carbon such as arts, crafts, meditation, and conversation. The seventh and eighth principles are **re-using** (RD7) products and materials, and **recycling** (RD8) waste (Latouche, 2010).

These eight R's are embedded in a resistance to, and the revolution of modernity, of conventional forms of economy and subsequent relations. Latouche argues further that the principles of re-evaluation, reduction and re-localization are a main priority for the degrowth imperative, since its realization must stem politically at the grassroots level. Households are the ideal scale to examine engagement with, resistance to, or challenges in adopting degrowth politics and practice because of their localized and decentralized nature (Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011; Organo, Head, & Waitt, 2013; Peterson, 2010; Safri & Graham, 2010). Household members have local autonomy and capacity to negotiate issues and make collaborative and democratic decisions about health, safety and provisioning. Households are also able to establish local economic autonomy through opportunities for self-sufficiency in food, material goods and finances. This can include a home or community food garden, mutual aid and trading systems between households, and redistributing finances among household members or to the wider region through charitable donations.

In this thesis, degrowth politics and practice are considered values, principles or activities that cultivate low-carbon economic alternatives. In terms of politics, this includes anti-capitalist and post-growth ethics and ideologies that strongly align with the principles outlined above, such as shifts in personal or professional priorities towards a less carbon-intensive way of life. This can also include political orientations that advocate for system-level institutional change. In terms of degrowth practice, this includes activities in the professional and personal spheres, from recreation to obligation, that advance the degrowth imperative such as arts and crafts, building social bonds, or limiting personal consumption. Degrowth politics and practices are another novel research contribution in this dissertation that will be more accurately articulated by the empirical findings detailed in the next chapters. The eight R's remain **bolded** and numbered (i.e., R1) throughout the remainder of this thesis to orient the reader around this framework.

3.7.2 Coding for Degrowth

The purpose of coding is to operationalize existing theory to expand and strengthen a research area. Coding qualitative interviews can either be driven by theory (i.e., existing research), data (i.e., raw data collected), or structure (i.e., project research goals) (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Due to the messy and complex properties of qualitative case studies, this research took an iterative coding

approach to simplify, condense and transform the raw data within the context of the research. Code development for this analysis was both theory- and data-driven, incorporating pre-existing understandings of degrowth principles, household sustainability and low-carbon transitions while leaving space for participant experiences to shape much of the context of this study.

A total of eight "parent nodes" were used in this study to code the interviews (Table 3). Parent nodes are the main theme of a particular category of code, followed by "child nodes" which are the sub-categories. This is in line with guidelines for coding qualitative data in NVivo software acquired during the NVivo Core Skills course I completed in April 2021, which recommended no more than 10-12 parent nodes that are 2-3 sub-categories deep. Theory-driven parent nodes include: activities (i.e., sleep or leisure activities initially identified in the research survey); commons (i.e., cultural, social); and degrowth (i.e., politics, practice). The remaining parent nodes were data-driven, emerging directly from consistent patterns and topics in the interviews. They include: characteristics (i.e., age, past experience); COVID-19 (i.e., safety, lockdown), and resources (i.e., technology, money). Other codes were inspired by literature and the skills course on coding methods, such as a code for "quotables" that feature memorable statements from the participants, or a code for contextualizing the impact of a coded statement such as positive or negative (i.e., degrowth politics – negative impact).

Table 3. Research Codes

NVivo "Node" Name (i.e. Code)	Brief Definition	Example
Activities (i.e., sleep, paid work, leisure)	Experiences relating to a participants' sleep, paid work, unpaid labour or leisure time	*"it was not feasible for me to be able to still go to work. There was just too much demanding from me at home that I had to deal with" (P1)*
Characteristics (i.e., age, ability, class)	Discussions or topics regarding personal characteristics, intersections of identity or experience	*"the privilege of having a car, the privilege of being able to do online shopping, or book it online and go pick it up in your car, not having to browse around the aisles and all that" (P41)*
Commons (i.e., culture, social)	Activities or ideals relating to the creation, maintenance or destruction of household commons	*"I don't get to go to my parents for Christmas this year. I'm quite upset about that. Cause I haven't missed a Christmas with them in 49 years" (P15)*
COVID-19 (i.e., safety, lockdown)	Discussion topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic	*"I feel like I, because we're a higher risk family I really took on the role of like researcher about how we could stay safe" (P20)*
Degrowth (i.e., politics, practice)	Activities or values that cultivate or impede low-carbon alternatives	*"we started trying to order more from the local pizzeria as opposed to through Uber eats kind of thing" (P15)*

Impact (i.e., positive, change, negative)	Usually coded with another "node", this indicates the impact of the discussion topic on the participant or situation	*"I think I spent more time outdoors than I really ever have like in the summer" (P10)*
Quotables	Relevant, inspiring, or emotionally impactful statements	*"[Government] really stepped up and help people who, you know, have lost work due to this lockdown, but it also proved that they are capable and able to do this. And it should not be just during lockdown." (P2)*
Resource Access (i.e., technology, time)	Experiences relating to the accessibility of household resources	*"Not at home. There is no space to grow food at home. I do have a food garden at the church." (P11)*

Through the initial open coding process, a number of possible variables emerged from the data (i.e., food, weather, shopping) that created a foundation for the codebook. The relationship between and among the different variables were then examined in order to better inform the axial coding process, whereby variables were sorted into relating categories and sub-categories, and categories were updated to better reflect participant perspectives and existing scholarship (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; LaRossa, 2005; Wicks, 2017). For example, many participants spoke to the ways in which their conspicuous consumption was reduced in response to lockdown measures. Although this experience – shared among most participants – was not described in the context of sustainability during the interview, it remains a key driver for mobilizing low-carbon alternatives. As such, sustainability-relevant actions described in the data such as reduced consumption or the informal exchanging goods and services were categorized under the 'Degrowth' parent node for ease of future analysis.

However, not all degrowth-related variables ended up within the Degrowth parent node. Notions of space, relationship to place, and experiences within and outside of the home became an extremely relevant topic amongst participants. Such variables in the data were categorized under the sub-category 'Space', which was housed under the 'Resource Access' parent node. This is a relevant example for the ways in which existing literature helped to guide the researcher to topics of relevance, while still allowing conceptual linkages in the data to emerge naturally rather than by force (LaRossa, 2005). Attachment to place is known in the climate change literature to be a critical factor for effective environmental policy (Gurney et al., 2017), but the variable only emerged as a result of participant experience. Other critical resources including food, money and technology were additional sub-categories of the Resource Access parent node that emerged as a direct result of the interview process.

In order to inform the opportunities and barriers to degrowth politics and practice for this case study, interview data categorized under the Degrowth parent node (once coded) were reviewed in relation to Latouche's (2010) 'Eight R's of Degrowth'. The variables were then further categorized

within themes of degrowth politics and practice identified in the literature as critical for mobilizing a degrowth future. The eight R's were also applied to the other parent nodes, including activities, characteristics, and resources in order to augment the emerging research themes. For the purposes of this case study, the scope of the project remains focused on opportunities and barriers to mobilizing degrowth futures. As such, many aspects of the interview data were not included in this thesis. Additional analysis is needed to understand the experience of households in contexts beyond the degrowth imperative.

3.8 Concluding Remarks

Considered an "Anthropause", the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown resulted in an unprecedented downsizing of the consumer economy, and prompted some of the material changes to production and consumption systems needed to meet climate targets. Situated in this thesis as an 'imposed degrowth' scenario, the lockdown demonstrated the capacity for internationally coordinated efforts to instigate such drastic changes to the global economy, despite decades of resistance and dismissal that this was possible. Acknowledging the increasing likelihood of disruptive events brought about by a climate uncertain future, this chapter calls attention to the process of responding to crisis as an opportunity for constituting and contesting persisting logics, subjects, and authorities. However, it also underscored the many lessons and challenges ahead in what a societal transition truly entails, making a smooth and incremental pathway impossible. It has thus never been more important to observe responses to disruption to understand where the strongest and weakest links in sustaining change may lie.

The following two chapters will examine case study findings of household experiences during the imposed degrowth scenario of COVID-19 lockdown. This exploration aims to elucidate how the pandemic fostered (Chapter 4) or impeded (Chapter 5) household experimentation with degrowth politics and practice, and the relevance of such experimentation to the larger low-carbon transition. Questioning the power of capitalist logics, the role of the individualized economic subject, and the responsibility of societal authorities are necessary steps for a meaningful and lasting low-carbon transition. Understanding the everyday struggles of the household can help inform a more robust, sincere, and applicable degrowth scholarship.

Chapter 4. Practicing Degrowth

What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?

2. Identify potential sites, subjects and tactics of a degrowth revolution, and barriers to realization

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures disrupted every facet of social, political and economic life. It brought international travel to a halt, caused unprecedented job loss, and profoundly disrupted education, research, health and many other critical societal institutions at their core. As an imposed degrowth, lockdown demanded significant changes to everyday household management including shopping, eating, cleaning, care, leisure, and community building. Education shifted to online learning platforms, creating major learning gaps among households without access to reliable technology or secure internet. Many of those who could shifted to remote work, blurring professional and personal spaces and challenging our identities. From a degrowth by disaster perspective, the pandemic lockdown offers an intriguing case for examining the impacts and outcomes of an imposed economic contraction on the everyday household, and the opportunities that may result from alternative ways of household organizing.

This chapter provides empirical results drawn from 42 surveys and interviews with members of Toronto households during the first major wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two main purposes to my empirical investigation. First, I wanted to address the significant gap in degrowth literature regarding the identity of the degrowth movement's subjects. Rather than focusing exclusively on values and visions that align with the degrowth imperative, this chapter presents people as political participants and their everyday socially reproductive labour as degrowth and anti-capitalism in action. Secondly, I wanted to examine the unexplored pathways and outcomes of a degrowth 'by disaster'. In brief, my work gives insights into the implications of a disaster-based degrowth on the everyday household to better inform future degrowth research and policy proposals for a climate uncertain future.

4.1 Divisions of a Domestic Degrowth

My focus on the household allows me to address the significant research gap in degrowth research around divisions of labour in the context of a low-carbon transition. Degrowth has focused on the *how* of mobilizing a transition – but not the *who.* For this reason, my work not only focuses on the household scale, but pays particular attention to how household responsibilities are negotiated and

ultimately divided during such a transition. To this end, this section shares the voices and gives the main themes of study participant experiences during lockdown.

Due to the stay-home order and the constant presence of household members, many domestic chores such as laundry, cleaning and cooking, increased in frequency and intensity. Household members had to keep up with these responsibilities. Of the 42 participants interviewed in this study, 15 felt that the division of household responsibilities was fair, 17 said it was unfair and seven had mixed opinions. Three did not respond to the question or felt it wasn't applicable, particularly those living alone. Interestingly, a majority of men (n=4) thought the division of labour was fair, while a majority of women (n=14) thought the division was unfair. Note that unfair did not necessarily mean it was unfair for the participant, but rather that there was an inequitable distribution among household members overall. Understanding how social reproduction was divided in response to an imposed degrowth is a key area of exploration for this thesis.

For the participants that felt the division was unfair, some mentioned that employment obligations structured this reality, such as P32:

> *I don't think it was ever fair to begin with, but I also think that it's just the way that [Partner's] work is set up. But I think that if we both were in office jobs, it would be fair. Cause I'm not gonna expect him to come home after a 12-hour shift dealing with patients and then say, Hey, do you want to take out the garbage and do the laundry and cook? Like I just can't do that* – P32

For others, participants mentioned how lockdown measures, changes to employment or gendered expectations directly informed this reality. This includes Participant #20, whose partner had to take on the majority of childcare while they took on the breadwinning role:

> *I don't think either of us think it's fair. I feel like there's a lot of resentment because I feel like we try to make it feel fair, but it's like, I think we've kind of landed on the fact that it just doesn't feel fair for anyone, you know, for either of us. And that's just kind of, part of the reality of not having a childcare option. Just because he's had to sacrifice a lot and then I've had to sacrifice a lot of self-care – P20*

Many households had to quickly reorient their schedules and expectations in order to meet the demands of lockdown measures. However, some participants said no negotiations were necessary since the responsibilities had been the same for years:

> *I think I would just rather do it myself and, you know, it's my kitchen and I'm used to being in charge of my kitchen – P23*

Divisions were perceived to be unfair due to limits in ability, such as Participant #4 who takes on a larger role in the home than her blind husband. Personal values also played an important role in P4's options for outsourcing some of these responsibilities:

> *[Partner] thinks that I should do them because quote, "people shouldn't engage in a high-class hierarchy". Again, my mother did it herself. So, it's not so much a traditional idea about gender roles as ideas about what labour you should pay people to do – P4*

A variety of factors influenced the division of labour, some of which exacerbated existing tensions, dynamics or inequities. When asked about their primary role in the household, many women in this study described it using words including: “manager”, “caregiver”, “caretaker”, “homemaker”, “housekeeper”, “bottlewasher” and “boss”. The men in the study used words including: “curator”, “responsible for everything”, and “sole everything”. Two participants who identified as non-binary or third gender used wordings including “in charge” since they owned their home, or “equal” after moving in with a partner.

A stereotypically gendered division of labour was found amongst many of the households in heterosexual partnerships, whereby women reported having to ask, remind, or instruct their male partners about what needed to be done around the house, even during lockdown:

> *You're the one who gets things done. Talk to your mom. Things are happening because I say they need to happen, right? Chief manager of the house, both the office administration and supervision of my staff - P15*

A number of households had to adjust the division of responsibilities due to disruptions in childcare, and some even incorporated their children into household tasks by creating schedules and assigning duties. In Participant #1's household:

> *I kinda try to space it out equally between everyone. So if you wash the dishes today, you don't have to wash them tomorrow. And, you know, I kind of divide it up. The younger ones don't do major chores. They'll kind of just do things like put their shoes away, put their toys away, things like that. But the older ones are expected to do things like clean the washroom, do laundry, you know, wash your dishes, sweep the floors – P1*

Managing childcare duties between two separated co-parents became increasingly challenging with the lockdown measures. Participant #21 lost her “neutral trading place” at the schoolyard where she would often pick up or drop off her child in collaboration with her co-parent. Lockdown exacerbated existing tensions in this relationship, eliminating such “neutral” spaces for healthy negotiation. The often-invisible forces of socially reproductive labour became painfully visible to household members during the pandemic lockdown.

Coping emotionally through the pandemic lockdown was also a key aspect of socially reproductive labour conducted in the household. Among study participants, 20 households reported sharing the burden of emotional coping and relying on each other as a unit of support. This included having explicit conversations and check-ins, and more casual assumptions that household members would reach out when needed. For example, while Participant #13 shared this responsibility with his roommates, Participant #14 who lived alone still felt connected to support systems with FaceTime calls from her son, sisters and brother:

So I feel surrounded by people that care and I can call on them, and vice versa. So that hasn't been a problem – P14

In comparison, 17 participants stated that they felt personally responsible for this duty, the majority of whom (n=14) were women. This outcome supports historical research on the heavily gendered nature of emotional labour, known as the "mental load" or cognitive labour, that overburdens women with the unofficial management of the household's collective schedule and needs (Bright Horizons Family Solutions LLC, 2017; Daminger, 2019). What was fascinating about this finding is the way women justified this responsibility as an outcome of their line of work. For example, Participant #20 claims her job keeps her more aware of the mental health implications:

I'm a psychotherapist… I'm always kind of monitoring to make sure my kiddo isn't, you know, inheriting this anxiety. We've really tried to talk to him in developmentally appropriate ways and not have him listen to a lot of news and focus on [the fact that] people are working together to stay safe, you know? So I feel like that's something that I'm pretty aware of, but I'd say both of us, just me in the lead – P20

This also aligned with Participant #27's response, who works as a social worker:

Definitely, definitely me. And when I'm not coping very well, the rest of the house doesn't cope very well. And so I try to, you know, take care of myself the best I can, and if I'm feeling really stressed and overwhelmed, then I have to tell my husband that… I'm the one who does sort of the emotional stuff when it comes to the kids. When they're sick or whatever, I'm mostly the one who takes care of them. And mostly the one who, you know, stays up at night with them or that kind of thing – P27

Factors including self-awareness, feelings of responsibility, and capacity influenced the division of this responsibility.

Participants also talked about past experience as another major factor in having the capacity and skills to cope. For example, Participant #19 had been treated in the past for mental health issues and was thus prepared with coping mechanisms for stressful events. Participant #11 had worked in a war zone in the past, and Participant #31 has a PTSD diagnosis. As an Indigenous man, participant #18 described spending the majority of his life in "surprisingly hard situations". Participant #10 had lived through the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong, and Participant #42 had just lost his wife to a three-year battle with cancer. All of these participants spoke about the ways in which lockdown did not frighten them, because they had been through worse. It is thus wise for degrowth scholars to consider the way varying perspectives and experiences inform understandings of and proposed actions for a just low-carbon transition. While degrowth pathways may be life-altering for some, for others it might be a small adjustment or life as usual.

Only two of the five men (Participants #18, 42) in this study took personal responsibility for this coping work, both of whom were single and caring for dependents. Two of the men in this study

were living in shared accommodation (P13, 26), and were thus able to share this burden fairly among household members. Only one male participant discussed his deep struggle with coping during the pandemic (P29), and as a result of compounding mental health factors and personal events, was finally brought to the decision to reach out to therapy through his employer. Five participants reported that they did not have nor provide the emotional support needed during the pandemic lockdown. The pandemic lockdown thus highlights how household membership and capacity for change is structural rather than inherent, and addressing those structures will be a key intervention point for facilitating an equitable degrowth.

Historically, women carry the burden of responsibility of unpaid domestic labour. Over three quarters of unpaid care work globally is conducted by women, in addition to making up two-thirds of paid care workers (International Labour Organization, 2018). At this time, in no country in the world do men and women perform an equal share. Note that the majority of participants (81%) were women, making it difficult to draw substantial conclusions about the role of gender in the division of unpaid household responsibilities outside of this context.

That being said, demographic transitions, shifts in household structures, and an increase in women's employment over the past few decades have altered traditional conventions regarding the division of responsibility. This is of particular relevance to the City of Toronto since growth in non-family (unrelated) households (37.1%) has outpaced family (related) households (15.8%) for the last thirty years (Toronto City Planning, 2019). Further, most participants of the present case study expanded the mold of a 'nuclear' household with a diversity of household membership and makeup, as well as blurring boundaries of belonging by sharing household spaces with outside members.

4.1.1 Evolving Household Roles

The boundaries of a household and its membership are important. According to Geist & Ruppanner (2018), existing theoretical approaches to domestic labour in the social sciences do not reflect contemporary realities of household makeup. The authors reviewed three dominant approaches to household divisions of labour and proposed theoretical extensions to update this scholarship to meet the realities of more current household structures, gender relations and membership dynamics. The following three sections will identify the three major approaches – time availability, bargaining, and gender display – and explore the ways in which the outcomes of the present case study contribute to the proposed extensions. Participant experiences served to **reconceptualize** (R2) and **reconstruct** (R3) core assumptions in household behaviour, negotiation and decision-making.

4.1.1.1 Time Availability

The first dominant theory identified by Geist and Ruppanner (2018) is known as time availability (see Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012). Here, time is (1) a zero-sum game where all household members have a finite amount to spend across various everyday demands; and (2) a one-dimensional, gender-neutral asset that requires constant trade-off between various domains (i.e., unpaid chores vs. paid employment). From this perspective, time availability echoes neoclassical economic assumptions by situating the division of labour as the rational and intentional trading of a finite resource that remains unchanged in quantity, quality or impact (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018).

This approach fails to account for a number of critical factors including: institutional pressures that might shape time availability (i.e., shift work); the capacity of households to outsource certain domestic tasks; and thus, the class and race-based differences in household makeup and capabilities (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018). For example, "the ability for some families to utilize market-based substitutes for time intensive demands identifies issues of class and race hierarchies that are essential to broader forms of inequality" (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018: 251). The time availability perspective does not yet encapsulate the complexities of time management within a twenty-first century capitalist household.

Instead, the authors propose the "work-family fit" perspective to better accommodate the competing demands of housework, time scarcity and employment hours. This approach embraces the possibility of simultaneous activities taking place, such as cleaning while child minding, and also acknowledges that the timing and location of such activities are increasingly relevant in the era of remote work. Household members may be performing multiple boundary-spanning tasks, such as cooking and answering an email, emphasizing the deep interconnections between paid work and unpaid household management. Further, this approach embraces the possibility of single-person households and other household structures outside of the dual-earner configuration, and acknowledges that the demands of domestic labour are based on the needs of all household members.

A number of examples of the alternative model came to life in the present case study. The multitasking between paid and unpaid work became particularly apparent due to the lockdown measures that required many participants to stay home full-time. In fact, at least two participants chose to breastfeed while conducting the interview for this case study, and many others had their children come on screen to introduce themselves or were heard in the background of the phone call. Some participants even conducted household chores such as dishes or meal prep while participating in the interview, or were logged in and muted on an ongoing conference call. Those who worked from home

often managed many paid and unpaid tasks simultaneously as demands from within the home were also physically present. During the imposed degrowth, linear and predictable notions of time became impossible due to the space/time demands of lockdown measures. This **reconceptualizing** (R2) and **restructuring** (R3) of conventional economic principles and relations is key to mobilizing a degrowth future.

While the degrowth imperative highlights the opportunities for more leisure time in a less carbon-intensive economy, it is important for the field to consider challenging broader divisions between paid and unpaid work time and the inherent value allocated to each. Further, as many households chose to outsource various domestic tasks such as take-out food or cleaning services, more attention is needed on outsourcing in the context of the global chain of reproductive labour which is inextricably linked to class- and race-based time patterns (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018).

4.1.1.2 Bargaining Perspective

The second major theory on the division of domestic labour is the bargaining perspective. This theory asserts that household members use economic resources to negotiate the distribution of domestic labour according to financial status, such that those with more financial resources do less of the domestic work (Baxter & Hewitt, 2013; Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003). Coinciding with the development of the economic model of utility, a theoretical focus on bargaining financial earnings to determine the division of housework is also rooted in rational choice logic. There is much support for this theory among heterosexual and same-sex couples, whereby greater inequalities in income as well as education are found to be associated with a more specialized division of unpaid domestic labour (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Goldberg, Smith, & Perry-Jenkins, 2012). The bargaining perspective in same sex couples tends to apply more often to childcare, but not necessarily other domestic tasks (Tornello, 2020). Indeed, the division of unpaid labour is reported to be much more egalitarian among same-sex couples compared to heterosexual couples (Bauer, 2016; Brewster, 2017; Farr & Patterson, 2013).

Yet, additional factors may influence the negotiation of responsibility such as the existing relationships among household members, emotional biases, or even structural factors. By assuming that earnings represent an adequate proxy for power, the bargaining perspective neglects other critical non-monetary assets such as emotional or relationship capital that may play a role in negotiations, or the ability to draw on extended social networks for support. Further, a bargaining approach prioritizes household membership within a dual-earner role, and fails to consider more complex household membership. Geist and Ruppanner (2018) expand the bargaining perspective to include multiple forms

of capital, such as economic measures that incorporate job quality or benefits, as well as non-fiscal resources including knowledge, emotional and relational capital. This expansion takes into account the material and immaterial realities involved in everyday household interactions, exchanges and negotiations of responsibilities.

Bargaining strategies were amply evident among households in the present case study. The division of responsibilities among household members was constantly negotiated and contingent on several competing factors ranging from employment status to previous knowledge, abilities and skills, and personal preferences. For example, participants who could sew made fabric masks for their own household, and also shared these critical public safety interventions with neighbours and friends. Previous knowledge and preferences were deciding factors for Participant #10, who lived with their significant other and worked from home together. Due to a greater interest and skill set in cooking, P10's partner took on groceries and cooking while P10 opted for laundry and cleaning duties. Other influences such as upbringing also played a role. Participant #15's grew up in a household with bankers and accountants, and was thus raised with skills in financial management. While the household was predicated on discussion between adults, P15 took on the advising and decision-making role. Households with multiple members demonstrated a number of ways to negotiate household responsibilities based on many factors competing including knowledge, preference and skills.

Non-fiscal factors like moral obligation and social relations were particularly relevant in this case study. This was especially true for participants with mental or physical conditions or disabilities, including anxiety or ADHD, where other household members offered to step in and take on a larger burden of responsibility. For example, Participant #4's partner is blind. His ability to participate in household chores is constrained, though he will do what he can – such as washing dishes. Participant #13's partner has ADHD and finds it difficult to coordinate ingredients for a meal, so P13 will provide guidance and direction throughout the meal prep. Participant #26, also struggling with severe ADHD, was too overwhelmed by public health measures to visit grocery stores and thus had his roommates help him by picking up groceries and supplies. Participants with significant others that lived in a separate household still managed to negotiate divisions of labour, often exchanging chores like cleaning for cooking in one household for chores in another. All this confirms the value of Geist and Ruppanner's expanded bargaining perspective because it helps to **reconceptualize** (R2) the various social exchanges in a household's economic activity.

4.1.1.3 Gender Display

The third theory on the division of unpaid labour is gender display, tying performances of household labour to performances of gender and the affirmation of identity. Taking into account the role of socialization in capitalist-patriarchy, this perspective asserts that internalized notions of masculinity and femininity are displayed through performances of gender (i.e., 'doing gender') tied to preconceived cultural scripts (Nelson, 1992; Sullivan, 2011; Thébaud, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Certain actions (or inactions) can thus be perceived as a way in which individuals affirm their identity as women or men, making divisions of responsibility highly gendered and specialized in nature.

Yet this perspective assumes the internalization of heteronormative gender roles in a universal way, which limits the application of this perspective beyond heteronormative couples (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018). It does not apply to contemporary forms of family, including dual-breadwinner, same-sex couples, or blended, multigenerational or non-partnered families, further limit the application of the above explanatory framework. An expanded doing-genders approach is thus warranted, with a particular emphasis on the importance of sexual orientation for developing theories of gender outside the confines of heteronormativity (Risman & Risman, 2009).

A number of diverse gender displays beyond the heteronormative took place in the present case study. Households included women as the primary 'breadwinner', men in full-time caretaker roles, and non-binary people participating in domestic life. One participant was particularly adamant she participate in this study to shift the study population away from traditional gender roles and contribute her experience as the financial provider:

> *This is actually one of the reasons I did want to talk to you is I think we have a somewhat gender atypical household. I am the primary earner. My husband is the primary caregiver for our daughter and does the majority of the domestic work. So that's, that's been the case for really ever since she was born – P11*

In another instance, Participant #20 was forced into the primary breadwinning role due to childcare demands in the home. Her partner had to put their PhD on hold in order to provide full-time childcare, and the entire financial burden for the household fell to P20.

Multiple men, including a transgender man, took on caregiving roles for their children, elderly parents or sick relatives, and prioritized such roles during lockdown in order to contribute to the safety and security of their broader social networks. This was the case for Participant #29, a man between 35-44 years of age, who spent his weekends cooking for his parents:

> *My parents who have compromised immune systems essentially had to be locked down in their household with very little access to the outside world. So my time was then spent taking care of*

them, getting food to them on a weekly basis and basically cooking, like, all day Saturday, all day Sunday, so that they would have meals for the week – P29

Participant #18, a man in his late 60s, provided his cousin with end-of-life care in the final stage of his cousin's battle with cancer:

I was responsible for everything. I mean really everything. So you know, as things went on in end of February, beginning of March, it was pretty obvious that he wasn't managing, there were a lot of things. And I suggested that the logical way to go ahead was that he would live with me because there's better set up in his place, closer to appointments when he needed to go to them – P18

Lastly, Participant #42 is a recent widower who was the sole caregiver to his young daughter during lockdown. Due to public health measures, P42 lost access to many of his childcare supports including his parents, his daughter's friends, and afterschool programming. In addition to working from home full-time, P42 also had to become a full-time parent.

Furthermore, lockdown measures forced most participants to stay home, which altered the environment in which divisions of responsibilities are usually negotiated. Instead, household members were pitching in based on energy level, proximity, or commitment. Many households reported being more "mess blind" living and working from home full-time, whereby everyday household messes became easier to overlook (or perhaps, more accurately, necessary). This was discussed by Participant #37, who found the monotony of the initial lockdown measures really impacted her ability to cope and focus. She thus found it much more difficult to notice messes in her home:

[T]he house is not necessarily cleaner. And I've talked to a few people about this, who also say this, which is like being at home working all the time makes you more mess blind. And so it's not cleaner – P37

Participant experiences attest to the affective, somatic and psychological complexities of the meanings of household responsibilities precisely because household labour is not just a function. It has symbolic resonances and is the deeply gendered site of proving moral worth.

More recent critical scholarship has called for an investigation into the 'undoing' of gender to challenge entrenched assumptions of 'inevitable' inequalities between masculinity and femininity (Deutsch, 2007; Sullivan, 2011). Working-class fathers, for example, actively 'undo' gender by adjusting their paid work schedules in order to be more present in their fatherhood role. Examining coping strategies among unemployed men during the 2008 financial recession, men were found to reframe household labour as 'masculine' work while simultaneously reiterating traditional gender ideals (Demantas & Myers, 2015). Yet working-class men who recently experienced job loss from a steel plant shut-down showed how "a significant degendering of housework is thwarted by institutional, interactive, and individual-level processes" (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010).

Through hetero-masculine, bachelor, and gay domesticities, alternative performances of domesticity take place that "subverts the dominant heterosexual family-based ideology of home" (ibid: 375). Engaging in sustainability practices specifically, such as digging vegetable gardens, repairing bikes or building a chicken coop, were found to advance particular "domestic masculinities" that relate to emotional health and well-being, shared domestic labour, environmental stewardship, partnership and leadership (Organo et al., 2013). While divisions of household labour among heterosexual couples is typically gendered and specialized, research shows that divisions among same-sex couples is reported to be quite egalitarian in nature, assigning tasks based on negotiation and personal preference (Brewster, 2017; Gorman-Murray, 2008b; Kurdek, 2005; Tornello et al., 2015). Scholarship in feminist political economy has demonstrated the disproportionate vulnerability of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex+ people to climate and economic instabilities, especially those who are Indigenous, Black, rural and/or working class (Coffey et al., 2020; Duffy, 2005; Gaard, 2015; Tornello, 2020). It is thus crucial that sustainability investigations consider gender as a spectrum and performances of gender remain contextual. While the low-carbon transition is necessary, the challenging and simultaneous entrenchment of gender norms during times of disruption demonstrate the uneven and unpredictable nature of system change.

4.1.2 Towards a Care-Full Degrowth

An ecofeminist perspective provides strategic insights into the drivers of the growth paradigm, its re/productive divisions, and offers oppositional ethical principles to counter neoclassical modes of economy. Throughout its forty-year development, ecological economics has made little effort to engage with feminist or ecofeminist economic approaches (Mellor, 2005). Yet many scholars acknowledge the complementary nature of these critical fields (Bauhardt, 2014; Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Floro, 2012; Kallis et al., 2012; McMahon, 1997; Perkins et al., 2005). In particular, the unpaid socially reproductive labour of households is seen as a precondition to the mobilization of, and transformation towards a degrowth society (Akbulut, 2019; Barca, 2017; Nierling, 2012). Similarly, a focus on the degrowth imperative emphasizes notions of care, provisioning, and reproduction (D'Alisa, Deriu, Demaria, 2015; Kallis et al., 2012; Picchio, 2015). Therefore, a symbiotic and complementary relationship exists between the degrowth imperative and the provisioning and care emphasis of ecofeminist economics.

Ethics of care (or indeed, care as ethics) can open up promising opportunities for other ways of being and doing in the household. While this case study presents many examples of redefined and evolving domestic divisions of labour, prevailing logics still remain. Here, the way care work places an

enormous emphasis on *relational* properties is of significance. It suggests this work has qualitatively distinct characteristics in comparison to work conducted in the "productive" market (Folbre, 1995; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Henry, 2018; Himmelweit, 1995; Katz, 2001; Nelson, 2003). Indeed, it is by way of a caring ethic specifically that brings about promising opportunities for alternative approaches to undermine divisions of the re/productive dualism and capitalist logics (Dengler & Strunk, 2018; Duffy, 2005; Picchio, 2015; Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). In addition, a nurturant framing of care work emphasizes the nature of the activity as relational and skills-based (i.e., childcare workers, doctors, therapists), and so more professionalized, higher paying, and dominated by white women (Duffy, 2005).

In contrast, a more encompassing "non-nurturant" framing of *reproductive* work (i.e., laundry, food, dishwashers) includes both relational and non-relational work. The latter is regarded to be predominantly low-paying unskilled menial jobs that lack emotional dimensions and remain over-represented by women of colour. In other words, the way we define and ascribe value to work matters. It means some people are seen and valued, while others are not. More recent contributions have critiqued the universal notion of a "woman's" experience, calling for intersectional analyses that demonstrates the outsourcing of reproduction of marginalized women including immigrants, women of colour, and low-income women by privileged men *and* women (Brodie, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Thompson, 2006).

Rather than liberating women from the confines of an exploitative economic system, feminist endeavours in the West have further commodified women's time, labour and bodies. In many instances, the financialization of domestic labour shifted the modality of female exploitation from the male wage earner to the direct control of capital through the banks (Federici, 2018). For example, in the United States women now hold the majority of student loan debt despite making up only 56% of the student population (American Association of University Women, 2019). Explicitly feminist approaches also fail to adequately engage with environmental issues, concerning itself with how gender inequalities impact or facilitate economic growth and the impact of economic regimes on vulnerable populations (Mellor, 2005). Climate stability, biodiversity and the regenerative capacity of ecosystems to process the burdens of human activity on a finite planet are thus inherently assumed by a strictly feminist approach. As degrowth imagines alternative economic systems, it must ensure that proposed changes act to disrupt and dismantle social institutions that perpetuate such harms at the intersections of race, gender and class.

4.2 Degrowth Uptake and Outcomes

The hegemonic economic growth paradigm has overwhelmed society's fundamental needs with market imperatives. Values of individualism, economic rationalism, independence, competition, status, image and power have influenced everything from political priorities to cultural characteristics and psychological infrastructures (Coffman & Mikulecky, 2015; Jackson, 2013; Kasser, 2016; Salzman, 2001; Welzer, 2011). The phenomenon of "economism" has subsumed social relations, identities and activities, subjecting the most essential facets of public life to a mere market calculation (Gare, 2013; Mcdowell, 2004a). This consequently displaces the responsibility of inequality and harm to an abstract entity (i.e., the 'rational' market), and reduces all social exchanges to the productivist tendency of continued economic growth (Fournier, 2008).

Building alternative forms of economy require alternative forms of economic participation, organization and activity. In particular, exchange or transactions outside the market sphere demonstrate the intricate dimensions of "economy" that go beyond mere monetary exchange (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2011; Pietilä, 1997). For Gibson-Graham and others, it is important to identify and explore persisting experiments of what they call 'community economies' that are already enacting the very ethics, practices and civic engagement degrowth scholars are seeking.

One of the major findings from this study is the way participants actively reclaimed their time, participation and agency from market imperatives. This took place in a number of ways, including spending time on new and different leisure activities, growing food, buying goods locally, and participating in economic exchange outside the paid market system. Through each of these experiences, participants enacted many of Latouche's eight R's of degrowth including the re-evaluation of values and priorities, the reconceptualization of the consumer identity, the relocalization of production, and the redistribution of wealth and resources (Latouche, 2010).

4.2.1 Changing Priorities

To mobilize a degrowth transition, personal and professional **values** and **priorities** must be disentangled from economic ones (R1). Beyond the material realities of reversing economic growth in overdeveloped regions, degrowth advocates insist more fundamentally on a "paradigmatic re-ordering of values" such that social and ecological imperatives come to the fore (Fournier, 2008). By re-orienting values, dominant market conventions are actively confronted to create space for re-imagining participation in the economy along more political terms, informed by social principles of solidarity, justice, care and democracy (Bauhardt, 2014; O'Neill, Dietz, & Jones, 2010; Pelletier, 2010; Schneider et al., 2010). A degrowth revolution necessarily entails rethinking the role of human beings beyond

producers or consumers, and rethinking the concept of participation in the economy as a social rather than financial obligation to the collective.

The imposed degrowth scenario of lockdown created an intriguing space for study participants to reconsider and even challenge economic conventions through the simple act of reflection. In the present case study, participants described the ways in which lockdown measures encouraged the re-evaluation of personal and professional values and priorities. This included values and perspectives of one's body and the self, personal relationships, their sense of meaning and quality of life, and goals around professional pursuits. Despite the challenges presented by a pandemic lockdown, unprecedented isolation and record economic disruption, participants took the opportunity to reorient their personal values – **re-evaluating** (R1) such priorities for an alternative economic future.

Participant #13 (P13), a man between the ages of 25-34, was living in a household full of roommates over the initial lockdown period in March, 2020. Pre-COVID, he held multiple part-time paid positions as well as volunteer roles. On occasion, he reported that his working day would last up to 20 hours. Throughout the interview, P13 reflected on the chance over lockdown to personally reflect on what his own personal anthropause meant:

> *Just being able to take a break and learn to unbind myself from capitalism a little bit. It was really important. And learning to think about the guilt that I felt about not producing, and why I felt that way, was one of the positives of lockdown, I think – Participant #13*

The above quotation encapsulates the emphasis of this thesis; that lockdown measures offered an opportunity for everyday citizens to engage with politics and practices that uproot and confront present capitalist economic conventions.

Participants in this study expressed gratitude for the additional hours available to spend time on important relationships, and had a strong recognition about not taking these relationships for granted. They expressed shifts in their perceptions of their own body, the self, and personal time, taking time to learn and reflect on themselves and their life course. This included finding greater clarity regarding job satisfaction, work-life balance, and productivity, and an express discontent with the demands and sacrifices of office work. Many participants expressed interest in alternative forms of work-life balance such as a shorter work week, flexible working hours, and began questioning the priority placed on wage labour more broadly. Re-evaluating personal and professional values and priorities is an extremely promising outcome for a degrowth future. There was a clear trend of **confrontation and reorientation** of social and economic values and relations away from capitalist conventions and towards more beneficial alternatives (R1,2).

4.2.2 Spending Time Differently

Reclaiming personal time from the market is key to advancing a low-carbon economy, as the demands of industrial time are directly implicated in ongoing environmental and social devastation. With the rise of industrial production, the notion of time has been corrupted by market logics and turned into a commodity to be used for work and securing income, rather than the medium in which to spend a good life (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Delaney, 2004). As such, "we have substituted earning for an older ethics of serving and caring, as the only legitimate motivation for work. Thus, alienation in the place of fulfillment, inner poverty" (Lovins, 1977: 169). With the distinction of paid work time, work and leisure are actively spatialized whereby the home was situated in opposition to paid and relevant work, which has been actively decoupled from the time of organizing and sustaining the embodied and collective rhythms of household and public interests (Odih, 2003).

The degrowth imperative focuses on prioritizing low-impact activities such as art, music, food and craft, which are time-intensive and can facilitate more **sustainable lifestyles** on environmental and social scales (R3,5). In response to lockdown measures, there was an immediate adoption of many creative, **low-carbon activities** by many participants in the study (R6). This included walking, photography, documentary filmmaking, embroidery, cooking, baking, and more. This was particularly pronounced for Participant #10 who had struggled to maintain creative hobbies outside of law school over the past few years:

> *Throughout my undergrad, I was very involved in community and I really enjoyed taking photos and stuff, and that very much fell by the wayside once law school started. And then sort of in that time, when I was stuck at home for a long time thinking about myself, I was noticing that gap in my life or things that I used to do that I wasn't doing any more. And so I was happy to tap into my creative side a bit more – P10*

P10 had prioritized career goals which required them to put their hobbies aside. It wasn't until the imposed degrowth scenario that P10 was given an opportunity to reflect on the various aspects of their life, notice and identify the gaps, and begin pursuing more creative outlets such as photography. Many participants in this study expressed the same sentiment, pursuing creative aspirations that they weren't able to prioritize before the lockdown. Such low-impact activities are time-intensive, which can facilitate slower and more sustainable economic participation as degrowth scholars assert (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Jackson, 2020; Victor, 2019).

In a post-growth economy, slow and time-intensive activities can be considered socially useful, blurring the lines between work and play as these activities become a valued part of economic participation rather than being viewed as an unprofitable waste of time (Barrett, 1976). An enthusiasm for the "slower pace" of lockdown was articulated explicitly by participants, echoing the core tenets of

the degrowth imperative. Participant #36, a mother with two daughters, described the pause lockdown enabled in regular parent life:

> *That slower pace has been really enjoyable instead of, you know, the weekend being like, okay, get up, we have to go to dance lessons and then we have to go to this birthday party and then we have to like cook dinner and we have to clean the house and we have to get the groceries done and that's like Saturday. And then, you know, Sunday's the same, it's nice to just wake up and be like, Oh, let's see. What's on the schedule for today. Ah, nothing like, it's sort of nice – P36*

Participants were able to appreciate experiences at a more intimate level unavailable to them in pre-pandemic times due to the fast-paced demands of corporate capitalism. It also encouraged participants to reconsider where they were spending their time, and whether the over-scheduling, particularly on weekends, was really necessary. Slowing the economy to improve quality of life, quality of production, and quality of experience is a foundational mantra for degrowth advocates (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis, 2017b).

One way a slower pace changed participant experiences during lockdown was the uptake in cooking homemade meals. Participants were able to hone their cooking skills, explore new recipes and experiment in the kitchen as a result of the stay-home order. Slowing down to cook and share a meal became a reliable avenue for household members to bond, share recipes among family and friendship networks, and build knowledge among the children in households. Participants paid closer attention to the ingredients they were using, and some even turned to weekly food box delivery of local ingredients to improve their nutrition. Slowing down for food is considered an antidote to the dominant economic paradigm that prioritizes mass production, globalization and unhealth food consumption (Hsu, 2015; Leitch, 2010). For example, the *slow food movement* actively counters social isolation with "convivial" food practices, which was a particular need during the lockdown measures (Dunlap, 2012; Gaytán, 2004). Lastly, slowing down with food can be considered an organized form of resistance against the fast-food and high-speed lifestyle of capitalism (Dunlap, 2012; Parkins, 2004; Pietrykowski, 2004).

Meah (2014) situates domestic responsibilities in the kitchen as an opportunity to exercise agency and resistance – particularly by members of the non-dominant class or race. Research on people's experiences in the kitchen show that – rather than a place of drudgery and oppression – cooking 'at home' can enable a sense of status and power among migrants and ethnic minorities, instill feelings of influence, authority and achievement, and celebrate skill, knowledge and identity (Meah, 2014). In particular, "expression[s] of love, nurturance, creativity and sharing, [became] a route through which to escape the painful realities of racist oppression" (ibid: 676). Having the time to explore and experiment was particularly popular for participants when it came to meal times. Taking the time for

creative expression, personal exploration, and innovative household entertainment offers promising potential for the degrowth imperative.

The race, class and gender inflections of cooking are complicated. It is a household chore that emerged in North America not only as a leisure activity, but an acceptably masculine lifestyle activity (Swenson, 2009). Men can be in the kitchen without fear of losing their masculinity. Note, however, the mechanics at work here: cooking becomes coded as manly because it is a way to display competence and use specialized tools, and extends men's interest in outdoor activities such as hiking, hunting, fishing and barbecuing (Dummitt, 1998). In addition, as Swinbank (2002) has noted, men tend to cook by choice, rather than necessity. All this echoes a larger trend in sustainable homemaking practices such that there are highly spatialized and gendered divisions of labour that keep men focused on outdoor, leisurely projects while the responsibility for the everyday implementation of green behaviours fall to women inside the home (Organo et al., 2013). Along class lines, the acquisition of appliances, clothing, tools and equipment for specialized activities such as cooking or exercise has emphasized individualization in the household, as well as carbon-intensive travelling, and accessibility is thus further limited by income available to practitioners (Røpke, 2009; Sanne, 2002). Lastly, recreation and leisure activities contribute a significant proportion of emissions due to the embedded transport and materials (Druckman & Jackson, 2009, 2010). Once again, any transition to a post-growth future must be cognizant of how existing asymmetries recalibrate, perpetuate or collapse, and the various intersectional dimensions of household ethics and ethical practice.

Degrowth scholars argue that reduced production, working hours and consumption, give communities more time for civic engagement, family and community life (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis et al., 2018). This was apparent during the imposed degrowth of lockdown, as study participants reported the myriad ways they filled their time while enduring lockdown. As a political project, experimenting with such low-carbon possibilities can bring to life underappreciated aspects of economic activity such as meaning and pride, aspects often lost in the hyper-industrialized setting of capitalism. Participating in such activities actively **reclaims** one's time and one's participation from the market, **reallocating** these essential assets towards the building and sustaining of local community (R3-5).

4.2.3 Conscious Consumption

Consumerism is a pivotal practice for participating in the social life of capitalism (Jackson, 2013). Considered an "iron cage" (Jackson, 2013), consumerism has become such an embedded ritual in capitalist society that human relationships are "increasingly mediated by objects" (Sandlin, Burdick,

& Norris, 2012: 141). Rooted in overproduction, overconsumption facilitates a means to a profit maximizing end, encouraging a market logic that fails to distinguish between basic needs and superfluous luxury, or entertain questions of sufficiency and limits (Pirgmaier, 2020). These interlocking processes fuel environmental disaster, social destruction, and global systems of exploitation via cheap labour and transportation systems (Kahn, 2010).

Households are primarily understood as sites of consumption, rather than also having capacity to produce or host a more complex micro-economy (Gibson, Head, Gill, & Waitt, 2011). The logic of the market has become so pervasive that freedom of consumer choice has become the dominant expression of one's democratic right rather than voting (Barber, 2007). So long as novelty and status are prioritized, responsibilities and obligations to fellow citizens and communities are undermined (Sandlin et al., 2012). In fact, referring to a person as a "consumer" rather than a "citizen" (common in media communications) increases materialism, competition and selfishness, while decreasing trust and willingness to cooperate with others (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, Bodenhausen, & Bodenhausen, 2012). Moreover, populations living under capitalistic economic systems have been found to more strongly endorse materialistic values such as money, power and status (Kasser et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2007).

One of the main prerogatives of the degrowth imperative is to **reduce rates of consumption** (R6). This can take place through acts of sharing and repairing goods, as well as the substantial downscaling of consumption by decreasing work hours, take-home income and thus purchasing power. Reducing rates of consumption is important for minimizing the ecological impact of human activity on the biosphere, but it is just as critical from a mental health perspective. Decades of research in psychology demonstrate that extrinsic values such as materialism have been found to decrease empathy, increase narcissism and anti-social behaviour, and are negatively associated with personal well-being (Kasser, 2016). The opposite also holds true: to the extent that intrinsic values are prioritized, more emphasis is placed on community, health, benevolence, trust and cooperation. These are the very values needed to mobilize and sustain a large-scale economic transition in the short- and longer term.

Lockdown measures had a major impact on participant shopping and consumption habits. Many participants explored new and innovative ways to access the supplies they needed through alternative channels, and expressed **changes to priorities** regarding spending habits including beauty and cosmetics, clothing and food (R3,5). There was a shift away from luxury consumption and towards meeting basic needs, and an intentional evaluation of consumer patterns to **realign participant values and actions** (R1). In particular, there was a dedicated effort by participants to support locally owned businesses. Over half of the participants (n=24) reported shifting their spending habits to support local

businesses and organizations. For example, Participant #8 said lockdown gave her the time to "buy carefully" due to the fact that her and her roommates were forced to stay home. She shared:

> *I would order food from places that weren't chain stores because I was concerned. You felt like that was a moral obligation, not to buy from places that were probably going to be okay in the long run. So I was cutting out any buying from chain stores and instead would try to buy from places that were local and small owned businesses, privately owned businesses – P8*

The morally-driven motivation to change consumer habits is an intriguing outcome of an imposed degrowth. Rather than being motivated by panic or security, these participants took the time to reflect on their contributions to the economic climate of the lockdown for themselves and for others.

This alternative consumer ethic also inspired many participants to reconsider or completely cut their support for corporations such as Amazon. Participants expressed how the lockdown exposed the harmful and exploitative ways that Amazon leveraged and benefitted from the economic hardship of the pandemic, driving a shift in consumer habits. For example, Participant #39 shared that:

> *I'm kind of anti-Amazon. I was kind of already anti-Amazon. But now I'm extra anti-Amazon. So, I think that that'll be a permanent change, I think, where I'm putting more effort into finding local places to get goods and services – P39*

Some participants even mentioned that smaller local businesses had fewer burdens such as shipping delays than a large international corporation, encouraging them to pursue alternatives.

Lastly, participants facilitated a multiplicity of material, service, and immaterial **exchange** that took place **beyond the formal paid market** (R3). While this was often facilitated by online mutual aid groups, which is where study participants were recruited, non-monetary exchanges also took place within households, neighbourhoods, as well as social and familial networks. A total of 38 participants discussed participating in the informal exchange of goods and services, with the majority (n=12) at an income of $50-75,000. Exchanges and gifts included clothing, cookware, food, toys, furniture, information and services. For example, Participant #29 spent twelve hours a day on both Saturday and Sunday every weekend to meal prep for his immune-compromised parents so they could minimize their exposure to the virus. Participant #14's apartment building coordinated a jigsaw puzzle exchange for residents to provide access to entertainment. Participant #13 had an informal food exchange with friends, leaving baked goods in each other's' mail boxes. He reflected on the importance of this exchange for maintaining a sense of community:

> *That was one way that we felt like we were staying connected. It was really nice just to feel like someone was also taking care of me at the same time – P13*

The above experiences focus on giving and supporting their community members during times of struggle. The imposed degrowth scenario encouraged these participants to reflect on what they could do with what they had to support others. In this time of crisis, participants found ways to engage in

alternative forms of economy based in social interaction rather than utility maximization. These very acts serve to disrupt conventional market logics by demonstrating alternative motivations for economic participation, especially since no financial exchange was involved.

A critical finding in the reporting of alternative economic exchange was the role of mutual aid groups in providing offered life-saving resources, services and supports that households were struggling to secure during lockdown. For Participant #1, mutual aid groups were critical to feeding and clothing her household of six children:

> *As the stress began to get more intense, the struggle financially began to get overwhelming. Those groups have been pretty much life-saving for myself and many other people that I know. For example, you know, you find yourself saying, Oh my God, how am I going to feed everyone? Or, you know, these kids can't fit into anything and let's be realistic. Everyone has been stuffing their faces this entire lockdown because there's literally nothing else to do. So everyone's growing out of everything. So I'm in a lot of mom groups. I'm also in a Caremonger group. And I've been able to like kind of clean out my kids' smaller stuff, my smaller stuff that's in good condition. I try to make trade offs with moms that have things that are more in my size and things along that nature – P1*

Mutual aid groups also helped participants connect to vital services including food, supplies and mental health support. For example, Participant #27 was able to address her own personal mental health needs and household financial concerns through these important networks. This included receiving reparations from settler-allies for her home mortgage and to support her child's dental work. P27 also commented on the way mutual aid groups created exclusive access to connections to meet her mental health needs:

> *I also accessed a psychotherapist who was specifically geared towards working with black clients and she's a black woman herself. I found out about her strictly from a mutual aid group that I'm part of. I really found her helpful because it was sort of like the we're all in this together type thing. And she was able to, to help me, you know, in a culturally specific way, I think in, you know, really normalizing what I was going through with the anxiety and the depression - P27*

These online resources were a critical factor for participants to meet their material and emotional needs, demonstrating the pivotal role of **social networks** in times of crisis (R2).

The multiplicity of exchange, the sharing of goods and the offering of services and supports to those in need reflect informal yet robust economic practices that have emerged partly in response to the unreliable nature of the capitalist market (Ince & Hall, 2018). Known to Horton and Kraftl (2009), as a "quiet politics",

> in the context of crisis, sharing practices might be understood to challenge, circumvent, and destabilise economic relationships underpinning current crises, as well as provide possible modes of mitigating risk or 'retrofitting' economic systems to adapt to changing circumstances. Sharing can also be understood as a form of politics, whether as a result of sharing, or by considering sharing as a political stance (Ince & Hall, 2018: 10)

Crises themselves are also shared as burdens, risks, experiences, material conditions and anxieties draw people together. The sharing of experience and emotion constitute social resources also integral to the concept of sharing (Hellwig, Belk, & Morhart, 2018). Many research participants created and shared informational resources such as tools for allyship, mental health, and a pandemic safety decision-making matrix. Additional examples in this study of sharing and exchanging beyond the market include:

- P21 gave her sister-in-law baby supplies including a car seat and stroller
- P24 bought groceries for a neighbour that was recovering from surgery
- P33 would batch cook and give extra food away to mutual aid groups, as well as sanitary products
- P41 would share grocery shopping duties with neighbours who did not have a car
- P20 and 18 were grateful to receive grocery and prescription drop offs from neighbours and strangers on mutual aid groups
- P32 gave away toys and clothes to 'new mom' Facebook Groups, and also bought bubbles for all the children in her building
- P39 donated spare cookie sheets to a neighbour that was starting up a baking business
- P2 furnished her daughter's entire bedroom with free finds on the online mutual aid groups
- P26 salvaged a seat from a local movie theatre that was closing down
- P36 repurposed a neighbour's train table for their child as a craft table
- P5 gave their old bike to their neighbour's children
- P6 received a sourdough starter from a friend to experiment with baking, and secured the majority of her household's plants and footwear from these trading sites
- P13 utilized the mutual aid groups to drop off baked goods to anyone who requested them on Mother's Day
- P4 made over 1200 homemade masks over the course of the initial lockdown, and could take advantage of free clothing giveaways

Households actively shared resources and support systems outside the paid realm, demonstrating that the market is not an essential mechanism for economic activity to occur – or for wellbeing to be maximized. Moreover, the **sharing and exchanging** of goods and services can serve to **retrofit existing economic systems** to adapt to present crises and change these systems in the longer term (R1,2,3,5).

The exploration of alternative mechanisms for meeting needs outside market conventions is a key aspect of mobilizing a degrowth future (Jarvis, 2019). Informal practices of exchange and sharing create opportunities to redistribute wealth and resources, localize economic activity by leveraging community groups to facilitate the exchange, reduce waste production through the re-use of material goods, and restructure key economic institutions and relations among social ties. Most importantly, experimenting with alternatives actively confront persisting market logics that insist on individualism, static preferences, autonomy and utility (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink,

2009; Nelson, 2013). In this instance, participants demonstrated interdependence by supporting each other through the crisis, and did so with limited or no exchange of services (Jochimsen, 2003). This challenges the primary assumption in conventional economics that all human behaviour is preference-based choice aimed strictly at maximizing utility (Farley & Washington, 2018; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Gintis, 2000).

4.2.4 From Consumer to Practitioner

Taking a practice theory approach, Røpke (2019) argues that the pursuit of activities outside market exchange serves to shift the conceptualization of humans from consumers to practitioners (R1). Acquiring skills and knowledge for particular activities emphasizes the importance of doing rather than having, and challenges the priority of consuming as the primary relation between people and the market (and planet) (Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007). In the present case study, by experimenting with food gardens households recognized their own capacity as "pro-sumers" (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). Processes of "prosuming" contribute to **de-materializing economic activity** through localized production, empowering individuals as **both producers and consumers of value** (R2,3,5). Such experimentation disrupts industrialized modes of food provisioning, and creates opportunities for recreation, social connection, improved biodiversity and cultural expression (Ghosh, 2014). Most importantly, as a localized act of resistance, experimenting with food gardens can restore social and economic relations through a sense of autonomy and participation among a local population (Ayres & Bosia, 2011; Naylor, 2012).

Just over half of the study's participants (n=22) chose to grow food at home during the initial lockdown. The majority of these participants (n=13) owned their home, were born in Canada (n=12) and had children (n=13). Interestingly, the prominent household type for household food production in this study was an apartment building (n=8) followed closely by a house (n=7). Growing food in this study included backyard vegetable gardens, rooftop or balcony gardens, as well as indoor potted vegetable plants and herbs. Food grown by participants largely consisted of herbs and vegetables. Reflecting on her experience, Participant #28 who was working from home with her partner and two children, exclaimed:

> *Yes, we did! We were terrible at it! We let the raccoons and the squirrels eat everything. So we were growing tomatoes and green beans and yellow beans, and zucchini and herbs and what else? There's a couple of things that didn't take, Oh, these little spicy peppers that we thought were sweet peppers, but they turned out to be little spicy things. So we did do much more gardening than we normally do. And yet it produced, you know, like five tomatoes and three green beans. But it was really fun, and it was fun to send the kids out everyday to, you know, try*

and collect stuff. Although all the tomatoes had big squirrel bites in them, but it was really fun – P28

Of note in P28's remarks is the fact that experimenting with home food gardens is a matter of recreation, joy, relationships and a reclamation of time. This highlights a major theme in the findings of this thesis: the middle-class identity of most research participants serves to shift the discourse of an imposed degrowth away from basic survival and towards an escape from the growth paradigm by finding meaningful ways to live. Understanding the class implications of a degrowth transition is key for a successful shift, since it is the regions and populations which have benefited from inequitable distributions of wealth that must shift behaviours and create the ecological space for less wealthy regions to flourish. Identifying trends in behavioural shifts is key to leveraging longer term changes, but this must be conducted in tandem with understanding and meeting the needs of less wealthy populations to devise socially just degrowth policies.

Household food production is increasingly being recognized as an important aspect of building alternative sustainable futures (Schupp & Sharp, 2012; Smith & Jehlicka, 2013; Vavra, Danek, & Jehlicka, 2018). While most research on this topic takes place in the Majority World, food gardens continue to be popular in overdeveloped nations such as Canada, where 42% of rural Canada's population has been found to engage in food self-provisioning (Teitelbaum & Beckley, 2006). The most critical factor for household food provisioning is access to land, which explains the high uptake among rural residents (Vavra, Danek, et al., 2018). Further, while environmental motives might be expected for uptake, factors including health, quality, and food security indicate that household food provisioning remains an "unintentionally sustainable" practice (Vavra, Megyesi, et al., 2018).

There were a variety of motivations among study participants for growing food at home during lockdown. For some, it was an opportunity for financial savings and securing consistent access to fresh produce. Access to fresh produce was also important for participants due to the risk of COVID-19 virus transmission at farmers markets. Interestingly, for other participants, securing fresh produce at home was motivated by perceived food shortages and scarcity during the lockdown. Participant #37 also expressed this perspective, claiming it was more than just extra free time to pursue the vegetable garden:

It wasn't even just the time. It was more like, Oh God, if we have actual shortages, if we have actual issues, I might need to start thinking more about - because I'd laid in some supplies. It had taken me more time and more thinking, but I figured out some Costco orders through a service for non-Costco members in the GTA. That's very helpful. But then I was like, well, I can't do that for things that are more like fresh products such as greens or whatever. So what should I do with that? So that's kind of what motivated it. It wasn't having more time. It was more like the scarcity – P37

The motivation experienced by Participants 37 and 41 were based in perceived scarcity. The concept of "actual shortages" has not and did not enter these participant households. They are experiences that these participants so far can only attempt to imagine. This again speaks to the significant role of class in the accessibility of degrowth politics and practice. While there is an awareness of the fragility of certain systems such as global food security, these fragilities and scarcities do not inform the experience of many participants in this thesis.

The universalized notion of scarcity has played a fundamental role in legitimizing present systems of power and politics. Traditional economic theory situates scarcity as a condition fundamental to the human experience due to an inevitable tension between unlimited wants and limited resources (Daoud, 2011). By naturalizing this phenomenon, scarcity persists outside market forces and is removed from the political and contextual drivers of environmental destruction (Mehta, Huff, & Allouche, 2019). The narrative of scarcity is strategically used to legitimize present systems of accumulation that have evolved from colonization, property regimes, resource control and appropriation. Major debates about the scarcity of global resources such as food, fuel or air quality are conveniently diverted away from historical and political contexts and towards the intensification of extraction. Verzola (2015) contends that both material and immaterial abundance is expressed in a multiplicity of forms, from the internet's ability to reproduce and share information to the energy of the sun or ocean to sustain populations. By understanding both scarcity and abundance as relative and contextual, notions of sufficiency come to the fore as a way to manage and adapt behaviour with present and future scarcities through an ethics of 'enough' rather than 'more' (Jackson, 2017b; Kallis, 2017b; Salleh, 2009).

Grassroots struggles towards new and alternative systems of provisioning challenge to the universalized notion of scarcity (Hildyard, 2019). By recognizing scarcity as a concept manufactured by elites through institutional means to serve political ends, alternative narratives can be articulated that directly account for historic systems of power and injustice to understand past changes and present responsibilities (D'Souza, 2019). Literature on degrowth juxtaposes the discourse of scarcity with the concept of 'frugal abundance', placing an emphasis on collective sufficiency and meeting basic needs equitably (Banerjee, Jermier, Peredo, Perey, & Reichel, 2020). Importantly, forms of fulfillment from a degrowth perspective include enriching non-material life goals such as secure social relationships (see next sub-section), problematizing the reliance on material resources to satisfy human desires. Abundance is an emerging field of inquiry and interest for challenging dominant scarcity narratives.

Changing food routines was a clear outcome of lockdown measures for many of the Toronto households in this study, which served to challenge behavioural assumptions that are foundational to the growth paradigm. By **reclaiming ownership** of and responsibility for food production, participants

demonstrated opportunities to **disrupt capitalist conventions** of the household as a strictly consumer-oriented entity (R1), and fostered opportunities for pro-sumption (R3,5), closing the loop between producer and consumer (Helfrich & Bollier, 2015). Pushing beyond the simple dichotomy of work and leisure, the activities pursued by participants during lockdown can be considered self-care activities that respond to the deep existential needs of the human experience (Jochimsen, 2003). Expressions of joy, creativity, concentration and skills-building encapsulate some of the rawest aspects of what it means to be human. Study participants reported the opportunity during lockdown to refine or develop skills such as cooking, baking, language, music, crafts and sewing. These activities foster qualitative social development rather than quantitative economic growth, and cultivate opportunities for personal enrichment not presently valued in GDP accounts (Finley, 2018).

4.2.5 Strengthening Social Bonds

Processes of capital accumulation are predicated on the social alienation from one's community, one's labour, the natural world, and from the self (Vergara-Camus, 2019; Weeks, 2011). Competition among workers for secure employment and income keep social relations estranged, eroding possibilities for trust, responsibility and cooperation. The prioritization and promotion of individualism come at the expense of the collective society, undermining any sense of solidary necessary for resistance. This is a sentiment aptly captured by Levine in his book *Get Up, Stand Up: Uniting Populists, Energizing the Defeated, and Battling the Corporate Elite*:

> There is nothing more important in breaking people from their capacity to resist oppressive forces than creating a society of isolated people. With social isolation, people stop sharing information, there is an absence of mutual validation about the source of their misery, and they are much more likely to believe that it is their personal weakness that has allowed them to be victimized. Without social isolation, people lack the bonds necessary to provide the collective self-confidence that they can overcome oppression (Levine 2011: 68).

Human interactions are increasingly reduced to mere exchange of labour power, and processes of alienation extend beyond paid work relations into all social facets of life. Emancipation from these harmful relations is an essential aspect of mobilizing ecologically viable economic alternatives.

Social connectedness is considered an antidote to apathy, depression and isolation (Levine, 2011). Building and maintaining social relations has also historically been a fundamental component of human survival (Daly & Farley, 2010). From the ecological economics perspective, human identity is conceptualized as a "person-in-community", whereby our existence is constituted by a relationship with members of the larger community – family, friends, neighbours, teachers, colleagues etc. (Daly & Cobb Jr., 1989). Human welfare depends on the quality of personal relationships, emphasizing the interdependent nature of communities and society. An example of this dependence has been

demonstrated by the significant impact of social cohesion on mortality rates during times of environmental disaster such as heatwaves (Klinenberg, 2012; Whitmore-Williams, Manning, Krygsman, & Speiser, 2017). Building and maintaining strong social relations actively counters the capitalist growth paradigm by articulating alternative subjectivities that prioritize care, consent, and compassion (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020).

In the present case study, another significant outcome of lockdown was the **strengthening of social bonds** between and among household members, neighbours, and the larger community (R2,3). Community in this regard is considered any other member of the participants' household, family or friendship network, or the surrounding neighbourhood. For example, Participant #14 saw her entire building complex come together over Facebook to arrange a network of emergency contacts and grocery shoppers for residents who were having trouble accessing resources:

> *We began to form a little network of people who would go grocery shopping for others. Just to be there, you know, to be emergency contacts and stuff. So that really affected the building. It affected the community – the sociology – if you will, of this building… the social fabric of this building has intensified; thickened a little bit - P14*

This 'thickening' of social bonds was a key factor for participants battling loneliness and isolation during lockdown. It encouraged participants to change their approaches to **communication**, and also required the development of new **trusting bonds** as lockdown restricted access to social gatherings and visits (R3). For example, Participant #8 had to turn inwards to her roommates for support in times of struggle, who had only been acquaintances prior to lockdown. They established "family dinners" and movie nights to stay connected to each other during such a tumultuous time.

During the imposed lockdown, participants felt that social relations among household members, friends and family became deeper and more enriching. Due to lockdown measures, quality connection became a more cherished experience. Participants thus expressed a reprioritizing of friendships and connections in order to invest their efforts in relationships that they value most, and put aside efforts around weaker connections. Participant #24 reflected on the value of social time, and the ways in which it was prioritized during lockdown:

> *I think has been very, very helpful because every moment now, when we are socializing, it's more cherished and it's more enriching. So I think our relationships are deeper and enriched, even though there's fewer contact with people – P24*

Proximity was certainly a factor for some, especially parents who appreciated the opportunity to build more intimate connections with their children at home. The imposed degrowth encouraged many child-rearing participants to reconsider their approaches to childcare as bonds strengthened, quality time increased, and creative housebound entertainment was embraced. Parents discovered more about their

children's' interests and skills, and was able to cater more meaningful collaborative activities in response. Bonds were also fostered at a distance, such as grandparents having video calls with their grandkids at a more frequent rate. Lastly, due to the global nature of the pandemic participants felt that the world became a kinder place. With the increase in community supports, participants had an overall sense that society changed for the better.

As a result of the imposed degrowth, households dedicated more time and effort **prioritizing social relations** (R1,2,3). This outcome disrupts conventional economic narratives of human identity as inherently selfish and individualistic, and instead demonstrates the role of cooperative behaviour and the importance of belonging to community. It is these "micro-social qualities of interaction and togetherness" that inform the socially reproductive labour of the everyday, and enhance the skills and processes of being and doing collaboratively that situates economics as an inherently social phenomenon (Jarvis, 2019: 6). The cultivation of loving communities of support creates a sense of belonging that is key to resisting the alienating nature of the capitalist economy (Gibson-Graham, 2011). Indeed, the future of the economy is ultimately dependent on non-monetary relations such as trust, which market institutions perpetually undermine to an extent that is "not only unrealizable but undesirable from the viewpoint of long-term reproduction of the capitalist system" (Federici, 2010: 2). The lockdown period enabled households and communities to re-evaluate relationships and engage more deeply with one another in ways that could not be prioritized prior to the imposed degrowth scenario. As a collective act of resistance, reclaiming the notion of community as an extension of oneself, and reliance on that community for support, is a key aspect of mobilizing economic alternatives.

4.2.6 Attachment to Place

Defined as the bond between people and places, place attachment plays a significant role in quality of life, personal identity, life satisfaction and more (Altman & Low, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Stedman, 2002). A growing body of literature is also recognizing the importance of place attachment for resilience, well-being and adaptive capacity in the face of a warming world (Adams, 2016; Agyeman, Devine-Wright, & Prange, 2009; Hess, Malilay, & Parkinson, 2008). Beyond the personal benefits derived from place attachment such as belonging, comfort, entertainment and connection to nature, leveraging communities of attachment has been identified as a critical factor for effective environmental policy via community engagement and public participation (Gurney et al., 2017). During lockdown, attachment to place was strengthened both within the household, and to the wider local neighbourhood and physical community.

Within the household, participants reorganized their spaces to adapt to living and working there full-time. Participants noted that their pride, investment and care for their home spaces significantly increased as a result, dedicating more time and effort to make themselves feel comfortable in their home. Participant #16 discussed the shift in priorities experienced during the lockdown:

> *Before [lockdown] our house used to be shelter for us to take our daily rest before starting our day, because our minds are elsewhere… Whereas now, because of quarantine, our priorities for the space that we occupy changed to: Okay, we're living here, we're actually invested in this place because we have to be. So we upped our chores, we upped our care for the place, and also stimulating activities with each other – P16*

Physical changes were made by many participants to home lighting, art, furniture and overall layout, and more time was dedicated to keeping spaces clean. As a result of lockdown measures, participants **invested more time and resources** to improve their household spaces (R5). Rather than a display of status or meaningless conspicuous consumption, participants prioritized **creating sacred spaces** of safety and comfort in a time of crisis (R1,2).

There were also changes to how the household spaces were utilized. Kitchen tables became work spaces and meeting rooms for participants, and even schools as kids conducted their online lessons remotely from home. Participant #24's partner was conducting their paid work remotely in their laundry closet so that their one-year-old could sleep, until they were able to coordinate home renovations in the summer. During warmer spring weather, Participant #8 moved her desk to the front porch where she was able to conduct her paid job remotely while enjoying fresh air. Participant #28's household began using their front yard to gather safely with neighbours and enjoy social time. Participant #6 put a hammock up in their front porch, making a significant difference for the entire household. Reorganizing household spaces also aided in delineating boundaries between work and play, described by Participant #10 who said:

> *Sort of being more intentional about what is leisure time and what is work time, I think, because it's all happening in the same space. You know, I would take my work laptop and I would put it away after work and then I would take my other laptop and I'd go somewhere else. I would very much be like, I work at this desk only. And then the rest of my house is like fun and I do other things – P10*

Taking up existing spaces in new and alternative ways is an intriguing outcome of an imposed degrowth scenario. Before lockdown, front yards, porches and balconies were taken for granted and often a backdrop to the larger household space and broader neighbourhood. As a result of lockdown measures, participants needed to find creative ways to use their space and find entertainment within the home setting. In order to facilitate a degrowth transition, low-carbon livelihoods will include spending more time in a localized setting. Creating desirable spaces to enjoy this time is key. Study participants made

an explicit effort to make their homes a desirable space to be, and through these experiences it is possible for participants to develop a deeper attachment with these spaces and take advantage of them more often in the future.

Lockdown measures also encouraged participants to explore their surrounding neighbourhood. Due to the limited number of activities available, participants had no choice but to explore local options for entertainment, leisure and exercise, as well as to host social gatherings. As mentioned previously, casual walks through local neighbourhoods was a very popular pastime among study participants. These leisurely experiences expanded awareness regarding the opportunities for outdoor time within the city limits, and participants' familiarity with it:

> *I guess in my head, I just wrote that off as not something you could do downtown, especially cause we don't have a car and I can't drive. So I sort of always thought hiking and the scenery and the nature was sort of somewhere outside, and inaccessible to me. But lately, during lockdown, I would just pull up Google maps and we would find a little green spot on the maps and we just walk there. And I really got to know the area around me a lot better than I would have – P10*

Local park and green spaces were an extremely popular choice among participants, as well as walks through city streets. At the individual level, outdoor walks were identified by participants as an important mechanism for maintaining mental health. It also created awareness among participants about localized entertainment options that might have otherwise been overlooked.

From a community perspective, participants found ways to **reclaim spaces for communal use**, including parks and parking lots (R2,3). Participant #14 met with her family in a local parking lot to watch her grandchildren skateboard. Participant #22 hosted their first family gathering of the pandemic in a local parking lot with lawn chairs, and did so again for a birthday. Participant #26 and his housemates took to their local parking lot with lawn chairs to listen to music and bond outside of the home. Participant #27 taught their daughter to ride a bike in a local No Frill's parking lot. Interestingly, Participant #14 also had the opportunity to move her singing group to an outdoor stage. On Saturday afternoons, her singing group would gather in a local park and sing, providing entertainment to passersby, simultaneously circumventing the difficulties of coordinating multiple singing voices on a Zoom call.

Using a place attachment framing of community, Gurney et al. (2017) argue that the largely neglected non-material bonds people form with places such as the household and local neighbourhood offer a unique vantage point for understanding and strengthening public participation, environmental stewardship and global sustainability goals. Cultivating a strong sense of belonging is an important aspect of civic duty and political advocacy. Without this attachment, citizens lack the feeling of pride

or obligation to advocate for their community. Further, in an increasingly globalized world it is possible these attachments could transgress physical borders and enable transnational public participation and stewardship. Building these strong attachments to the home during an imposed degrowth could offer much promise for a more politically active degrowth citizen by facilitating greater demand for policy advocacy at the local level and beyond.

4.2.7 Political Engagement

In the present capitalist growth paradigm, the most effective and meaningful way to participate in society is through one's purchasing power (Sandlin et al., 2012). Consumerism has strategically undermined the notion of citizenship whereby political action has been worn down into nothing more than satisfying fleeting material desires (Jackson, 2013). Even conventional sustainable development narratives situate the market as the central mechanism for individuals to express their environmental values (Hobson, 2013). Logics of competition and profit pervade the most crucial aspects of political life, replacing social citizens responsible by and for the community to individual agents responsible for personal investments in time, money and energy (Dardot & Laval, 2014). The growth paradigm actively pacifies the political, neutralizes democratic organizing, and commodifies public services through deregulation and financial liberalization (Floro & Dymski, 2000; Levine, 2011; Vergara-Camus, 2019). A key organizing tactic for degrowth is the reconstitution of a deliberative democracy including the "radical restructuring of economic processes through collective deliberation about their scope, functions, and structure" (Kallis et al., 2018: 17).

For these reasons, my work follow critical feminists, ecofeminists and cultural geographers who emphasize that the household is a fundamentally political space. The everyday reproductive labour conducted in households upsets the false divisions between private and public life precisely because it is both (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Head, Farbotko, Gibson, Gill & Waitt, 2013). Household relations "extend outward to automobiles, schools, community organisational meeting places, corner stores and other dwellings. Friendship and social networks also contribute to (re)structuring domestic space through providing emotional support and concrete assistance with maintenance tasks" (Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011: 10). Households shape and inform demographics, ideological codes, citizenship, and labour power (Jochimsen, 2003; Peterson, 2010). Understanding the socially reproductive labours that develop and inform personal politics is a key avenue for informing an engaged degrowth citizenship.

In response to an imposed degrowth, participants reported a multiplicity of ways in which they were engaged politically from within their own home. This included voting, signing petitions, putting

up lawn signs of solidarity, participating in development consultation meetings, learning about the structure of local political systems, and expressing an appetite for explicitly degrowth politics. Lastly, participants expressed a renewed support for state intervention in the form of public health, economic relief and emergency measures. The examples highlighted in this study demonstrate the interest and persistence of households to participate in the political sphere despite the capitalist insistence that the private domain of the home is a politically vacant space. Further, despite an international pandemic emergency, study participants still found ways to participate in civic responsibilities across political borders. This demonstrates the dedication and interest of participants to engage in such civic duties, which is an essential aspect of implementing a successful low-carbon shift. It will be important for future degrowth scenarios to maintain this possibility to ensure political engagement remains active.

Voting is a fundamental aspect of participating in a liberal democracy. Seven participants discussed their experience voting during the pandemic. Four of these participants were American and voted abroad in the U.S. federal election, many of them for the first time (R1). Participant #2 found support with Democrats Abroad to vote for the first time. Participant #26 campaigned on behalf of the Bernie Sanders campaign during lockdown, and Participant #37 registered Americans to vote in their federal election. In terms of local elections, a few participants voted in local by-elections such as Participant #38. She pointed to the ease of the process in comparison to the election south of the border:

> *You see videos of Americans lining up to vote for hours during a pandemic. We just walked down to our lobby of our building, cast our vote on the day of election. There was nobody there. So, you know, it's just night and day to see the issues of, you know, basically voter suppression happening in the US and then in our situation voting in the by-election – P38*

As a result of the pandemic, participants expressed they felt a civic obligation to **participate in the democratic process** to ensure their elected representatives would prioritize public health and safety during this crucial time (R2,3,5).

Participants also reported an opportunity for political education during lockdown. Many parents fielded questions from curious children about politics, elections, and frontline workers. Participants felt a responsibility to raise children that were politically aware and curious, so having regular conversations and answering questions was a key part of this process. As such, participants shared the ways their children expressed solidarity during the pandemic, such as window signs and chalk drawings with inclusive messaging. Participants themselves also did this with lawn signs for the *$15 and Fairness* campaign and Black Lives Matter. While frontline protesting and activism was less accessible due to the pandemic, political participation was expressed in numerous other ways. This includes signing the petition for pandemic pay, and participating in public consultation meetings for land development decisions in the city. Online meetings removed historical barriers to participation

like scheduling and accessibility. Lockdown also brought to prominence the structure and function of the different levels of government, as noted by Participant #13:

> *I could not have named Teresa Tam [Chief Public Health Officer of Canada] before this happened. And to be honest, if I had never had to know what her job was, I think I would have been a happier person. So I think that my view on what different parts of the government do has changed in the way that that impacts. And I think we've all become more aware of what's federally regulated versus what's provincially and municipally regulated – P13*

As a result of lockdown measures, participants **became more aware** of regional regulations, political bodies and members of parliament (R1,2). This awareness and knowledge are key factors for an engaged and informed citizenry that is capable of mobilizing change.

Many participants in this study expressed the desire for **changes to policy** that reflect the degrowth imperative such as universal basic income, rent relief, improved education systems, and public access resources such as the internet (R1). Note once again that participants were not aware of the degrowth framing of this study, as conversations were expressly framed as learning about participant experience during lockdown. Yet the very resources and interventions participants desired during lockdown paralleled the policies found throughout degrowth literature (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022; Kallis et al., 2018). For example, Participant #1 described the inappropriate assumptions being made by state officials about household capacities to adapt and survive lockdown and facilitate distance education:

> *They [the government] should be doing something because they don't know that every home has the ability to pay for internet. They don't know that every home has devices for these kids to be online with school. They don't know, you know, that people are able to keep houses warm right now with no income, or to keep kids fed – P1*

This appetite for degrowth policy gives much promise to degrowth advocates for advancing a low-carbon transition. Rent relief, childcare supports, and mental health services were all identified by participants as critical avenues of support during the pandemic lockdown. Universal basic income (UBI) was discussed by many, including Participant #28 who spoke with her children about UBI as an intervention for homelessness and to create awareness of their households' privilege. Despite claiming Participant #12's household avoided political conversations and involvement, universal basic income was a top priority as a result of lockdown:

> *I'm a strong believer in universal basic income. And I know that with COVID, it's actually come back into the limelight a lot, a lot of lower politicians are playing with the idea and trying to figure out how it might work. And I'm hoping that with all this mess that they're going to figure it out because that's almost what CERB was – P12*

Household members may not recognize the power and potential they have as political actors to initiate radical change. But the political values and interventions expressed by participants align directly with

the degrowth imperative. These interventions were identified as solutions to the ailments of lockdown that participants were facing. As such, the very policies that are needed to mobilize a low-carbon shift also serve to support households through such a shift in the short- and long-term.

In line with degrowth politics and values, many participants expressed a desire for redistributing wealth and resources to those who needed them during the lockdown period. This issue hit close to home for Participant #1 who had the curriculum of six children to manage spanning two school districts and six different schools:

> *I don't think that they really took into play that these kids are home, home. Like they're home now. So all of that money that you guys were pumping into keeping them in school, why is that not being evenly distributed throughout society to ensure that parents are able to give them the same quality of education at home? – P1*

Mutual aid groups were critical for redistributing resources. Participants used these groups to facilitate aid, donate money and goods, or support those in need. This sentiment was also captured in conversations about the distribution of responsibility for public health safety, and an acknowledgement that health is a public priority:

> *I think public health wise, like a acknowledgement that health is a like public priority… not a private thing. And one person's health impacts the community and those kinds of things. So I would hope to see in the future a more distributed responsibility for health and mental health as well, because mental health has been such a huge topic of conversation as well – P8*

Despite being isolated by pandemic lockdown measures, participants found creative ways to maintain or begin engaging in political life at local, regional, national and international scales. This outcome is rather promising for an imposed degrowth context, where participants easily could have taken shelter from the pandemic storm and awaited its end. Instead, participants felt that the lockdown gave them a unique opportunity to engage politically in new ways, and were actively inspired by the events of the pandemic around them to remain diligent and informed.

Moreover, participants demanded more from their elected representatives. One of the most intriguing narratives to come out of participant interviews was a renewed **support for state intervention** in the form of public health, economic relief and emergency measures (R3). Participants expressed deep disappointment in the Ontario government specifically and its lack of coordination, integration of scientific understanding, and stringent lockdown measures:

> *I think it would have been terrific if we had either a federal or provincial government that was willing to really take some risks to lead on this… what we need is leaders who are going to step up and say, okay, we're going into this hard. And we are going to give people whatever supports they need to survive that. You know, rent relief, small business relief, individual payments, whatever it takes to make it possible for people to just shut right down and stay home until this thing is under control. And that's been the Atlantic approach. It's been the Asia Pacific approach. And it means that now in those parts of the world, people are actually having something like*

normal lives. And it does take courage and it does take leadership. And it doesn't surprise me that both our federal and provincial governments have fallen short on that, but it would have been nice – P11

This was particularly prudent since participants were aware this was not the first virus outbreak or pandemic. Many participants discussed their disappointment with the lack of preparedness, coordination and action since the SARS outbreak in Toronto in 2003. Participants expressed a clear desire for preparedness, consistency and initiative from government representatives. In addition to this, households understood that lockdown measures required intervention and support from the state in the face of monthly bills and payments. Demanding adaptation from households without providing the supports to adequately accomplish this demand was a great source of disappointment for participants.

Participants recognized that a lack of state intervention had widespread implications for all members of the community and beyond, including parents, businesses, teachers, daycare providers and other frontline workers. Household members were adamant that there was much elected representatives could have done prior to the lockdown to make the stay-home order transition more bearable. Further, participants recognized that a state of emergency is not the only time state intervention is appropriate:

On one hand, I think it's great what they've done. They [the government] really stepped up and help people who, you know, have lost work due to this lockdown. But it also proved that they are capable and able to do this. And it should not be just during lockdown. It should continue on. If people can't live on their employment, there's not a livable wage in the city, then that needs to change – P2

The desire for state intervention during a time of upheaval brings great promise for garnering support and mobilizing a degrowth transition. Participants were frustrated with the poorly coordinated, inconsistent and unreliable measures in place for public health. The lack of intervention forced some participants to step up and fill in, such as Participant #24 who coordinated importing masks from Korea to ensure her colleagues at the hospital were protected with adequate equipment. The right to safe work and adequate access to necessary supplies for good work is another key area of intervention highlighted by participants during the interviews. Further, the interventions coordinated by various levels of the state demonstrated a clear capacity to do so that could be implemented beyond times of crisis.

During the time of uncertainty and upheaval of lockdown, the study population embraced state intervention and actively critiqued slow, missing or insufficient efforts. The enthusiastic support for quick and systematic government intervention expressed by participants brings great potential for supporting degrowth interventions at this scale. Cosme et al. (2017) highlight the key role of state intervention in achieving degrowth objectives of limiting material and energy consumption and redistributing wealth. Regulatory measures such as income caps, progressive tax schemes and environmental regulation inherently require direct control by government (Jarvis, 2019). As Coote

articulates in a report for the New Economics Foundation, “there is no other comparable vehicle that is capable of promoting equality across national populations” (2015: 12).

4.2.8 Keeping with the Change

With the introduction of vaccines and a decrease in case counts, there is certainly concern that adaptive responses implemented by households during this time of crisis may be short-lived. However, economic or environmental disruptions have often led to lasting effects on various household behaviours including hygiene, mobility, or food provisioning. For example, following the 1929 financial crisis, consumers in the United States held on to their possessions for much longer leading to a significant reduction in environmental pressures (Boons et al., 2020). Trends during lockdown include a significant uptake in e-commerce and delivery services, and a global shift to remote work for entire industries (Grzelec & Jagiełło, 2020; Jackson, Weiss, Schwarzenberg, & Nelson, 2020). These trends have drastically transformed the future of shopping and working practices, spaces and routines. Further, after experiencing such drastic and immediate changes, individuals may have a greater acceptance of changes and regulations to shift production and consumption patterns in the longer term.

One of the final interview questions asked study participants what aspect of their changed lockdown routine they would consider keeping once public health measures were completely lifted. It was encouraging to hear great enthusiasm from participants about the new or different aspects of their routine they intended to carry forward. Without any particular intention to contribute to low-carbon alternatives, these routine changes actively shift societal norms towards more just and sustainable life ways. This includes prioritizing one’s time with more meaningful and significant activities, including spending quality time with members of one’s household, family, or community; cooking from home more frequently; creative activities and functional expenses such as furniture; physical fitness and quality of life; or, spending time outdoors or caring for food gardens. Participant #2 valued the opportunity to put things in perspective, and aims to carry that forward post-lockdown:

> *Just the mindset of, you know, keeping priorities straight or reminding ourselves, you know, what's important. What's not, and not to, you know, we kind of fill our time with stuff that's unimportant – P2*

The imposed degrowth scenario invited participants to **experiment with alternative lifeways** that persisted beyond the everyday drudgery of capitalist convention (R1,2). Participants desired a meaningful shift towards social connection, craft and creativity, outdoors and meals. These so-called alternatives are in reality the truest form of economic participation, as they build the foundations for trust, connection and exchange.

Changes to work-life balance was another major theme to come out of post-lockdown conversations. Participant #7 felt encouraged to ask for more accommodations from their job going into the future. Participant #9 felt hopeful for a shortened work week in order to more effectively balance personal and professional priorities. Participant #20 discussed efforts for minimizing the commute to work by possibly keeping her therapy practice online or facilitating a hybrid approach. Participant #42 also recognized the value of working from home multiple times a week, and Participant #40 described how working from home brought convenience and flexibility to their once extremely rigid schedule.

> *Why do we all have to be somewhere between the hours of nine to five? And we all try to mass commute into one small radius of downtown Toronto, and then everyone scurries away like that, the thought of that actually before this just kind of blew my mind – P38*

Prioritizing time for oneself, and taking the time to absorb the "bigger picture" is something many participants found useful that they hoped to extend beyond lockdown. Participants valued the ability to **slow down** and focus on themselves (R1-3), exploring self-improvement activities such as reading or working out instead of historically rushing around to complete various errands. It was also key to transgress entrenched lifeways propagated by consumer culture, as described by Participant #20, who said:

> *I feel like ultimately more time spent at home has just meant a shift away from consumerism so much and just more of a connection to the things that can lead us to have a healthier life, like spending time outdoors, spending time with each other, sitting around a table. Finding ways to connect to our long-distance family that are creative. Figuring out ways to spend time with family, or spend time with friends, even though it's not the old ways. I think all that really matters for us – P20*

Participants expressed clear enthusiasm for maintaining certain changes to their routine as a result of lockdown measures.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter reported findings from 42 surveys and interviews with members of Toronto households, illustrating the various ways in which these households engaged in degrowth politics and practice as a result of March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown measures. Participating households were found to: experience major shifts in personal and professional perspectives (R1); prioritized their time and values differently (R1,2); experimented with household food gardens (R3,5); became more conscious and critical consumers (R2,3,5); focused on strengthening inter-personal relationships (R3); engaged in a multiplicity of exchange beyond the market (R3,4); built stronger attachments within the home and surrounding community (R5); engaged in political discourse and actions (R2,3,5); and articulated support for government intervention both during and outside periods of crisis (R2). These socially

reproductive labours are illustrated in Figure 9 depicting the uptake in degrowth politics and practices that took place in this study:

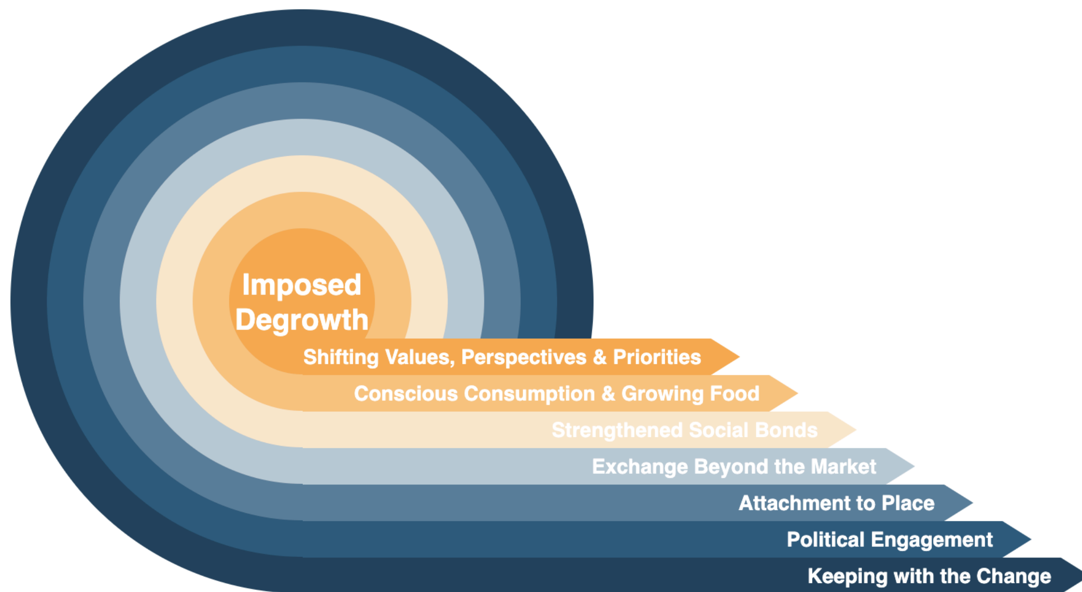

Figure 9. Uptake of Degrowth Principles & Practice in Imposed Degrowth Context

These activities took place throughout the household space from kitchen tables to porches and front lawns, and extended out to the local community in parking lots, parks, sidewalks and streets. Most importantly, these activities emphasize a nurturing of relationships between social subjects towards a common good, rather than the mindless reproduction of capitalist cogs that alienate and dehumanize. These are the socially reproductive labours that can bring about a degrowth revolution (Akbulut, 2019; Barca, 2017; Raworth, 2017).

In this sense, the household can be situated as a potential site for direct action as study participants actively confronted conventional economic values and reoriented their priorities towards more degrowth aligned principles and practices. Through this experience, household members were found to reclaim their agency from the imperatives of the market, emphasizing the importance of understanding the processes and structures informing social reproduction in a degrowth context. It is a particularly positive outcome that in the face of a public health and economic crisis, households voluntarily chose to participate in the experimentation alternative economies that actively contribute to the mobilization of a degrowth future.

Examining Toronto households during this unprecedented time of worldwide lockdown provided a unique opportunity to observe vulnerabilities to, as well as resilience for wide-scale disruption. Situating COVID-19 lockdown as an imposed degrowth scenario, the outcomes of this

research study can inform policy proposals for instigating longer term degrowth implementation in high-consumption countries. Participants took up a variety of activities that have previously been identified by degrowth scholars as vital to mobilizing the movement. Having a more specific understanding of such activities can inform degrowth advocates in both ongoing discourses and organizing. More crucially, understanding the barriers to participation can further inform degrowth discourse to ensure the most robust policy proposals. The next chapter will examine such limitations in detail.

Chapter 5. Degrowth Barriers

What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?

2. Identify potential sites, subjects and tactics of a degrowth revolution, and barriers to realization

This thesis is founded in the idea that another world beyond capitalism is possible. In the face of irreversible and compounding social and environmental crises, exploring alternative economic systems is a global imperative for the twenty-first century. However, the process of creating such an alternative is anything but simple. Structural limitations and entrenched interests of the growth paradigm mean that change will necessarily be messy, uneven, and possibly harmful. One of the objectives of this thesis is to underscore the challenges ahead in mobilizing degrowth futures by examining the barriers households faced during a global economic disruption.

Ideally, the shift to a steady-state economy slows economic growth "by design" (Kallis et al., 2018; Victor, 2019). But understanding the implications of a degrowth-by-disaster scenario is pivotal in the context of a climate uncertain future (Gibson et al., 2015). Identifying challenges and barriers highlighted by a crisis (the global pandemic) can only serve to strengthen degrowth policy proposals and support households through a worldwide economic transformation. The previous chapter examined the opportunities and positive shifts among research participants. This chapter presents additional empirical results from the 42 household surveys and interviews to examine the ways in which degrowth politics or practices were inaccessible to participants.

5.1 Identifying Barriers

The continuous accumulation of capital on a finite planet is contradictory. The growth imperative of capitalism has embedded market logics into all aspects of social life, systematically compromising social and ecological foundations of the economy (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Federici, 2011; Floro, 2012; Fraser, 2016). These entrenched logics presume that profit is an incentive that will bring about a good life for all through an increasingly autonomous and privatized market system (Fournier, 2008; Schmelzer, 2015). But in reality, the deregulation and financialization necessary for capital accumulation cause, and so require, constant crisis management and serve to elucidate the very contradictions fundamental to the profit motive (Buch-Hansen, 2018; Fraser, 2016; Harvey, 2014). The following sections explore how the priorities of the growth paradigm layer additional difficulties for mobilizing transformational change from within the capitalist system.

Drawing from Latouche's (2010) eight principles, I define barriers to degrowth politics and practice as anything that prevents participants from re-conceptualizing, re-localizing, or re-evaluating economic institutions and their place within them. This could include, for example, the weakening of social connections because of lockdown's isolation, and the consequent impeding of collective action. It could also include pressure on mental health, degrading the well-being of populations and their ability to participate meaningfully in society. Here, the pandemic is not an *exception*. It exposes the *rules* of an untenable and unbearable economic system. It also shows what ought to be central to any kind of alternative system. Degrowth by disaster shows what degrowth by design should pay attention to. The sections below offer novel insights in this regard.

5.2 Barriers to Degrowth Politics & Practice

A number of factors emerged as barriers to engaging in degrowth politics and practice during March 2020 lockdown measures. Pandemic safety made it extremely difficult to engage in regular everyday behaviours that enhance the degrowth imperative, such as visiting farmers markets or using public transportation. Other factors that prevented degrowth participation include the blurring of personal and professional spaces, compounding mental health issues, the loss of essential services, poor community support, and poor confidence in state leadership. For example, the individualized approach to public health measures assumed every individual had a home in which to safely isolate, while ignoring the realities of housing insecurity or the risk of domestic violence. It also, as in the previous chapter, ignores recent shifts in household structures and demographic transitions that have changed the makeup of households from a presumed nuclear family unit to intergenerational households or shared accommodations. The findings reported below are critical for informing degrowth policy proposals that can address such factors within the policies themselves, creating the greatest possible opportunity for uptake and long-term success of a degrowth future.

5.2.1 Pandemic Safety

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 demanded an equally (if not more) rapid response by the global community to minimize transmission rates. Mobility and capacity restrictions, mask-wearing and physical-distancing mandates, protective equipment requirements, and the cancelling of mass gatherings were some of the many government measures put in place as response (World Health Organization, 2020b). Unfortunately, such impositions heightened persisting societal fractures and harms. The pandemic shone a glaring light on social injustice and inequality.

5.2.1.1 Racism & Racial Profiling

The call by degrowth scholars for a more equitable and just society necessarily entails explicitly anti-racist principles and tactics for meaningful change. There continue to be expanding discourses on the role of justice in shaping ecological economics (Pelletier, 2010; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019; Spencer et al., 2018). Just distribution sits as one of the main three pillars of the heterodox economics framework, emphasizing a more equitable division of material resources including money or housing (Daly, 1992). However, this neutralizes the political conversation around power, access and historical responsibility. Degrowth politicizes the sustainable economics conversation by intentionally pursuing pathways to redistribute access power and wealth across peoples, regions and generations (Federico Demaria et al., 2013). However, since racist and white supremacist ideologies inform the institution of capitalism, changes to the economic system have the possibility to both challenge but also solidify such logics. In the case of the imposed degrowth of lockdown measures, racism and racial profiling were prolific.

Although the overwhelming spread of cases in North America originated from American and European travelers, the racialization of COVID-19 as the "Chinese Virus" was quick to spread (Rito, Richards, Pala, Correia-Neves, & Soares, 2020). In a repeat of what happened during in the 2003 SARS outbreak, Chinese and Asian communities became the primary target of harassment, terror and violence (Kong, Ip, Huang, & Lin, 2021; Leung, 2003). This was unfortunate, particularly due to the historical experiences of the SARS outbreak that could have been used to inform and minimize such harms (Leung, 2003).

A total of 1,150 cases of racist attacks were reported in Canada between March 2020 and March 2021, 40% of which occurred in Ontario (Kong et al., 2021). A 2020 report by Statistics Canada found that one in five visible minority participants perceived more frequent race-based harassment or attacks since the start of the pandemic (Heidinger & Cotter, 2020). Moreover, the proportion of visible minorities that had experienced an increase in harassment or attacks based on race had tripled (18%) compared to the rest of the population (6%), further pronounced among Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian participants. Women represented nearly 60% of reported cases, and men were twice as likely to report a physical assault (ibid). Further, children (under 18) and older adults (55+) were respectively 233% and 250% more likely to report being coughed or spat on than those aged 19-35 (Kong et al., 2021).

Of the eight participants (19%) in this case study that identified as Asian, East or South Asian, or Southeast Asian, only one spoke to the fear they experienced from the growing anti-Asian sentiments of early 2020 in Toronto:

There were certain things that I knew I wasn't comfortable doing that I previously did in the past. So for example grocery shopping I do have quite a bit of anxiety. So suddenly, you know, I felt very much like unable to go outside to do the shopping. So my partner was kind enough to sort of fully take on those responsibilities… At the time there was also quite a strong sort of a rise in sort of anti-Asian sentiment, and that was also another thing that I was a bit concerned about. You know, you're seeing stories on like how people, you know, were acting and I sort of just didn't feel comfortable going out on my own – P10

P10 understated her well-founded fears as discomforts. Food and grocery establishments accounted for nearly one in five of all reported racist incidents towards Asian Canadians (Kong et al., 2021). Demonizing socially vulnerable groups is an age-old strategy to salvage class power in the midst of a crisis and an "epochal feature of the Capitalocene" (Debney, 2019: 8). This phenomenon of "scapegoating" is observed by Federici (2005) in her accounts of the European witch hunts as well as the colonization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, which both served to justify the appropriation and exploitation of resources and labour from these groups. Scapegoating and 'othering' keep a societal focus on blaming the causes of the crisis rather than finding solutions in order to simultaneously maintain the status quo and attempt to hide the fundamental failures of the broader economic system (Debney, 2019). COVID-19 was no exception. The collective panic caused by the public health crisis was strategically channeled into creating greater divides between social groups, thereby keeping the focus away from the growth paradigm.

In Canada, police presence on the streets of Toronto during the initial lockdown period intensified the already well-documented racial inflections of surveillance and control. P41 said:

Me and my partner are racialized. Our daughter is racialized. And so the weird thing we were noticing was in those early days of lockdown where, you know, you would hear about cops being in parks. It was fucking nuts, honestly. I couldn't even believe that cops were policing parks and stuff. And so the weird thing we noticed was the white families in our neighborhood were not being approached in the way that my partner specifically was. And this is infuriating when you're already aware of systemic racism and, I'm sorry, but bullshit police crap in the world. It was weird to start seeing it when people are so vulnerable, and then being approached by these shitty people with authority who were telling you, aggressively, you shouldn't be in the park - in front of your daughter… I remember going out as a family in that time and feeling afraid and so going to smaller parks and constantly looking around and making sure that there were no cop cars, cause we might get ticketed, for what? I'm not sure because there's other families out too. And that was a horrible feeling until that whole thing passed and there was less policing happening around us – P41

The direct connection between policing and racism had already, pre-pandemic, damaged **community safety, trust, and longevity** (R1,2,3). While some participants shared experiences with white privilege, racism, or educating household members on such topics, others did not identify race as a factor in their lockdown experience.

Whiteness was identified by many participants as a key factor in their access to privilege including secure housing and employment during the pandemic, as well as a lower risk of virus transmission rates. This can be contrasted with Participant 4's experience as a black American:

> *I come from an African-American community and I'm telling you, twelve people have lost a parent. And sometimes more, one of my own friends - an ex-boyfriend - lost his wife. My sister's ex-boyfriend died. And these are not old people. My ex-boyfriend's wife was in her forties – P4*

Systemic racism was and is a key risk factor in the exposure to and death from COVID-19 (Wallis, 2020). Structural inequities in healthcare and employment create conditions for greater exposure, less protection, and an increased likelihood of death (Centre for Resarch & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, 2020). Racism reduces the quality of healthcare that people of colour can access, increases exposure to polluted environments, and forces people of colour onto the frontlines of **unstable and unsafe working conditions** (R4). Systemic racism in Canada "made the impact of COVID-19 medically unequal from the start", and functioned as a barrier to necessary supports (ibid: 2). Where white Canadians where (comparatively) insulated from the virus, poor and racialized Canadians were exposed, and at far greater risk. Racism was and is a defining factor in whether a person lives or dies.

Toronto Public Health estimated that in the first wave of the pandemic, racialized people disproportionately made up 83% of COVID-19 cases (Cheung, 2020). Black people represented 21% of all cases but only 9% of the City's population. On a national scale, racialized people were also disproportionately represented among recipients of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), making up 41% of the population to receive payments and only 22.3% of the total population (Morissette, Turcotte, Bernard, & Olson, 2021). Without a whole-scale commitment to anti-racism, societal responses to disruptive events may only serve to deepen these inequalities. Healing such injustices with a distributive justice framework will be key for future degrowth policy and sustainability advocacy (Gabriel & Bond, 2019; Pelletier, 2010; Spencer et al., 2018).

5.2.1.2 Limiting Gender and Sexual Expression

Gender equity is also an essential facet of meaningful economic change. Indeed, capitalist economic conventions are founded in deeply gendered constructions of knowledge and politics that actively serve to exploit women and other marginalized groups (Elias & Rai, 2019; Nelson, 1997; Plumwood, 1993). Access to power, income, employment, land and bodily autonomy are based on a heavily gendered division of labour, such as the feminization of care work which minimizes the social and economic significance of such work (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2012; Katz, 2001). Oppression based on sexuality is also rampant in capitalist logic, marking queer identities and practices

as morally, physiologically and psychologically transgressive, deviant or pathological (Pronk, Vriend, & Hart, 1993). Controlling the discourse on sexuality was essential, since the persecution of the erotic (i.e., queer) served to legitimize and justify colonization, dispossession and slavery (Crist, 2004; Gaard, 1997).

Another emergent impact of lockdown's imposed degrowth limited gender and sexual expression among participants. This occurred for Participant #39 with the introduction of face masks, a critical PPE tool to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. While identifying as a cis woman, she chooses not to present herself in a typically feminine way. This meant P39 to take on an extra burden of emotional and physical labour to reassure those around her of her presence and belonging with smiles of encouragement, particularly in places like women's public washrooms, which face masks drastically altered:

> *I've always had people looking at me funny in the women's washroom, for instance. But if you're not wearing a mask, I'm smiley and friendly. So it's like, "I know that I belong here. Do you know that I belong here? We're cool". Versus throwing a mask on, all of a sudden, I can't reassure people. I can't make people more comfortable with my appearance, which is screwed up for a lot of reasons. But I had never thought like really not wanting to stop to pee before – P39*

As a result of mask mandates, P39's gender expression became restricted and her comfort level around strangers decreased with her inability to reassure bystanders of her non-traditional self-expression:

> *In everyday interactions… I'm called sir more, I'm mis-gendered more, which only bugs me because I feel like if they figured out that they screwed it up, that then they're going to be uncomfortable. I don't really care for my own. Like, if you think I'm male, I don't care. What do I care? Doesn't matter to me. But it does care to me that you're going to feel embarrassed because you screwed it up. So then I have to reassure you that I'm okay. Because you did something stupid. You mis-gendered me. So, yeah. It's, it's hard when you can't use this part of your face – P39*

These limitations of personal expression were experienced broadly and deeply by members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. In a study of 61 LGBTQ2S youth in the Greater Toronto Area, the majority (84%) experienced changes to medical health care access and 87% experienced changes to mental health care access as a result of the pandemic (Abramovich et al., 2021). Three-quarters (74%) delayed or failed to access health care needs, 64% had to postpone or cancel transition-related appointments, and 50% had to postpone or cancel transition-related surgery. Of the 61 participants in the study, 62% were unable to access counselling or support groups, 81% engaged in non-suicidal self-injury, and nearly all youth in the study (97%) reported feeling lonelier because of the pandemic (ibid).

This experience was most pronounced in the present case study by Participant #20 and her partner, a transgender man, who had been planning to have another child through fertility treatments and assisted conception. However, fertility services were suspended during lockdown:

We were thinking of having another kid and at this point, and we're not young, like we're in our mid or early forties. And we've basically had to can that, which is really a deep sadness, but it just doesn't feel possible with the fact that now we've had to put [partner's] dissertation on hold. It will probably be almost two years by the time he gets back to it, who knows, about a year and a half or something like that. So it just feels like it kind of, yeah, it's thrown us off our life plan for sure… Probably if we were straight, we'd be able to just try to have a baby at home and that giant thing wouldn't - I'm not sure that it would be such a huge decision that we feel like we have to put off and then may never come back to – P20

The unexpected outcome of limiting access to critical public health resources is a pivotal lesson learned in the midst of an imposed degrowth. Lockdown measures thus served to highlight differences in the definition and necessity of essential services. Gender-affirming care is a **critical service** for Participant 20's household, but was not considered a priority during the pandemic lockdown measures (R1,4). Finding alternative modes of access and delivery will be essential for an inclusive and sustainable degrowth future.

Gender-based self-expression also had impacts on cis men, as Participant #33 reported. Working in the male-dominated mining industry, P33 had many male colleagues that turned to her for emotional support during times of mental distress caused by the pandemic:

I work in a very male dominated field. And a lot of people are very stereotypical, "I'm the man, let me chop a tree with my beard" kind of people. And a lot of them reached out to me privately. And they were like, I'm having a mental health crisis, help. And I'm like, why are you contacting me and not your wife? And they basically said something like, I don't want her to think I'm a pussy. And I know that you know what depression is. And I was like, Oh-kay. You need to go to therapy? – P33

It is often through the regulation of emotional displays, including fear and pain, that signify masculine identity codes "that are symbolic constituents of the gender order" (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009: 281). For P33, this resulted in the demand of her time and labour to turn her energy away from her work or personal priorities and counsel her male colleagues.

Socially constructed and conditioned performances of hetero-masculinity serve to legitimize patriarchal and thus capitalist relations and, in turn, environmental degradation (Cornwall, Edström, & Greig, 2011; Paulson, 2016). This can be demonstrated by the ways in which climate change policy arguments are gendered. Recent research in psychology showed that men using an "ethical" rather than "business" framing of climate policy were perceived by both men and women as more likely to be gay and to have feminine traits (Swim, Vescio, Dahl, & Zawadzki, 2018). Such perceptions even led to seeing the ethics-based policy argument as *weaker*, which is problematic since ethical framings serve to deconstruct the harmful systems perpetuating the climate crisis (ibid). However, such framings may be systematically minimized as a result of their perceived femininity, restricting solutions to highly

masculinized narratives of technological intervention and resource management that led to the crisis in the first place (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Pulé & Hultman, 2019).

The above example by P33 demonstrates the ways in which an imposed degrowth further entrenched gendered divisions of labour, which many scholars insist is at the root of the exploitation of women (Federici, 2009; Mies, 1998). This was additionally experienced by Participant #2 who describing her frustration with feeling unable to ask for more support from her husband since he is the sole income earner:

> *I am a full-time stay at home parent and it's hard for me to juggle that with my husband. He is the main breadwinner, so that's something that's kind of ongoing that I kind of struggle with because I obviously would like him to do more, but I don't feel like it's right for me to ask him to do more. You know what I mean? – P2*

Due to this perceived division of responsibilities, P2 did not feel it would be fair to ask her husband to step in and take on additional unpaid labour at home. Yet, women who are the primary earners frequently take on this infamous double burden.

Degrowth research and policy outputs must consider the gender equity components of this work for a sustainable long-term movement (Bauhardt, 2014; Dengler & Strunk, 2018; Rai, Brown, & Ruwanpura, 2019). This underscores the need for ecofeminist degrowth approaches to prioritize the importance of cooperation, care and sustainability by actively rejecting the logic of accumulation and re-valuing care in general – and its gendered distributions (Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017). Without such considerations, the conflict between capital and life will have unfavourable ends.

5.3 Drop in Sustainability Habits

Households are a major contributor to environmental pressures through mobility, shelter, food and energy use. A recent study found that globally, household consumption represents 60% of global emissions and 50-80% of global resource use (Ivanova et al., 2016). As a "macroactor" of the global economy, feminist researchers are dedicated to making the household a visible international economic institution by highlighting the globally transformative post-capitalist politics that can stem from household activity (Safri & Graham, 2010). Further, heading towards a climate uncertain future, limited material standards of living may force human labour power to substitute the energy and labour provided by the conventional fossil fuel economy (Lesley Head, 2015). Participating in sustainable consumption habits – and having viable energy and household options – thus remain a key aspect for cultivating a degrowth future.

In the first wave of the pandemic, minimizing the spread of the COVID-19 virus was a top priority for households, governments and businesses alike. The closure of borders and schools, banning

large gatherings, and prioritizing essential services demanded quick and sweeping adaptation to a new way of life in a global pandemic (Christakis, 2020). As a result of lockdown and safety measures, a number of sustainable and degrowth-related activities were inaccessible to study participants. While an unintended outcome of an imposed degrowth scenario, this finding is relevant for degrowth scholars to better equip public policy solutions with mechanisms that can prevent future outcomes of this kind.

5.3.1 Public Transportation

A robust public transit system is a key driver of the low-carbon transition due to the energy efficient nature of these systems, reduced emissions and land use, and the myriad socio-economic benefits such as reduced auto-dependency, improved access, and increased contributions to economic activity (Schiller, Bruun, & Kenworthy, 2010). In fact, the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) estimates a $19 billion annual benefit to the Canadian economy due to transit (CUTA, 2019). Particularly within urban centres, public transportation reduces the number of trips needed by encouraging riders to combine trips, often results in households giving up their car, and encourages other active transportation such as walking or cycling.

But the "public" in public transit assumed health risks during the pandemic. At least eight participants chose to **end their reliance** on Toronto's public transportation system to avoid risks of COVID-19 transmission (R3). While many participants worked from home and thus had their work commute eliminated, it was still necessary to travel to pick up supplies or groceries, or get to or from work. The small and confined space, mixed with the uncertainty at the start of the pandemic regarding safety protocol, made many participants very uncomfortable with public transit. As a result, many participants started to increase their personal vehicle use, such as Participant 29, whose partner historically took the TTC on a daily basis:

> *Obviously [public transit] was a major contributing factor to the spread of COVID. So, you know that was one of the first things I did with my girlfriend is she took the TTC on a daily basis and I cut that down. So wherever I could, you know, physically go out of my way, drive her wherever she needed to be was essentially what I needed to do - P29*

This circumstance was complicated for Participant 4 by her partner's physical disability. As a blind person, it was difficult for him to feel safe on public transit without being able to actively keep distance between riders. P4 said:

> *I was concerned that you'd be breathing in the air with other people. I remember at the beginning, we didn't completely understand all the ways of transmission, but breathing in the air with other people. You put your hands on the surfaces. [Partner] also was concerned that he wouldn't be able to stay away from people. He doesn't know how close they are. So we just completely stopped the TTC. And any kind of Uber or taxi or anything that we might take was*

just completely out. So now I drive him to wherever he might like to go, which is almost no where cause you can't go nowhere cause it's a lockdown – P4

Uptake in personal car use also took place for Participant #24 who started studying for a driver's test as she didn't have a license and was no longer comfortable taking the TTC. In response to pandemic safety measures, some participants turned to more **individualized and carbon-intensive** modes of transportation (R6).

For other participants, public transit was the only option for mobility and accessibility across the city. Participant 37 opted to switch from the subway to longer bus routes because the routes were less popular and thus minimized virus transmission risk. However, this meant that P37 had to find alternative stores to complete her errands as the bus routes did not go to her typical destinations. For others, participants expressed deep frustrations with the horrors of navigating Toronto's public transit system. Participant #7 declared the streetcar system in Toronto inaccessible for them in their power wheelchair, reporting the fact that they "drop you in the middle of the street" putting P7 at great physical risk. Participants thus frame public transport uptake as an **inconvenient but necessary** mode of commuting (R3,4,6).

In response to lockdown measures, uptake in public transportation was significantly derailed. As discussed earlier in the thesis, ridership of the TTC fell by 85% within the first month of the pandemic (City News Toronto, 2020e). This trend is paralleled by a drop in public transit ridership in major cities around the world (Figure 10).

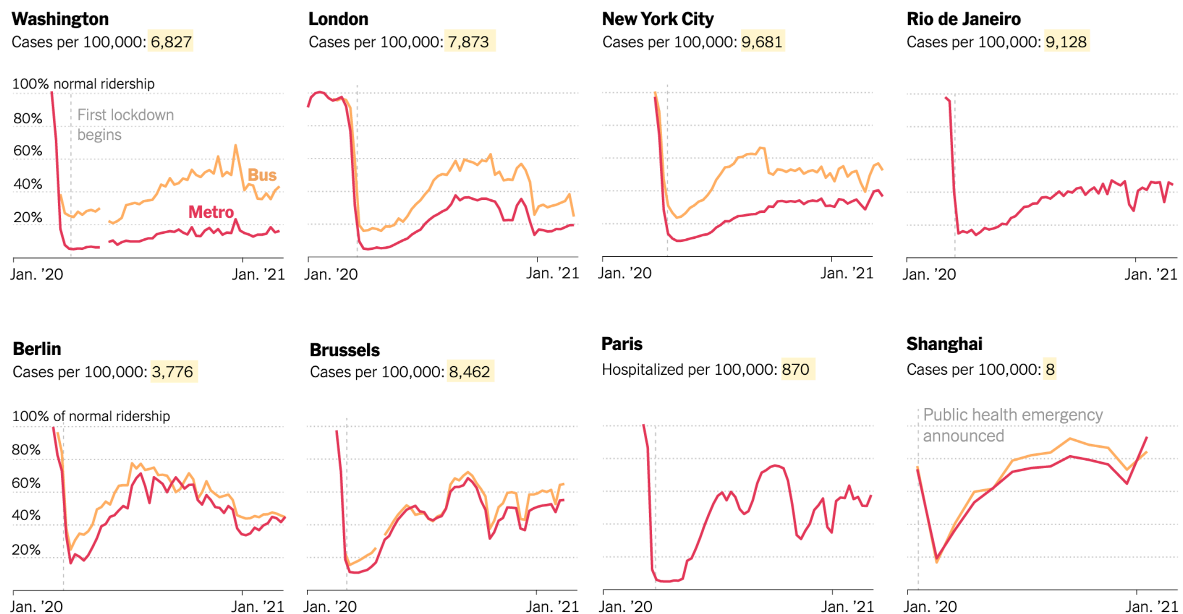

Figure 10. Transit (bus & metro) ridership in major global cities during COVID-19 pandemic (Jan 2020-2021) (Sengupta, Abdul, Andreoni, & Penney, 2021)

With participants reverting to more individualized solutions including personal vehicles or Uber, there risks a significant impact on the **attractiveness of public transport** as a feasible mobility option (R2,6). This is discouraging for two main reasons. First, a decrease in ridership could result in increased greenhouse gas emissions as commuters seek alternatives. Second, a loss in ridership also threatens the revenue needed to not only maintain but upgrade transit systems. While the threat of a contagious virus may not be a concern in future degrowth contexts, other disruptive events such as flooding, fires or droughts can also divert passengers away from transit systems and towards carbon-intensive alternatives. A major point of advocacy for the degrowth movement going forward will be to encourage and increase public transit ridership and uptake in the aftermath of the pandemic. More broadly, it is essential that degrowth policy incorporate strategies that ensure such low-carbon options like public transit remain accessible and safe during disruptive events.

5.3.2 Experimenting with Food Gardens

As described in the previous chapter, household food decisions are increasingly recognized as pivotal actions for building alternative sustainable economic futures (Smith & Jehlicka, 2013; Vavra, Danek, et al., 2018). Despite an opportunity for experimentation, some participants were unable to engage in **low-carbon food practices** such as growing their own food (R5). One of the main barriers

to entry was a **lack of space**, especially those in apartment buildings (R4). This was particularly apparent for Participant #39 who lives in a 30-storey building in the downtown core:

> *I was thinking that would be really cool to grow some vegetables on the balcony, but people throw lit cigarette butts off of their balconies and I just felt like [it was] a fire hazard, so I didn't do any growing – P39*

The limitations of **quality** space for food gardens also came up for Participant #23, who expressed concerns about the contamination of their local soil:

> *We have we don't have the yard space and we live, there's a car repair and body shop behind us and it just doesn't feel like a nice place to grow food – P23*

This also came up for Participant #4 who mentioned the **contamination** by city traffic, buses, cars and people that her vegetable garden would have to be exposed to (R6).

Access to adequate space for food gardens was a clear limitation for many to engage in alternative food practices. This aligns with recent research of household food gardens in Canada during the pandemic, which found that 41.5% of non-gardeners claim lack of space was the primary reason for not growing food (Mullins, Charlebois, Finch, & Music, 2021). Just as with the problems around public transit, these issues point to the need for innovative approaches to low-carbon alternatives and urban planning (Lehtinen, 2018; Xue, 2021). Degrowth advocacy can align itself with movements that work to reclaim privatized spaces from elite interests and create shared spaces outside the household for collaborative community projects, such as food gardens (Ghosh, 2014; Mullins et al., 2021). Despite the parallels, degrowth literature has yet to embrace the potential of urban planning in the degrowth transition (Xue, 2021). This may be due to the way the fossil fuel energy regime has saturated politics in places like Canada and the United States, structuring social and economic relations – as well as physical urban infrastructure – in ways that deepen and strengthen the logics of capital accumulation (Simpson, 2020). The challenges experienced by study participants to engage in alternative food practices help to justify a more thorough investigation.

The skills gap caused by an increasing dependency on market and technological capacities was also brought to the fore in this research (Feola, 2019; Previtali & Fagiani, 2015). **Lacking adequate skills** such as a "green thumb" was another major barrier identified by participants (R1,3), such as Participant #12:

> *I tried last summer to do some balcony gardening. It was not successful. I don't know how to do it. I don't have a green thumb – P12*

Despite having the necessary equipment at home, including pots and soil, having adequate skills for growing food was cited as a barrier by many. In addition to skills, developing the habit of caring for the plants was another barrier, as well as the location of the plants. For example, Participant #21 had

more sunlight exposure in the bedroom, but felt it was easier to remember to water plants in the kitchen. Having **access to local knowledge** of shops with gardening supplies was cited as an additional barrier in this study (R5).

This gap in skills and experience speak to the **market-imposed priorities** of production that have overwhelmed socio-political interests in the context of the growth paradigm (R1). The most practical skills, such as growing food, have been lost (in the context of this study's participants) and replaced by the production of wage worker subjectivities that serve to control the labour force in the service of capital accumulation (Previtali & Fagiani, 2015). Within the growth paradigm it is essential that workers are prevented from **controlling the labour process** (R4). As a result, work is progressively reduced to niche and simplified specialized tasks – and education is reduced to standardized curriculums and national testing – to ultimately keep the worker dependent on the market to provide essential services (Braverman, 1998).

Of particular note was Participant #27's experience, whose husband had started a community garden on their building's terrace. Unfortunately, it never opened as a result of the pandemic. By the time the garden re-opened mid-lockdown, there were multiple restrictions in place to limit access and thus the care for the plants. From scheduling to pandemic safety, various complications led to neglecting the plants and thus no one was able to benefit from the available space. While diverse, these barriers to engagement identified by study participants illuminate areas of improvement for the degrowth imperative. Understanding what barriers to entry exist will ultimately serve to inform a more robust degrowth policy agenda that actively minimizes such limitations.

There are intriguing historical links between home food gardens and economic hardship. From the 'Relief Garden' movement following the Great Depression, Victory Gardens in the world wars, and the emergence of the 'crisis garden' following the 2008 recession, home food gardens have played a pivotal role in disaster response (Mosby, 2014). Interestingly, while research shows that this response to economic hardship is employed by all income brackets, the poorest Canadian households are the least likely to grow their own food (Mullins et al., 2021; Schupp & Sharp, 2012). Food gardens are instead considered a hobby for creativity, community and culture rather than a strategy for tackling food insecurity (Huisken, Orr, & Tarasuk, 2016). Yet the practice of home food gardens has been a neglected avenue of research in Canada. Despite most Canadians growing food at home for personal use, scholarship has primarily focused on community gardening (Guitart, Pickering, & Byrne, 2012; Mullins et al., 2021).

Recent research has demonstrated the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has grown consumer attention to the globalized nature and industrialization of Canada's food supply (Mullins et al., 2021).

Growing, processing, packaging and food distribution systems have many complexities that are compounded by global trade regimes and economic disruptions. Understanding household approaches for (and barriers to) bracing food system shocks during times of crisis are key avenues for the successful mobilizing of degrowth futures. Further, it is important to identify opportunities for empowering citizens to participate in the disruption of globalized production systems.

5.3.3 Consumption Habits

Lockdown measures and pandemic safety concerns also brought an end to many **low-carbon oriented consumption habits**, including informal material trades, yard sales, farmers markets, or minimizing waste (R3-8). Barriers to access also tended to have extended impacts as participants explored alternative options. For example, Participant #4's husband tends to break their bowls or plates more often while doing dishes as a result of being blind. Usually, they would find replacements through local efforts, but did not feel safe doing so during a pandemic:

> *Now, some people would tell him to get plastic bowls and plates again – pretty obviously that's not going to be our value system to have plastic bowls and plates. So we are running out of bowls. Now I haven't bought a new plate or bowl in literally decades because there's a yard sale or somebody's cast off or something. But because of the COVID, we can't go to yard sales. So we decided to go out and try to buy some. And we were talking in the car. I was telling him I haven't been to these stores since way before I met you. You know, it's more than 20 years. I couldn't even tell the names of the stores where you could get those kinds of [items] – P4*

Due to a lack of knowledge around the virus at the start of lockdown, participants no longer felt comfortable pursuing traditional avenues to acquire **second-hand goods** (R6). P4 had to resort to more consumeristic practices including driving a personal vehicle and purchasing new rather than used goods in order to meet everyday needs.

Without knowing whether virus transmission took place on material goods, participants didn't feel safe trading used goods. **Plastic waste** also increased as a result of PPE and delivery services (R6). For example, Participant #10 used to bring Tupperware to restaurants or a reusable mug to coffee shops, but this was temporarily restricted due to public health and safety measures. Many grocery stores also chose to stop accepting reusable bags to minimize virus spread when it was still considered to be shared via surfaces. Some of the most simple and accessible solutions to **minimizing waste** at the household level were no longer available for participants (R6-8). Once again, degrowth has to understand what is and could be the range of viable and practicable alternatives available to people at the level of the household and the everyday.

For the sake of lockdown safety, some participants also shifted to online modes of shopping including an uptake in delivery services, like Participant #12:

> *I would do 95% of my shopping in physical stores. I like to touch, but if there was something specific I wanted and I couldn't find it or maybe something that I didn't know how to get home and I could order online and then get it delivered. Now at least 50% of my shopping is online – P12*

These shifts towards online alternatives occurred for a number of reasons. Participant #40 had just moved into a new neighbourhood, making it difficult to know of local stores to turn to. In addition to convenience, some participants found it difficult to secure goods such as pet supplies due to the supply chain disruptions making **online ordering** that much more reliable (R4-6). Reliability, familiarity, convenience and speed were all factors articulated by participants in their choice for turning to online shopping platforms.

The exponential increase in online shopping saw Amazon alone producing 271 million kilograms of plastic packaging waste in 2020 due to the high demand for delivery during lockdown – an increase of 29% above 2019 estimates (Oceana, 2021). Moreover, Canadian consumers' *monthly* online shopping expenditures grew by more than $2 billion compared to pre-lockdown, with 59% of Canadians increasing their online shopping habits (PayPal, 2021). After a full year of pandemic living, 49% of Canadians were purchasing groceries online. Furthermore, due to inventory shortages, brand loyalty fell as consumers became more flexible in the retailers and products available to meet their needs (Retail Council of Canada, 2021). These changes in consumer behaviour have substantially altered the landscape of consumerism and could have lasting impacts on future routines and preferences.

Degrowth scholars thus have compounding challenges related to curbing consumption (and advertising). With the added complexity of digital media consumption, the restriction of advertisements in public spaces will no longer suffice (Costanza et al., 2012). An Ontario-based study with children aged 6-12 found a 3.2 hour increase in daily screen time between March and July, 2020 (Seguin, Kuenzel, Morton, & Duerden, 2021). With ever-increasing screens and digital media, degrowth policy proposals will need to incorporate concerted efforts to disincentivize online shopping or fast-paced delivery in order to curb demand and resulting emissions and packaging waste. Beyond convenience, threats of surveillance capitalism have long-lasting implications on democratic freedom:

> To harvest increasingly targeted data into financial return, the system feeds on behavioural modification of its users to create a parasitic economic logic. Digital platforms and networks manipulate desires and behaviours, then sell off those desires and the granular personal data of their users to product and service providers. Because the system is predicated on surveillance, manipulation and predictive certainties… it has a new instrumentarian power that challenges market democracy. It's an expropriation of critical human rights and represents an overthrow of people's sovereignty (Wizinsky, 2022).

Degrowth critiques of consumerism must more intentionally engage with the role of technology, social media and big data in its critique of consumerism (Kerschner & Ehlers, 2016; Kish, 2020). The well-documented silo effects and "echo chambers" can influence the flow of information, obscure scientific fact, and block progress on political resolutions (Jasny, Waggle, & Fisher, 2015; van Eck, Mulder, & van der Linden, 2020). However, lockdown also demonstrated that consumers can be flexible about what products they buy, and where they buy them from. Moments of disruption can alter consumer preferences, indicating the need to better understand and possibly leverage lockdown consumer trends.

5.3.4 Social Justice Protest Participation

Degrowth stems from the mobilizing of citizen-led direct action that challenges the harmful global systems of capitalist production and demands environmentally and socially oriented alternatives (Demaria et al., 2013). Citizen protest has long been a driver of anti-globalization, anti-poverty, anti-racism, and climate justice action and policy outcomes (Bond, 2020; Cutter, 1995; P. Routledge & Cumbers, 2009). Citizen action for climate justice continues to encourage and merge with broader discussions on employment, basic income, and radical systemic change (Beer, 2020). It is crucial for individual citizens to participate in protest actions to highlight the importance of climate action, demand accountability of policy makers, and influence comprehensive policy intervention.

A number of notable civil rights and social justice protests took place in Toronto over the first lockdown phase of 2020. On April 1, thousands took to the street in a "Keep Your Rent" movement calling on all tenants to skip their monthly rent payments in solidarity with those who can't afford to pay during the pandemic (Gaviola, 2020). These protests took place in tandem with groups in London, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver, Los Angeles, and Portland, as well as multiple neighbourhood groups across Toronto. On May 30, approximately 4,000 people marched from Christie Pits Park to Toronto Police Headquarters protesting anti-black racism after the horrific murders of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet (Aguilar & Fox, 2020). Following similar demonstrations around the world, thousands of people gathered in Toronto again on June 5 and 6 to protest police brutality and anti-black racism, demanding justice and peace (CBC News, 2020b; DeClerq & Tsekouras, 2020).

Unfortunately, many study participants were not able to attend **social justice marches** during the first lockdown of 2020 due to pandemic safety concerns (R1,3,5). Participant #30 reflects:

> *I remember the day, like the main kind of protest happened in Toronto following the George Floyd killing. And I remember texting my friends and thinking like, it feels really wrong that we're not there, but we were not wanting to go into a crowd. And so we didn't, but it's still, I think right now, even just talking about, it feels like that might've been a poor call to sit that one out – P30*

Many participants expressed a desire to attend protests and marches, but the perceived risk of virus transmission in large crowds was a major motivator to stay home. Participants thus felt that their activism became rather limited as a result of the pandemic, resorting to signing petitions and putting up window signs as alternative expressions of solidarity. A handful of participants even discussed their desire to bring their children to the marches, but again due to safety concerns this could not take place. This is a rather interesting observation that demonstrates the tension and complexities between emotion and reason, and the moral pressures placed on parents as children not only generally have milder COVID-19 symptoms, but are at much lower risk of death than adults and the elderly (Smith et al., 2021; Yoshida et al., 2021).

Protesting in the street seizes and reclaims both the "spaces" and the "public" in public spaces, building social bonds around an issue (Rucht, 2007). Following historical evidence of past epidemics influencing political unrest, Censolo and Morelli (2020) anticipate an increase in global protests in the coming years in response to the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. Yet civic action must evolve beyond protesting a single issue through a single outlet, especially due to the limitations that participants experienced during the lockdown. Various social, economic and environmental emergencies are compounding in scale and intensity over time, and thus require a coordinated response. Degrowth scholars should therefore also grapple with how to organize activist groups around economic revolution and to disrupt the constellation of powerful systems that are reproducing capitalism.

One historical example comes from Mueller's (2021) book *Breaking Things At Work.* In the early nineteenth century, so-called Luddites systematically organized in England to resist the implementation of new machines, such as mills, that were replacing workers, impacting wages, and threatening complete displacement. Understanding technology as inherently political, Luddites organized to destroy the machines in efforts to resist the uprising of industrial society that threatened their way of life. However, machine breaking was only one of many techniques deployed in an interconnected set of struggles, or an "assemblage of enunciation" (Deseriis, 2015: 68). Other tactics included protests, riots, and writing songs, poems and letters. Yet Hobsbawm (1952) suggests that machine breaking was a practice of solidarity that organized workers into a disciplined mass. Through these efforts technology was targeted not for the machines themselves, but for the role of machinery in reproducing the hierarchies and injustices of capitalism (Mueller, 2021). In the face of a warming climate and increasingly disruptive events, alternative mechanisms for political protest are essential for a degrowth revolution.

In the age of digital and social media platforms, the intersections of technology and politics have never been more relevant for degrowth scholars. The political landscape today is shaped by peer-

to-peer “likes” and “shares” that ultimately add up to a powerful and common message amongst thousands or even millions around the world. For some, social media offers an emancipatory potential by minimizing the financial and labour costs of building collective action (Shirkey, 2009). In this way, power and knowledge relations are actively reconfigured across the globe, flattening the terrain of democratic participation (Postill, 2014). In contrast, social media can be weaponized to strengthen repressive corporate and government regimes at a cost to social justice and democracy. Authoritarian governments capitalize on the power of the internet to pacify members of the public with digital entertainment, suppress free speech, and advance surveillance, propaganda, and disinformation (Morozov, 2011). This approach works to silence criticism and control political narratives, which is a “vision for cyber sovereignty [that] is antithetical to universal human rights” (Lamensch, 2021).

In a more nuanced approach, Postill (2014) argues that the democratic potential of social media comes in its deliberative and distributed properties. Drawing from fieldwork on the indignados movement in Spain, Postill observed how online and offline organizing worked in tandem as mutually constitutive forces to reclaim the power to communicate back from mainstream media monopolies. Spain’s indignados 15M movement launched a series of encampments in cities across the nation with tens of thousands of citizens to protest the corrupt political system - efforts that later inspired the Occupy movement in the United States, Canada and elsewhere (Juris, 2012). It was through social media platforms such as Twitter that 15M activists could not only rally people at short notice, but could set the emotional tone of the campaign (Postill, 2014). Further, organizers took advantage of the algorithm structure which favours novelty, and so would frequently change campaign keywords to reach a wider audience and build sustainable momentum for the movement. Through courage and coordination, Bekker (2021) sees protests as an act of love – an obligation to act on shared grievances that manifest in different ways in different regions in the world. Degrowth must pay close attention to the ways social movements utilize digital tools and platforms to mobilize the kinds of revolutionary momentum needed for transformational change.

5.4 Blurring Personal & Professional Priorities

Paid work is a central function of the economic growth paradigm. Control over the workforce is control over the means of production for the ultimate purpose of capital accumulation (Brownhill et al., 2012; Federici, 2014; Weeks, 2011). In the capitalist economy, economic growth is essential for creating employment, which indicates that financial security and social status are tied with a growth in profits (Mair, Druckman, & Jackson, 2020). Secure employment has also been identified as a critical factor in mortality rates during times of disruption (Brenner, 2021). For example, COVID-19-induced

unemployment and bankruptcy was found to significantly increase mortality rates among Americans, estimated to be between two and five times larger than a typical unemployment shock (Bianchi, Bianchi, & Song, 2021). The tie between income and personal security has never been more apparent.

One of the central narratives of the degrowth imperative is a shift in the paid work regime. From a degrowth by design perspective, the social imaginary of work must evolve to end the hegemony of productivity (i.e., wage labour) over historically 'unproductive' activities (i.e., idleness, rest). This includes changes to work hours, and what constitutes as 'work', to overcome the primacy of the capitalist relation. Through such efforts, workers can reclaim their subjectivity, agency and autonomy, actively de-alienating the worker and resolving class conflict. Overcoming the centrality of paid work and the social reorganization and redefinition of time and money are pivotal aspects of mobilizing a degrowth society (Nierling, 2012; Schneider et al., 2010).

One area of opportunity is remote work. With a worldwide shift to remote work, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures caused drastic changes to work-life balance. The catastrophic event brought unique insights into both worker and organizational capacities for leadership and resilience during times of disruption, which will be key for a climate uncertain future (Marino & Capone, 2021). There are many positives to remote work. Working from home brings many advantages to the sustainability agenda including reduced emissions, reduced electricity and gas consumption, reduced deterioration of infrastructure, decreased traffic, congestion and related health risks, and more (Global Workplace Analytics, 2021; Zhu & Mason, 2014). Employees can benefit from remote work by having more job flexibility to balance professional and personal aspirations, experience reduced stress, improved mental health, and increase retention, job satisfaction and productivity. Employers can also benefit with increased productivity, reduced costs of operations, and a decrease in absenteeism of anywhere between 26 and 88% (Blake-Beard, O'Neill, Ingols, & Shapiro, 2010; Global Workplace Analytics, 2021). More recent discourse on tele-work during COVID-19 lockdown emphasizes the significant role that widespread remote work can play in tackling global climate change (Cruickshank, 2020).

However, the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown had detrimental impacts on participant work culture, time, and identity. Of the 42 study participants interviewed, 23 were able to work from home during the first wave of the pandemic, while five continued to work from the workplace due to the essential nature of their job. Five additional participants had a hybrid model, where they visited the physical work site a few times a week. The majority of participants working from home (n=7) had an income of $50-70,000, while the majority still at work (n=3) were making $25-50,000 annually. Eight of the participants that worked from home were home owners, while only

one participant that was working at the physical work site owned their home. Four participants lost their jobs as a result of lockdown, working in industries including recreation, retail, and food service. Conducting paid work duties during lockdown resulted in many challenges as identities, spaces and responsibilities were forced to merge and blur. The sub-sections below review participant experience of managing paid work from home and the challenges endured, which will provide key insights for the future of work in a post-growth economy.

5.4.1 Personal and Professional Identities

The demands of remote work, compounded by Toronto's lockdown measures, made household dynamics rather difficult for many participants. In particular, housing both personal and professional priorities under one roof began to **blur respective identities and responsibilities** (R1,2). A lack of motivation was a major factor in the struggle to manage these differing priorities:

> *Initially I was getting up and I was still getting dressed for work. Like I'd set up an office area type thing, and it was like all excited, cause I just started a new job two weeks before lockdown happened. And then within about a week of that, I was like just going to my desk and my sweat pants and getting up 20 minutes before I had to start work, like log in and stuff. And really became quite lazy – P19*

Participants felt it was nearly **impossible to deliver the same level of productivity** and focus expected of them during pre-pandemic times (R3). While remote work was praised for offering flexibility to a certain extent, it also deeply infringed on personal boundaries in the home. Participants were checking emails at all times of day, and found it difficult to find a few uninterrupted hours to stay mentally present in their work:

> *Quite often myself and my other teammate, we'd be checking our emails and responding very much live online either between seven in the morning and nine in the morning, or, you know, 9:00 PM to midnight. So it really did shift how flexible our hours could be. But because of that, you really get outside of what maybe healthy boundaries might be – P6*

These boundaries were particularly difficult to manage for working parents, such as Participant #21 who described bouncing their twenty-month-old child up and down in a carrier sling across her body while standing at the dining table doing her paid work in the public sector:

> *It's not like it's a sick day – it's a work day and it's a school day and it's a daycare day. And I have to do all of that at the same time – P21*

The demands of conducting work at home felt **overwhelming** for many working parents, and impacted their **ability to be an effective** parent and employee (R2,3). The sentiments expressed by participants in the above quotations demonstrate a major challenge for mobilizing a degrowth future. Households were not able to maintain a critical capacity for change in the face of economic disruption, and thus

could not advocate for alternative paid work regimes. Instead, meeting basic paid work demands became a near impossibility for many participants.

Remote work also significantly impacted the household dynamic for children in the home. Having unlimited access to parents might be exciting at first thought, but professional demands made this experience quite a struggle. As Participant #40 described:

> *Explaining that, despite his dad being home, he was still working. So I guess just that, okay, if you go into his office, you need to be quiet. If he's talking to someone, you can't be interrupting him. So I guess those kinds of like, this is what his role is. You need to be, you know, you need to be quiet. This is what's expected of you day to day because Dad is working from home now – P40*

This was further elaborated upon by Participant #11, whose husband provides full-time care for their adult daughter with autism while managing a part-time job. Their daughter found it particularly frustrating to have to accommodate her caregiver's work schedule, and would respond in deep agitation that often required her father to end the call early. Under pre-pandemic circumstances, their daughter was participating in day programs that would allow both parents to work, but these programs were cancelled as a result of lockdown measures.

Participants reported that the shift to remote work added additional hours and responsibilities that were not present in pre-pandemic times. Rather than taking a lunch break, Participant #31 was asked to manage the zoom call to admit colleagues into the video conference. It became much easier to extend working hours and address additional tasks since there was no rush to commute home. Participant #33 described doing dishes as her break from the demands of the private sector. In the non-profit sector, Participant #34 was coordinating emergency programs that required additional hours with no extra pay. These demands inevitably **infringed on personal relationships and obligations**, making it difficult to prioritize competing demands in a healthy and sustainable way (R1-3). As Participant #32 recounted:

> *My boyfriend and I had a fight and I was like, "I spent four hours fighting and trying to make you feel better where I could have been working. That is my billable time…". I didn't tell him that, obviously, that was my thought process. That's how in the zone for working I was in. It was insane – P32*

Reports of tension, resentment and stress were common among participants, particularly since priorities around time and income had to be negotiated in response to the demands of lockdown. Sacrifices to career goals or personal time were made in order to accommodate such demands, having a **detrimental impact on identity and sense of self** (R1,2). Especially in single-earner households, participants reported great amounts of **stress and pressure** to keep their household financially afloat during the

pandemic (R3,4). Paid work obligations brought about more stress and complexity to participants' every day, hindering their ability to cope with the realities of the public health crisis.

For those participants that worked at the physical job site (n=5), the majority had an increase in hours and responsibilities. Employers demanded more from their employees as they responded to the realities of lockdown. Some experienced the opposite, such as Participant #11 who was able to enjoy more time at home with her family compared to pre-lockdown. Participant #16, a frontline nurse redeployed during COVID-19, was also enthusiastic about the opportunity to enjoy a better work-life balance while she conducted part-time hours, but commented that "wages don't allow for that". Others such as Participant #1 was working on the frontlines in healthcare and had an abundance of work hours due to understaffing issues. However, P1 was overwhelmed with simultaneously managing childcare responsibilities from a distance, spreading herself thin to meet all the needs of her employer and children. Childcare also disrupted steady employment for Participant #32 who took unpaid leave to meet the gap in support.

In an intentional degrowth, the goal for workers is to collectively emancipate from the alienating and dehumanizing experience of capital accumulation (Brownhill et al., 2012; Chatterton & Pusey, 2020). This includes participating in more socially meaningful work opportunities in the service of autonomy and self-determination (Graeber, 2018; Mair et al., 2020). The imposed degrowth of lockdown prevented the ability of workers to foster such opportunities. Instead, employer demands consumed participant focus, time and identities away from personal needs and towards the maintenance of continuous growth. These outcomes serve to emphasize the pervasiveness of the growth paradigm, and the complex and challenging task ahead in building alternative economic systems.

5.4.2 Personal and Professional Spaces

In addition to the merging of identities, personal and professional spaces were also forcibly amalgamated under one roof. This was frustrating for participants who had expressly chosen city living in order to be close to their place of work and access a vibrant downtown life. Small downtown apartments were not ideal locations for meeting professional work demands in addition to constant residing. As a result, some participants had no choice but to transform some of the most intimate and private spaces of the house into a productive office space. This included bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, even closets. For example, Participant #33 lived in a 196 square foot apartment:

> *[T]here was really no work-life balance, there was no workplace space delineation. My entire space is devoted to work – P33*

The demands of remote work required participants to prioritize meeting the job responsibilities **over and above personal ones** (R1,2). This was particularly difficult due to limitations in space and furniture. For example, Participant #10 and their partner only had one desk to share making it difficult to structure their day around two paid work schedules. In other shared accommodations, Participant #31 reported she could not just "take over" a common space and displace her roommates so she conducted her paid job in her bedroom. But due to internet connection issues, Participant #8 was forced to transform her shared kitchen space into a work space while her roommates conducted their jobs in their respective bedrooms. This had significant impacts for personal privacy, especially for Participant #1 who discussed the challenge of finding alone time in a full household:

> *How do you get that alone time that you crave or that you need? How do you get that time in your home where you can have space to even work on a personal home project. It's pretty much impossible. People are always in kitchen. People are always in the washroom, the personal spaces, the backyard or the front porch or the balcony or anything. There's no space because everyone is confined to being at home – P1*

The issue of negotiating work space played a pivotal role for participants conducting childcare in the home. Participant #20 had to conduct psychotherapy with her clients from her bedroom, which she claimed was the only room in her two-bedroom apartment she could make look like an office. She used noise machines in the hallway to hide the ongoing childcare taking place in the same apartment, but it inevitably entered the work. Participant #27 reported switching between the bedroom for productivity or rest, and the living space for childcare between her and her partner throughout the day. Participant #23 reported that her husband "took over" the entire first floor, requiring the rest of the household to quietly accommodate at his convenience. Participant #30 reported jumping between childcare duties and paid responsibilities after extending her part-time status following a maternity leave that concluded at the start of the pandemic. In contrast, P30's husband was able to utilize an entire guest bedroom and would close the door for "meetings that go on all day long". Participant #24 even reported leaving the house altogether in order to contribute to her partner's productivity during important meetings:

> *If [husband] had an important conference call, I would try to be outside of the house. We would just walk around or sit somewhere on the bench or in a park. We would find an excuse to be outside of the house. So that was a big thing around space. I would find sort of things to do in order to stay out of the office environment or his work environment – P24*

This tactic was shared by Participant #38, whose husband would run errands or go for a walk to give P38 some quiet and productive time in the home.

Remote work requirements also had an impact on where and how participants spent their down time. For example, Participant #6 complained that her husband wanted to spend days off at home

relaxing since he was still working in person, while P6 had spent the entire week at home and desired down time outside the home. Participant #8 also expressed frustrations with an inability to decompress after a day at work, since lockdown measures limited her ability to get a coffee with friends or exit the "office environment" in any meaningful way. This inability to delineate space also compounded mental health needs, as described by Participant #26:

> *Part of ADHD also is like, I have to define physical spaces for myself for specific activities. So my house has always been defined as a place for fun and creativity. So that when I would come home from work or other events, I'd always be able to unwind in the space for that. But when the pandemic started, the house had to become a space for everything… And having to transform my room into a home office, a classroom, and a place for sleep, and a place for creativity and relaxation was just, it was so much – P26*

Without proper preparations, the lockdown measures forced participants into uncomfortable and unproductive work and home environments. This created many **challenges to creating healthy boundaries** between various obligations (R1-3). The worldwide shift to working from home had countless implications for productivity, stress, meaning and health.

Lockdown measures **advanced the interests of economism** by transforming the private domain of households into paid work spaces (R1,2). Workers were expected to operate at full capacity while they experienced a public health crisis, managed personal obligations like childcare, and witnessed the devastation of many industries, communities and lives. Such unreasonable demands kept workers bound to their devices and to their employers, rather than having the opportunity to care for themselves. Indeed, during the pandemic nearly all aspects of social life came to a halt except the demands of wage work. As participants reorganized their personal spaces and priorities with the obligations of work, they simultaneously lost connections to important networks, services and recreational outlets, while being bombarded with climbing infection numbers and the worries of contracting a deadly virus. These unsustainable pressures demonstrate the need to radically reconsider the role of work in the cultivation of post-growth alternatives.

5.5 Compounding Mental Health Issues

If mental wellness is critical to human well-being and how we shape and sustain relationships with ourselves, others, and the planet, what happens in times of crisis? Disaster research has examined the dramatic role of environmental and economic disruption on mental wellness during extreme flooding (Whittle et al., 2012), drought (Sartore et al., 2008) and the global financial crisis (Demantas & Myers, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2011). These studies show how the profound impact of disruptive events on personal identity and belonging, gender ideals, threaten increased risks of mental health

issues, and take ample time, commitment and emotional intelligence and resources to manage. More recent research has identified mental health as a critical aspect of outbreak preparedness and mitigation (Huremović, 2019; Maunder, 2009). For example, ignoring mental health during a pandemic can have social consequences such as not complying with public health regulations, fostering unsustainable demand for care, or increasing substance abuse or unsafe work practices (Pfefferbaum et al., 2012).

Experiencing an ongoing pandemic can threaten both physical as well as mental well-being (Christakis, 2020). A pandemic involves the suffering and distress of those who have the disease, or those who care for or about them. It also involves the suffering and distress of those struggling with prevention and lockdown measures, and the socio-economic impacts of these measures. Psychological responses to disease outbreaks can include anxiety, depression, fear, insomnia, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and post-traumatic stress (Talevi et al., 2020). Here, some are more vulnerable to the psychological effects of pandemics, particularly those at heightened risk of illness, heightened risk of transmission as a result of living or working conditions, or those with pre-existing medical or psychiatric conditions (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

Many participants shared the painful impacts of lockdown measures on their **mental health** (R1-3). They spoke about loss, loss of self-image and loss of a sense of self, because of the loss of personal routines and social groups. Lockdown prevented family gatherings, coffee shop visits, birthday and other celebrations. The additional layer of uncertainty in the midst of pandemic turmoil made it particularly difficult to navigate everyday life with ease. With COVID-19 infection numbers continuing to increase, participants felt exhausted by the thought of continuing to cope through the ongoing pandemic. For example, Participant #39 articulated how:

> *It's harder than ever to make any decision. I feel full all the time, like emotionally and mentally kind of just full and always sort of ready to cocoon. Which is weird if you think it's just these four walls. So it's not like there's a bunch of stimuli coming at me – P39*

Feelings of exhaustion and distress overwhelmed participants, making everyday coping and survival during the pandemic extremely difficult. During the imposed degrowth, participants mental health was not only **undermined**, but existing symptoms and issues were **compounded** by the realities of an ongoing public health crisis (R1).

The pandemic was (and continues to be) trauma for all. For many study participants it was more accurately described as a re-traumatization. This theme of re-traumatizing occurred in a variety of contexts. Participant #17, who is prone to depressive episodes, reported falling into a “depression spiral” that made it nearly impossible to cope. Participant #25 shared that she had not felt suicidal in over ten years but lockdown measures changed this dramatically. Feelings of anger and frustration

fueled her struggles as she was forced to appeal to state administrators for support. This manifested for Participant #26 through ADHD symptoms that he claimed he hadn't experienced since he was a child. P26's experience was further intensified by persisting demands of a learning disability that made it extremely challenging to navigate specific lockdown measures like physical distancing:

> *Part of a nonverbal learning disability is literal thinking. So, you know, the recommendation was six feet apart. And the only way that I could really understand that, I had to visualize six feet all the time, and then try to practice that. And it kind of drove me crazy because people around me weren't really practicing it. And that for me, it's very literal and I'm thinking six feet is like, it's a must and it has to be six feet. And if anyone comes within six feet, I would freak out, I would have these big reactions. And it was just not a good place. I was not in a good place. It was very difficult – P26*

Participants were largely left to their own devices to manage such symptoms while facing unprecedented economic, health and isolation (R1).

Fear of discrimination was another major theme in this study. Participant #20's household had already faced homophobia and transphobia in the medical system. As a transgender youth, P20's partner struggled with isolation in their childhood making the demands of lockdown all the more overwhelming. Further, her child's traumatic health history including hospitalization and respirators fostered additional hypervigilance about the COVID-19 virus. Global lockdown was the perfect combination of triggers to open old wounds and cause great turmoil in the household. This was also highlighted by Participant #9 who was forced to manage symptoms from bipolar and OCD in addition to lockdown. Postpartum depression was also aggravated in Participant #41 by the loss of supports for childrearing:

> *I also had very strong postpartum anxiety that I was working through. And so when COVID started, it got much worse because I already felt socially isolated. And then the drop-in programs and the grandparents were taken away and that was kind of our village, right? – P41*

Many participants noted the "re-traumatizing" effect of lockdown, such as trauma related to healthcare, social isolation, or depression. Participants further feared the isolation brought about by changing seasons, as a normally dark and cold winter would be compounded by public health restrictions. Degrowth must consider what kinds of demands and sacrifices may trigger similar psychological responses in order to prepare and support communities through the low-carbon transition (R1-3).

While the importance of mental wellness cannot be over-emphasized in the context of an imposed degrowth scenario such as a pandemic lockdown, the role of mental wellness in sustainability transitions more broadly has been vastly underappreciated (Berry, Waite, Dear, Capon, & Murray, 2018). Concrete climate action implicitly threatens systems of trust and security that currently inform a global market politics (Lucas, Leith, & Davison, 2014; Salzman, 2001). The degrowth imperative

demands radical shifts not only in material access and physical infrastructure, but ideological shifts as well. More recent scientific efforts have begun to consider the role of loss in the psychology of climate change – loss of species or physical environment, but also, of particular importance for degrowth scholars, loss of a cultural worldview and way of life (Albrecht, 2006, 2014; Salzman, 2001). Degrowth scholars should take note of the significant role mental health played in managing lockdown measures, and prioritize accessible services to support communities through radical and uncomfortable changes that a degrowth future will likely bring.

5.6 Loss of Critical Services

Ecological economists maintain that the sustainability transition must feature a shift away from resource-intensive production and towards an economy based in qualitative development and service provisioning. For Jackson and Victor (2016: 15), community and service-based enterprise is a key transformational element in the cultivation of an ecological economy: "enterprise must provide real opportunities for meaningful employment; it must be materially light and ecologically sustainable, and yet deliver the capabilities we need in order to prosper: nutrition, health, education, renovation and maintenance, care, craft, culture, and ecological restoration". Service provisioning in this context leverages locally sourced solutions to community needs including infrastructure and resources, strengthening community trust and empowering local autonomy and decision-making while minimizing material impact and maximizing opportunities for prosperity (ibid). In this light, the primary function of economic activity is delivering human services necessary to improve quality of life and prosperity to all. Thus, the care and maintenance of service provisioning is a key element in the context of a degrowth transition.

However, as a result of lockdown measures, study participants experienced a **significant loss** of important private and public services and supports (R3-5). This included services to address their own needs, the needs of their household, as well as needs of their wider community. Often, these services tied directly into pre-existing conditions and needs that participants were forced to address in isolation as a result of lockdown. From health services such as physical therapy, scheduled surgeries, or psychotherapy appointments, to educational programs and personal maintenance, many services were rendered inaccessible. Remarkable here is the different interpretation of essential services – and emergencies – by the participants themselves.

One of the areas of critical service provision was healthcare. For example, Participant #22 had a follow-up surgery that was cancelled, but reasoned that since her prognosis was good compared to others she felt the cancellation was upsetting but justified. In comparison, Participant #4 was not able

to start up the physical therapy she needed for damaged knees and ankles, creating major limitations in her ability to travel and run errands. Participant #21 suffered from a hearing impairment that needed attention. While she acknowledged this didn't fit into the category of emergency, the impairment impacted her ability to hear when her baby was crying. She waited until near breaking point before asking for help. Distress, guilt and frustration for P21 were driven by the narrowing of medical (and legal) emergencies in a time of a public health crisis. At stake for P21 was the life of her baby and the ability to be a good mother, which quickly became compromised as priorities changes to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

The digital divide also impeded service access and community care. Participant #7 reported feeling excluded from necessary communications when she would travel to her local laundromat only to discover the hours had changed. This also applied to errands such as grocery shopping. While stores offered times for seniors or those at high risk, P7 was not able to commit to any specific time for shopping due to the precarious nature of their mobility. On any given outing, P7 had to pack extra supplies on their mobility device, but also balance leaving space for picking up and transporting supplies. This also applied to Participant #11, an Anglican Priest, could not include some of the elderly members of her congregation when she shifted to Zoom because they still used rotary phones and thus couldn't call in.

Special needs programming was another significant loss for participants. Participant #11 experienced the cancellation of her daughter's day programming including speech therapy and behaviour therapy, which was particularly difficult to replicate in an online format due to the characteristics of her daughter's severe autism. Participant #4 described the loss her household experienced when her husband's blind community group activities were cancelled including lunches, social events and a media group. Participant #25 lost access to her Personal Social Worker (PSW) who would help P25 take a shower, as well as house cleaning, psychotherapy and dietician services. P25 also lost access to veterinarian and dog walking services. Due to her living situation in subsidized housing, her dog walker was not comfortable entering the building due to virus transmission concerns.

Lastly, parents experienced a significant loss to critical services provided by the school – such as guidance counselling – as well as after-school programming. For instance, Participant #6 had to end music lessons for her sons due to the sheer volume of online time they were already spending with distance education. Participant #32 lost access to external children's programming such as a recreational centre, putting all of the responsibility on P32 to provide daily entertainment. Frustrations were also expressed around the province's lack of state-driven direction for school safety, consistent educational services, and teacher support. Participant #9 expressed her disappointment with the Toronto

District School Board more specifically, and the ways in which varying options for action were communicated to struggling parents:

> *The Board sat on their asses all summer and didn't do anything to train, even say, don't know where you're going to be in the fall, but we need you to take three days of training on the software so you know what you're doing if you are teaching virtually, right? That didn't happen. Clearly the province wants virtual learning and they want to pay zero dollars for it. So they downloaded it to everybody else. This lack of accountability, the incompetence of institutions is my albatross, man – P9*

In particular, P9 was seeking more transparent communication regarding which public health approaches to education were *not* taken, and *why*, in a consistent manner. Participants desired science-based decisions that meet the needs of the community and serve the public good. Instead, participants witnessed **slow or no solutions** to some of the society's most critical needs, including education and safety (R1-3).

Inequities were further highlighted by Participant #20, who discussed the **differences in resources and wealth** among school districts and their ability to afford air purifiers for classrooms (R4). These disparities perpetuate public health risk through social inequities, as schools with fewer resources may have parents with less time, energy or knowledge to even advocate. The support for teachers, parents and schools was significantly lacking according to participants. Global lockdown measures created unanticipated turbulence to previously accessible resources and services relied upon by many participants. More importantly, the suspension and disruption to services proved just how essential all these services are to participants and the community. Degrowth policy proposals must carefully consider how the democratic downscaling of the global economy must maintain, fund and expand the necessary elements of the public good to achieve an equitable low-carbon transformation.

5.7 Childcare Demands

Through the re-localizing and reclaiming of a public economy for people and the planet, the degrowth imperative inherently emphasizes the centrality of care, provisioning, and reproduction (D'Alisa, Deriu & Demaria, 2015; Picchio, 2015). For many degrowth scholars, the unpaid labour of care work such as childcare is seen as a precondition to the mobilization of, and transformation towards, a degrowth society (Akbulut, 2019; Barca, 2017; Nierling, 2012). Childcare is thus a pivotal asset to successful degrowth futures for two main reasons. First, childcare fosters critical ethics, trust and citizenship that can inform future degrowth subjects and politics (Elson, 1998). Second, degrowth proposals can bring about gender equality by re-evaluating the notions of paid and unpaid work, redistributing responsibilities for care among genders, and facilitating the public provisioning of key

childcare and educational services (Bauhardt, 2014; Dengler & Strunk, 2018). Certainly, ensuring affordable and reliable childcare is critical for a low-carbon transition not only to maintain stability for the children themselves, but to provide support for parents to participate actively in the transition itself. But there is something else here: childcare, especially for infants and young children, is a 24/7/365 job – and someone has to do it.

Nineteen of the households in this study had children under the age of 18 at the time of lockdown. Only one participant with children in the home was unemployed, by choice, as a stay-home mother during the initial lockdown. Eleven of the participants with children were born in Canada, and twelve of them owned their home. Three participants were on maternity leave during the first phase of lockdown, and two of these participants chose to return to their paid work as a part-time employee in order to manage the unpaid childcare burden in the absence of daycare. Eleven households had one child, six households had two, one had three children, and one household had six. But these calculations presume chronological age to determine and define children and their need for care. One participating household has an adult daughter at home with severe disabilities, but did not count in the list of households with children due to her age. Childcare is demanding and never ending.

The imposed degrowth scenario had **numerous implications for the provisioning of childcare**, including a loss of community support systems, negative impacts to parent's well-being, and a negative impact on the children themselves as well as their education (R1-3). The struggles faced by parents during this pivotal time demonstrates the clear priorities of the growth paradigm and the way critical aspects of society are not valued. The value of socially reproductive childcare labour has been a topic of analysis for feminist economists for decades (Bezanson, 2018; Folbre, 1995; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Tronto, 2006). Economic systems that exclude, ignore, or harm such pivotal elements of society by definition fail as *the measure* of a good life. Participant struggles are ample evidence of this *as* a failure.

First, participants were under enormous pressure to adapt their childcare routine during the lockdown without access to the many supports they used to rely on. Not only was there a closure of schools and after-school programs, but having paid or informal childcare including babysitters, grandparents, neighbours or family friends was also out of the question as lockdown measures demanded households isolate from each other. Having access to the proverbial "village", even for half a day or over a weekend, were crucial for parents to attend to personal needs, household errands, or professional priorities. In the face of a global pandemic, households were forced to prioritize public health and safety and thus absorb the demands of childcare themselves.

The second major area of impact of lockdown for childcare was the impact to parents' mental health, professional aspirations and personal well-being. As the sole breadwinner, Participant #20 commented on how she had to **sacrifice a lot of self-care** in order to manage her full-time job and show up for her child outside of her office hours (R1,3). In the same vein, her partner put their PhD on hold to become the full-time caregiver, sacrificing part of their identity and progress on their professional aspirations. Participant #24 advised against her partner taking on paternity leave due to the economic climate of the pandemic. As such, P24 took on the main burden of childcare thus causing some friction and resentment in the home.

The realities of childcare provisioning during lockdown also had a great impact on the children themselves. Participant #27 commented on the difficulties she faced trying to get her "spirited" and "strong-willed" daughter to focus on virtual learning as the confines of quarantine impacted the patience and tempers of the household. Participant #41's daughter was having trouble sleeping, which was a problem magnified by lockdown due to the loss of socialization at Early Years centres. Participant #12's autistic child had a very difficult time adjusting to a new routine imposed upon by lockdown. Participants also shared the ways in which, on occasion, they had to rely on their own kids to help facilitate childcare. For example, Participant #21 would ask her eldest to watch the baby while she completed a teleconference for work or take out the trash, and Participant #6 asked her oldest to watch two younger ones causing immense pressure and an eventual meltdown over the stress of responsibility for younger siblings.

Lastly, changes to education created additional challenges that parents and their children had to grapple with together. Not only did parents have to figure out what to do until online schooling started, but many parents expressed frustration with having to adapt to constantly changing demands. Parents felt abandoned by the school system and helpless at navigating their children's' curriculum. For example, Participant #6 has no background in French but had to assist in French immersion homework. Challenges with delivering educational curricula at home were further exacerbated by having a diverse group of ages and learning levels within the household, such as Participant #1. With six children in the home, each at their own learning level and registered at a different school in two distinct school districts, P1 felt that some of the children's' learning objectives had to be held back to accommodate others.

Lockdown measures placed a challenging burden on the children of participant households in this study, as well as the parents. Adapting to new routines and expectations within the household while isolating from a global pandemic is a lot for any child to process. UNICEF estimates that approximately 40 million children around the world experienced childcare or educational service disruption due to

lockdown (Gromada, Richardson, & Rees, 2020). In Canada, only 28% of all childcare centres nationwide were open during the peak (April 2020) of the first COVID-19 wave – three quarters of which only accepted the children of essential workers (Friendly, Forer, Vickerson, & Mohamed, 2021). Quality and reliable childcare services that support families, contribute to gender equality, and introduce children to society had been jeopardized (Bezanson & Lysack, 2020). It seems absurd to have to state the fact that childcare is an inescapable everyday reality and an absolute necessity for a functioning economy. It is even more absurd that, despite this, pre-school in Canada is still not free.

Indeed, scholars argue that the fragile state of Canada's childcare system – underscored by the pandemic – is due to the fact that it is not publicly funded or managed (Ballantyne, Friendly, & Prentice, 2021). Instead, childcare is **inequitably distributed across the country** and unsustainably reliant on parent fees, whereby **revenue was a key factor** in a centers' ability to respond to the pandemic (R3,4). This put regulated childcare service providers at risk during the pandemic, as 58% of closed centres had to lay off all staff or all but the director (Friendly et al., 2021). Adequate public funding for childcare services is not only a clear lesson learned from the pandemic, but a key factor in a sustainable economic recovery (Bezanson & Lysack, 2020). The challenges experienced by participants in their management of childcare highlights the inefficient and unsustainable nature of privately provisioned societal services and demands immediate publicly funded alternatives.

5.8 Unreliable Community

Despite the reliance of conventional capitalist logic on impersonal notions of state and market actors, it is well established that economic activity is predicated on non-monetary relations including trust and ethics (Federici, 2010; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Healy, Borowiak, Pavlovskaya, & Safri, 2018). It is precisely such ethics of care and compassion that undermine exploitative forms of economy by foregrounding relationship rather than atomization and difference, and allowing for the cultivation of creative alternatives (Cox, 2010; Folbre, 1995). Elements of kinship, reciprocity and belonging invite opportunities for a shared identity and a shared vision for prosperity, mutuality and interdependence (Gibson-Graham, 2011). It is precisely through such robust community ties that alternative forms of economic organizing can come to fruition (Daly & Cobb Jr., 1989).

Of course, community cannot be romanticized. How and where community ties fray has to be understood. Trust, reliability and accountability become extremely important as well as fragile in times of crisis. The conflicting but time-sensitive information related to public health requires an immediate assessment of reliability and trustworthiness (Zhang et al., 2022). Without comprehensive guidelines for COVID-19 data collection, reporting and regulatory measures were inconsistent, making it difficult

to make informed and safe decisions (Global News, 2020; Rocca, 2020e). Regulatory requirements such as physical distancing also implicate interpersonal trust by viewing others in suspicion of possible virus carriers (Belardinelli & Gili, 2022). Study participants spoke about the unreliable, and sometimes detrimental impact of an **unsupportive community** on participant well-being (R3). This manifested as friction or disappointment among family members, neighbourhoods, community services, social media groups, and building or land management. Degrowth has to pay attention to community dynamics, to what threatens community coherence and collaboration when working on and with community-based initiatives.

Participants found it difficult to establish safe visitation boundaries during the pandemic while engaging with family members. This was immediately apparent for Participant #32, an immigrant from Sri Lanka whose culture is predicated on family ties and frequent family gatherings. This made it all the more difficult to impose rules about, for example, wearing masks indoors or declining requests to hold her son. Participant #30 chose to limit family visits as well, and chose to stay outdoors rather than joining indoor dinner invitations. Tensions would arise due to the expectation that everyone would gather indoors to eat. To justify their hesitation, P30 framed their own household as the risky one due to the use of a building elevator and their child playing in parks. Lockdown measures created difficult tensions within family dynamics that clashed with cultural and familial obligations. Participants were forced to **develop their own comfort levels and solutions**, as well as the skills necessary to communicate and implement these solutions (R3).

Beyond the household, participants reported struggles with garnering support and comradery from their surrounding network. Reciprocity, curiosity, gratitude and respect for boundaries were sometimes lacking. Participant #4 was "grumpy as hell" after her neighbours asked for homemade masks for them and their extended family. It takes P4 thirty minutes to make each mask. She felt taken for granted and advantage of by neighbours she wasn't that connected to in the first place. After reaching out multiple times, Participant #27 expressed disappointment that her monsignor at her church did not reach out to check in on his constituents. P27 had the same remarks about her MP, hoping for more investment in the well-being of households and better understanding the challenges they were facing.

Lastly, participants reported tensions that arose from the facilitation of online mutual aid groups often found on Facebook. While they created unparalleled opportunities for various households to meet their needs, connect with community and minimize waste, they also caused much distress for participants due to some **abusive members in the groups** (R3). This was described by Participant #1

who relied heavily on these mutual aid groups to make ends meet including groceries or bus passes on a monthly basis, but expressing needs on these groups was not always easy:

> *It's hard enough for me to admit that I'm struggling much then have someone accuse me of creating a circumstance or to have someone making me feel like I'm taking advantage of a situation. So it's a double edged sword – P1*

This sentiment was shared by Participant #7 who described the online mutual aid community as a gatekeeping group of "cult leaders" that perpetuated systems of abuse. As a disabled minority, P7 was extremely concerned about being targeted and taken advantage of by being asked for more money, or having to deliver on something they weren't physically capable of:

> *[T]hey're not being helpful, and they're being discriminatory. And a lot of donations, as well as volunteer efforts, are being hogged by a few people who run a personality cult. That's what I call it. They run cults… there's true gate keeping happening – P7*

P7 commented on how they were completely reliant on the random generosity of strangers, rather than having their needs met more systematically. She described it as "scary" to have her basic needs met by **sheer accident** (R3,4). P25 also reported this experience, dealing with multiple unresponsive mutual aid group members as they tried to meet needs while struggling with a broken ankle. P7 went on to discuss how some neighbourhoods were able to leverage mutual aid groups to build momentum that blocked evictions, but again this was perceived as accidental – as luck of the draw – as it occurred for some communities and not others.

Beyond familial obligations, challenges arose between households and their landlords. Participants reported unsafe and unsupportive practices by their landlords that put some participants in danger in the midst of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant #39 shared that building management would not wear masks consistently, and would push in front of residents to get on the elevator first:

> *[I]t feels like the community in my building, anyway, didn't have the support that one would hope for from the staff – P39*

Participant #31 also struggled with her landlord who did not respond when they were notified P31's washing machine stopped working during the lockdown. P31 opted to buy and install a new machine. Months later, the landlord "reappeared" to discover the coin operated machine was replaced with a non-coin-operated machine. In retaliation, the landlord removed the dryer from the house putting P31's household in a precarious position as none of the household members could afford a new dryer nor a car large enough to pick one up.

Personal networks let participants down. These networks were sorely tested by the pressures of navigating a global pandemic and dealing with related personal crises including managing mental

health, childcare and relationships. These observations are critical lessons learned for the degrowth imperative. Community members will need to negotiate expectations and allocate resources accordingly while operating within ecological limits. It will be an important aspect of degrowth scholarship to empower communities with conflict management and communication tools that can serve to navigate these tricky conversations.

5.9 Poor Confidence in Government Leadership

Coordinated state-level intervention plays a critical role in facilitating a degrowth future. Policy proposals including comprehensive tax reform, advertising regulations, imposing income limits, redistributing wealth, incentivizing local production, sharing work time, promoting ecological restoration, and taxing environmental externalities are key tools in the degrowth toolbox for a transformational shift to a steady-state ecological economy (Costanza et al., 2012). Despite the grassroots and activist origins of the degrowth movement, the majority of peer-reviewed degrowth proposals advocate for a top-down approach and focus at the national level in both environmental and social policy recommendations (Cosme, Santos & O'Neill, 2017). Support for state actors and action is thus a key aspect for mobilizing a successful degrowth transition.

Trust is viewed by social scientists as an essential component of communicating climate science, climate change implications and solutions (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, & Whitmarsh, 2007). Having strong trusting interpersonal social networks has been found to result in a greater trust in government, while distrust in government can contribute to a decrease in interpersonal trust (Schyns & Koop, 2010). Strong dynamic relationships exist between the strength of individual social interactions, social trust, civic engagement, and trust in government. It is important for degrowth scholars to have a good understanding of what state interventions can lead to (dis)trust or (dis)engagement for more robust policy recommendations and a greater chance of garnering public support for the degrowth imperative.

There was a significant shift in trust levels amongst Canadians in the first year of the pandemic. Medical doctors and scientists were identified as the most trusted sources for reliable information in 2021, taking the place of family and friends for the first time as the most trusted source in January 2020 (Proof Strategies Inc., 2021). However, trust in government to "be competent and effective and to do the right thing" has steadily declined over the past six years of the Proof Strategies CanTrust Index, falling nearly 10% between 2016 and 2021. In particular, trust in the Prime Minister and trust in local mayors both fell by 7% in 2020, yet trust in premiers stayed relatively stable. By 2022, both provincial and federal levels of government were the least trusted groups to provide a meaningful response to natural disasters, with the military, non-profits and national charities representing the most trusted

groups (Proof Strategies Inc., 2022). Interestingly, those born in Canada were found to be the least trusting (i.e., aggregate trust in government, media, business etc.) compared to those born elsewhere, whereby trust increases with more recent arrivals.

In the present case study, participants were extremely disappointed in government performance during the initial lockdown. Interestingly, the majority of issues identified by participants concerned the provincial level of government, which is where public health and lockdown mandates originate in Canada. Indeed, the pandemic revealed fragmentation and friction within Canada's governance structure, as data collection and reporting, the interpretation of provincial guidelines, and economic recovery efforts were in constant negotiation and brought up questions of authority and dependence (Brail & Kleinman, 2022). Government funding and relief programs largely came from the federal level, although there were some small business relief programs at the provincial level. Participants were less critical of municipal and federal levels of government, but remained diligent in their disappointment overall. Understanding these disappointments will directly inform future degrowth policy approaches that actively build trust and engagement to maintain long-term implementation.

5.9.1 Conflicting Guidelines

One of the main complaints from the participants was the unclear and often conflicting nature of lockdown guidelines provided by the various levels of government, particularly the Provincial government (see Appendix E). Inconsistent information made it difficult for participants to **adequately respond to the pandemic**, leading to confusion as well as frustration (R2,3). For example, Ontario's Premier Doug Ford encouraged families to go away for March Break, despite also discussing the seriousness of lockdown and the need to prevent the spread of the virus (Global News, 2020). In the same breath, households were asked to "stay home" while gyms and indoor dining was instructed to open (Rocca, 2020e). These conflicting instructions put some participants at risk, like Participant #17 who was thrown back on the frontlines of a coffee shop as infection numbers continued to grow. Participant #6 articulated how the information being provided was not enough to **make informed decisions** to keep themselves and their household safe during the pandemic (R3). She was never sure if it was safe to walk her dog or go to the park, making everyday decisions to keep mental health in check much more difficult. This lack of preparedness brought about great disappointment for participants, especially Participant #36 who thought the provincial government could have been more prepared and authoritative – especially after the SARS outbreak of 2003.

Despite unparalleled access to scientific information and many past pandemics to learn from, participants experienced deep disappointment in the lack of consistency and preparedness by state

representatives in response to the pandemic. This parallels concern for a successful low-carbon transition, where economic interests continue to be prioritized over and above the realities of a changing climate. While disappointment from participants is promising in this context, it is not guaranteed that degrowth can foster the same level of invested support for a voluntary economic contraction that demands much more disruptive and long-term changes to lifestyle. Aligning with other critical and concerned scholars, more effort in degrowth scholarship needs to be dedicated to building a supportive public degrowth movement (Alcock, 2016; Romano, 2019; Schneider, 2019).

Consistent and clear messaging about a degrowth transition will be a vital aspect of a successful economic revolution. Unfortunately, degrowth critics have pointed to the vague and weak policy prescriptions currently found in the literature, which risk frustrating not only decision-makers but the ability to garner support from the public as well (Bartowski, 2014; Prieto & Slim, 2010). Instead, degrowth scholarship leans on non-specific abstract declarations for change without describing when, where or how they are to be done, limiting the disruptive power of the imperative (Parrique, 2019). If a degrowth revolution is to be successful, it will need concrete definitions, timelines, and pathways that can be shared and consumed by the public. Without more concrete policy proposals, the degrowth imperative risks losing support before it begins.

5.9.2 Profit over People

Participants expressed disappointment in the Ontario government for **prioritizing economic interests** over and above the emergent needs of the public health crisis (R1,3,4). This disappointment was shared by many, with a particular criticism for the way in which economic security was being prioritized in the province over and above public health:

> *It's all about money. It's not about our safety. And now we're sort of facing our second lockdown. But we're not getting any information about what that's gonna look like, what that means for anyone. Nobody knows what's happening – P19*

Throughout the first wave, lockdown measures were changed or lifted on multiple occasions in order to keep Ontario's economy open – at the direct expense of public health. Such criticisms relate to the priorities placed between public safety and economic performance during the lockdown period. The inevitable a trade-off between the two perceivably competing priorities was identified as a significant factor in the poor performance of government.

The trade-off between profit and people also took place at the scale of municipal (city) politics. Participant #3, who is employed in social services, was furious with the city's lack of intervention when it came to accessible housing and sanitation during lockdown. Working in this sector, P3 often needed

three to four days for one of her clients to get a bed in a shelter. This stood in stark contrast to government expectations and efforts to address it. Furthermore, P3 noted that no bathrooms or sanitation stations were made available for the homeless during the lockdown. Participant #37 and others brought up the removal of homeless encampments, which was disturbing due to the increase in tents she has seen in her neighbourhood.

Participants in this study called into question the commitment of elected officials to serve the public good, **reconceptualizing the economic imaginary** (R2). This critique speaks to the underlying hypocrisy of so-called liberal democracy, where present modes of governance prioritize (de)regulations that conform to market – rather than societal – interests (Kallis et al., 2018). While liberal democracies have served to temper capitalist relations through civil and political rights (Dale, 2012), they have also legitimized capitalism due to their dependence on economic growth. Indeed, modern democratic states rely on economic growth for stabilization (i.e., tax revenue), legitimization (i.e., participation and independence) and structural reproduction (Dörre, Lessenich, & Rosa, 2015; Muraca, 2014). As such, "the same imaginary that forms the basis of democratic consensus is historically based on the promise of growth" (Deriu, 2012: 554). Now, however, continuous growth threatens both the legitimacy and stability of liberal democracy, as neoliberal rationality extends itself to all aspects of social and public life, neutralizing the foundations of this governance structure (Brown, 2015).

Rather than prioritizing the public good, market logics insidiously embed themselves into governmental institutions through the systematic erasing, privatizing, fiscalizing of social policies, programs and services into commodities for purchase (Clarke, 2007). This is best expressed by Participant #25, who commented on how little she felt the government cared about the population:

> *[T]he government doesn't seem to honestly really give a care about where you are in general. I realized that our government really doesn't care if you live or die actually, at the end of the day – P25*

This loss of confidence in government - to genuinely believe your country doesn't care whether you live - is deeply discouraging. Public trust in the democratic institution of government is not only essential for battling the pandemic, but remains a **critical tool for implementing low-carbon initiatives** at an impactful scale (R1,3). There is a risk, with increased chance of disruption, that future events may create a crisis of confidence in government institutions and thus create additional barriers to the degrowth revolution. The hegemonic neoliberal mode of governance must be challenged in order to facilitate a revolutionary economic transformation (Brown, Kraftl, Pickerill, & Upton, 2012).

5.9.3 Limited Target Audience

In addition to the poor communication of lockdown measures, participants were also disappointed with the **defined target audience** of these measures (R2,3). For example, the City of Toronto COVID-19 support and resources webpage is targeted to "individuals and families", excluding multiple diverse constituencies (City of Toronto, 2022b). Participant #38 astutely observed the exclusive focus of lockdown measures on the "nuclear family", and the ways in which this approach excluded many other forms of households, such as multi-generational households or neighbourhoods:

> *when you live in a multi-generational household - and that involves your neighbors, who are your cousins, who are your extended family - that's the nuclear unit, right? It's not just the people in your household, it doesn't make any sense. And so public health messaging has completely missed that entire group and has not given any messaging or like coping on how to navigate that… if you don't have immediate family, like your family is your friend circle, but then how does that get shifted when people decide who their network would be – P38*

The deeply embedded logics of heteronormativity that inform government policy were exposed through various COVID-19 lockdown measure announcements. By focusing on heteronormative kinship structures, the diversity of alternative household structures was not only excluded, but **structurally limited** from accessing benefits and supports and **depriving** people from critical circuits of care (R3,4).

Participants noted the ways lockdown measures were structurally exclusive in other ways, including in health disparities, job insecurity and the privilege to "stay home". Regions with high COVID-19 numbers also had a high number of frontline workers who put their health – and the health of their households – at risk to keep the economy afloat throughout the crisis (Rao, Ma, Moloney et al., 2021). Participants felt that government policy, particularly at the provincial level, repeatedly failed to acknowledge and advocate for those most marginalized by the system. This was front and centre for Participant #7, who described how the operation of publicly funded services was in "gangster style" that was nearly impossible to hold accountable:

> *I'm my own caregiver and you know, just keeping myself afloat was hard before pandemic, so now is definitely worse… There are resources that provide for this, but they operate in almost gangster style. I mean, literally gangster style. There is no government accountability on publicly funded services. Not, you cannot complain, you can't do anything – P7*

A lack of accountability allowed governments to impose regulations and provide supports based on their own assessment of the situation, rather than consulting with their constituents. Without active consultation and engagement with the public, it is not possible for these institutions to **serve the public good** effectively (R3-5).

Mano (2021) calls for "queering" kinship, highlighting the urgent need to disrupt heteronormative and Western foundations of kinship that shape public policy approaches. Rather than

privileging the heterosexual 'nuclear' family unit, it is necessary to "question the heteronormative kinship structures within which social support and care are exclusively and exhaustively imagined" (Mano, 2021: 144). Degrowth scholarship must consider this approach critically in its theorizing and policy proposals. When degrowth imagines communicating pathways, it is essential that the movement make such possibilities accessible to all kinds of households and identities. Understanding the implications of degrowth proposals on differing intersections of class, race and gender will be essential for the success of this movement (Brownhill et al., 2012; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Prieto & Domínguez-Serrano, 2017).

5.9.4 Mismanaged Resources

Participants found state-sponsored resources to be extremely **mismanaged and inefficiently distributed** as a result of lockdown (R4). This included financial supports such as disability benefits, but also included accessible public spaces such as roads. In particular, participants spoke to the ways in which they were not qualified to receive various financial benefits due to certain financial factors. For example, Participant #1 commented on the way in which her hard work does not get rewarded the same way those unemployed can benefit:

> *[T]he minute you decide that you want to go out there and you want to do something for yourself, or you don't want to depend on the system to do everything for you. It's almost as if you're penalized for that. You know what I mean? I have neighbors in my building that get subsidized daycare and they don't even work, but because I work, I have to pay for daycare. It makes no sense to me – P1*

This sentiment was further shared by participants trying to access the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Participant #12 was not able to qualify due to financial savings, despite the fact that she is "not mentally capable of having a proper income". The importance of **redistributing wealth and resources**, and ensuring access to those who need them (RD4), was a critical observation made by many study participants. Interestingly, ODSP came up for Participant #11, whose daughter received government funding during lockdown but had nowhere to spend it:

> *She gets ODSP and she gets what's called passport funding, which is just an amount of money, which is allotted to a person based on their level of need. And can be flexibly spent on different, a range of supports. And that is what we use to pay for her respite work. Right now we have got passport money, which we have no way of spending. So we don't actually need more financial supports. We need more supports we can access with the money that we have. So we've got this money from the government, which is great, but we have nothing we can spend it on – P11*

In this instance, P11's household received financial support – but due to lockdown measures, lacked access to the appropriate programming. This is an important lesson learned for degrowth scholars to

consider. In future degrowth scenarios, it will be important to reorganize resources as well as opportunities accordingly.

Another area of criticism was regarding the slow uptake in adapting city streets for pedestrian access. In a study documenting public sector responses to COVID-19, researchers found that cities in 60 countries and on every continent except Antarctica reallocated road space within five months of the start of the pandemic (Combs & Pardo, 2021). Participant #42 expressed disappointment in how long it took before Toronto's city streets were adapted to greater pedestrian access during lockdown for walking, biking and outdoor dining:

> *Closing down streets for pedestrian access - that took them a while from what I remember. You know, doing make-shift bike lanes. Like I said, we bike a lot and most places my daughter has to ride on the sidewalk because I would not trust her to ride in the street. I actually got yelled at from a bylaw officer during the lockdown, for allowing my daughter to ride on a side street in the street. Which like, where are kids supposed to ride? – P42*

Biking and walking were a popular pastime activity among many study participants, and was a vital lifeline for exercise and time outdoors during the lockdown. On weekend days, 26,000 cyclists and 10,000 pedestrians in Toronto reported using road closures during the summer of 2020 (Beattie, 2021). Furthermore, over 90% of respondents to a city-wide survey said they wanted road closures to continue after the pandemic (City of Toronto, 2021a). With the over-use of parks and sidewalks during the height of the pandemic, adding additional space for people to stay active was key for sustaining mental health during the lockdown. Having the ingenuity and adaptability to leverage disruptive events is a key strategy for mobilizing longer-term economic transformation, recognized by some governments such as New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2020).

Participants perceived that government bodies placed a low priority on state services at the time of lockdown. This signals to participants that their own welfare, and the **welfare of their communities** through state institutions such as healthcare and education, are **not taking precedence** in government regulation broadly, or in emergency responses more specifically (R3,4). These experiences serve to actively **erode confidence and trust in government institutions**, making it much more difficult to implement low-carbon economy regulations (R1,2). The sharing of conflicting or even inaccurate information, the slow adoption of mandates that were being implemented in other regions, and the inability to act on both scientific information and previous experience (i.e., multiple lockdowns) was truly disheartening for participants in this study.

5.10 Concluding Remarks

This chapter examined the emergent barriers identified by Toronto households that inhibited them from participating in degrowth politics and practice during the initial lockdown of March 2020. The outcomes of this chapter contribute to a deep gap in degrowth literature by illuminating potential factors that may make degrowth activism inaccessible during times of unplanned economic downturn. This knowledge contribution is considerable, since the majority of degrowth research assumes a planned, incremental transition with peaceful and willing actors and stable socio-economic factors. Situating lockdown measures as an imposed degrowth, this chapter provides empirical insight into the implications of unplanned economic contractions in order to inform more robust degrowth policy proposals.

A number of factors were identified by participants that made it difficult to participate in low-carbon alternatives during an imposed degrowth scenario. Sustainability habits including low-waste consumption, low-carbon transportation and food practices, and citizen activism were perceived by participants as dangerous due to the threat of COVID-19 virus spread. With the shift to remote work, many participants struggled to maintain clear and healthy boundaries between personal and professional spaces and identities increasing stress and placing pressure on personal relationships and mental health. Lockdown measures also compounded mental health issues, causing significant stress, trauma and depression among participants. This was particularly emphasized for participants with pre-existing mental health conditions that were even more difficult to manage in the midst of a pandemic lockdown.

Lockdown measures disrupted access to critical private and public services including health services, educational programming and community services that were vital to participant well-being. Losing support for childcare was of significant note, including formal services such as educational and after-school programming, and informal supports from social networks. Participants also noted the ways in which lockdown measures weakened community ties and made it difficult to find and reliable assistance during such uncertain times. Lastly, participants expressed poor confidence in state leadership, particularly at the provincial level, in the face of the pandemic. An imposed degrowth scenario thus had detrimental impacts on the very social foundations critical to establishing a safe operating space on a finite planet (Raworth, 2017). Table 4 below summarizes the findings from this chapter.

Table 4. Summary of Degrowth Barriers & Implications

Category	Summary of Implications	Relevance to Degrowth
Pandemic safety	Public health and safety measures exacerbated societal harms such as race-based harassment and the limitation of gender and sexual expression	Degrowth necessarily entails the dismantling of structural oppression including systems of racism, sexism, classism etc (R1). In the context of an imposed degrowth, the logics of these systems were perpetuated and enhanced by the stresses of disruption, indicating the importance of building anti-oppressive tactics directly into degrowth policies and practices.
Sustainable habits	Lockdown measures influenced study participants to minimize or halt sustainable practices essential to a low-carbon transition, including public transit use, food gardens, low-waste consumption, and social justice protest	Some sustainable practices became inaccessible due to the imposed degrowth scenario (R5-8). Degrowth scholars must pay attention to such barriers, and consider alternative means to access practices in disruptive contexts. For example, how might social justice protest continue if public marches cannot?
Personal and professional identities and spaces	Lockdown demands forced participants into impossible situations where professional and personal priorities and spaces became blurred. This created additional stress while making it impossible to maintain the productivity demanded by participant employers.	In the imposed degrowth context, participants were unable to realize the goals of self-determination and emancipation from the growth paradigm (R2,3). Instead, employer demands were prioritized, often above personal needs, demonstrating the pervasiveness of market logics. Degrowth scholarship must investigate policy pathways that can circumvent such outcomes, and demonstrates the need to radically reconsider the role of work in post-growth futures.
Mental health	Participants experienced exacerbated and compounding mental health symptoms that trivialized their ability to cope during an ongoing public health crisis.	An economic revolution to a post-growth alternative necessarily challenges entrenched material and ideological infrastructures, threatening the trust and security that inform present market politics (R1-3). Access to mental health support will play a significant role in a successful degrowth as major changes take place.
Critical services	Participants lost access to a number of critical private and public services and supports during the pandemic lockdown. Further, participant experience underscored the diversity of services that may be considered essential depending on personal need.	Degrowth must prioritize the provisioning of essential services during the low-carbon transition (R1-4). Further, strategies for transformation must remain participatory in order to ensure marginalized voices can express their needs and ensure no one is left behind.
Childcare	Participants lost critical childcare supports including informal (friends, family) and formal (school, extracurricular) during the imposed degrowth scenario. This exacerbated	Childcare in Canada is inequitably distributed across the country, but more critically, unsustainably reliant on private revenues from parents. The imposed degrowth thus highlighted the inefficient

	psychological, financial and material ailments for many participants that were already over-burdened by the pandemic.	nature of privately provisioned essential services, demanding radical alternatives (R1,3). Adequate public funding for childcare services remains a key factor for a sustainable economic recovery.
Community	Participants witnessed an erosion of essential community supports in response to lockdown measures. This included conflicting interpretations of public health regulations, and abusive members of mutual aid groups. This caused much disappointment for participants, exacerbating the isolation caused by lockdown measures.	Collective negotiations are essential for a participatory post-growth future. Responding to time-sensitive information requires an immediate assessment of reliability and trustworthiness. In the context of an imposed degrowth scenario, community members became overwhelmed with the demands of the pandemic and became suspicious of each other as possible virus carriers. It will be essential for degrowth scholarship to explore ways that empower communities with conflict management and communication tools that serve to navigate these critical dialogues (R1,3).
Confidence in government leadership	Participants expressed much disappointment in the lack of preparedness and response by state leadership during the pandemic. This includes the implementation of conflicting public health guidelines, prioritizing economic interests over slowing virus transmission, limiting the target audience of regulations, and mismanaging state resources.	Trust is an essential component of communicating climate science and solutions. In the context of an imposed degrowth, friction in the present governing structure was exposed causing a loss in confidence amongst participants (R1,2). Yet concrete definitions, timelines and pathways must be articulated effectively for a successful low-carbon transition. With increased chances for disruptive events, a crisis in confidence may create additional barriers to the degrowth imperative.

Most significantly, this chapter demonstrated the neglect and deflection of responsibility for core societal needs and public services by state authorities. By utilizing the meso-scale of the household, this case study makes visible the labours, tensions and contradictions at play in the process of reproducing and revolutionizing capitalism. It further illuminates the systematic diversion of public interests and resources away from social necessity and towards private profit, “subordinating the social” (Clarke, 2007) and unfairly burdening the household to fill in this impossible gap (Elson, 1998). Households were unable to meet some of their most basic needs, such as mental health and childcare services, making it all the more challenging for these actors to realize a degrowth future. This chapter therefore exposes the unsuitable nature of growth economics for adequately addressing a climate uncertain future, and demands those with a power to change to take responsibility, through large-scale policy interventions. The following chapter will identify policy recommendations that respond to the

needs identified by households in this study, which serve to protect public interests during times of disruption and simultaneously advance degrowth futures.

Chapter 6. Degrowth Policy Implications

What can degrowth advocates learn from household experiences that took place during the imposed degrowth context of COVID-19 lockdown?

3. *Propose policy recommendations to enhance the degrowth agenda for a climate uncertain context*

A number of parallel and compounding global challenges require urgent and systematic intervention to minimize harmful consequences for societal well-being and environmental sustainability (Coffman & Mikulecky, 2015; Herrington, 2021; Max-Neef, 2014; Waziyatawin, 2012). These problems, seemingly disparate, are symptoms of an economic system that prioritizes the continuous accumulation of capital through environmentally and socially wasteful and destructive pursuits (Daly, 2017; Hickel & Kallis, 2019; Rockström et al., 2009). To carry on business-as-usual is to secure unimaginable consequences that will undermine food security, international safety, and human welfare within this century (Herrington, 2021; Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2004).

Shifting global political economies towards low-carbon and low-growth priorities remains a pivotal objective in the face of unstable climate futures, positive feedback loops[8], and unfathomable and irreparable loss (Hickel, 2021; Hickel & Kallis, 2019; Victor, 2019). Degrowth presents a democratic social and political transformation to reduce and redistribute production and consumption systems in order to facilitate social and climate justice around the world (Asara et al., 2015; Kallis, 2017a; Kallis et al., 2018). Critical to this approach is the role of top-down intervention by institutions such as governments to drive change at a meaningful scale (Cosme, Santos & O'Neill, 2017). However, policies in the degrowth literature have largely been developed within a "by design" context, to the neglect of disasters and emergencies. As Fitzpatrick, Parrique and Cosme (2022) point out, while identifying the optimal scale for transformational change is pivotal, the sequence in which policies are implemented also matters a great deal. Understanding which policies to prioritize, particularly in the face of climate uncertainty, is a pivotal though undertheorized area of research for degrowth. My research enters the discourse here.

By exploring the intimate details of household management during a global pandemic, my work prioritizes not only the household as an optimal scale for observing vulnerabilities and opportunities in the pursuit of alternative economic futures, but helps to identify the priorities within and for households

[8] A term in the complexity sciences literature that refers to a phenomenon where a reaction or response in a system leads to an increase in that reaction and becomes exacerbated in magnitude over time (Kay, Boyle, Regier, & Francis, 1999). A typical example is global warming, whereby increased greenhouse gas emissions trap more and more heat within the atmosphere, creating a faster melting effect and thus exacerbating climate instability.

so that policies can adequately realize the imperatives of degrowth. Indeed, this research serves to demonstrate the value of degrowth policy for not only supporting households through times of crisis, but for mobilizing post-growth economic futures. This chapter therefore details current and possible degrowth policy proposals that work to address the very challenges articulated by participating households.

6.1 Responding to an Imposed Degrowth

In response to a rapidly transmissible and deadly virus, global lockdown measures forced the world to reorient priorities to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Within the growth paradigm, where economic livelihood is based on unrelenting systems of production, consumption and waste, the global pandemic disrupted large-scale exploitation and overturned the very base of the economy in order to preserve life (Mezzadri, 2020). Rather than a war or a market crash, a microscopic organism spread around the world and debilitated global economic infrastructure in a matter of weeks. This imposed degrowth scenario presented a kind of experimental lab where reoriented economic priorities could be tested.

Household responses to lockdown brought about many promising opportunities for future degrowth efforts. First, participants were quick to adapt to the circumstance by going into lockdown with their households and slowing the spread of the virus. This collaborative and community effort could only work if the majority of the world participated, highlighting the global scale of cooperation and communication available for degrowth futures (Alisa & Kallis, 2020; Cosme, Santos & O'Neill, 2017; Quilley, 2022). In the same vein, participants also became acutely aware of their interdependence with each other, as well as with the planet. Understanding the risks of virus exposure and the importance of following safety orders to protect others allowed for a relatively smooth shut down. Education and rapid communication were key here. The ability of international public health bodies to learn, synthesize and share urgent information about an ongoing pandemic proved that global cooperation was possible and it saves lives (Christakis, 2020; Roberts, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020b).

Household members also had to talk with each other and their social networks about safety and comfort, negotiate risk tolerance, decode public health messaging, discern between fact and misinformation, and deal with the fall-out when members of their personal network chose the latter over the former (World Health Organization, 2021). Households developed skills in conflict management to maintain the peace in the household during a time of complete lockdown. These experiences demonstrate the promising potential of households to negotiate their needs and interests in a time of economic contraction, as well as the importance of social and emotional intelligence for

informing productive responses to an imposed degrowth (Hoffman, 2010; Robison, 2019; Throop & Mayberry, 2017).

Lastly, households paid unprecedented attention to scientific and government bodies during the pandemic lockdown. This includes staying up to date on pandemic numbers as well as scientific advancements on the virus itself, and to keep pace with rapidly changing government regulations that had to adapt as fast as the science developed (Nielsen, 2021; Rocca, 2020c). Future degrowth efforts should consider the ways in which performance indicators, government interventions and scientific knowledge are actively synthesized, shared and updated to keep communities engaged and informed.

The above outcomes align with the eight R's of degrowth framework presented at the start of this thesis. Participants **re-evaluated** (R1,2) priorities and values, and through this experience, began **reconceptualizing** and **reconstructing** – in their own minds and through their own actions – some of the fundamental tenets of the capitalist economic imaginary. To bring these changes to scale, policies must **restructure**, **redistribute** and **re-localize** (R3,4,5) current ways of economic organizing in order to facilitate a **low-carbon** (R6-8) transformation (Latouche, 2010). The following degrowth policies serve to meet the immediate needs participants had expressed during the lockdown. They offer the tools and pathways to facilitate a longer-term transformation.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Household responses to the pandemic lockdown illustrated two sides of imposed degrowth: opportunities on the one side (Chapter 4), and barriers on the other (Chapter 5). The imposed degrowth brought about by global lockdown measures created intriguing opportunities for everyday households to participate in advancing the low-carbon transition. At the same time, the unplanned nature of an imposed degrowth presented challenging barriers to participation that are of note to degrowth scholars for future policy outputs. This chapter orients these lived opportunities and barriers within degrowth's comprehensive policy agenda. By doing so, my research highlights the value of degrowth policy proposals for supporting households through times of disruption, and further, for mobilizing the very low-carbon alternatives required to adapt to a warming climate.

Here, Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2022) distillation of over one thousand texts (2005-2020) into 13 policy themes and ten policy instruments offers the most exhaustive degrowth policy agenda to date. The top ten degrowth policy interventions are: universal basic incomes; work-time reductions; job guarantees with a living wage; maximum income caps; declining caps on resource use and emissions; non-profit cooperatives; holding deliberative forums; reclaiming the commons; establishing ecovillages; and housing cooperatives. The systematic review provides an invaluable map for degrowth

activism and policy – and for understanding the significance of my research findings. This chapter uses the comprehensive policy agenda to orient participant challenges within ongoing degrowth policy discourse.

6.2.1 Universal Provisioning of Fundamental Human Needs

The degrowth imperative aims to reorient economic priorities towards more equitable and sustainable principles. Policy proposals prioritize a reduction in inequality and the eradication of poverty. Such proposals align strongly with the present case study participants' desire and support for changes through mechanisms including universal basic income and the provisioning of free and reliable access to public services including housing, transportation and healthcare (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis et al., 2018). Under rising conditions of economic hardship, declining job security and increased automation, providing a fundamental safety net is a key priority for a sustainable degrowth future (Jackson & Victor, 2018). This was made abundantly clear during lockdown. Approximately 30% of Toronto citizens struggled to pay for essentials like rent, food and utilities in the first year of the pandemic (Toronto Foundation, 2020). This case study exposed important gaps in degrowth scholarship and policy. It could be argued that these gaps are specific to the 'imposed' nature of degrowth during a pandemic. But not only does the "imposition" teach lessons for disaster preparedness, it helps to show what degrowth scholars have prioritized and what has been overlooked.

6.2.1.1 Basic Income

Participants in this study expressed interest in the concept of a universal basic income (UBI), a **redistributive effort** (R4) which they equated with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Basic income was identified by participants as an essential measure for supporting households through lockdown, but also as a promising longer-term intervention to meet basic needs such as housing, food, job security and good health. Participants who were parents even spoke to their children about what basic income could offer in efforts to reflect on their own privilege and to create more economic equality amongst the population. This echoed how many universal basic income proponents have pointed to the CERB as an opportunity for longer-term implementation (Olive, 2021). Although the CERB was implemented under emergency circumstances on a national scale with limited oversight, by comparison, a universal basic income would likely have greater effectiveness and success through a more intentional design. In addition, CERB confirmed what past field experiments with a guaranteed income has already demonstrated.

In a 1970s guaranteed annual income field experiment held in Manitoba, participants of all ages and abilities who received the income were less likely to be hospitalized, less likely to seek out support for mental and physical health physicians, and more likely to continue their education (Forget, 2011). Another more recent effort by The New Leaf Project gave 50 homeless individuals in British Columbia a one-time cash transfer of $7,500 (New Leaf Project, 2019). Over 60% of the participants were food secure after one month, and the number of nights spent in a shelter reduced by over 50% in the first three months. After six months, 80% of participants had found stable housing, and spending on temptation goods such as drugs or alcohol also decreased by 33%.

Universal basic income was identified by Fitzpatrick et al.'s systematic review as the *top* policy instrument cited in degrowth literature. While there are currently over nine different basic income proposals, Fitzpatrick et al. raise a concern of "policy dropping" whereby such proposals are cited due to their early presence in foundational papers, and question whether such proposals truly offer the most promising leverage point for mobilizing a degrowth future. Further, in a fiscal policy measures model, researchers found that basic income had the least impact on inequality (Jackson & Victor, 2018). Since basic income was given equally to households of all income brackets in this model, this policy was found to be most effective alongside the **redistribution of wealth** (R4) including a graduated income tax regime and a tax on household wealth. Fitzpatrick et al. (2022: 17) remark that degrowth policies are often explored independently, in parallel or in competition - rather than in collaboration. As such, "it is hardly controversial to say that the degrowth agenda is closer to a disparate list of ingredients than a neatly organised recipe".

This means that basic income in particular should dovetail with reforms that decrease the wealth of top earners, such as a salary cap and taxing luxury goods. The provisioning of a guaranteed income will not be the only solution to the inequality crisis. If essential services and fundamental human needs such as housing and transportation were sponsored through government spending, citizens would have fewer total expenses with which to concern themselves. The emergency distribution of basic income during a time of imposed degrowth underscores the role of state as the pivotal scale for implementing widespread action on societal welfare. But the "emergency" nature of such measures also demonstrates the reactive, rather than intentional and long-term interventions necessary for longer-term transformation.

In the context of the imposed degrowth scenario, emergency relief programs such as the CERB represented a nationwide experiment with UBI. Though this kind of economic intervention had never been implemented at this scale, more than one in five Canadians accessed the emergency benefit in the first four weeks it was available (Press, 2021). Over the six-month period the benefit was offered, 8.9

million Canadians accessed the financial relief – nearly one third of the country's population. While a temporary measure, job and income security trends demonstrate the need for longer term interventions. According to a recent poll, 78% of Canadians have three months of savings or less (Gerster, 2020) and 42% of the Canadian workforce is at risk of losing their jobs to automation (Lamb, 2016). CERB's stabilizing force underlined how valuable and necessary UBI is longer term.

However, such an intervention does not come without complications. While the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has sent a notice to more than one million Canadians to repay their pandemic income assistance, placing a disproportionate burden on low-income individuals (Moon, 2022). The same demands have not been made of corporations that exploited $101 billion (CAD) in supposed "wage subsidy" assistance (Darrah, 2022). Although the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) was implemented to protect workers and jobs, only 185 out of 460,060 companies that received the funds but used them fraudulently have been penalized. Critics argue that the poor enforcement of eligibility and monitoring demonstrates a **clear corporate bias** (R3,4), as corporations took the subsidy and simultaneously increased dividends to their shareholders, laid off workers, and ultimately facilitated a "massive transfer of wealth" (ibid). Canadian taxpayer dollars are essentially subsidizing, and artificially inflating, payments to shareholders in the midst of an economic and public health crisis (Ferreira & Carmichael, 2020). While only 388 of the subsidy recipients were publicly traded companies, the CRA is still able to investigate how the subsidy was spent. See Appendix F for a list of public companies that received the wage subsidy and simultaneously paid out dividends.

6.2.1.2 Internet Access

Internet services were used consistently in all households of the present case study for a variety of personal and professional needs. This included maintaining social or familial ties, conducting paid work and meetings, facilitating educational, cultural and spiritual services, and so much more (R1-3). Participants reported attending graduation ceremonies, family funerals, church services, and many other **important societal cornerstones** that they had lost physical access to as a result of the pandemic. It was that much more important for participants to stay connected virtually during a time of physical distancing. Participants regarded strong internet connection as a **vital lifeline** for households to connect with the rest of society during the pandemic (R1).

The internet offers unrivalled opportunities for members of society to connect, share, communicate and disseminate information at global scales and unprecedented speeds. With the call for a global shutdown in response to the COVID-19 virus, people around the world went online to stay connected, informed, and prepared for what was to come. The Canadian Internet Use Survey found that

75% of people aged 15 years or older engaged in online activities more often as a result of the pandemic, and nearly half of Canadians (48%) reported performing at least one online activity for the first time (Bilodeau & Minnema, 2021). Shockingly, while 98% of Toronto households have home internet access, 38% of these households reported download speeds that were below the national target (Figure 11) (Andrey, Masoodi, Malli, & Dorkenoo, 2021).

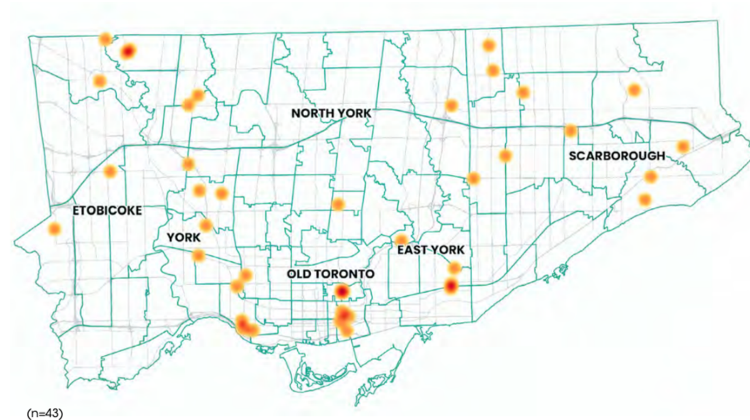

Figure 11. Heat map of Toronto residents with no home internet service (Andrey et al., 2021)

This stark reality directly impacted the accessibility of COVID-19 public health announcements, information about business closures and lockdown measures, information about accessing emergency relief programs, and information about remote learning. A recent nation-wide study in the United States found higher COVID-19 mortality rates for communities with limited internet access in the first year of the pandemic (Lin, Paykin, & Halpern, 2022). This finding held regardless of demographic risk factors (i.e., health insurance coverage) or spatial regime (i.e., urban vs rural). Researchers estimate that for every additional 1% of residents with internet access, between 2.4-6 pandemic deaths per 100,000 people could be prevented.

So, many other community and social contexts require reliable internet access – and, most importantly, access to reliable information in the middle of an ongoing pandemic (Benda, Veinot, Sieck, & Ancker, 2020). Scholars have begun discussing internet access as a **social determinant of health**, and is more recently being considered a social determinant of health (Rubin, 2021). Reduced internet access directly **exacerbates** health disparities (R4,5). For example, making health appointments or getting medical test results, accessing job boards and submitting applications, virtual classrooms, food delivery and store opening times (i.e., seniors hours), and so many other community and social contexts require reliable internet access. Benda et al. prepared a diagram (Figure 12) illustrating the many ways

in which internet access directly ties into critical health outcomes including life expectancy and health care expenditures:

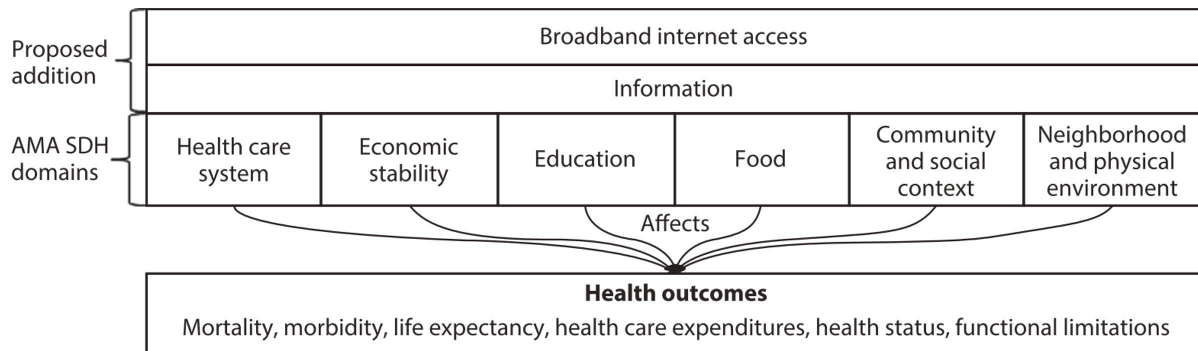

Figure 12. Proposed extended model of social determinants of health by Benda et al. (2020: 1124)

With much surprise, a major policy gap illuminated by the present case study in Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2022) systematic review was the provisioning of internet connection (R4,5). While the provisioning of "universal basic public services" was identified, the review did not identify the public provisioning of internet access as a tool for implementing degrowth. The technology-related degrowth policy remains largely focused on technological sovereignty and convivial tools, often taking the term technology in a literal sense. For example, degrowth literature is critical of negative emissions technology often used in climate modeling research that embeds enormous assumptions into feasible climate targets (Fuss et al., 2014; Hickel & Kallis, 2019; Vaughan & Gough, 2016). Degrowth also intersects with technology in conversations on patent ownership, and dismantling patent monopolies for more equitable access to technological resources such as seeds (Daly, 2008). Lastly, degrowth concerns itself more concretely with physical technologies and tools through right to repair movements and skills-building for community food gardens (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

However, the concept of the digital commons (e.g., Wikipedia) has remained on the periphery of degrowth literature as some scholars remain adamant but wary of the role of digital technology in democratic participation and information sharing. For some, socialized global infrastructure such as a digital commons is vital to a degrowth transition that prioritizes local manufacturing (Kostakis, Latoufis, Liarokapis, & Bauwens, 2018). For example, providing accessible open-source knowledge or software encourages the locally controlled and autonomous management of decision-making and investment, creating the potential of a positive degrowth feedback-loop. The provisioning of free internet therefore allows possibilities for **distributing and decentralizing the means of production** while democratizing technological development, making such a policy priority of critical interest to

degrowth scholars (R3-5). Research should also consider decentralized and peer-to-peer networks to re-appropriate the internet (Aigrain, 2010).

Degrowth scholars should prioritize publicly provisioned internet access as a key policy avenue for mobilizing the degrowth imperative. During the imposed degrowth scenario, access to information and connection to social networks were essential for the health and well-being of participants. Moreover, the quick implementation of emergency measures during lockdown made the dissemination of such measures pivotal for public health and safety. Considered a social determinant of health, internet access can simultaneously tackle wealth and resource inequalities, disparities which have a direct impact on life expectancy. In the facilitation of a low-carbon transition, maintaining transparent communications on public policy will be essential for maintaining support and eliciting civic engagement.

6.2.1.3 Childcare

Childcare is a fundamental and inescapable societal necessity. It contributes directly to the quality and capacity of a region's labour power. It shapes societal norms, ethical systems, and citizenship (Elson, 1998). Degrowth literature has yet to contribute an explicit policy proposal about childcare, childcare subsidies, parental leave or care income, focusing more broadly on the provisioning of universal basic needs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Yet these interventions are the keystones of a gender equitable post-capitalist and post-growth future (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Dengler & Strunk, 2018; Folbre, 1995; Folbre & Nelson, 2000). Raising and molding future generations into critical thinkers with a strong moral compass is a pivotal (unpaid) duty that remains largely invisible to mainstream economic approaches (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Elson, 1998; Jochimsen & Knobloch, 1997; Nelson, 1997). It is thus important to ensure it is visible and valued in a post-growth economy, particularly in the context of larger public policy issues including family law, public transportation, education and healthcare (Gauthier, 2000).

Lockdown dramatically exposed the essential (here, childcare) as neglected and un-valued, and simultaneously allowed something else: reclaimed time and relationships.

1. *The essential as neglected:* The closed schools, cancelled after-school and weekend programming, and disrupted social support systems (i.e., family and friends) saw my research participants frequently expressing their frustrations with having to adapt their households to provide full-time childcare in the midst of professional and personal obligations. Without access to additional supports, parents in this study struggled to maintain their child's

educational curriculum, their own professional objectives, and their mental health and that of their children (R1,2).

In addition to facilitating full-time school curriculums from home, participants also lost access to after-school programming, family or neighbour provided childcare, or other paid services. Participants who had to maintain steady paid working hours struggled to balance the duties of childcare, homeschooling and their own jobs. Other households had to sacrifice professional goals in order to provide their children with adequate support at home. Having access to a subsidy for paid childcare services was an explicit need articulated by many participants during the lockdown. Further, the concern about maintaining one's personal identity while being a parent, and meeting the demands of one's paid job, brought the topics of school safety and teacher rights to the fore.

2. *The reclamations of time and of relations:* At the same time, participants reported an appreciation for the **slower pace** of the imposed degrowth, offering time to cook, play, interact, and build more meaningful and quality relationships with their children in close proximity (R1,2). They took up activities including craft, games, biking, and spending time outdoors. Participants also deeply appreciated the opportunity to strengthen family bonds, such as their child's relationship with their grandparents. Lockdown gave participants an opportunity to re-evaluate and reorient personal priorities **towards** childcare and **away** from paid work or consumeristic activities (R3).

As described by many participants, childcare support during a time of imposed degrowth was a fundamental and largely unmet need that could have profoundly altered participant experiences, mental health challenges, and work-life balance. This neglected need is a direct consequence of gender blindness in neoclassical economic theory (Bauhardt, 2014), which situates wage labour as resource not produced yet "springs up fully formed, with preferences fully developed, and is fully active and self-contained" (Nelson, 1992: 115). McDowell finds this paradox particularly intriguing considering the individualistic emphasis of neoclassical analysis, since the achievement of adult self-sufficiency and economic agency depends on "a particular version of selfless parenting" (2004: 153). This inherent contradiction speaks to the necessity of market logic to deny its dependence on the socially reproductive labours of women in the home in order to simultaneously justify the exploitation of such labours to maintain the functioning of the economy (Nelson, 1997; Plumwood, 1986).

The outcomes of this case study serve to **make visible this dependence**, and illuminate the **theoretical limitations** of the growth paradigm (R1) (Jochimsen, 2003). Coined by Brodie (2003) as the 'paradox of necessity', the imperatives to accumulate capital have "stripped away mechanisms and institutional supports, the capabilities of states, while simultaneously maximising the need for social

intervention because of the socially destabilising effects of unfettered markets" (Bakker, 2007: 546). Such contradictions come to the fore when considering the social basis of market relations. Indeed, social norms and ethical behaviour must continually be constructed and sustained for a society to comply with market regulations, state law and moral codes. Calling back to Elson's (1998: 195) commentary on the contribution of the domestic to economic production, she argues:

> without an underpinning of ethical norms and the participation of people with some sense of ethics and some willingness to trust, no well functioning market system is possible. The primary site of production of these key social assets is the process of bringing up children in the home and the neighbourhood, a process which rests upon unpaid domestic labour. Thus the domestic also plays a role in constituting the market circuit and determining how well it functions.

This case study emphasized the time and relational investments necessary for quality parent-children relationships, and the **inability of present economic conventions** to acknowledge the significance of this labour (R1-3). Unfortunately, gender blindness also pervades ecological economics literature, underscoring the necessity for an ecofeminist, rather than ecological, economic alternative (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). Participant experiences shared in this study offer the humble beginnings of a childcare policy for the degrowth imperative.

There are two main avenues offered in feminist economics literature for supporting socially reproductive labour such as childcare. The first, sparking much debate, is financially valuing this work in the formal economy (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2014). This can be pursued in a number of ways, including facilitating a care income, investments in early learning and childcare centres, job security provisions like parental leave or flexible schedules, and protective workplace policies for daycare workers, teachers and schools (R3,4). In response to COVID-19 lockdown measures, and the resulting increased burden of childcare on women in households around the globe, the first international campaign for care income was launched by Global Women's Strike and Women of Colour GWS in partnership with the Green New Deal for Europe (Global Women's Strike, 2020). Care income is recognized by these groups as a key aspect of facilitating climate justice to support the unwaged labours of caring for people and planet that maintain the waged workforce. Paid parental leave – essential to work-life balance, familial bonding and job security (Kate Bezanson, 2018; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010) – has also been found to advance a range of Sustainable Development Goals in low- and high-income countries including health (SDG #3), decent work (SDG #8), poverty and inequality (SDGs #1, 10) and of course gender equality (SDG #5) (Heymann et al., 2017). Monetized childcare interventions offer a promising opportunity to advance social, economic and environmental interests simultaneously (R2-5).

But there are problems with paid interventions. Parental leave, for example – a more recent addition to welfare state policies – has a higher risk of retrenchment when compared to more established workplace rights or retirement protections (Henderson & White, 2004). In addition, paid leave can extend the "motherhood penalty" in earnings, encourage more women to exit the labour market, and increase women's lifetime risk of poverty (Budig, 2019; Mandel, 2012). Extending leave times could also offer governments an excuse to further decrease investment in early learning and care services. Further, substantial leave times are often reserved for high-income households due to the low income replacement rate (i.e., proportion of leave benefits relative to previous earnings) (Kate Bezanson, 2018). There are thus class-based implications for parental leave, whereby high-income households can more easily address childcare needs with longer leave times. Coincidentally, the three participants in this study on maternity at the time of lockdown reported annual earnings of $150,000 or more.

The second avenue is recognizing that this invaluable labour does not, and cannot, have a price (Cox, 2010; Folbre, 1995; Jochimsen, 2003). The **intrinsic motivations** of love, care, reciprocity and moral obligation far surpass the extrinsic desire for money or utility (R1). Indeed, expressing care to another – especially a dependent child – threatens the foundations of market logic and the theory of the rational economic actor with unequal exchanges and power asymmetries (Jochimsen, 2003). For example, a child may not be able to identify or express their needs, compromising the child's autonomy and creating an asymmetric relationship between the child and caregiver. Further, the caregiver may receive little to no "return" in exchange for the services provided.

Labour conducted out of responsibility and affection does not require an economic return, as no amount of money can guarantee love (Anderson, 2006; Silvia Federici, 2018). What is the appropriate price for reading a child a bedtime story, or holding their hand while crossing the street, or being available for a comforting conversation about monsters in the closet? Following the debate in ecological economics literature about the valuation of ecosystem services, these reproductive labours take place for so many reasons that the **market is incapable of capturing**, and it is thus inappropriate to use such market mechanisms to assign financial value to reproductive labour (R1,2).

For Folbre (1995), the only way to truly preserve the value of reproductive labour is to not pay for it. Situating children as public goods, Folbre argues that the labours devoted to their development as ethically guided and engaged citizens benefits the larger community. This aligns with Elson's (1998) interpretation of the domestic sector as a pivotal area of production for social assets that begin at childrearing. Moreover, through the participation in paid employment, public policy actively transfers resources away from parents to non-parents through the provisioning of social insurance, while parents are left with moral and cultural awards (Folbre 1995). Childcare services should thus also be considered

a public service, and be supported accordingly in order **to redistribute the burden of labour** in a more gender equitable way (R2,4). The value of care labour is in the fulfillment of human dignity, not the pursuit of profit. As a collective social responsibility, the public control, accountability and participation of service provisioning is for quality services in the long term (Future of Public Services Global Manifesto, 2021).

One of the most promising mechanisms for managing public goods is the state (Future of Public Services Global Manifesto, 2021). This was clearly demonstrated through the provisioning of emergency childcare interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontario ordered a declaration of emergency on March 17, 2020, requiring all licensed childcare centres to close. By March 22 however, the City of Toronto received authorization from the Province to open licensed childcare centres to support essential workers provided at no cost and open seven days a week (City of Toronto, 2020). Emergency childcare protocols developed by Children's Services and Toronto Public Health ended up becoming models copied in other jurisdictions across the country:

> The capacity of a municipality to respond in an emergency context is not paralleled by the community-based or nonprofit sector. Toronto's ability to leverage its highly trained and experienced workforce, the ease of collaboration between Children's Services and Toronto Public Health to implement new health and safety protocols, and a direct government to government relationship with the Province were all vital to the speed of implementing emergency child care (Akbari et al., 2021: 4)

The scale and resources available for state intervention remains unparalleled. This emergency childcare intervention again demonstrated the capacity and willingness of government bodies to allocate resources to address such issues when necessary – but again, as a reactive response. In line with the reflections of study participants on the need for state intervention, state-provisioned childcare services – as well as a publicly managed universal system of free early learning, childcare, and health services – should be considered a central component of childcare for a degrowth future.

Recent advances for childcare in Canada offer a prime example of how the COVID-19 health crisis brutally exposed not only the necessity of this service, but the precarity of its provisioning, making it impossible for governments to ignore. In the 2021 federal budget, Canada laid out a transformative universal early learning and childcare system that will result in 30,000 new spaces across the country in the next five years (Government of Canada, 2021a). In March 2022, Ontario signed a five-year, $10.2 billion (CAD) childcare deal that will create over 70,000 new childcare spaces, cut service fees by 80%, and simultaneously set new wage floors for childcare workers (CBC News, 2022). This historical outcome follows a long and vibrant history of childcare advocacy in Canada that created the foundations for this possibility (Pasolli, 2021). This outcome also raises the unfortunate observation

that it took global tragedy, suffering, and significant loss of life before a policy of this magnitude could be adopted. What more must be sacrificed before the lethal disease of the growth paradigm is contained?

6.2.1.4 Mental Health Support

The negative impacts of lockdown measures on participant mental health were a significant outcome of this case study. Due to compounding factors including isolation, uncertainty, fear, and existing health conditions, participants struggled immensely to manage their mental health during the first wave of the pandemic. Participants reported losing their sense of self, no longer being able to keep up with everyday personal or professional responsibilities, and of the triggering of childhood symptoms or episodes. Mental health support was one of the top needs identified by study participants as a priority for government intervention during the lockdown.

These study outcomes align with what Canadians experienced during the first wave of the pandemic. In a national study on the differential mental health impacts of the pandemic, researchers found a deterioration of mental health and coping ability, suicidality, stress, and substance abuse during the first wave of the pandemic (Jenkins et al., 2021). The greatest sources of stress included the physical threat of the COVID-19 virus, as well as financial and employment insecurity. Moreover, nearly one in five Canadians reported feeling worried about having enough food to meet their household's basic needs, compounding stressors that were further magnified by members of vulnerable groups such as those with a low income. Racialized and Indigenous groups were more than twice as likely to report a fear of domestic violence which can exacerbate mental health outcomes (ibid). These findings underscore the social and structural causes of vulnerability for systematically oppressed populations, and further illuminate the need for an equity-oriented public health approach to mental health promotion (Campion, Javed, Sartorius, & Marmot, 2020; Haynes, Cooper, & Albert, 2020).

Research on the links between the degrowth imperative and implications for mental health remain limited. Broadly speaking, the degrowth imperative promises the **alleviating of psychological stressors and anxieties** prevalent in the capitalist growth paradigm by prioritizing human and environmental health and non-materialistic values (R1-3) (Arndt, Solomon, & Kasser, 2004; Jackson, 2013). More specific degrowth policy proposals incorporate mental health objectives within policy instruments such as the universal provisioning of basic needs and services, including mental and physical healthcare (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). While this is a noteworthy effort, deeper links between psychological wellbeing and the degrowth imperative are paramount in the face of unpredictable shifts in climate, economy and society (Drews & Antal, 2016). In particular, degrowth scholars need a better understanding of the psychological and emotional implications of a degrowth future which requires

unprecedented changes to socially entrenched lifeways, as well **as irremediable shifts** in local and global ecosystems (R2,5) (Adams, 2016; Lucas et al., 2014).

Little attention has been paid to the relationship between mental health and a changing climate, though research and discussion are beginning to emerge (Berry et al., 2018; Whitmore-Williams et al., 2017). Changes to one's environment have been shown to "induce stress, depression, and anxiety; strain social and community relationships; and have been linked to increases in aggression, violence, and crime" (Whitmore-Williams et al., 2017: 4). For example, one's occupational identity (i.e., fisher) can be **threatened by environmental change** (i.e., warmer climate) which can lead to an increased risk of depression (R1) (Wasini, West, Mills, & Usher, 2014). Using a systems approach, Figure 13 below illustrates various factors that interact such as (a) personal resources, (b) wide-spread upheavals, (c) public resources and (d) resulting mental illness.

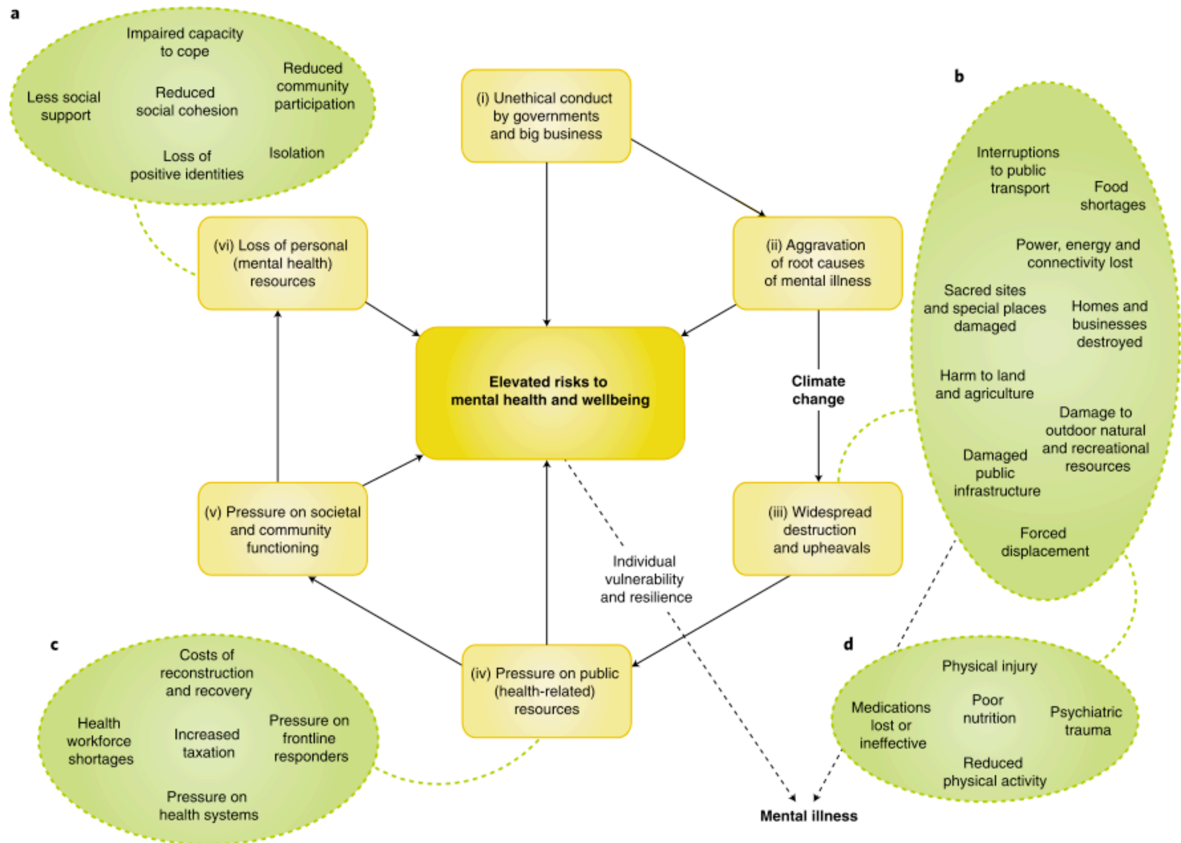

Figure 13. Major domains of harm linking climate change and mental illness (Berry et al., 2018: 286)

Berry et al. assert that the "association between disasters, disadvantage and compromised mental health is no coincidence" (2018: 288). Changes in climate can result in **acute mental health impacts** such as trauma and shock, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, substance abuse,

and strain on interpersonal relations, as well as **chronic impacts** including interpersonal violence and intergroup aggression (R1-3) (Whitmore-Williams et al., 2017). Further, direct threats such as natural disasters – or pandemics – can **divert essential resources** away from public health, causing greater distress to the capacities of individuals and communities to manage these psychological stressors (R4,5) (Nature Editorial, 2018).

Ecological grief is an emerging area for both psychological and environmental inquiry that attempts to encapsulate personal and collective responses to ecological loss, such as irreversible changes to one's environment (Albrecht, 2005, 2014; Albrecht et al., 2007). Albrecht coined this experience as 'solastalgia', combining the worlds solace and nostalgia to encapsulate the experience of being dislocated and unable to find solace in familiar places as they actively change. Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) identify three main areas where empirical research has been able to capture and report the experience of ecological grief: i) grief associated with physical ecological losses; ii) grief associated with loss of environmental knowledge, and iii) grief associated with anticipated future losses. These three areas are certainly not exhaustive, and the subject matter covered within each are likely to overlap and build upon each other. But the three areas are strategic intervention points for better understanding the impacts of ecological grief on the human psyche as well as on larger communities or regions.

The synthesis by Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) alerts us to the grief of *anticipated future loss*. While many social theorists have advocated for the possibility of a return to – or alternate point of – relative stability following the trauma of significant personal loss (Neimeyer & Cacciatore, 2016), this potential may not be accessible in the context of the Anthropocene, where ongoing or unending environmental losses becomes the norm (Costello et al., 2009; Eriksen et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2015; Head, 2015; Steffen et al., 2011). This brings about fundamentally alternative understandings of ambiguous loss; "loss that goes on without answers or closure and leads to feelings of being frozen, halted, or stuck in the grief process, living with both the presence and the absence of what was lost" (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018: 279). Mental health experts agree that the grief and anxiety resulting from ambiguous [ecological] loss will increase in prevalence and is particularly difficult to articulate and grapple with as it is a relatively new phenomenon (Whitmore-Williams et al., 2017).

Present research efforts at the intersection of climate change and mental health continue to emphasize clinical, psychological and proximate factors that limit the scope of investigation to individual experience rather than the dynamics of health across contexts including populations, distal influences, and the life-course (Casstevens, 2010; Raphaely & Marinova, 2014). More recent research on biomechanics and non-verbal communications also point to the physical health avenue for addressing mental health issues (Garcia, 2021). As a result, our present understanding of mental health

and wellbeing "fails both to astutely decompose [sic] and to properly integrate vital facts about mental health, weather and climate change" (Berry et al., 2018: 283). This is particularly problematic since the individual capacity to access mental health supports is largely shaped by social determinants and **structural opportunities**, which happen to be least accessible to those in greatest need (R4) (Collins et al., 2011; Manderscheid et al., 2010).

It is thus essential for degrowth scholarship to aid in facilitating this gap. First, mental health supports must adapt to the realities of a changing climate, and the demands of these changes on contemporary society. Rather than addressing a discrete illness, mental health supports in a climate uncertain context require an **ongoing dialogue** about change, loss, grief, reflection and opportunity (R1,2). Degrowth scholars should explore existing climate-aware mental health services and inform frameworks for conducting productive dialogues about the growth paradigm, degrowth, and the importance of living in a low-carbon society (Van Susteren & Al-Delaimy, 2020; Wong, 2022). Through a systems thinking approach, some mental health experts advocate for community- or group-based endeavours that strengthen social capital through notions of citizenship and identity (Brink & Wamsler, 2019; van Kasteren, 2014).

Improving access to mental health services is also a priority for the degrowth imperative because it can address **socioeconomic inequalities** (R4). Those most vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate may also be the least able to access mental health care, especially as these inequalities get exacerbated by additional environmental or economic disruptions. As such, mental health offers a leading indicator for the progress of climate change mitigation (Berry et al., 2018). In this regard, indicators have been developed by the Lancet Countdown as recently as 2021 to track progress at the intersections of climate and health (Romanello et al., 2021). However, the historical stigmatization and treatment of mental health requires ongoing assessment and community-driven solutions that support traditional knowledge to enhance social and cultural needs. Degrowth advocates must prioritize mental health supports and services in the wake of the lockdown repercussions in the short-term, and aim to institutionalize support systems for longer term changes in the low-carbon transition.

6.2.1.5 Housing

Participants in the study expressed a desire for policy changes such as rent relief to support households during the pandemic lockdown. The demand from renters for greater support was catalyzed for some participants by the inconsistent public health messaging and measures taking place throughout the pandemic lockdown. As one participant commented, if it was truly a lockdown, then governments had to recognize how many households lost access to steady income streams and thus were not able to

make rent payments. Cooperative housing models and co-housing were other housing structures brought up by participants as a solution to the inequities and wastefulness of high-consumption living. The demand for greater housing support largely came from participants renting their home rather than from home owners, though home owners made comments about accessible housing options for those in need of shelter during lockdown and some worked in the social housing sector specifically.

For the first five months of the pandemic, Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) suspended all non-urgent eviction hearings as well as the issuance of evictions in order to "safeguard the health and well-being of all Ontarians" (Tribunals Ontario, 2020). However, tenants were still expected to pay monthly rent, and encouraged by Ontario's Premier Doug Ford to "communicate with your landlord, work with your landlord and do your very best" (Amin, 2020). Here again, structural state powers are **abdicating responsibility** and leaving it to their constituents to negotiate housing security terms independently (R3-5). This power differential between landlords and tenants was further exacerbated by the introduction of Bill 184[9], a new provincial law that ultimately serves to allow landlords to more easily violate tenant rights and accelerate evictions (Gibson, 2022). In combination with the stresses of the pandemic, Toronto tenants can be evicted without a hearing if they are a day late or a dollar short on their rent (Raza, 2020). Despite global economic turmoil brought about by the pandemic, those experiencing housing precarity or homelessness face increased difficulty securing limited and deteriorating shelter space (and an increased risk of virus transmission) as well as increased police violence and criminalization (McCartan, Graham, Van Wagner, Schwan, & Flynn, 2021).

With 50% of Canadian renters living on one month's savings or less (one third have two weeks or less) (Tranjan, 2020), the combined pressures of Bill 184 with the realities of a global pandemic have put Toronto's housing affordability crisis in the spotlight. But the housing crisis was deepening long before the pandemic. In fact, the City of Toronto declared the homeless and housing crisis a state of emergency over one year before the pandemic even started (Wong-Tam & Perks, 2019). The options available to renters during the lockdown remain insufficient, and further, **exacerbate existing structural inequalities** (R3,4), such as Indigenous peoples being disproportionately represented in encampments or disabled people facing increased expenses to accommodate public health measures with reduced incomes (Alini, 2020; McCartan et al., 2021). In the present housing structure, renters are burdened with the responsibility of protecting the investment income of their landlords at the **expense of meeting their own basic needs** (R2,3). Morris and Pin (2020) argue that this crisis is the direct

[9] The City of Toronto has launched a legal challenge against Bill 184, arguing the Bill is unconstitutional and accelerates evictions (Gibson, 2022).

result of a "policy vacuum created by the inaction of the Ontario and federal governments during the pandemic". More broadly, it is a **crisis perpetuated** by essential universal public services being treated as a private commodity (R1).

The provisioning of housing is critical for a number of reasons. Housing has been identified as a social determinant of health, and a critical intervention point for mental and physical health, financial security, and the prevention of domestic violence, addiction and death (Rolfe et al., 2020; Taylor, 2018). Further, cities have human rights obligations under federal, provincial and municipal law (McCartan et al., 2021). However, when housing is treated as a commodity, the priorities are no longer to provide decent shelter. Even the most basic obligations to tenants are neglected, such as safety, repairs and hazards like mold or asbestos, as the goal becomes minimizing cost and maximizing profits (Bashir, 2002). Indeed, Üçoğlu, Keil, and Tomar (2021) argue that the financialization of Ontario housing, driven by the economic growth paradigm, has created a "financial trap" for the housing system that makes it difficult to create and access alternative housing options. In this regard, housing is seen as a "market" to invest in, and is structurally reliant on the growth of real estate, construction and mortgage credits traded in the global financial markets. The authors situate the housing crisis in Toronto as a failure of the growth model, perpetuated by the pandemic, and keeping the issue of housing security vulnerable to future disruptions.

The promotion of guaranteed universal or shared housing are two of the top ten most frequently mentioned policy objectives in degrowth literature today. Recognizing housing as a human right, housing for degrowth prioritizes the **fair and equitable distribution** of housing based on need rather than conceptualizing and producing it as a commodity through markets (R1,2,4) (Lehtinen, 2018; Nelson & Schneider, 2018; Weiss & Cattaneo, 2017). Typical degrowth housing policy proposals include progressive property taxes, rent caps and controls, the nationalization of vacant lands and properties, and creating maximum quotas for housing stocks, holiday homes, household floor areas, or banning the construction of detached single-family homes altogether (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Other interventions include strengthening legal aid, improving mediation processes, and expanding prevention programs (Leon & Iveniuk, 2020). Housing for degrowth offers **transformational implications** (R3-6) for eradicating poverty, encouraging voluntary simplicity, lowering the ecological footprint of dwellings, and strengthening community bonds (Nelson & Schneider, 2018).

Housing movements across the globe have set the stage for both challenges and opportunities presented by micro- and macro-level housing politics. Housing struggles in Rome, Italy integrate notions of rights, distribution and environmental justice to simultaneously resist urbanization and reject the over-use of concrete and energy sources in housing development towards the sustainable degrowth

of the city centre (Olsen, Orefice, & Pietrangeli, 2018). The campaign against the demolition of the Heygate public housing estate in in London, England highlights both social and environmental inefficiencies and chronic dysfunctions of mainstream housing approaches (Ferreri, 2019). Innovative housing design and building approaches in Bengaluru, South India source excess earth from previous construction sites to create Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks (CSEBs), and other waste materials such as computer keyboards, to offset the environmental impacts of construction by making the home a waste sink (Vishwanath, 2019).

Housing for degrowth transitions are already taking place at the local level, but require laws and policies to promote such shifts at larger scales (Anitra Nelson & Schneider, 2019). In fact, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified residential housing and household practices as "low hanging fruit" for reducing carbon emissions (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014). Proper building regulations have the unique potential to minimize requirements for disaster responses in the face of an uncertain climate future (World Bank Group, 2016). Particularly in high-consumption regions like Ontario, a degrowth approach to housing requires the redistribution of ownership and spaces due to the excessive unused housing supply (Doyle, 2017). Such localized but diverse international efforts identified above broaden public discourse on the distinction between needs and wants (R1), highlight the unsustainability of the built environment (R2), and also emphasize the importance of shared spaces beyond the household to fulfill needs of community, relaxation and enjoyment (R3,5) (Stefansdottir & Xue, 2019).

6.2.1.6 Active Transportation

A number of study participants increased their uptake in active modes of transportation during lockdown, including walking and cycling. Participants **acquainted themselves with local areas** and green spaces they did not visit prior to the pandemic (R5), and attributed such experiences as an important mechanism for **maintaining mental health** during a time of isolation (R1). Further, participants found new and innovative ways to **transform existing public spaces** such as parking lots or front yards into places for distanced social gatherings, and took advantage of closing city streets for pedestrian access (R4,5). Unfortunately, COVID-19 safety concerns also had negative implications for the uptake in public transit. Due to the fear of virus transmission, many participants chose to **avoid public transit** such as the TTC altogether, and many turned to personal vehicle use as a replacement during the lockdown (R6).

Reducing reliance on fossil fuel-based transport systems such as cars and planes are a key goal for the degrowth movement. To achieve this reduction, a range of disincentives must be coordinated,

such as car free zones, as well as encouraging active modes of transport including walking, cycling, and public transport (Cattaneo et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). **Reducing fossil fuel transport** also requires more large-scale policy instruments including extraction and carbon taxes, the divestment from unethical industries, abolishing fossil fuel subsidies, and reducing energy demand by taxing industrial energy consumption (R3,4,6). Such strategies are intended to reduce both energy and material consumption while promoting social and environmental health, enhancing self-sufficiency, and prioritizing public safety and well-being (Lehtinen, 2018). Active commuting has also been found to deplete stress, increase fitness and cognitive performance, and positively impact mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Berke, Gottlieb, Vernez Moudon, & Larson, 2007; Litman, 2010; Martin, Goryakin, & Suhrcke, 2014; Van Dijk, De Groot, Van Acker, Savelberg, & Kirschner, 2014).

Urban centres such as cities have larger ecological footprints, locked-in and uneven infrastructure, and broad environmental impacts that transcend political borders. This makes municipal politics a critical contextual avenue for mobilizing a degrowth transition (Cattaneo et al., 2022; Heynen, 2014; Wackernagel, Kitzes, Moran, Goldfinger, & Thomas, 2006). Research demonstrates that increasing the **accessibility of cities** through the provisioning of public transport has significantly decreased commuting times, increased employment rates and activity participation, and reduces social isolation through fostering greater social inclusion (R3,5) (Hu, 2015; Lucas, 2012; Schiller et al., 2010). In an exploration of transport poverty, nearly one million low-income Canadians in urban areas were found to be living with low transit accessibility (Allen & Farber, 2019). More efforts are needed to better incorporate social equity concerns in transportation plans and policy (Manaugh, Badami, & El-Geneidy, 2015; Pereira, Schwanen, & Banister, 2017).

A major point of degrowth advocacy coming out of global lockdown measures will be increasing the uptake in modes of public transportation. From an equity perspective, this could include services and infrastructure improvements, transit-supportive development, and mitigating negative impacts such as increased housing prices as a result of such improvements (Metrolinx, 2018). Relevant transit service improvements recommended by Metrolinx for the Greater Toronto Area include increasing the frequency and span of service including evenings and weekends, improving reliability through existing operational protocols, and improving first- and last-mile connections where riders commute to and from transit stops (ibid). Providing universal access to such services through government subsidies should be a key policy endeavour for degrowth advocates, and offers a prime opportunity to **divest and reallocate** subsidies in harmful industries such as fossil fuels (R3-6).

Interestingly, in a recent analysis on the principles and criteria for the mobility of a degrowth society, researchers compared urban mobility options including private, public and hybrid to enrich the

sustainable transportation debate (Cattaneo et al., 2022). They conclude that while private means such as the personal vehicle are not desirable from a degrowth perspective due to the social and environmental costs, the researchers also observe that public options depend on both material and political infrastructure that takes time to develop and maintain, and thus cannot offer immediate alternatives in a climate emergency. Hybrid, active and shared/pooled means of transport were identified in the study as the most promising option to improve quality of life, address social and environmental injustice, and instigate a positive feedback loop away from private options that can foster greater uptake of public transport (ibid). As such, there may be more restrictive travel implications during an initial economic slowdown while upgrades and changes are made to existing infrastructures. These restrictions come as a direct result of the entrenched corrupt logics of accumulation in urban development, which must be dismantled to mobilize a low-carbon transformation (Simpson, 2020). Degrowth scholarship must improve its dialogue with urban planning in this regard, and offer policy proposals that promote shifts towards active transport alternatives (Cattaneo et al., 2022; Lehtinen, 2018; Xue, 2021).

6.2.2 Transformative Justice

The strength of the degrowth imperative comes in two forms – a scientific critique of the present economic paradigm, and strategies for revolutionary change. For degrowth scholars, addressing inequality requires building economic alternatives that incorporate principles of transformative justice to actively **dismantle harmful systems of oppression** including racism, sexism and colonialism (R1-3) (Brownhill et al., 2012; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Waziyatawin, 2012). Policy proposals found in degrowth literature include free access to legal services and alternatives to incarceration such as rehabilitation programs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). A post-carbon and post-growth transformation of the global economy must incorporate transformative politics that build solidarity among parallel struggles including labour justice, racial justice and gender equity to catalyze liberation and revolution for all (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Pelletier, 2010; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019; Temper & Gilbertson, 2015).

Transformative justice embraces principles of intersectional feminism, which acknowledge the systemic power structures at play in the distribution of resources, divisions of labour, and the maintenance and performance of the production/reproduction dualism across intersecting spectrums of race, gender, class, age and other identities (Beier, 2018; Duffy, 2005; Hamington, 2015; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). By acknowledging that systematically oppressive economic institutions are fuelled by sexism, racism, classism, misogyny and heterosexism, it is only by **bridging** the divides between

struggles that the growth paradigm can truly be **dismantled** (R1-3) (Gaard, 2001; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2009; Mellor, 1997a; Mies, 1998; Plumwood, 1993).

Critical scholarship has more recently highlighted the role of colonialism, enslavement, and state-driven violence in the origins of the climate crisis. For many, the climate crisis is not a crisis at all, but the most recent cumulative expression of a violent economic system based in accumulation, dispossession and colonization (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; H. Davis & Todd, 2017; Whyte, 2019). It is indeed precisely through the active denial of Indigenous peoples to access and express their cultural roots, languages, relationships and lifeways that imperial hyper-exploitative powers could flourish and dominate. Far from being historical anomalies, these destructive processes of enclosure and accumulation are "constitutive of capitalist relations at all times, eternally recurrent" (Federici, 2019: 15).

This could not be more relevant than in a settler-colonial nation like Canada, where historical depictions of "settlement" stress the shrinking of Indigenous populations as natural and inevitable (Freeman, 2010). Despite numerous petitions and land deeds over multiple decades following initial settlement, Indigenous peoples were said to have vanished on their own accord. Yet the colonial government of Upper Canada in the late 1700s and early 1800s made Indigenous peoples like the Mississaugas financially dependent on the Crown by destroying critical environments for traditional hunting and provisioning practices, disrupting political alliances with other First Nations, and paying marginal costs of the land's true market value (Freeman, 2010). For example, the Mississaugas received an estimated 2.5% of the cost for the Mississauga Tract, now the suburb of Mississauga.

By framing the settlement of Canada as a distant and historical event, rather than an ongoing process, the state is able to "cover its tracks and operate towards self-supersession" (Brown, 2019). The settler-colonial city has often been viewed as the "consummation of empire", becoming critical sites for developing colonial and imperial ideologies and enacting colonial relations (Edmonds, 2004; Stanger-Ross, 2008). For Edmonds, the "nineteenth-century city marked an unprecedented urban space in the New World, signifying a key moment in both Empire and modernity" (2004: 12). The urban household is thus a critical site for understanding the formation and maintenance of settler subjectivity, nationhood and Indigeneity. In particular, the 'Indigenizing' or naturalizing of non-native populations, and the racializing of Indigenous populations, contribute to the seemingly unassailable state of settler society. The reproduction and navigation of the settler colony is performed daily in the household (Brown, 2019).

Transformative justice is a critical aspect of challenging the growth paradigm in the face of rising economic, resource and political conflict. While understanding historical power relations is a key

step for allocating liability and responsibility, there exists a distinct paradox whereby the opportunity to emancipate and escape from the grasp of the growth paradigm is challenged by the real risk of ecological devastation that jeopardizes the capacity for life to continue (Waziyatawin, 2012; Whyte, 2019). There is thus an urgent sense to restore such qualities including trust, accountability, and reciprocity as these **relational qualities** are inseparable from the drivers that warm the global climate (R1-3).

The present case study exemplified some crucial instances in which an intersectional approach to degrowth can offer the robust policies needed for the diverse community members of high-consumption society. Participants engaged or struggled with degrowth practice at their own personal intersections of age, race, ability, gender, sexuality, and class. Below, the issues of race, gender, and ability are explored to further augment degrowth scholarship and emphasize the significant role of transformative justice principles in the mobilizing of equitable and sustainable low-carbon futures.

6.2.2.1 Racial Justice

Institutionalized racism is both a historical and ongoing form of oppression that perpetuates the physical and psychological harm, financial exclusion, and cultural marginalization of individuals and communities of colour. Structurally, this can be exemplified by cases of environmental racism, whereby communities of colour are targeted as sites for polluting industries and toxic waste disposal, as well as the active exclusion of these communities from decision-making and regulatory bodies (Bullard, 1993; Gaard, 2001). During the pandemic, people of colour were thrust to the frontlines due to their overrepresentation as essential workers, and faced disproportionately high COVID-19 infection and death rates. **Structural inequities** in healthcare access, employment, and community affluence have directly caused these outcomes (R3,4). Institutionalized racism also requires an examination of deeply internalized beliefs about these communities and their role in shaping and participating in desirable alternative futures (Healy et al., 2018).

Racism and racial profiling were observed and experienced by many participants of the present case study. From anti-Asian sentiments motivated by fears of the COVID-19 virus, to the racial profiling of participants of colour while they enjoyed outdoor spaces in peace, racist acts were a defining aspect of the pandemic lockdown. A number of policy instruments have been proposed in the degrowth literature to address such incidents in a systemic way, including funding rehabilitation and social programs that serve as alternatives to incarceration, the guaranteed access to free legal services, and proposing new principles of non-discrimination and equality in human rights law (Fitzpatrick et

al., 2022). Anti-racist degrowth discourse also includes the opposition to racism or dismantling colonialism, which require more nuanced policy instruments that are regionally contextualized.

Information

Collecting data disaggregated by race is critical to building evidence-informed policies that support and heal communities of colour. Due to the historical misuse of race-based data in Canada (e.g., residential school systems), there has been minimal motivation to collect this information (Rossiter & Ndekezi, 2021). For example, despite recent written commitments in Canada's 2019-2022 *Anti-Racism Strategy* for an increase in reliable data (Government of Canada, 2019), no changes were made to the most recent 2021 census questions with respect to race-based data (Menezes, Henry, & Agarwal, 2022). The Canadian Institute for Health Information took two years following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to release guidelines on collecting race-based data during the pandemic (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022), leaving public health units such as the Region of Peel to independently collect and publicly report this data at the height of the pandemic (McKenzie, 2020). These limited and piecemeal approaches have devastating impacts on Canada's racialized communities, systematically increasing vulnerabilities and limiting the potential of interventions and responses. For example, Canada's federal government admitted that the COVID-19 case and death count among Indigenous communities was likely four times the numbers collected and reported (Cardinal, 2020). Disaggregated data plays a pivotal role in better research and data, enhanced relationships, and a healthier and more stable society.

When collected responsibly and collaboratively, disaggregated data can be utilized as a tool to **dismantle** discriminatory practices and institutionalized racism in Canada (R3,4). A sensitive and community-informed approach to the collection, storing and interpretation of the data is key: "For data to be employed as a tool for empowerment and change, there must be a shift from data governance by systems that have reinforced racial injustice and marginalization to governance by communities that are positioned to lead in the decision-making and stewardship of their information" (Rossiter & Ndekezi, 2021). The province of Ontario's Anti-Racism Act and Data Standards offer a promising strategy to use data outcomes as an anti-racism tool (Government of Ontario, 2022). Devised collaboratively with community leaders, these provincial standards set benchmarks, establish consistent practices, and enforce public accountability to promote racial equity and understand the impact of systemic racism on racialized communities in the justice, education and child welfare systems. By shifting the goal to address racial inequity, data collection can focus on strengths rather than deficits

and inform anti-racist policies that actively eliminate discrimination (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022; Menezes et al., 2022).

Action

The abolitionist demand of defunding the police offers a radical undoing of the processes of policing that have institutionalized state-driven violence to maintain the white supremacist roots of the economic growth paradigm. More than simply eliminating the violence, defunding the police actively engages in alternative conversations about public safety and the **reallocation** of financial resources to promote physical, mental and economic security in ways that **meet community needs** (R4) (Aronoff, 2020; Woodly et al., 2021). The possibilities presented by such abolitionist efforts offer the chance to initiate the undoing of systemic violence, the withdrawal from such harmful regimes, and to **reorient priorities** in ways that serve social needs rather than economic ones (R1-3).

Since June 2020, mental health clinicians and paramedics in Denver, Colorado have been providing emergency response through Denver's Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program (Schmelzer, 2022). The program provides unarmed health experts to certain emergency calls to **minimize unnecessary harms** as well as **unnecessary police spending** (R3,5). STAR has thus far received 2,700 calls, none of which required police backup. Of those citizens that accessed STAR's services, two thirds were experiencing homelessness, three quarters had mental health diagnoses, and STAR has responded by connecting those in need with shelter, food, water and clothing. The program is actively expanding, aiming to respond to more than 10,000 calls per year and cities across the United States have expressed interest in launching similar efforts. Interestingly, while the program was launched under Denver's Department of Public Safety, it is now housed under the city's Department of Public Health and Environment (ibid). **Civilian-led strategies** (R1,3,5) coordinated in various cities across the U.S.A. are able to handle 99.6% of calls without police support and have a near zero record of violence (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2021). Research suggests that at least 60% of emergency calls made in Toronto would be appropriate for civilian personnel to respond, as they do not involve violent situations or require any force (Irwin & Pearl, 2020).

These efforts align strongly with recent campaigns by Black Lives Matter Toronto, who are advocating for a 50% **reduction in funding** to the Toronto Police Service and the **reallocation** (R4) of those funds to community service needs, including mental health and employment programs (Toronto Foundation, 2020). According to a recent provincial study, Black people are 3.9 times more likely to be charged by police than white people, and 4.8 times more likely to be charged with obstruction-of-justice offences (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2020). Nationwide, Indigenous people are five

times as likely to be incarcerated and constitute over one quarter of Canada's prison population despite making up only 4.9% of the population as a whole (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2021). In Toronto, while mental health crises make up only 3% of police calls, they account for 11% of the use of force (Toronto Police Service, 2018).

In order to attain the equitable and sustainable low-carbon economic alternative for which degrowth advocates strive, research and policy proposals must employ anti-racist measures that **actively dismantle** the very institutions that uphold the capitalist growth paradigm (R2,3). Locally, this can begin with the vocal support of Defund the Police efforts and the creation of citizen-led public safety alternatives that are better equipped to manage distress calls. On a larger scale, Canada's Department of National Defence – the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the federal government – is exempt from national emissions reduction targets (Engler, 2021). Police, prisons and military are key areas of opportunity for **divestment** and **wealth reallocation** (R4) to the communities that have been destabilized, dispossessed or destroyed by these violent institutions (Estes, 2019).

6.2.2.2 Gender Equality

The COVID-19 lockdown measures were a tragedy for gender justice. Globally, women saw their incomes and job security fall while their exposure to extreme poverty and violence rose (Azcona et al., 2020). Women and girls around the world reported a reduced access to essential healthcare and reproductive services, such that maternal deaths are estimated to have increased between 8-39% per month in low and middle-income countries (Oxfam International, 2022). Lockdown also increased the likelihood of food insecurity and gender-based violence for women and girls due to public health restrictions and systemic discrimination (Bolis et al., 2020). In the context of an imposed degrowth, gender equality was exacerbated by the demands of an economic system that has **systematically neglected** the contribution of socially reproductive labour (R3,4).

In the present case study, gender equality issues arose in a variety of ways and settings. For many women in this study, their role in the household was described as the primary caregiver and many were responsible for household chores, financial management, and childcare or homeschooling, as well as the emotional burdens of household coping during the pandemic. There were also shifts and challenges to the typical gendered division of labour, whereby men and nonbinary people participated in essential household roles, sometimes taking primary responsibility. Changes to employment circumstances played a critical role in this division. Understanding the implications of an already inequitable distribution of labour will be key to a successful degrowth transition.

A truly equitable and inclusive post-growth society must embrace a diversity of genders and sexual expressions. Minimal conversations in degrowth presently discuss such intersections and parallels, but a **liberation of nature** from capitalist production must also entail a **liberation of women, the erotic, and queers** (R2,3). As ecofeminists assert, "a democratic, ecological society envisioned as the goal of ecofeminism will, of necessity, be a society that values sexual diversity and the erotic" (Gaard, 1997: 138). Degrowth policy instruments for gender equality include a gender-sensitive redistribution of paid work and job sharing, the empowerment of women to control their reproductive rights through the provision of reproductive health services and fertility control methods, and the opposition of pro-natalist policies (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). As such, gender equity remains a key priority for any successful degrowth transition (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2010; Mellor, 1997b; Nelson, 1992; Perkins, 2007).

Women, animals, queers and people of colour are all feminized, eroticized, and naturalized, as they are situated as "closer" to nature and thus devalued by the dominant economic value system (Adams, 2016; Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993). Those perceived as expressions of nature were persecuted through a variety of violent assaults including witch burnings, voyages of 'discovery' and much more (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2009). Yet, paradoxically, queer sexualities are simultaneously viewed as acts "against" nature, implying an inherent value in the *natural* (Gaard, 1997). Bringing these perspectives together, the very "nature" that others are judged against is the dominant paradigm of hetero-patriarchy, a culturally constructed system in and of itself that ideologically justifies the oppression of women and nature in the processes of capital accumulation (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019).

One of the most systemic forms of gender oppression comes in the emphasis placed on GDP economic indicators, which **systematically discount or neglect** the value and cost of socially reproductive labour (R3,4) (Coffey et al., 2020; Montgomerie & Tepe-belfrage, 2016; Nelson, 1992). This includes childcare, cooking, cleaning, and other unpaid domestic chores that often take place in the household and are largely conducted by women. Moreover, per capita GDP cannot account for the conditions of a workplace, the rights afforded to workers, or the ways in which gender or other inequalities are structurally perpetuated (Rai et al., 2019). Lastly, even paid care work remains gender segregated in the labour market. As such, it is systematically undervalued in terms of wages earned, and thus labour rights violations including the gender pay gap, sexual harassment, and the dismissal or disinterest in the employability of pregnant women pervade (Gammage & Stevanovic, 2019).

While such paid work policies are critical to a safer and more equitable society, an emphasis on paid work alone remains **limited** without strategies to **redistribute** unpaid domestic labour (R1,4)

(Rai et al., 2019). The waged productive sector is contingent on processes of unpaid social reproduction and thus remains a pivotal cornerstone of the global economy (Peterson, 2010; Safri & Graham, 2010). Socially reproductive labours must also be more purposefully articulated in degrowth scholarship to include notions of trust, community cohesion, and ethics. In the present case study, gender and sexual expression became limited by an imposed degrowth context due to the changes to health care access in the midst of a pandemic, as well as changes to mask legislation to minimize virus transmission. The argument here is not that a pandemic-induced degrowth threatens gender expression. Rather, degrowth scholars must pay close attention to the provisioning of health and safety services throughout the low-carbon transformation to ensure those in need can access supports and continue to express themselves in their most authentic ways. Nothing could make the loss of gender-affirming care more apparent than the United States Supreme Court decision to overturn the constitutional right to abortion in June 2022 (Totenberg & McCammon, 2022).

6.2.2.3 (Dis)Ability Rights & Inclusion

According to the World Health Organization, approximately one billion people, or 15% of the world's population, live with a physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental health impairment (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Although disability is a universal human experience, as a "non-fatal health outcome" it has not received enough attention in public health or sustainability contexts (Groce, 2018; Kett & Cole, 2018). Furthermore, people with disabilities have a heightened vulnerability to severe climate change impacts as well as a reduced capacity for resilience, compared to the wider population (Kett & Cole, 2018). Research has demonstrated that unless people with disabilities are consistently incorporated in global development efforts, their socioeconomic status remains unchanged compared to their able-bodied peers (Groce & Kett, 2013).

The present case study highlighted some of these observations, as 19 study participants (45%) were managing long-term mental or physical conditions or impairments at the time of the pandemic lockdown. Many cited the ways in which the imposed degrowth **compounded existing conditions** while simultaneously **restricting access** to necessary supports (R3,4). The demands of isolation during lockdown to limit virus transmission further complicated the situation, as access to community or family networks, public transit systems and public health services also became restricted. In the face of an uncertain climate future, degrowth scholars must more intentionally incorporate disability rights and supports beyond the universal access to basic healthcare services.

People with disabilities went unmentioned in the Millennium Development Goals, targets, indicators, as well the Millennium Declaration (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011).

This is particularly disheartening since the most pressing issues are not necessarily the disability itself, but instead the lack of equitable access to resources including education, employment, and healthcare, social supports including legal services, or equal participation in the religious, political or cultural lives of their communities (Groce, 2018). Persons with disabilities are thus left behind battling a disproportionate rate of financial as well as social poverty. More than a lost opportunity, it is frankly not possible to meet goals related to poverty or education without the explicit inclusion of persons with disabilities (Wolfensohn, 2002).

In contrast, the more recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have explicitly included specific reference to the inclusion of people with disabilities in multiple targets and goals (#4, 8, 10, 11) (Izutsu et al., 2015). Moreover, new methods for collecting disaggregated data have vastly improved internationally comparable insights into the distribution of people with disabilities (Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2022). Such efforts are crucial for informing regional and national strategies to achieve such goals and more accurately monitor progress, particularly as the realization of such indicators including good mental health directly contribute to the realization of equality, sustainability, peace, and security (Cieza, Sabariego, Bickenbach, & Chatterji, 2018; Groce, 2018; Izutsu et al., 2015). Reporting can strengthen policies and laws regarding the mental and physical wellbeing of the population, improve care and treatment services, and **better allocate and develop appropriate resources** for support (R1,2). Degrowth scholarship should ensure there is an accessibility component to its many policy imperatives.

6.2.2.4 Wicked Tensions

The above examinations that persist on the periphery of degrowth scholarship are crucial for identifying the fallacies that characterize oppressive economic structures, and creating opportunities to undermine the harmful logics of exploitative economic systems. Yet there persists a fringe debate on the complex dilemmas that threaten the possibility for a politics of radical degrowth in the context of an economic slow-down. Due to the availability of cheap energy such as fossil fuels, some researchers argue that the foundations of democratic liberal states – such as anti-racism, gender equality, and disability rights – were merely a by-product of industrialization over the last 500 years (Kish & Quilley, 2017; Quilley, 2022; Quilley, 2008).

The concern stems from the idea that so-called "radical" politics of equality can only exist in tandem with high-energy states that made way for socially and spatially mobile sovereign individuals (Elias, 1991). Thus, the argument goes, it is impossible to disentangle social emancipation from the politics of the growth paradigm that is embedded so deeply in the state and market. Without abandoning

the cosmopolitan and individualist assumptions of degrowth, in combination with unprecedented international cooperation, "it's difficult to imagine a strategy of degrowth that doesn't amount to a kind of dangerously utopian unilateral disarmament" (Quilley, 2022: 233).

To be sure, complex trade-offs must take place for a successful degrowth (Elrick-Barr et al., 2014; Hammond & Winnett, 2009; Kish & Quilley, 2017). The foundational principles of an ecological economy – scale, allocation and distribution – inherently acknowledge the trade-offs that must take place among differing resources, needs and people within biophysical limits (Daly, 1992; Pelletier, 2010). A good example of such complex trade-offs is the improvement of technology for people with disabilities, including smartphone applications, wheelchair parts, 3D printing of artificial limbs, or low-cost glasses and hearing aids (Groce, 2018). Degrowth of some industrial sectors in the near future will have to work in tandem with maintaining the production and accessibility of such resources if people with disabilities are to continue having their needs met.

Yet the argument that growth in the capitalist system is what necessarily fostered innovation in radical inclusive politics is potently ahistorical. Pre-capitalist societies with cultures of plural abilities and identities, solidarity, mutual respect, collaboration, and ecological awareness abounded (Davis, 2006; McRuer, 2006; Schmidt, 2017). Matristic societies for example, believed to be in existence as early as the Paleolithic Age, tended to experience greater well-being, more peace and more economic growth as a result of being more gender-balanced, egalitarian and equitable (Behar et al., 2008; Kennett et al., 2017). Gender fluid, genderless or bi-gendered gods and goddesses were celebrated in Greek, Persian, and Egyptian mythologies among many others before the rise of Judeo-Christian religion (Hillman, 2013). Feminist scholars engaged in this discourse cite the shift in social organization away from matrifocal, goddess-worshiping cultures towards patriarchal social and value structures as the pivotal factor that instigated hierarchies of oppression between nature, humans, genders and identities (Eisler, 1987; Spretnak, 1982).

It is thus the rise of capitalism that necessarily required the oppression of such "liberal" rights and freedoms in order for exploitative forms of economy to succeed. The rise in private property ownership, the alienation and control over labour power and the hoarding of wealth required the silencing and oppression of minorities to transform them as resources for capital flow (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2011; Plumwood, 1993; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). As such, the expression of radical and diverse identities is not borne out of a capitalist economy, but in fact is a phenomenon that occurred in spite of its own subjugation. Expressing and demanding for "radical" and "liberal" rights is in essence a radical everyday act of revolution that reorients value systems away from the economic growth paradigm. It is thereby a fundamental imperative of degrowth advocates to **dismantle**

intersecting institutions of oppression towards minority groups in order to release radical identity politics from the grasps of economic oppression (R1,3,4).

6.2.3 Curbing Consumption

Participants in this study reported a shift away from consumeristic values during lockdown. Many described taking the time for a more **conscious approach** to money and spending, **reassessing** their consumer patterns, and taking a more **intentional** approach to "buy carefully" during a time of imposed degrowth (R1,2). A number of participants were particularly adamant about the moral obligation during the pandemic to support local businesses, keeping production and profits circulating locally. Moreover, a small contingent of participants felt additional motivation to express anti-globalization politics by resisting multinationals such as Amazon. Watching the rates of profit and exploitation taking place during the pandemic, many participants used the lockdown as an opportunity to end their support of the corporation outright.

The degrowth imperative has a strong focus on eliminating the overproduction of goods and services, as well as luxury goods, that are environmentally costly without adding much value to societal wellbeing. This includes products like meat, cars, or secondary houses, and services like aviation and tourism. Policy proposals to curb consumption include the public control, reduction and taxation of advertising, comprehensive environmental tax schemes, criminalizing planned obsolescence, regulating lobbying, mandating environmental impacts, and guaranteeing the right to repair (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). The goal of these policies is to not only **materially reduce** harmful environmental pressures on the biosphere (R6), but also **emancipate society** from consumeristic and capitalist ideologies (R1,2) by framing the participation of such activities as undesirable (Akbulut, 2019; Fournier, 2008; Jackson, 2013).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis did not result in the advancement of such progressive policies. Pandemic relief packages from Canada's federal government in 2020 included $18 billion CAD to the oil and gas sector, and nearly $6 billion CAD to the nation's largest airline Air Canada – two-thirds of the airline company's value (Environmental Defence Canada, 2021; Fife & Willis, 2021). Canada's three largest telecom companies, Rogers, Bell and Telus, collectively received over $240 million CAD from the Emergency Wage Subsidy program aimed to support employers during the pandemic (Dobby, 2021). Most striking were the gains made by the multinational tech company Amazon, which saw a 200% rise in profits, a 50% increase in fulfillment infrastructure, and came to employ more than one million workers worldwide for the first time in its history (Wakabayashi, Weise, Nicas, & Isaac, 2020). While corporations and billionaires profited from the crisis, those at the highest

poverty line were estimated to lose between $73 million and $4.4 billion USD per day (R4) (Sumner, Ortiz-Juarez, & Hoy, 2020).

These attempts for "relief" during a time of crisis follow the same paths of privatization, deregulation, trade and globalization that remain emblematic of a growth-oriented economic system. What's more, nearly every Canadian company or sector mentioned was once government owned and at the service of the public interest (Noakes, 2021). In the wake of post-war neoliberalism, privatizing publicly owned assets was justified based on insidious market-driven logics that depict government intervention as negative – despite the creation and nationalization of public companies to keep the economy afloat during previous wars and recessions:

> Somehow the postwar economic foundation of direct government intervention, tight regulations, high taxes and strategic public corporations that had created several decades of prosperity was suddenly the source of potential economic ruin. Strategic industrial assets designed to guarantee a local means of production for everything from fighter jets to vaccines, or to ensure Canadian consumers had access to inexpensive air travel or gasoline, were dropped in favour of free markets and a dogmatic belief the market would always right itself, no matter how bad the crisis (Noakes, 2021).

Government solutions to crises such as the pandemic, but also issues of unemployment, housing or climate change, are **deeply embedded in capitalist logics** that actively harm the public interest by prioritizing short-term gains over long-term well-being (R1-3).

While government intervention and strong regulations are high priorities for managing crises and implementing a low-carbon future, degrowth scholarship does not effectively address the **inequitable distribution** of power, privilege and wealth (R4). Regulating fossil fuel lobbying in a nation like Canada would certainly be a strategic approach to minimize the influence of private interests on public welfare. Over the course of the pandemic, the federal government increased support for the oil industry by 200%, and the largest oil lobby – the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers – had 250 contacts with government representatives; the most lobbying in this sector since 2011 (Lukacs, 2021). In the context of what some are calling a "deep oil state", entrenched oil interests remain inextricably linked to state policy priorities, weakened democratic structures, and the pacifying of concern regarding the climate emergency (Taft, 2017). Without broad consensus for ambitious action to radically restore democracy to citizen control and interest, regulating the oil industry in a nation like Canada remains a distant pipedream (pun intended). There remains a deep disconnect between degrowth policy proposals and feasible pathways to implementation (Parrique, 2019).

One promising avenue that came out of the present case study in the context of consumption was a movement towards **food sovereignty** (R3-5). Over half (52%) of participants chose to grow food at home during the pandemic lockdown. Such experiences of growing herbs and vegetables from

household spaces including rooftops, balconies and backyards align strongly with degrowth policy proposals to shift the food system towards away from intensive industrialization and towards low-carbon alternatives. This includes home and urban gardening which shortens the agricultural supply chain, building food sharing networks including the sharing of seeds, land and harvest, and reforming consumer education through skills-building as well as visiting farmers markets (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Further, by limiting food garden experimentation to vegetables and herbs, participant diets complemented meat and dairy consumption with local and seasonal foods while fostering experiences of pride, education and community-building. Moreover, the imposed degrowth forced many households to reorient themselves with home cooking, normalizing the "slow food movement" that is time- and quality-intensive (Hsu, 2015; Pietrykowski, 2004).

Food sovereignty emerged in opposition to the impact of neoliberal political economy on farmers around the world (McMichael, 2011). In contrast to food security, which places a strict emphasis on access, food sovereignty actively addresses power relations in the political economy of food production by empowering communities to define food systems for themselves (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). In the context of intentional degrowth transitions, policy instruments should prioritize opportunities for food sovereignty that empower households and communities to share responsibility for food provisioning. Shifting to localized food systems is not necessarily a scalable degrowth solution, but as discussed in Section 4.2.4 of this thesis, local food provisioning disrupts industrialized modes of agriculture and serves to "mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change by repairing the dynamic and interdependent processes that link society to nature through labour" (Paul Routledge, Cumbers, & Derickson, 2018: 81-82).

Note that the majority of case study participants that experimented with household food gardens did so out of entertainment and interest, rather than other motivations such as tradition or necessity. While the outcomes of this specific case remain limited, it is essential for degrowth scholars to embrace a more pluralistic definition of sustainable consumption that embraces non-capitalist and collectivist economic models, which are institutionally embedded in sustainable consumption practices through structural organization (Michaelis, 2018). Degrowth research can thus serve to **legitimize communities** that facilitate alternative forms of economic organizing, such as immigrants or those in low income brackets, and the cultural and experiential knowledge informing them (R1,2). This will also serve to expand the degrowth agenda beyond the individual's voluntary pursuit for sufficiency.

6.2.4 Shifting Paid Work Regimes

Many participants in this study expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity during lockdown to **shift their priorities** away from commutes and wage work, and focus on matters and values closer to home (R1,2). Participants recognized the value of "slowing down" and experiencing the everyday at a more intimate level, compared to the rapid pace of the corporate mindset. Lockdown also encouraged participants to **reconsider** where and how they were spending their time, and the wasteful nature of paid work demands like the morning commute. Study participants were eager for a **change of pace** from the capitalist grind, and strong support of more radical degrowth policy (R3,4). However, lockdown measures made it difficult for participants to meaningfully advocate for reorganizing paid work hours and expectations. It is thus important for degrowth scholarship to consider tools and avenues to mobilize such shifts during times of disruption.

In order to **slow the rates** of production and consumption in the global economy, respective working hours must respond in kind (R6). Numerous studies demonstrate a direct link between longer working hours and unsustainable consumption patterns (Jalas, 2002; Knight, Rosa, & Schor, 2013; Rosnick & Weisbrot, 2006; Schor, 2005). Relevant policy proposals include job sharing, job guarantees, and shorter work days or weeks (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Reducing the number of working hours is a major condition for a stable degrowth in order to prevent unemployment, but must work in tandem with job sharing and the intentional shrinking of production and particularly luxury consumption (Jackson & Victor, 2016; Kallis et al., 2018).

Reducing paid work hours offers a promising policy intervention that can be introduced gradually (i.e., 40 to 30 hours per week) with minimal risk to the economy. However, the specificity of such a policy is not adequately defined in the degrowth literature. As Fitzpatrick et al. (2022) point out, there are many work-time reduction policies that are not compatible with degrowth ideals, such as a zero-hour contract, which does not guarantee work to an employee and thus creates additional opportunities for worker exploitation. Further, operationalizing such a policy proposal becomes difficult when the details such as the days, hours or duration of the policy have not been adequately defined (Parrique, 2019).

This concern can be elaborated upon by the risk to gender equality that a work reduction policy intervention poses. Different work-sharing regimes can have deeply gendered impacts, such that reduced working hours will benefit those unrestricted by unpaid domestic responsibilities such as childrearing (Dengler & Strunk, 2018). The daily "second shift" of domestic labour in combination with paid work increases time pressures that further complicate the possibility of paid work hour

reductions (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). As such, critical feminist scholars call for the shortening of the work day (rather than work week) in order to alleviate these unfair burdens, often carried by women, as well as create space for a more equitable division of unpaid labour among the genders (Sirianni & Negrey, 2000). While degrowth proposals for work hour reductions are focused on the ecological impact, it is just as important to incorporate feminist concerns in these schemes as gender equality is a precondition to social sustainability. **Sharing** available working time is key to ensure that every member of society has access to a decent and enjoyable livelihood (R3,4).

Beyond practical policy interventions, conceptions of work in a post-growth economy require rejecting present notions of productivity and shifting priorities towards facilitating life rather than exchange (Mair et al., 2020). The growth paradigm has demanded a rise in "bullshit jobs" and facilitated an epidemic of meaningless, unsatisfying and spiritually empty occupations (Graeber, 2018). For many workers around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity to reconsider their role, satisfaction and dedication to the workforce, and have leveraged this role to **demand more** from workplace culture (R1,2) (Goldberg, 2022; Tapper, 2022). In the 2022 PwC Global Workforce survey, one third of workers reported plans to ask for a raise, and one in five said they were planning to switch employers altogether in the next year (PwC, 2022). The lack of work-life balance, exhausting workplace hustle culture, and uncompensated responsibilities have left workers burnt out and no longer willing to go "above and beyond" for companies that continue to exploit their time and labour power. Beyond a 'Great Resignation', the pandemic has inspired a 'Great Rethink' whereby workers across sectors and pay grades are **reconsidering the role of work** (R1-3) in overall life satisfaction (Gulati, 2022).

Yet many of the productivity gains made in the last decades of industrialization are a direct result of shifting the emphasis away from human labour and towards fossil fuel extraction and combustion. Meeting climate targets by shrinking global scales of production will require a dramatic reduction in fossil fuel use, shifting this burden of productivity back to human labour (Costanza et al., 2012). More time will be dedicated to provisioning essential needs and caring services as fossil fuel use becomes less possible in a warming world. It is thus pertinent for degrowth scholars to create distinctions between social necessity and economic luxury, such that people and planet are prioritized over and above economic production for production's sake. This will require support and incentives to reduce paid working time, redistributing working hours fairly among populations, and implementing employment and career protections that promote engagement in non-paid activities (O'Neill, Dietz, & Jones, 2010). This also requires a shift towards paid work paradigms that prioritize socially useful companies, jobs and tasks that contribute to building alternative low-carbon futures.

6.2.5 Participatory Democracy

Reclaiming authentic human relations requires the practice of **participatory democracy** through which collective decisions can be made fairly and responsibly (R3). In the book *The Careless Society*, Mcknight argues that a genuine democracy requires a genuine community of empowered citizens that can define problems and consequent solutions (Mcknight, 1996). Moreover, many of the above proposed policies foundational to degrowth literature – and central supports identified by case study participants – illuminate the importance of situating the provisioning of essential needs as an obligation of public service. Market mechanisms were never designed to create or manage public goods like societal welfare (Future of Public Services Global Manifesto, 2021). As discussed at length in this thesis, market logics work to erode the social and ecological foundations that allow people and planet to flourish in the interest of capital. Of the many lessons learned during the pandemic lockdown, this crisis was a call to remind the government – and its people – the role of public service in the protection and management of public interests.

Despite lockdown and stay-home measures, case study participants found a number of ways to remain **politically engaged** (R5). Participants voted in local by-elections, took part in land development consultation processes, voted in the American federal election, and even campaigned for and registered Americans voters. The particular demands of lockdown measures and rapid pandemic responses resulted in participants **learning** about the different levels and functions of government systems in Canada (R2). Participants also expressed **explicitly degrowth politics**, including the provisioning of universal basic services and welcoming greater state intervention to support households (R3-5). However, the role of the state – particularly the provincial government due to its role in public health –disappointed participants when it failed or performed inadequately. Participants lamented **inconsistent** messaging, a **lack of preparedness** for emergency circumstances, the **mismanagement or waste** of public services, and the **inability** to hold state representatives accountable (R2,3,5).

Degrowth literature makes state intervention a necessary precondition to mobilize a low-carbon transition through regulations such as progressive taxation schemes (Cosme, Santos & O'Neill, 2017). For degrowth scholars and activists, a degrowth transition is necessarily a democratic one through the equitable redistribution and downscaling of production and consumption (Buch-Hansen, 2018; Deriu, 2012; Joutsenvirta, 2016). Through more direct democracy initiatives, the political process itself can also be **decentralized** and **reoriented** to renew public participation and build consensus on critical matters including economic self-reliance, self-determination and political ownership and control (R3-

5) (Mason, 2014; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). Deepening democracy is thus a pivotal objective for degrowth to ensure communities can express their voices, needs, and differences (Jarvis, 2019).

A degrowth state cannot be the state which dispossessed and depleted communities and resources (Zanoni et al., 2017). Democratic institutions and commitments have been systematically undermined and overtaken by neoliberal market logics, sacrificing public interests for private profit (Salzman, 2001; Woodly et al., 2021). Present state systems are not fit to mobilize a degrowth future while they remain focused on short-term time increments and economic gains over and above long-term sustainable investments in just socio-ecological futures. Democracy must be reclaimed in order to bring about an equitable and desirable low-carbon transition (Deriu, 2012).

6.2.5.1 Democratizing Institutions

Due to the principles of shared learning, organizing, educating and collective transformation, the degrowth movement is a promising avenue for re-engaging with the foundational elements of direct democracy (Deriu, 2012). Radical ecological or participatory democracy is a **localized** form of government that has been identified as a uniquely equitable way to **decentralize** decision-making and **govern** in a degrowth future (R2,3,5) (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). The concept of a radical ecological democracy stems from civil society efforts in India that "seek to empower every person to be a part of decision making, and its holistic vision of human well-being encompasses physical, material, socio-cultural, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions" (Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2014: 368). Communities are placed at the centre of governance structures, giving each and every person an opportunity to participate meaningfully while respecting ecological and cultural boundaries.

However, while participants were free to express an appetite for such institutions in the case study research, the context of the imposed degrowth limited the ability of participants to meaningfully contribute to the democratic organizing of their workplace. An important lesson learned for degrowth is to advocate for and **institutionalize** direct forms of **democracy** in the workplace to ensure workers can express their needs in future disruptive events (R3). A hyper-local example of such efforts come in the form of cooperative business models. The cooperative model is an employee-owned and operated, institutionalizing mechanisms for accountability and empowering the members to make collective decisions about production and profits. The profitability of an enterprise thus becomes a community-centred investment into a region's prosperity and dignity, rather than maximizing corporate wealth at the expense of people and planet.

Gibson-Graham (2011) highlights a recent example of the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio which responded to the local needs of jobs, wealth and neighbourhood stability. The

Evergreen Cooperative Laundry was the first cooperative model in a series of community experiments to compete with commercial laundries by offering cheaper, greener and locally-owned services (Yates, 2009). This model intentionally targets local markets and creates local assets and social wealth out of existing community needs. More than providing the community service of laundry to local hospitals and schools, Evergreen Cooperative Laundry actively strengthens "the enterprise diversity of the economy" through a worker-owned business that secures local wealth and prioritizes local needs (Gibson-Graham, 2011: 6).

The possibility for radical democracy is also exemplified by the Zapatistas in Chiapas state, Mexico. Through the establishment of autonomous municipalities and direct democracy, the "Zapatista self-rule is distinguished by a commitment to openness, full participation and desire for others to experiment, without making exclusive claims on the governance of the Mexican nation state" (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006: 734). The Zapatistas experiment with slow and intentional shifts towards more autonomous geographies and governing structures that embrace community as a foundational principle for organizing society, including resisting the commodification of land, taking on some functions of the state such as education or conflict resolution, and increasing the political participation of women (Escobar, 2015; Vergara-Camus, 2019). The Zapatistas participatory political structures, production systems and relations of exchange challenge market institutions simply by existing (and continuing to exist).

Resistance to capitalist powers by different groups such as peasants, farmers or Indigenous communities constitute a powerful "politics from below" that emphasizes the sovereignty and agency of people in creating and managing their own economies, relations and communities (Hall et al., 2015). Indeed, ongoing responses to resource enclosure such as land grabs "go beyond seeing rural and indigenous peoples as mere victims of different forms of grabbing, from ways in which they emerge as new 'rights-bearing subjects' to ways in which resistance is networked, rooted and territorial" (Mehta et al., 2019: 7). Such resistance maintains a flexible yet contextual response to publicly contest and make visible the violence that drives extractive industry, agriculture and tourism (Demaria, Kallis, & Bakker, 2019; King & Yesno, 2019; Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Rocheleau, 2015).

The potential for the degrowth imperative to align with grassroots Indigenous justice struggles remains contested (Demaria et al., 2019). The dominance of western and northern political theory at the "intellectual heart" of degrowth scholarship limits its focus, applicability and understanding of global issues (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019). In particular, significant barriers to adoption persist so long as degrowth focuses on the individualistic nature of voluntary simplicity – as there is a pivotal difference between frugality as a choice or a socially constructed condition (Muradian, 2019).

Environmental justice activists navigating the Majority World see the degrowth imperative as an inadequate colonial conceptualization of a much more diverse and complex form of resistance to extractivism (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019).

Although degrowth advocates insist that its imperative focus on economically contracting overdeveloped regions to create ecological space for the majority world, this approach ignores larger critiques of unequal development and difference among and within regions, and fails to address the direct linkages between wealth and poverty (Escobar, 2015). The degrowth agenda can illuminate the myriad struggles and subjects managing their differences and struggling to defend and **create alternative forms of economic relations** (R1-5). Rather than dichotomously identifying regions for growth and regions for degrowth:

> a more instructive question would be *how* growth produces poverty, how people challenge on the ground destructive and extractive processes of growth, and what tentative alternatives do they create along the way. Degrowth, in this sense, is not a material process of lowering consumption, an irrelevant demand for those who live within conditions of poverty, but a sustained critique or resistance – intellectual and practical – to growth and its consequences. The ideology of growth disguises continued colonial relations with a pretense of generalized betterment, while securing the unequal exchanges and the access by capital to cheap raw materials and human labour that is necessary for sustaining growth for some at the expense of others (Demaria et al., 2019: 439).

Degrowth has to embrace less obvious candidates for degrowth case studies engaged in resurgence, reconnection and recovery from extractivism to sufficiency in the midst of the growth paradigm (ibid). Notably, Muraca (2014: 3) remains hesitant about relying solely on decentralized bottom-up approaches, warning that the "danger of radical and ideological localisms has to be counterbalanced by a democratically legitimated structure that intervenes against discrimination, exclusion, and isolation". She argues that coordination and cooperation beyond the local scale is a necessary condition for a successful degrowth movement, but whether this is the present nation state or an alternative system is yet to be established in the literature. Thus, the collective negotiation over a post-growth future is less about establishing basic needs but more about the means to achieve such universal conditions of a good life. Frameworks such as alternative economic indicators can be a useful tool in this regard.

6.2.5.2 Alternative Indicators

The degrowth imperative seeks to realign growth-oriented economic priorities, which have taken precedence through the rise of neoliberalism, with social and ecological principles to better account for qualitative aspects of economic performance. One of the most popular solutions in ecological economics is to abandon Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a primary economic indicator, and instead embrace alternative indicators that can better communicate the health and well-being of

people and planet (Giannetti, Agostinho, Almeida, & Huisingh, 2015; Schmelzer, 2015; Schneider et al., 2010; Strunz & Schindler, 2018). Reframing economic indicators would strike a balance between economic performance and other factors including literacy, health, inequality, biodiversity, or air quality. Replacing such a rigid and limited indicator like GDP is best articulated by degrowth founder Serge Latouche, who says that we must decrease "well-having" – measured by quantitative economic indicators – with "well-being" through qualitative improvements to social life (Romano, 2012).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the default standard measure of economic and societal progress, reporting on the value of goods and services produced by a nation in a given year. Heterodox economists reject GDP as *the* measure of measures (Fanning & O'Neill, 2019; Giannetti et al., 2015; Schmelzer, 2015; Strunz & Schindler, 2018). These scholars argue that it excludes nearly all non-monetary production such as childcare or biodiversity, does not distinguish between welfare-enhancing and welfare-reducing spending (so vast expenditure on the military is normalized), and completely disregards for environmental costs, resource depletion rates, or longer-term environmental consequences (Giannetti et al., 2015). Not only is GDP drastically insufficient for providing an indicator of social or environmental health, it is in fact this very measure that systematically perpetuates the growth paradigm and thus the planetary crisis (Hickel & Kallis, 2019).

There are many exciting examples of alternative indicators presently being employed around the world. Examples include Gross National Happiness in Bhutan and the recently adopted Wellbeing Budgets in Iceland, New Zealand and Scotland (Government of Iceland, 2019; New Zealand Government, 2021; Verma, 2017). New Zealand was the first country in the world to adopt such a budget, identifying twelve domains of well-being including housing, civic engagement, social connection, and cultural identity (Hancock, 2022). Key investments that resulted from the well-being budget include climate change mitigation, affordable housing, health system reform, and education reform (R3-5). In Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing found that over a twenty year period (1994-2014), GDP grew by 38% while wellbeing measures such as education and environment only grew by 9.9% (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2016). These efforts privilege social and environmental concerns in economic performance, and provide a living manifestation of the degrowth imperative through multi-dimensional measures (Verma, 2017).

Research in psychology research shows that incorporating a greater diversity of indicators influences decision-making to **de-privilege economic outcomes** (R3,4). A recent experimental study on human behaviour explored the implications of adopting alternative indicators and the influence of such indicators on land development decisions (Kasser, Maynard, & Perry, 2019). A total of 127 participants were tasked as mayor of a fictional city to make decisions about 10,000 acres of natural

land over the course of a political term, and were provided either standard economic indicators such as tax revenue and economic growth, or alternative indicators which also included citizen satisfaction and nature and air quality. Study results demonstrated that participants primed with standard economic indicators chose to develop 42.7% more of the available land than participants who used alternative indicators. This research offers the first experimental data supporting the claim that the definition of an indicator is crucial. Alternative indicators can re-orient decision-making entirely so that social and environmental outcomes are prioritized (ibid). Incorporating a diversity of socioeconomic and environmental indicators thus may be an effective mechanism for influencing decision-making powers to de-privilege economic outcomes and prioritize human and planetary well-being.

My research participants enactment of alternative livelihoods showed they were more than ready for alternative forms of economic organizing. They were angered by the ways in which public health interests were being sacrificed at the altar of sustained economic growth. Measuring the economy by society and the environment should bring about the very supports and services participants identified as important for the lockdown. There will likely be renowned support for changes to economic indicators in light of the recent events brought about by the pandemic, though degrowth activists must act quickly to leverage the "policy window" (Amri & Logan, 2021).

6.2.5.3 Decolonizing the State

The arrival of European settlers in the Caribbean in 1492, and the subsequent colonization of the Americas, "led to the largest human population replacement in the past 13,000 years" (Lewis & Maslin, 2015: 174). Colonial governments systematically eradicated Indigenous populations, cultures, knowledge systems and lands in order to facilitate Western colonial exploitation and expansion (Waziyatawin, 2012). Indigenous scholars thus situate the nation state as a colonial tool or technology (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To legitimize a monopoly on power, the state systematically conquered Indigenous lands, subjugated Indigenous peoples through enslavement, forced migration and genocide, and endangered Indigenous relationships with earth and the earth itself (Sium, Chandni, & Ritskes, 2012).

Here, the incorporation of the City of Toronto is a prime example in this regard (Freeman, 2010). While the sale of the lands in Toronto between the Mississaugas of New Credit and the British crown was initially conducted in 1787, it remained in dispute for over 200 years (Edwards, 2010). Further, despite numerous petitions and land deeds over multiple decades following initial settlement, Indigenous peoples were said to have "vanished" on their own accord. Yet the colonial government of Upper Canada in the late 1700s and early 1800s made Indigenous peoples like the Mississaugas

financially dependent on the Crown by destroying critical environments for traditional hunting and provisioning practices, disrupting political alliances with other First Nations, and paying marginal costs of the land's true market value (Freeman, 2010). Public memory can be seen as "a discourse about power" that is utilized to legitimize ideologies, politics and states (Gordon, 2001). Historical depictions of Toronto continue to emphasize the shrinking Indigenous populations as simultaneously natural and inevitable, while also describing the territory as virtually empty, virgin land (Freeman, 2010).

The process of colonization employs the very "ecocidal logics" that serve to justify and perpetuate ecological degradation in the service of capital accumulation, culminating in the supposed inevitability and desirability of economic growth (Davis & Todd, 2017; Fournier, 2008). While the scale for a low-carbon transformation requires intervention from global state powers, it is important to remain critical of these systems and work to transform them to meet the demands of an equitable and inclusive post-growth alternative. In brief, the growth paradigm is **inherently colonial in nature**, and the authority of the state played a central role in enforcing global imperialism (R1). Reclaiming this authority back from pervasive market logics requires nothing less than an "epistemic delinking" to shift and foreground other epistemologies, knowledges, ethics, economies and politics (Mignolio, 2011; Mignolo, 2007). Working in tandem with Latoche's (2015) call for a "decolonization of the imaginary", it is a moral and scientific imperative that Indigenous voices and knowledges become a leading authority in the scholarly and political imaginings of post-growth futures.

For Mcgregor (2014), environmental sustainability at any and all scales can only be achieved through the recognition and respect for Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and traditional knowledge systems. This must necessarily entail the material, spiritual psychological and epistemological forms of Indigenous sovereignty as defined by Indigenous peoples (Sium et al., 2012). The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) calls on nation states to do precisely this. UNDRIP is an international human rights instrument that sets out the minimum standards to recognize Indigenous rights, traditions and dignity (Department of Justice Canada, 2022). In June 2021, the Act became law in Canada, providing a legal framework for the government to "take all measures necessary to ensure the laws of Canada are consistent" with the Declaration (Government of Canada, 2022). Working in consultation with Indigenous peoples, the Government of Canada is working to develop an action plan to achieve the objectives of the Declaration by June 2023.

The implementation of UNDRIP in Canada presents an unprecedented opportunity to confront the colonial legacies that shape this nation's history. This legal framework can advance lasting reconciliation by providing a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Government of Canada, 2022).

However, affirming constitutional protection, treaty rights, and human rights within the confines of the sovereign state powers, which are inherently maintained through social control and violence, remains an unresolved challenge (Henderson, 2017). King and Yesno (2019) argue that the state's monopoly on power "radically constraints" the negotiations for Indigenous rights, as these processes necessarily reinforce state and economic structures, and impose ideologies and practices that undermine self-determination. At the same time, the human rights of Indigenous peoples necessarily "undermine and unsettle the arrangement of most nations, societies and politics" (Henderson, 2017: 13). In the interest of any post-growth alternative, ecological economists must lend unequivocal material and discursive support to the Indigenous pursuit of sovereignty, reclamation, and self-determination (R3-5).

6.3 An Ecofascist Agenda?

As wealth inequalities, political instability and resource insecurity continue to increase in a climate unstable world, some critics express concern that the degrowth imperative is an authoritarian imposition of radical and urgent ecofascist interventions (Clerc, 2008; Labouchere, 2016; Milanovic, 2017; Muradian, 2019). These critics fear that the strictly material interpretation of degrowth as a top-down imposition of environmental limits risk breeding power-hungry dictatorships and totalitarian minorities. This long-standing dread of green totalitarianism or eco-authoritarianism that has haunted the environmental movement since its inception. Understandably so, as Nazi leadership were among the first political parties to champion renewable energy, organic farming and land-use planning (Smith, 2019). But a closer look shows that degrowth authoritarianism are incompatible (Liegey, 2010; Muraca, 2014).

The first major difference lies in the allocation of responsibility for action. Rooted in far-right racist and xenophobic ideologies, ecofascism blames marginalized populations exclusively for the climate crisis (Kaplan, 2021). Ecofascism points to plastic consumption, waste, procreation and migration in the Majority World, while conveniently neglecting the consumption habits of overdeveloped regions. Ecofascists invoke environmental concern for climate change and the degradation of ecosystems as a nationalist and cultural crisis that can only be addressed by halting migration and even forcibly decreasing the global human population (Linkola, 2009). Border control, limits to migration, and even environmental conservation efforts are key to imposing white supremacist and nationalist ideals that ultimately serve to eradicate poor and marginalized populations. Ecofascist narratives have the frightening potential to facilitate the weaponized displacement of environmental concern as a tool to fuel the oppression and eradication of certain populations, belief systems and cultures (Bove, 2021).

While degrowth is concerned with global rates of consumption and consequent environmental harms, advocates are clear that it is the overdeveloped regions that are driving the global crisis and that must take the lead on reducing environmental impact (Escobar, 2015; Hickel, 2020; Kallis et al., 2018). In fact, overdeveloped regions such as Canada or Australia are collectively responsible for 92% of excess emissions according to a recent study of historical emissions from 1850-2015 (Hickel, 2020). Countries in the Majority World remain well within their carbon budget and have contributed minimally to climate breakdown. Further, United Nations global resource reporting demonstrates that affluence, rather than population, is the primary driver of material consumption (Oberle et al., 2019).

Resource use must increase to meet human needs in many low-income regions. Additional inequalities such as a lack of social cohesion and unfair concentrations of power also contribute to the struggle certain regions face in garnering collective action on climate (Islam & Winkel, 2017). Thus, overdeveloped regions must not only work to reduce emissions more quickly, they must also play a leading role in supporting other regions that are disproportionately impacted by climate change (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Hanaček et al., 2020; Hickel et al., 2022). The degrowth agenda centres this imperative by **placing the responsibility** of initiating the low-carbon transition among historically carbon-intensive regions (R4). Further, effective low-carbon policy interventions must centre the voices and needs of those most impacted by climate change, especially due to the ecological debts accrued through the historical social, ecological and economic appropriation of resources and spaces in the Majority World by overdeveloped regions (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Temper & Gilbertson, 2015).

Ecofascists also call for the suspension of democracy and the rejection of democratic freedom to meet climate goals. The urgency of the climate crisis, coinciding with the perceived threat of increased migration, resource insecurity and geopolitical conflict, call for totalitarian political regimes that tighten borders, limit personal liberties, and betray core human desires (Linkola, 2009). Yet this perspective remains blind to the historical realities of the market economy's growth paradigm which, should it continue business-as-usual, risks bringing forth the very authoritarian responses these critics fear (Latouche, 2011; Lucas et al., 2014; Salzman, 2001). As the pressures of market fundamentalism intensify in the latter half of the twenty-first century, the securities of global capitalism will continue to become inaccessible, creating discomfort, distrust, and ever-greater socio-political tensions (Coffman & Mikulecky, 2015; Salzman, 2001). Ecofascist ideologies fail to acknowledge the inherently political and (un)ethical foundations of global market mechanisms, and the historical commodification and exploitation that gave rise to the growth paradigm (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Hickel et al., 2022; Katz, 2001; Nelson, 1997).

Degrowth sees the **emancipatory potential** in a low-carbon shift away from capital accumulation and towards alternative post-growth futures (R1-3). For degrowth activists, reaching these futures requires a strong sense of community, self-government, and democratic structures to ensure adequate representation and participation in shaping such alternatives (Muraca, 2014; Schneider et al., 2010). A commitment to direct democracy allows communities to make informed and contextualized decisions about what should be prioritized in the economy and how, and utilizing the scale and power of state actors to implement these demands. As Parrique states, "degrowth cannot be done *to* people but only *by* people" (2019: 363). This is antithetical to totalitarianism. Therefore, degrowth must not only challenge the violence of ecofascist narratives outright, but work to channel these ideologies towards the collective goal of liberating humanity from market imperatives. The real monster looming behind the curtains is none other than the growth paradigm itself, proving that ecofascist ideologies are not about environmental health but rather eugenics, white supremacy and violence.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented a meaningful and novel contribution to degrowth discourse by identifying areas of support and intervention that better support households through disruptive events. Moreover, this chapter served to underscore the critical role of universal public service provisioning in addressing such gaps in support. These needs align directly with the critical social foundations presented by Raworth (2017) in the Doughnut Economic model that serve to complement the biophysical limits to economic activity established in ecological economics literature. Thus, the very interventions identified by case study participants as crucial to surviving lockdown also advance the policy changes necessary for mobilizing alternative post-growth futures (Figure 14). The outcomes of this thesis serve to demonstrate the value of degrowth policies for unpredictable futures.

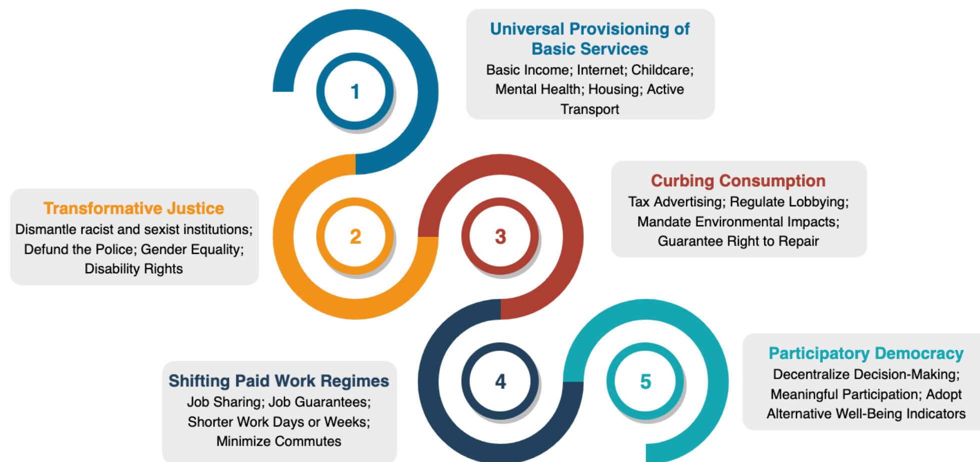

Figure 14. Degrowth Policy Recommendations for a Climate Uncertain Future

A number of universal basic human needs were identified in response to lockdown measures including internet access, childcare, and mental health support. These key issues framed existing policy debates in the degrowth literature to exemplify the value of degrowth policy proposals for unplanned societal disruptions. Interestingly, the present case study illuminated a wide policy gap in the degrowth discourse, whereby particular policy recommendations for basic internet access and childcare remain absent. This thesis identifies supports that may prove important in either an imposed or intentional low-carbon transition. Additional policy proposals identified through this study include shifts to consumption patterns, paid work regimes, and to the institution of democracy. Most crucially, the public policies outlined present a call to remind the institution of the state about its role to service the public good, and take care when defining public assets and their management.

The pandemic is not an anomalous crisis. There will be – and already are – other severe disruptions to energy or food supply, water contamination, political corruption, extreme weather events, fires and flooding (or, all of these factors taking place simultaneously). In the context of a climate uncertain future, social, ecological and economic stability should not be assumed. This research demonstrates that degrowth needs to go much further to theorize and design policy to meet household needs in a time of transition.

Chapter 7. Thesis Conclusions

The imperatives of the growth paradigm threaten the very social and ecological foundations upon which the human economy depends. While these pervasive market logics claim to be about the "hearth", my thesis shows how such logics systematically exclude and devastate the most precious aspects of everyday life. During a global health crisis, some of the most basic necessities of life became inaccessible to everyday households. Governments compromised public health interests at every turn as they attempted to balance economic growth with slowing the spread of the virus. Indeed, "growth-as-governance is now a major obstacle to effective public health action" (Steinberger, 2020). Investing in the public good was seen as a drain on growth, and countless lives were readily sacrificed to a deadly virus in order to minimize restrictive measures on economic performance (Rocca, 2020e). The COVID-19 pandemic has thus exposed the limits of an economic system predicated on growth, and underscored the importance of developing alternatives in the face of a climate uncertain future. The question becomes whether this crisis builds the impetus needed to mobilize such alternatives, or whether an even greater crisis will incapacitate entire economies before alternatives can be implemented.

Beyond limits, the pandemic highlighted the essential aspects of what is needed from an economic system for a healthy and good life. During the worldwide shut-down, it was the nurses, cleaners, grocery store cashiers and delivery drivers that kept the economy going, while "profitable" industries such as airlines stopped being a priority. Lockdown measures demanded from society a deep reflection on what is truly needed to live well, what work is essential, and what is no longer worth prioritizing. Living better through principles of sufficiency, equity and sustainability is not only possible, but a necessary economic revolution for humanity to sustain themselves on this planet over the coming decades. The struggle to transform the global economy is a struggle for life, and will only become more difficult as compounding crises increase in frequency and intensity. In this concluding chapter, I synthesize thesis contributions to degrowth literature specifically and the gaps in the sustainability discourse more broadly. Following this, I provide a commentary on degrowth as a fundamentally existential quest towards the definition of not only a good life, but also what it means to have a good death in the context of a climate uncertain future. Finally, I conclude this thesis with a call for a post-growth economic future centred in the service of the public good.

7.1 Thesis Contributions

Situating the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as an imposed degrowth scenario, my dissertation presented an exploratory case study on the repercussions of disruptive events and the

possibilities for mobilizing alternative economic futures in this context at the household scale. I spoke with 42 households from Toronto, Canada between October 2020 and January 2021 to learn about changes made to personal and professional priorities, maintaining social networks, negotiating responsibilities and conflicts, coping methods as a result of lockdown measures. Through these experiences, this thesis identified the ways in which households were able to engage and advance degrowth politics and practice, as well as barriers to engagement. In the context of an imposed degrowth, this research highlights key insights that will undoubtedly contribute to a more robust and realistic degrowth imperative.

Following the "Eight R's of Degrowth", the present case study presented a number of opportunities for households to participate in the advancement of degrowth politics and practice during the global lockdown (Latouche, 2010). Participants described the ways in which lockdown influenced them to **re-evaluate** personal and professional values (R1), actively confronting economic values and shifting priorities towards more socially-oriented endeavours. Participants expressed enthusiasm for a **slower** pace of life, and learned to appreciate **experiences**, such as baking, crafts, reading and music, at a more intimate level not available to them in pre-pandemic times (R1,2,5,6). Participants **consumed differently**, choosing to grow food at home, support **local** businesses, and **reconsider** the role of consumerism in their daily life (R1,2,3,5,6). Through these experiences, alternative forms of material and service **exchange** took place beyond the market, consequently growing and building stronger **community** ties in the process. (R2,3,5,6,7). Participants built more **intimate relationships** with their household space, as well as their neighbourhood, **exploring** new locations and **utilizing** spaces such as empty parking lots in new ways (R3-5). Lastly, participants expressed a variety of degrowth-related **politics** including the need for basic income, rent relief, the redistribution of wealth, and the importance of state intervention for public health issues (R3-5).

The outcomes of degrowth engagement offer much promise for a future low-carbon transition. Even in the context of an imposed degrowth, with an ongoing deadly pandemic, households had the capacity to participate in radically alternative economic politics. In fact, the very political interventions recommended in degrowth scholarship are precisely the interventions articulated and welcomed by participants. This thesis demonstrates the value of degrowth policy to everyday households in times of unplanned disruption, and the importance of such interventions for mobilizing alternative post-growth futures. This aligns with existing sustainability research arguing how coping strategies during the pandemic offer promising potential for larger socioeconomic transformations through the abstaining and altering of normalized, high-consumption household practices (Boons et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, a number of barriers to engaging in degrowth politics and practice also emerged within the pandemic lockdown circumstance. Due to virus safety and prevention measures, existing **social harms** such as racism and sexism became heightened and directly impacted the well-being of study participants (R1-3). It also became much more difficult for participants to **engage in sustainability practices** such as taking public transit, using reusable bags, growing food, or demonstrating in community protests (R3,5). Lockdown measures had detrimental impacts on participant **mental health**, whether creating new anxieties or compounding existing health conditions (R1,3). Many participants lost access to critical social and economic **services** as a result of lockdown measures, including doctors, veterinarians, education, and community services (R3-5). There were also many instances where participants could not turn to their local community for **support**, and were thus left to manage personal priorities in isolation (R3,5). Participants with children in the home were **overwhelmed** with the demands of full-time childcare while balancing financial, social and safety priorities during lockdown (R3,4). Lastly, participants expressed much disappointment towards the provincial level of government for failing to adequately **intervene**, provide helpful information, and follow scientific protocol during a global pandemic (R2-5).

These barriers, while experienced during the world's second-ever global pandemic, offer interesting insights for the degrowth imperative. This case study provides useful points of intervention for degrowth scholars to better support households and communities during the low-carbon transition. It is important to reflect, for example, on what kinds of services should be prioritized to ensure citizens needs continue to be met throughout the shift. Creating and advocating for more accessible childcare services is a key yet under-theorized area for degrowth scholarship that this case study identified. Degrowth researchers should also consider what and how it will communicate ongoing changes to low-carbon transition strategies to keep citizens informed and participating. Acknowledging such gaps in an imposed degrowth context will most certainly augment existing research and policy efforts.

The above findings serve to address a number of persisting gaps in the sustainability literature. First, most proposals adopt an incremental approach whereby smooth political and ecological conditions are assumed. Within the ecological economics literature specifically, policy proposals emphasize a degrowth "by design", with controlled and intentional interventions over time (Jackson, 2009; Victor, 2019). However, the rapid pace of the COVID-19 virus outbreak demonstrated the scale and speed at which disruptive events can cause the complete upheaval of the globalized economy, and further emphasized the vulnerabilities and fragilities of present market infrastructure (Hall et al., 2020; Rentschler, Klaiber, Tariverdi, Desjonqueres, & Mercadante, 2021). Public health measures served to exacerbate persisting socio-economic inequalities in society through the uneven impacts and access to

supports (Abramovich et al., 2021; Bates et al., 2020; Kola et al., 2021; Sumner et al., 2020). Unpredictable, non-linear changes are defining characteristics of any complex social system and should thus be embraced and responded to accordingly. An example from this thesis is the ways participant mental health conditions were compounded and exacerbated by the pandemic, some of whom experienced symptoms they had not experienced since childhood. Understanding household needs and responses to such disruptions offer important insights into the gaps in degrowth research and policy discourse in this regard.

The second gap this thesis addresses is the under-theorized role of the household scale – and socially reproductive labour – in mobilizing a degrowth transition. Social reproduction within and beyond the household was a necessary condition for coping through the pandemic (Katz, 2008; Mezzadri, 2020). Household members in this case study provided material and emotional supports, developed conflict management skills to discuss pandemic safety concerns and establish a consensus on risk exposure, negotiated the division of responsibilities among members, and shifted values and perspectives to adopt more degrowth-oriented politics and practices. Households will need to continue building such social and political orientations in the context of a low-carbon shift, in order to negotiate with community members and elected representatives about the conditions of a good life in a post-growth society (Akbulut, 2019; Muraca, 2014).

We also saw the systematic exhaustion of socially reproductive labours as lockdown measures exacerbated persisting issues of distributive justice. Childcare, mental health, and trust levels in community and government were challenged, eroded and depleted by the demands of lockdown. This speaks directly to Elson's (1998) contribution to feminist economics literature on the depletion of human capacities and provisioning values at the household scale. She argues that human energies require replenishment from both the public and private sectors through the provisioning of goods and services. In this case, the costs of provisioning were transferred away from responsible authorities and absorbed by unpaid socially reproductive labour in the domestic sector. Deterioration of such pivotal social assets undermines the quality of provisioning, social relations, labour services, and ultimately the efficiency of the economy (ibid). More importantly, it deeply weakens the energy and commitment needed to mobilize post-growth economic alternatives. This thesis helps to demonstrate the limited capacities of the domestic sector, rejecting the assumption in ecological economics literature that social reproduction is limitless (Bauhardt, 2014; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019).

The third gap addressed in this thesis is the outcomes of climate disasters on overdeveloped regions. While high-consumption countries should take the lead on instigating a low-carbon transition, there is limited research on the adaptive capacity of these regions due to assumed infrastructural and

technological advances. In this thesis, Toronto households certainly struggled, but it was not a question of survival. For example, participants experimented with food gardens for entertainment purposes, with the minimal harvest augmented by the grocery store. That being said, despite the supposed "advanced" nature of overdeveloped countries, participants failed to access critical support systems including childcare, and were exposed to a multitude of harms exacerbated by persisting inequities in the economic system. The implementation of conflicting public health measures also negatively impacted virus numbers and eroded trust in social and state institutions. Emergency relief programs such as income supplements proved to be temporary and reactive, and were quickly co-opted by corporate greed.

In response to the above gaps, my thesis identified a number of degrowth policy recommendations informed directly by participant experience in the imposed degrowth scenario. This included: the universal provisioning of basic human needs including income, housing and childcare; transformative justice; comprehensive changes to consumption and paid work regimes; and alternative forms of democratic organizing. Many of these policies have been cited in degrowth and ecological economic scholarship for decades. Others, such as universal internet access and childcare, as well as disability rights, require much more investigation by the discipline. The promising outcome from this research is the opportunity to demonstrate the value of the degrowth imperative, and degrowth policy proposals more specifically, for unpredictable contexts like a pandemic lockdown. Indeed, it was the very degrowth policies called for by participants that would not only address fundamental human needs in an uncertain climate future, but actively shift society towards a more low-carbon sustainable alternative.

7.2 A Good Life

Degrowth is fundamentally a philosophical project that explores the concept of a "good life" within planetary limits. At its core, degrowth is rooted in the confrontation and elimination of market fundamentalism in efforts to reorient economic relations along principles of autonomy, justice, democracy, care and conviviality (Akbulut, 2019; D'Alisa et al., 2015; Fournier, 2008; Kallis, 2019; Kallis et al., 2018). Beyond the material applications of shrinking economic production, degrowth seeks to ensure a high quality of life for all through non-material pursuits including community, conviviality and citizenship (Daly & Cobb Jr., 1989; Fanning, O'Neill, & Büchs, 2020; Nierling, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2018). Challenging the priority of economic growth in social and political pursuits, the degrowth imperative seeks for alternative, equitable modes of social organization that balance the needs of

humanity and the earth. Shifting society towards a post-growth and post-capitalist economy is a necessary pursuit should humanity wish to maintain a stable existence on a warming planet.

For many critical degrowth scholars, the low-carbon transition cannot take place without cultivating socially reproductive degrowth politics to articulate and demand alternative forms of livelihood (Akbulut, 2019). To reimagine economic relations, problematize economic priorities and politicize the economy, it is critical to investigate the role of social reproduction in advancing or contesting capitalist economics (Mezzadri, 2019). The household was identified by scholars as a prime scale of analysis, though under-theorized, for understanding the ways in which capitalist values are reinforced, negotiated and changed (Elson, 1998; Lane & Gorman-Murray, 2011). It is the household where ethical systems are shared, social identities are fostered, and everyday human needs are met.

Even in the context of an imposed degrowth, case study participants identified a number of ways that lockdown shifted their perspectives, values and priorities away from economism and towards more socially and environmentally conscious alternatives. Taking their time back from the capitalist system was a major theme, through opportunities like working from home instead of commuting, or having more flexibility with paid work hours. Participants also took the time to engage in slower and less carbon-intensive activities, rewarding participants with feelings of joy and creative skills that go beyond market calculations. Lastly, participants built strong ties with members of their household, neighbours, extended networks, communities, and the local region. Socially reproductive degrowth politics and practices were actively cultivated, informed, and expanded upon during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

This research has augmented existing scholarship on envisioning alternative approaches to the 'good life', which challenge capitalist conventions and replace them with socially and environmentally conscious alternatives. For these participants, a good life means universal access to basic human needs and services, the ability to express oneself at a diversity of intersections safely, to support local producers and participate meaningfully in political life, and to prioritize spending time and energy on quality relationships and activities. All of these aspects of a good life articulated by this case study's participants contribute equally to the enhancement of societal wellbeing and cohesion, and to the advancement of low-carbon economic alternatives. There are many lessons learned from household experiences during the pandemic lockdown that can be translated to inform degrowth scholarship and policy for a more rounded approach to a good life in an uncertain climate future.

7.3 A Good Death

While much sustainability research concentrates on redefining "the good life" along ecologically conscious terms, there is limited discourse on what qualifies as a good and dignified death – particularly in the context of a climate uncertain future. Research shows that regions that contributed the least to the climate crisis are set to experience some of the most drastic environmental impacts including droughts, fires and floods (Timperley, 2021). Women specifically have an increased physical vulnerability to extreme weather events as a result of inequitable access to basic social goods and security (Moosa & Tuana, 2014). Other minorities including Black and Indigenous peoples have also historically been thrust on the front lines of extractive industry, toxic waste disposal and pollution, leading to an increase in illness and death and greater exposure to environmental disaster (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Gaard, 2001; Temper & Gilbertson, 2015). In the face of climate uncertainty and increased variability in weather, food security and social cohesion, it is paramount that degrowth scholars address questions of the right to a good death.

The COVID-19 global pandemic took too many lives too early. What's more, many of these deaths were and will remain preventable. For example, nearly one quarter of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States were preventable with vaccination (Bump, 2022). The pandemic brought forth extremely difficult choices to make between economic priorities, financial security, and public health and safety. While climate change will remain a gradual disaster (with many intermittent large-scale events), the pandemic created an intriguing opportunity to examine how the value of a stranger's life was weighted in the context of alternative priorities such as accessing groceries, visiting friends, celebrating holidays, or gathering to mourn the death of a loved one. More acutely, the growth paradigm forced many to sacrifice their ability to stay isolated and safe to keep the economy going (Mezzadri, 2020).

What might a good death look like in a climate uncertain future? Should we be able to count on comfortable hospital beds and being surrounded by loved ones as we peacefully breathe our final breaths? Can we guarantee the opportunity to resolve ancient interpersonal conflicts or deep personal regrets? Will we secure access to the appropriate medication to minimize pain and suffering? In the face of class, race and gender disparities, how might increasing climate-related disruptions perpetuate and exacerbate inequalities among minority groups regarding healthcare access, treatment and support? Whose deaths get to matter?

During the lockdown, even mourning the death of a loved one became a high-risk activity, leaving many with an intensified or prolonged grieving process – and some with no outlet for grief at

all (Young, 2022). Those who were taken to emergency services did not have the chance for a final visit with their loved ones. Many were unable to communicate last words once ventilators became necessary. Families are left to wonder what the final moments were like, and moreover are unable to express their grief through the ritual of funerals, wakes or Shivas. There are thus multiple compounding losses, as loved ones left behind struggle with their inability to support the dying in their final moments, and are also unable to honour their loved ones through a celebration of life.

One of the hardest lessons of the pandemic answers these inquiries – that a good death may ultimately be out of our control. As the public health system became overwhelmed in early 2020, it became nearly impossible to address the death and despair caused by the rapid spread of the virus. Temporary morgues and freezers were put to use to store bodies after a surge of deadly infections (McKenzie-Sutter, 2021). Local healthcare systems and workers became incapacitated as the need for medical attention continued to grow (DeClerq, 2022). There was limited if any capacity for a surge in medical emergencies, and this was from one virus outbreak. Healthcare systems play a critical role in mitigating illness and deaths caused by emergencies. To facilitate a truly inclusive ecological economic future, the foundations of healthcare systems must be strengthened to continue to provide inclusive and quality services that understand patients as those who suffer, who have a world of meaning beyond their systems and medicalization (Rentschler et al., 2021).

7.4 Study Limitations & Future Research

With any small qualitative sample, caution should be applied. A multiplicity of factors limited my research approach, analysis, and the application of the present case study. As discussed in the methods section, the scope of this study – including population, location and timing – limit the application to households in overdeveloped regions during a time of major disruption. The particular context also makes replication and triangulation quite difficult. Further, as an exploratory case study, further research is needed to investigate whether the reported findings are applicable to other contexts. A longitudinal approach to this research over the course of the entire pandemic would certainly provide more robust results, but limits in research funding and timeline prohibit this option. Most importantly, study participants were recruited from a mutual aid Facebook group indicating a predisposition to sharing economy values. While this may be the case, it should be noted that participants joined these groups for a variety of reasons – some to give, some to seek help, some to provide support. Thus, while the findings from this study are certainly biased towards individuals with pro-environmental and pro-social values, there is a complexity to the reasons for membership.

Moreover, the majority of participants in this study were highly educated white women. The application of my research sample was thus vastly restricted by the experience of largely middle to upper class households managing the demands of lockdown in the comfort of consistent shelter and economic security. These characteristics do not reflect the realities of the Majority World, where communities are on the front lines of climate disaster, economic instability and societal breakdown. However, as noted previously in this thesis, experiences from the overdeveloped world are often excluded from climate adaptation literature due to their perceived competitive advantages, so such capacities remain unclear (Toole, Klockner & Head, 2016; Porter, Dessai & Tompkins, 2014). My thesis demonstrates that even some of the most privileged of households failed to secure the supports needed to adequately respond to the pandemic lockdown. These outcomes are compounded by participant membership of mutual aid and informal economy groups, indicating ideal candidacy for mobilizing degrowth futures. If this population was met with barriers to engagement, degrowth scholarship must make a more dedicated effort to understanding and eliminating such barriers if the social movement is to be widely accessible and sustainable in the long-term.

Another major limitation in this study is in the approach to data analysis. As discussed in the methods, participant interviews lasted on average for 1.5 hours, indicating a plethora of data to sort through. However, for the purposes of this thesis, results and outcomes focused on the implications of participant experiences for degrowth. The rich data set collected has a number of additional findings that this dissertation did not have the capacity to cover. Scoping decisions had to be made, which certainly speaks to the researcher bias in a focus on degrowth implications. Alternative approaches to analysis could likely result in alternative compelling narratives about participant experience during the pandemic. Lastly, to mention again, living through a global pandemic had negative consequences for my mental health and the quality of research I could produce. On occasion, I needed to prioritize my needs over the progress on this thesis, impacting the final outcome of this work.

That being said, this dissertation provided a number of novel insights regarding the capacity of households to mobilize degrowth politics and practice in the context of an imposed economic contraction. The present case study will undoubtedly contribute to a more robust degrowth imperative as it adapts to better embrace possibilities of uncertainty and disruption in its endeavours. Most importantly, this research explores the degrowth subjectivities by identifying low-carbon transition activities and values from within households that do not necessarily prescribe to the traditionally narrow field. The social subjects of degrowth can be activated in a number of ways that go beyond the original scope of the imperative. In the face of an unpredictable climate future, it is important for degrowth to

embrace less obvious candidates for case studies engaged in reorientation, reconnection and recovery within the present economic paradigm.

This case study presents a number of possible avenues for future research on the degrowth imperative. Policy recommendations from this case study included the universal provisioning of childcare and internet – two areas thus far neglected in degrowth scholarship. Degrowth advocates should address these gaps, and in particular contribute to discourse on universal childcare in the context of a low-carbon transition. The upbringing of children is a fundamental social good that provides a distinct opportunity to explore and expand ethical, ideological and social systems. An area not identified by participants under the same theme is universal phone and data services. While this was not explicitly mentioned by the households interviewed for this study, internet access was a critical asset for maintaining secure employment and secure connection to personal networks. In a 2021 study, Canada was ranked as having the most expensive smartphone plan in the world among 51 other countries (Reweel, 2021). In addition to situating internet access as a basic need, degrowth advocates should incorporate phone and data plans into its universal services policy proposals as well.

Mental health support was another major theme that came out of the findings of this case study. In the face of increasing rates and scales of environmental disaster and increasing economic disparities, compromised or compounding mental health crises are certain to follow. As the climate warms and weather, land and water systems adapt, profound ecological loss will take place. Moreover, climate uncertainty's consequent anxieties and senses of anticipated future losses deserve more attention in psychology and sustainability. Mental health must be prioritized as a pivotal well-being indicator for social and climate performance in the context of a low-carbon transition (Berry et al., 2018). Degrowth scholarship must contribute to developing the mental health supports needed to respond to ecological grief, anticipated future loss, and irreversible loss, as thus far these supports remain limited.

Exploring and experimenting with home food gardens was another positive finding of the imposed degrowth case study. Participants utilized indoor and outdoor spaces, and even shared land with social networks to grow food. This brief experiment with food sovereignty should be considered in more detail with regards to which households are engaging in food gardens, and the barriers to adoption. In particular, more research should be conducted to understand the willingness to transform existing private lands such as back or front yards into accessible food gardens. For example, there are a multiplicity of community-driven efforts taking place across Canada to share the harvest of fruit trees in residential areas with volunteers, community members and charitable organizations (https://operationfruitrescue.org/). Diversifying the food economy remains a top priority for the degrowth imperative.

Another promising area that came out of this case study was participants' clear expectation of state intervention. The majority of degrowth research suggests that top-down, state-level intervention will be a necessary driver of the degrowth transition due to the coordinated scale of operation (Cosme, Santos, & O'Neill, 2017). Further, through the pandemic lockdown the world witnessed unprecedented international cooperation in efforts to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. International scientific experts informed public health policy at a rapid rate, and governments responded accordingly to implement regulations that best respected the current reality. Yet participants wanted to see even more state intervention, including the provisioning of basic services and supports as well as more comprehensive information about the pandemic. Degrowth scholars need to work far more with Earth jurisprudence to improve or even introduce tougher legislation and accountability in regulating fossil fuel companies or changing emissions or pollution regulations (Garver, 2019).

One area of research beyond the scope of this thesis is the notion of the household as a form of public commons. I intend to explore this avenue of investigation in future publications, but it should be noted that the research design and data collection had additional research questions in mind regarding the potential of unpaid household labour as a form of commons. Households produced knowledge commons, such as cooking skills and political awareness; cultural commons, including language, dance, and cuisine; social commons, including strong interpersonal relationships; and biophysical commons, including food gardens and adopting low-carbon transit options (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). The household is thus a pivotal scale for understanding the production and maintenance of social assets key to a functioning economy (Aier, 2020; Peterson, 2010; Raworth, 2017).

Finally, an area left unexplored in this thesis was the sexual activity of participants during lockdown. Unfortunately, a specific question about this activity was not included in the interview – although there were questions about how lockdown impacted the participant's relationship with their significant other. Only one participant mentioned sex at all, and reported that sexual activity increased as a result of lockdown measures. The accessibility, frequency and possibilities of sexual activity in the context of an imposed degrowth, climate uncertainty, or environmental disaster deserves more investigation. Liberating and reconceptualizing the role of the human in relation to society and the economy necessarily requires liberating the erotic (Gaard, 1997). Ecofeminists assert that any democratic, ecological society must celebrate sexual diversity and the erotic. Moreover, links between, sex, death and finitude are important for understanding the cultural conventions around the growth paradigm, which are built upon a denial of humanity's interdependence with nature (Adams, 2016; Bastian & Loughnan, 2016; Goldenberg, Cox, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2002).

7.5 The Future is Public

With calls for lockdowns around the world, the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 public health crisis are predicted to "exceed that of any recession in the last 150 years – that is, in the entire history of capitalism" (Mezzadri, 2020). As a result, many aspects of the global economy were reorganized to take place under one roof: the household. As the hearth of society, the household provided a refuge for many to limit their exposure to the COVID-19 virus. It also became an essential service as household members reoriented their spaces, schedules and priorities to facilitate education, healthcare, entertainment, therapy, and so much more. Rather than an emphasis on return on investment and market production, society at large reoriented towards the goals of care, well-being and reproduction in the home. The repercussions of the virus outbreak have laid bare the essential life-making work of social reproduction: security of food, water, shelter and healthcare – security of well-being. Rather than an emphasis on the productive sphere and profit, the priority of society has been refocused on the *continuation of life.*

The imposed degrowth of the pandemic lockdown also demonstrated that international cooperation to solve a problem in common is both feasible and effective. It identified what aspects and sectors of the global economy are truly "essential", and which are a luxury. It encouraged business entities large and small to re-tool their operations to address imminent needs such as sanitizer, illustrating the permeability of the corporate institution. Further, households themselves had to adapt or replace habits and routines in order to respond to the demands of the pandemic lockdown. This case study offers a novel contribution to degrowth scholarship by illuminating the possibilities of an unplanned economic contraction for mobilizing the degrowth imperative. In the face of a climate uncertain future, sustainability research must embrace the possibility for unpredictable disruption and inform policy proposals accordingly.

In this regard, the provisioning of public services, as identified by study participants, has never been more important in the face of unprecedented wealth inequality, ecological collapse and societal unrest. Universal access to public services build the foundations for a fair and just society, confront collective challenges, and meet shared needs (Future of Public Services Global Manifesto, 2021; Kishimoto, Steinfort, & Petitjean, 2020). Access to public services such as sanitation, electricity, or education have direct implications for human rights. Lack of access can perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities among populations as well as generations (UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, 2018). For Parrique (2019: 430), degrowth "calls for a wider struggle where revolutionary agents are not merely fighting for a piece of the cake but for autonomy over its recipe

and in defence of the social- ecological foundations that allows its existence". As such, a central tenet of degrowth advocacy must be to redefine public ownership – including broadening the definitions of public goods (i.e., banks, telecommunications, airports) – in a way to advance the democratic control and ownership of public interests. Cities are a critical scale for the exploration of direct democracy, and the Toronto households that shaped this study have certainly demonstrated a desire for something different.

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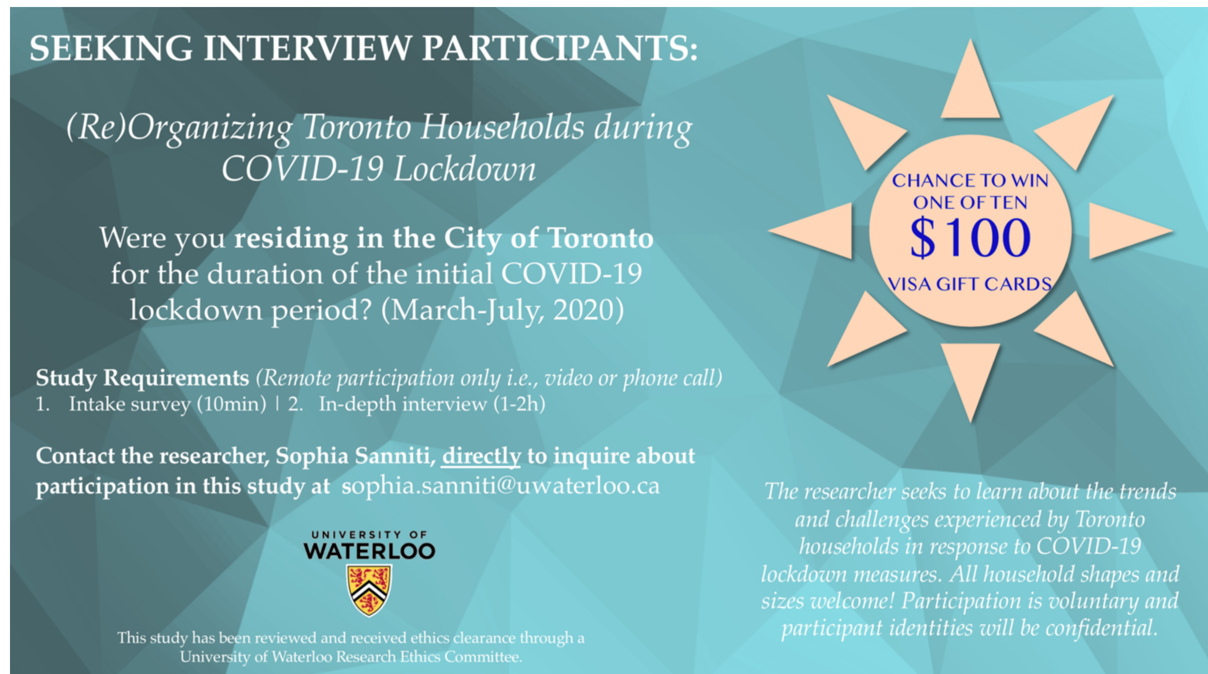
Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Materials



Caption: Were you residing in the City of Toronto for the duration of the initial COVID-19 lockdown period? Contact the researcher Sophia at sophia.sanniti@uwaterloo.ca to inquire about participation and learn more about the study!

Appendix B. Letter of Information

LETTER OF INFORMATION

(Re)Organizing Toronto Households during COVID-19 Lockdown

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Lynes, Thesis Supervisor
Student Investigator: Sophia Sanniti, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo

Purpose

My name is Sophia Sanniti and I am doing research for my PhD thesis on the challenges and opportunities presented to households during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Coping strategies during this unique point in time offer interesting insights for societal goals related to equality and sustainability. I will be investigating the experiences of households in Toronto, Ontario to understand how these households adapted and how domestic responsibilities were changed or shared.

What will happen during the study?

The study involves two phases. You are invited to participate in a short online survey that asks about demographic information and recent changes to personal routine due to lockdown. During the survey, you are able to skip any questions in the survey you do not feel comfortable answering. Following the survey, we are inviting you to participate in an online or phone interview that will last between one and two hours. We will ask you about some of your responses in the survey regarding changing responsibilities during lockdown, as well as how the demands of lockdown have changed your household dynamics. Topics including changes to spending or consumption, changes to routine and responsibilities, and changes to community engagement will be discussed. You may stop the interview at any time to take a short break or end your participation, and may choose not to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering. You also have the option to pause the interview at any time if you would prefer to arrange an alternate time to continue the conversation. The audio of your interview will be recorded and transcribed. All of this will be done by me, the researcher. My supervisor Dr. Jennifer Lynes will be the only one to have access to the data I collect, but they will not know your identity. Your identity will be confidential.

Are there any risks to doing the study?

The risks involved in participating in this study are low due to the nature of the study. You may feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics due to their personal nature, such as your strategies for coping or household conflicts that have taken place. The in-depth interview questions may trigger short-term emotional or psychological reactions if you are facing financial, health or other personal challenges or hardships relating to COVID-19. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can stop taking part at any time. If you need additional supports during or after the study, please consider seeking professional mental health support provided by the Government of Ontario https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-mental-health-support.

Since you are participating in this study privately, no one but me (the researcher) will know whether you participated unless you tell them. I will not use your name or any personal information that would allow you to be identified on any of your interview materials or audio recordings. Information from the surveys will be downloaded, encrypted and password protected on the UWaterloo server. Information from the interviews will be audio recorded – the mp3 recording and subsequent written transcriptions will be encrypted and password protected on the UWaterloo server. All data collected for this study will be retained for seven years, which is the minimum data retention period for

doctoral research. The final version of this study will be published in my thesis and may be presented in academic journals or at conferences. No information that should identify you will be included in these outputs.

When completing the online survey, operated by Qualtrics, or participating via video interview, privacy cannot be guaranteed for information transmitted over the internet. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). University of Waterloo researchers will not collect or use internet protocol (IP) addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic device without first informing you. Qualtrics temporarily collects your computer IP address to avoid duplicate responses in the dataset but will not collect information that could identify you personally.

If you prefer not to participate using this online method, please contact the researcher Sophia so you can participate using an alternative method such as a paper-based questionnaire for the survey, or indicate your preference for a telephone call for the interview.

What are the benefits to my participation?

There are both direct and indirect benefits to your participation. During this strange and unprecedented time, it may be beneficial to share your experiences and personal stories about how you and your household have adapted to the lockdown measures. Your participation may inform research on household management during economic downturns, and could provide insights for policy approaches at municipal levels and beyond to better support households in ways that are environmentally sustainable and socially beneficial. Overall, your participation advances knowledge and scholarship on a range of topics in the social sciences and humanities.

Remuneration

By participating in this study, you are automatically entered into a draw to win one of ten $100 VISA Gift Cards. The draw will take place either: (i) by December 18th, 2020; or (ii) when up to 60 individuals have participated in the study. Only the ten winners will be contacted about the draw. VISA Gift Cards will be delivered by Canada Post once the draw has taken place. The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes. All participants qualify for the draw including those that choose to withdraw from the study during the research process. If a participant wishes to withdraw, they can communicate their interest in entering the draw to the researcher by emailing Sophia directly. The data from these withdrawn participants will not be used in the study.

What if I decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop at any time, even after providing consent or part-way through the interview. If you decide to withdraw, any information you have provided until that point will be destroyed unless you specify otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. You can withdraw your participation from the study at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

Research Ethics Information

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE #42372). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

How do I find out the results of this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately December 2021. The thesis abstract will be shared with all participants as well as a link to my online thesis once it is published.

Further Questions

Please contact Sophia Sanniti, the researcher, at any time with questions or concerns about participation in or outcomes of the study. You can reach Sophia at sophia.sanniti@uwaterloo.ca or her supervisor Dr. Jennifer Lynes at jklynes@uwaterloo.ca.

Appendix C. Survey Questions

Q1 My postal code is:

Postal code is needed to verify that you qualify for the study (residing in TO) and to examine geographic location with other socio-economic factors for the study.

____

Q2 What kind of building do you live in?

House

Townhouse

Apartment building

Duplex

Triplex

Other ____

Q3 What best describes your lockdown living situation?

I own my home

I rent a unit in a home

I rent my home

I am living with family or friends (rent free)

Other ____

Q4 Did your living situation change as a result of lockdown, or after lockdown was lifted? (i.e., Phase 3 - July 2020)

No

Yes - Briefly explain: ____

Q5 How many people did you live with during initial lockdown (Mar-Jul, 2020)?

▼ 0 (1) ... 7 or more (8)

Q6 How many children under the age of 18 were living in your household during initial lockdown?

▼ 0 (9) ... 8+ (8)

Q7 What is your age?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75+

Q8 What is your gender?

Man

Woman

Non-binary or third-gender

Prefer to self-describe ____

Prefer not to disclose

Q9 Please specify your sexual orientation

Heterosexual or straight

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Questioning

Self-identified Orientation ____

Prefer not to disclose

Q10 What is your current relationship status?

Single, never married

Single, co-habitating with a significant other

Married

Divorced

Widowed

Engaged

Separated (legally)

Domestic partnership or civil union

Q11 What ethnicity do you identify with?

Asian

Black/ African

Caucasian/ White

Hispanic/ Latino

First Nations, Inuit or Metis

Mixed Race

Pacific Islander

Other ____

Prefer not to disclose

Q12 Were you born in Canada?

Yes

No - Briefly explain: ____

Prefer not to disclose

Q13 Do you have any difficulties or long-term conditions that have lasted or are expected to last for six months or more? Select all that apply.

This question is part of this study because long-term conditions may have a specific impact on your ability to adapt to lockdown measures.

No

Seeing impairment

Hearing impairment

Physical mobility impairment

Learning impairment

Mental or psychological conditions

Other ____

Q14 Does anyone in your household have difficulties or long-term conditions that have lasted or are expected to last for six months or more? Select all that apply.

This question is part of this study because long-term conditions may have a specific impact on your ability to adapt to lockdown measures.

No

Seeing impairment

Hearing impairment

Physical mobility impairment

Learning impairment

Mental or psychological conditions

Other ____

Q15 What was the primary language spoken at home during the initial stages of lockdown (Mar-Jul, 2020)?

____

Q16 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Elementary school

High school - no diploma

High school diploma

College

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

PhD or higher

Other ____

Q17 What is your annual household income? ($CAD)

Less that $25,000

$25-50,000

$50-75,000

$75-100,000

$100-150,000

$150-200,000

$200,000 +

Q18 Do you share household income with family or friends outside the household?

No

Yes - briefly explain ____

Other ____

Q19 Are you currently employed?

Yes, full-time

Yes, part-time

No

Retired

Other ____

Q20 Did the COVID-19 crisis impact your employment status? Briefly explain.

____

Display This Question:

If Are you currently employed? = Yes, full-time

Or Are you currently employed? = Yes, part-time

Or Are you currently employed? = Other

Q21 In which industry are you employed? (i.e., Education, Health Care, Hospitality, Mining, Construction)

____

Q22 What best describes your position in the household?

Primary earner

Secondary earner

Other ____

Q23 During the initial stages of lockdown (Mar-Jul, 2020), were you conducting your paid work at home or at work?

At home

At work

Other ____

Not applicable

Display This Question:

If During the initial stages of lockdown (Mar-Jul, 2020), were you conducting your paid work at home... != At home

Q24 How did you get to work during the initial stages of lockdown? Select all that apply.

Public Transportation

Personal car

Carpool

Bike

Walk

Other ____

Does not apply

Display This Question:

If During the initial stages of lockdown (Mar-Jul, 2020), were you conducting your paid work at home... != At home

Q25 Was your mode of transportation to and from work different prior to lockdown?

No

Yes - Briefly explain: ____

Q26 Does your household have access private to outdoor space? Select all that apply.

No

Backyard

Frontyard

Balcony

Rooftop patio

Shared green space

Other ____

Q27 How did your household conduct everyday errands during the initial stages of lockdown (i.e. Mar-July, 2020)? Select all that apply.

Public transportation

Personal car

Carpool

Bike

Walk

Other ____

Q28 Was your mode of transport for errands different prior to lockdown?

No

Yes - Briefly explain: ____

Q29 During the initial lockdown period (Mar-Jul, 2020), did your household access government benefits or services to complement household income? This can include COVID-19 specific benefits among others.

No

Yes - please explain ____

Q30 Which activities were you personally responsible for ***prior to* lockdown** (prior to March 2020)?

Drag the activities you completed in one of the two boxes. Categorize the 'type' of activity (chore or leisure) based on your own opinion. Leave the activities you did not do before lockdown behind.

Unpaid Chores	Leisure & Entertainment
______ Personal care/ grooming	______ Personal care/ grooming

______ Commuting/ Travel	______ Commuting/ Travel
______ Cooking	______ Cooking
______ Household calendar & finances	______ Household calendar & finances
______ Errands (bank, groceries)	______ Errands (bank, groceries)
______ Education (coursework, news, skills-building)	______ Education (coursework, news, skills-building)
______ Childcare (including homeschooling)	______ Childcare (including homeschooling)
______ Indoor cleaning (laundry, sweeping, dishes)	______ Indoor cleaning (laundry, sweeping, dishes)
______ Outdoor cleaning (garbage, yard work)	______ Outdoor cleaning (garbage, yard work)
______ Pet Care	______ Pet Care
______ Physical exercise	______ Physical exercise
______ Friends & family relations	______ Friends & family relations
______ Volunteering	______ Volunteering
______ Entertainment (music, art, hikes, games, hobbies)	______ Entertainment (music, art, hikes, games, hobbies)
______ Other	______ Other

Q31 Prior to lockdown (prior to March 2020), what did a typical day look like for you?

Hours spent must add up to 24, use up to one decimal to indicate time increments. Average your weekly activities to the best of your abilities.

_______ Sleep
_______ Paid Work
_______ Unpaid Chores
_______ Leisure & Entertainment

Q32 Which activities were you personally responsible for ***during* initial stages of lockdown** (March 2020 onwards)? (See Q30 for options)

Q33 During the **initial stages of lockdown** (Mar-Jul, 2020), what did a typical day look like for you?

Hours spent must add up to 24, use up to one decimal to indicate time increments. Average your weekly activities to the best of your abilities.

_______ Sleep
_______ Paid Work
_______ Unpaid Chores
_______ Leisure & Entertainment

Q34 Since Stage 3 of lockdown (July 2020 onwards), which activities were you personally responsible for? (See Q30 for options)

Q35 Since Stage 3 of lockdown (July 2020 onwards), what does a typical day look like for you?

Hours spent must add up to 24, use up to one decimal to indicate time increments. Average your weekly activities to the best of your abilities.

_______ Sleep
_______ Paid Work
_______ Unpaid Chores
_______ Leisure & Entertainment

SURVEY COMPLETE!

Thank you for completing the survey! You are now ready to move on to the second portion of this study, the in-depth interview. The researcher Sophia will be in contact with you to make arrangements.

Appendix D. Interview Guide

Hi [Participant name], how are you today?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview portion of this study. I'm a sustainability scholar and I'm really interested to learn about the way households reorganized during COVID-19 lockdown. The lockdown period was a really unique point in time where our work, our play, our education – everything was quickly reorganized under one roof. I hope to gain a better idea of how to help households and communities prepare in the face of future disruption using some of the lessons learned from lockdown.

As outlined in the information letter, your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process. You can stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to continue or need a break, and you can choose not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. I will be recording the audio to ensure an accurate recording of your responses. Excerpts from this interview may be included in the thesis or other publications, but all quotations will be anonymous.

Are you comfortable moving forward with the interview?

This interview has three sections usually lasts just over one hour. We'll start off with some background details, discuss the impact of initial lockdown measures on your household routine, and finish off with some reflections and discussion. After each section I'll ask as to whether you are comfortable continuing, would like a break, or would prefer to arrange an alternate time to continue the conversation.

Are you ready to begin?

PART A

1. Have there been any changes to your living situation or employment status since completing the survey? If so, what?
2. In your survey you mention there was X number of people in your household. Is this still the case, and can you tell me about who you spent lockdown with?
3. How would you describe your primary role in the household generally? Has lockdown impacted this role? How so?
    a. *Prompts: Homemaker, parent, caretaker, worker, consumer, producer*
4. I'd like to learn more about how your household initially adapted to the lockdown measures in Stage One (March 2020). Please walk me through the changes to your routine based in your survey responses, and comment on whether lockdown had an impact. For each category (sleep, paid work, unpaid chores, leisure), please describe to me what was done to adapt to the change, and any new or different responsibilities or skills you had to take on in response.

A. Let's start with your sleep schedule [comment on hours indicated in survey]
B. How about your paid work?
C. Unpaid Chores:
    i. *Comment on activities sorted in this category*
    ii. What led you to take on these responsibilities? Did you need to learn new skills?
    iii. Did you expect anything in return for these tasks?
    iv. Do these responsibilities contribute to your sense of self or role in the household?

v. Childcare: do you share childcare (dependent care) responsibilities with other households? With who, how often, where/when?

D. Leisure/ Entertainment:
   i. *Comment on activities sorted in this category*
   ii. Are these activities new or different than your leisure prior to lockdown?
   iii. What led you to take on these activities? Did you need to learn new skills?
   iv. Did you expect anything in return for these tasks?
   v. Do these activities contribute to your sense of self or role in the household?

E. How do you divide your time/ household space among paid, unpaid and leisure?

F. Follow-up:
   i. During the initial lockdown period, were there any major changes to your household's monthly expenses?
      i. Any cancellation of services?
   ii. Did you buy any new or different products as a result of lockdown?
      i. Local or Online
   iii. How are financial decisions negotiated/ managed? (budget, loans, luxury purchases)
   iv. Were you growing food at home? (Why/why not)
      i. Inquire about harvest
   v. Did you repair or repurpose any household goods? What goods, how often?
      i. Textiles, furniture, renovations
   vi. Did you exchange, gift, or trade goods with neighbours, friends/ family, or on the Facebook mutual aid group? What goods? How often? Did you expect anything in return?
      i. Charity donations: $, items, time, space
      ii. expressions of gratitude to essential workers
   vii. How did you maintain important relationships during initial lockdown?
      i. i.e., romantic partners, children, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues
   viii. How did you share important information with members of your household?
      i. i.e., news, health trends; casual - recipes, craft ideas
   ix. Did lockdown change priorities of info/source?
   x. Do you share/ receive information from people outside your HH? What/ how often? What results?

PART B

5. What responsibilities did you expect other members of your household/ community to take on?
   a. Did you have new or different expectations of child/ dependent contributions to HH chores due to lockdown?
6. How is the division of HH labour negotiated?
7. Do you feel the division of work among household members is fair? What would make it fair?
8. During the initial stages of lockdown, what were your methods for coping through the experience?
   a. Did you spend much time outdoors?
9. How did your household cope?
   a. Celebrate cultural traditions:
   b. Who ensures household members are coping properly? *(Direct and indirect)*
   c. Are there supports you feel your household needed lockdown but did not receive? *(Government, financial, personal)*
   d. Do you speak with neighbours, friends or family about coping? What topics? How often? What are the outcomes of these conversations?

PART C

10. What would you say was the most significant change your household experienced during the initial lockdown period?
11. Have there been any positive experiences or outcomes lockdown brought to yourself or your household?
12. Have there been any conflicts or challenges within your household as a result of lockdown?
    a. Would you like to comment on the role your positionality played in your lockdown experience: Age, gender/sexuality, race, ability, place
13. Have your expectations/ perceptions of the government changed as a result of lockdown? (Regional, provincial, federal)
    a. Role of politics/ discussions
    b. Activism/causes
14. I'd now like you to comment on any additional changes your routine underwent once Toronto entered Stage 3 at the end of July.
    a. What aspects of the initial lockdown routine did you keep, what did you remove and why?
    b. Will your lockdown experience inform how to approach future lockdowns over the coming months? In what ways?
    c. Do you expect to keep any changes to your household routine once lockdown is completely lifted? What and why?
15. Has lockdown changed your priorities regarding how you spend/value your time?
16. Do you think more time spent at home is better for you/ your household? Why/not?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add or ask me before we close off?
    a. Topics not discussed

Thank you for sharing your experiences and lending me your valuable time. Will follow up with thank-you note and the draw results closer to the Holidays. Please share this opportunity with friends and neighbours in TO as I am actively recruiting.

Appendix E. COVID-19 Timeline in Toronto

The first case of the novel coronavirus arrived in Canada on January 25, 2020 when a man traveled from Wuhan, China to Toronto, and after reporting his symptoms, was promptly placed in isolation in Sunnybrook Hospital (Nielsen, 2021). On March 11, COVID-19 took the life of a 77-year-old man from Barrie, becoming Ontario's first COVID-19 death. One day later, Ontario's Premier Doug Ford announced that publicly funded schools would be closed for two weeks following March Break, while simultaneously encouraging families to "have fun" and "go away" during the break (Global News, 2020). This discrepancy, confusion and inconsistency in public health messaging would remain a persistent theme in the management of Ontario's COVID-19 outbreak.

A state of emergency was declared on March 17, 2020 in Ontario, resulting in the prompt closure of businesses across the province including daycares, restaurants and theatres (Nielsen, 2021). Toronto followed suit, declaring a state of emergency for the first time in the city's history on March 23 (Katawazi, 2020). Ontario's Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks announced the closure of provincial parks on March 19, and all city-owned playgrounds and park amenities in Toronto were closed or otherwise taped off on March 25 (City News Toronto, 2020b). The first nursing home outbreak was declared in the same week, and the Canadian Armed Forces were eventually called in to assist with virus spread in long-term care homes across the province (Tsekouras, 2020).

The following week, all non-essential businesses were ordered to close but this excluded liquor stores, realty and construction services. Toronto's Mayor John Tory announced that all city-led major events, festivals, conferences and cultural programs including Pride Weekend would be cancelled through to June 30 (City News Toronto, 2020a). At the start of April, Toronto implemented a new physical distancing by-law with citizens facing up to $5,000 for non-compliance (The Canadian Press, 2020c). During this time, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau opened applications for emergency income support through the Canada emergency response benefit (CERB), providing $2,000 a month to people who lost their income source due to the pandemic (Harris, 2020). Throughout April, COVID-19 cases continued to spread and climb, including in a remote Ontario Indigenous community 300 kilometres north of Thunder Bay (McQuigge, 2020).

On April 27, Premier Ford announced the framework for reopening the province, broken down into three phases including Protect (imposition of emergency orders), Restart (gradual reopening of the economy) and Recover (ensuring safety in a new normal) (Rocca, 2020b). Ford noted that the plan was a roadmap and not a calendar, and thus did not commit to any dates for initiating the plan. On May 6, emergency orders were extended by the province for the third time. Yet in the same week, the Ontario government announced the opening of garden centres, hardware stores, retail stores with a street

entrance (curbside pickup and delivery only), as well as the opening of provincial parks for walking, hiking, biking and bird watching (Nielsen, 2021).

On May 13, Premier Ford announced details on the province's 'Restart' plan, entering the province into the first stage of the second phase of the three-phase reopening (Patton, 2020b). This included the opening of workplaces deemed well-positioned to maintain physical distancing and limit large gatherings such as construction, retail, car dealerships and media operations. To improve physical distancing and encourage physical activity, the City of Toronto's ActiveTO closed 57 kilometres of streets for walking, running, biking and other activities (City News Toronto, 2020c). Toronto also reopened over 850 park amenities across the city including picnic shelters, soccer fields, skateboard parks and tennis courts, but excluded playgrounds, splash pads and nature conservatories (City News Toronto, 2020d). Following these openings, thousands of people gathered in Trinity Bellwoods Park in Toronto on May 23, sparking outrage and disappointment from Toronto's mayor, health officials and members of the public (Venn, 2020). By the end of May, Toronto and surrounding regions (the Greater Toronto Area) accounted for 76% of new infections, further compelling political leaders to take a more regional approach – something that had thus far been resisted by Premier Ford (Crawley, 2020). Also, around this time Ontario's officials put forth recommendations for the public to wear masks on public transit, but Premier Ford refused to mandate public mask wearing. Health Minister Christine Elliot requested members of the public avoid using medical masks so they could be reserved for healthcare workers (CBC News, 2020a).

On June 2 Ontario's state of emergency was extended by an additional 28 days, but Premier Ford insisted that this did not necessarily halt his plans for reopening the province (Nielsen, 2021). On June 8, Ontario initiated a regional approach, announcing some regions could enter Stage 2 of the recovery plan but excluded Toronto, Mississauga and Hamilton (Nielsen, 2021). On June 12, all child-care centres were invited to reopen but gatherings were limited to 10 staff and children, and centres faced a penalty of $1,000 per child per day for non-compliance (Patton, 2020a). By June 14, more than one million COVID-19 tests had been conducted in the province of Ontario (Nielsen, 2021). On June 22, Toronto and Peel Region were permitted to enter Stage 2 of the recovery plan, one day before Ontario reported the first death of someone 19 years old or younger. On June 24, emergency orders were extended until July 15, and then again to July 22, and July 29.

The province appealed to Ontario school boards on July 1 to consider starting the academic year earlier to maximize instruction time due to planned re-openings (Westoll, 2020b). The next day, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) announced a requirement for passengers to wear face masks or coverings (The Canadian Press, 2020a). On July 13, regions in the province moved to Stage 3 of the

second recovery plan phase, excluding the Greater Toronto Area and other high-risk zones. Toronto and Peel Region move into Stage 3 on July 31, the last two regions to do so. On July 30, the province expressed confidently that elementary students would be in the physical classroom five days a week, and secondary students for at least half of their curriculum. Over the month of August, as cases climbed, Ontario announced that the number of people participating in indoor sports, fitness and recreation could increase as long as distancing measures were implemented (Nielsen, 2021). Emergency pandemic orders were extended on August 20 until September 22, providing flexibility for the province to address ongoing risks.

On September 17, private gatherings were limited to 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors in Toronto, Peel Region and Ottawa – two days later, these limitations were expanded in other regions across the province. On September 28, Ontario reported 700 new COVID-19 cases, establishing the new record for the most daily infections recorded in the province and provoking the Premier to formally declare Ontario in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rodrigues, 2020). On October 2, seven months after the start of the pandemic, Ontario announced a provincewide mask policy, mandating masks in all indoor public areas, on transit, and in workplaces where physical distancing is difficult (Rocca, 2020c). Yet three days later, Premier Ford rejected calls to close indoor dining from Toronto's medical officer and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, citing a lack of evidence that establishments contribute to community outbreaks (Rocca, 2020e). By the end of that same week, Ontario had reached a record number of cases for two days in a row (Nielsen, 2021).

On October 10, new restrictions were imposed for Toronto, Peel Region and Ottawa including the closure of indoor dining, gyms, casinos, cinemas and performing arts centres for at least 28 days (Rocca, 2020a). This was complemented by a call from Ontario's chief medical officer of health to limit trips outside the home to essential activities only such as school, groceries and medical appointments. On October 25, the province reported over 1,000 new COVID-19 cases for the first time (Nielsen, 2021). At the start of November, Ontario revealed a new five-tiered colour-coded system to help implement a more regional approach to municipal shutdowns and restrictions. Toronto was promptly placed in the "Red Zone" following a test positivity rate of 6% and an overall rising case count (Rocca, 2020f). By November 16, Ontario had experienced 11 days straight of announcing more than 1,000 new cases per day (Nielsen, 2021).

On December 7, Premier Ford announced a three-part vaccination rollout plan, focusing on vulnerable seniors, their caregivers and health-care workers as well as regions with the highest rates of infection (Jeffords, 2020). Ontario's fiscal watchdog reported on December 8 that the province had $12 billion in unspent reserve funds by the end of September (The Canadian Press, 2020b). The next day,

Pfizer coronavirus vaccine was approved for use in Canada (Connolly, 2020). Over the following weeks, Ontario administered the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to front-line workers in Toronto as hospitalizations increased by 70% and ICU admissions increased by 80%, and over 2,000 cases a day are reported by the province in late December. On December 26, Ontario imposed a provincewide shutdown which was expected to last at least four weeks (Rocca, 2020d).

In January, all Ontario students moved to remote learning as the province surpassed 5,000 COVID-19 deaths (Ranger, 2021). A stay-at-home order was imposed soon after, requiring residents to stay home except for essential outings. Critics accused the measure of being too vague, since it provided no set definition on what is deemed "essential" and no limits on the number of times or length that a person can leave their home (The Canadian Press, 2021). Further, the province empowered the police and bylaw officers to enforce the order and issue tickets.

On March 11, more than one million COVID-19 vaccines were administered in the province of Ontario, the same day Canada marked the one-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic (Nielsen, 2021; Ranger, 2021). Over the following months, various efforts including an emergency break, stay-at-home orders and other efforts continued to impose restrictions on citizens across Ontario. The relentless regional impositions by the province resulted in Toronto being under one of the longest lockdowns of a major city in the world (Levinson-King, 2021). While the pandemic is far from over, the bounded nature of this thesis limits the analysis to within the first year of lockdown.

Appendix F. Public Companies with Wage Subsidy & Dividend Payouts

(Ferreira & Carmichael, 2020)