"Sometimes, it's not just about the food": The Social Identity dynamics of foodbank helping transactions

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

This work was funded with Kickstarter and Consolidator funding from Nottingham Trent University Department of Psychology

9984 words (minus title-page, keywords, tables, and references)

Abstract

Food insecurity in developed countries has increased rapidly. Research has suggested that stigma may inhibit food-aid help-seeking, but has failed to determine how such barriers might be overcome. Adopting a social identity perspective, this study explored the processes involved in food-aid helping transactions and sought to identify conditions that facilitate positive helping outcomes. Interviews were conducted with 18 clients and 12 volunteers at two English foodbanks, and a theoretically-guided Thematic Analysis was conducted. Two primary themes were identified: 'Here to Help' and 'The Legitimate Recipient'. This paper offers a distinct and novel contribution by applying a social identity perspective to foodbank helping transactions, thereby demonstrating how group dynamics and behaviours are integral to these interactions, and by moving beyond the typical 'Social Curse' focus on barriers to help-seeking to explore how such obstacles may be overcome. Suggestions for addressing stigma-laden helping transactions and promoting successful delivery of aid are provided.

Introduction

Food poverty is increasing amongst the richest nations. One in eight children living in high-income countries face food insecurity: a finding Sarah Cook (UNICEF Innocenti Director) considers ‘a wake-up call’ (UNICEF, 2017). The UK is no exception, with food insecurity affecting 19.50% of UK children (Pereira, Handa, & Holmqvist, 2017). Those affected often seek help from foodbanks: community- or charity-run initiatives providing free food-parcels. However, foodbanks’ societal role has become increasingly politicised (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler, 2015), undermining the fact that, at their simplest level, foodbanks involve helping transactions: help is sought by clients, and given by volunteers. The meanings attached to this help are, however, socially significant (Gergen & Gergen, 1983): by requesting food, clients implicitly admit they are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Stigma within Foodbank Helping Transactions

This admittance can be a source of shame and embarrassment, thereby preventing people from visiting foodbanks (Caplan, 2016): a finding also observed in Dutch, German, and French contexts (Rombach, Bitsch, Kang, & Ricchieri, 2018; van der Horst, Pascucci, & Bol, 2014). Those who do visit often disclose that accessing aid has made them feel like ‘failures’ (Douglas, Sapko, Kiezebrink, & Kyle, 2015). The individual is also forced to adopt a foodbank recipient identity, thus risking the growing stigmatisation of foodbank use resulting from increased public awareness of foodbanks and blame-laden ‘scrounger’ rhetoric (Garthwaite, 2016a, 2017; Purdam, Garratt, & Esmail, 2016). Accordingly, Purdam and colleagues (2016) argue that although foodbank aid is free, it comes with hidden social costs: an observation that aligns with social psychological models of interpersonal help-seeking like the Threat to Self-Esteem Model (Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982). This

posits that help has a two-faced "Janus-like quality" (Nadler, 2010, p. 271): while aid can be supportive, it can also threaten one's social standing, particularly if it implies dependency. Individuals therefore perform a cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to seek help: a particularly significant analysis when its outcome determines whether one has food to eat.

Intergroup Helping as Status Relations

We contend that the later development of the Threat to Self-Esteem Model into the social identity-based Intergroup Helping as Status Relations (IHSR) Model (Nadler, 2002) sheds additional light on the foodbank context. This is because food-aid helping transactions represent an intergroup context where power/status differences between client and volunteer may be thrown into sharp relief (Nadler, 2010): an observation made explicitly about the foodbank context by Poppendiek (1998). The IHSR model demonstrates how helping transactions can reinforce status differences, and may be used strategically by higher-status groups to maintain power or promote a positive social identity (Nadler, 2002). The latter motivation is of particular relevance in the foodbank context: by using help as a way to communicate warmth/generosity (Hopkins et al., 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2012) volunteers may strategically promote a positive social identity in contrast to the clients' negative social identity of incapability. Clients may therefore become reticent about seeking help from volunteers, jeopardising effective helping (Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Nadler's model also shows how, for members of low-status groups, help-seeking can be conceptualised as stigma-consistent (Halabi & Nadler, 2017), because requests can be perceived as evidence of chronic dependency or incompetence (Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2014). Help-seeking can therefore reinforce the higher-status group's stereotypes of the low-status group, perpetuating stigma and inequality (Halabi & Nadler, 2017).

The Social Curse of Intergroup Helping

These observations are consistent with social identity literature, which recognises stigma's damaging potential for group members' well-being (Major & O'Brien, 2005) and positions stigma as a 'Social Curse' that may deny group members of valuable support (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Kellezi, Bowe, Wakefield, McNamara & Bosworth, 2018; Stevenson, McNamara, & Muldoon, 2014). Social Curse processes are the antithesis of Social Cure processes (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012): rather than providing curative support resources, groups that are stigmatised can lead to vulnerability and isolation. This work also suggests that transactions where marginalised groups receive help from powerful groups have the potential to reinforce stigma. Indeed, Stevenson et al. (2014) explored service use within socioeconomically-disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Limerick city, Ireland, and showed how stigma consciousness can transform supportive intragroup helping transactions into tense intergroup transactions where recipients feel stereotyped by service providers. The sense of unfairness surrounding this perceived stereotyping can encourage group members to avoid seeking needed help in order to challenge these perceptions (Wakefield, Hopkins, & Greenwood, 2012, 2013).

Ultimately, both the IHSR model and Social Curse literature suggest the unequal nature of the groups in foodbank helping transactions and the stigmatised nature of the recipient identity may reinforce social divisions, reduce trust, and inhibit aid uptake. The question of how such issues may be overcome remains unanswered.

Perceived Similarity in Foodbank Helping Transactions

While there are status differences between clients and volunteers, foodbank transactions are more nuanced than this. Garthwaite (2016a, 2017) makes two observations

that highlight how client/volunteer social distance may be much smaller than the IHSR model or Social Curse literature would suggest. First, there is a general societal awareness (predominantly via media) that people who did not require food-aid a few years ago are now seeking it (Ellam, 2013): an awareness strengthened by research showing that one in fourteen Britons have used foodbanks (Bulman, 2018). This suggests clients may be seen less in terms of chronic negative stereotypes and more as victims of recent socio-political/economic circumstances that could affect anyone (austerity measures, zero-hours contracts, benefits sanctions), thus encouraging a sense of potential common fate between client and volunteer. Second, it is relatively common for volunteers to have been previous recipients of food-aid who wish to 'give something back' (Caplan, 2016).

These observations suggest a different way of understanding the transaction. Rather than two groups with a large status differential and wide social division, volunteers and clients could be conceptualised as being closer together in terms of status and social distance. This has important implications for intergroup dynamics. For instance, Rodríguez-Pérez, Delgado-Rodriguez, Betancor-Rodríguez, Leyens, and Vaes (2011) found that outgroups are more likely to be humanised (i.e., seen as fellow humans) if they are perceived as friendly and similar. Furthermore, Capozza, Trifiletti, Vezzali, and Favara (2013) showed that contact can increase outgroup humanisation. Indeed, the helping transaction might be an especially relevant form of contact, since observing fellow ingroup members helping the outgroup can increase outgroup humanisation (Saguy et al., 2015), and intergroup helping can create more inclusive communities (Wakefield & Hopkins, 2017). This evidence, combined with the finding that humanisation promotes empathy and helping (Costello & Hodson, 2010; Cuddy, Rock, & Norton, 2007) means this alternative

conceptualisation of the transaction predicts more positive interactions than those posited by the IHSR model and Social Curse literature.

These dynamics, coupled with the fact that foodbanks tend to exist within relatively small communities, may allow volunteers and clients to interact as members of a more inclusive community-based identity. It is also possible they may experience a shared sense of humanity – a superordinate categorisation that can influence helping transactions. This categorisation is integral in caring relationships, such as between nurses and patients (Walsh, 1999). It could also help overcome the negative foodbank transaction outcomes predicted by the IHSR model and Social Curse literature, and instead produce outcomes more akin to the Social Cure model (Jetten et al., 2012), where clients feel valued and supported. It is this potential overcoming of negative transaction outcomes that we wished to explore in this study.

Context: The Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust (TT) is the largest UK foodbank charity, with 40,000 volunteers in 428 foodbanks providing 1,332,952 three-day emergency food parcels in 2017-18.This is an increase of 12.68% on 2016-17, and 284.14% on 2012-13 (Trussell Trust, 2018). Clients are referred by professionals such as doctors, who provide a voucher to exchange for food. The average client was referred twice in the last year, and 70% cited low income or benefit delays/changes as the reason for visiting (Trussell Trust, 2018). It is through exploration of TT client and volunteer interview data that we intended to satisfy the aims of our study.

The Present Study

To our knowledge, this is the first paper to apply the social identity approach (SIA) to foodbanks: something that, for the reasons above, we consider long overdue. The SIA comprises social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (SCT: Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and both are relevant to the foodbank context. Specifically, SCT illuminates the relevance of categorizing oneself as a client/volunteer, while SIT considers the impact of identifying with these categories, and the implications of this for behaviour. Ultimately, the SIA posits that helping transactions will be influenced by the group identities of client and volunteer.

We thus feel the foodbank context provides a unique opportunity to explore the perspectives and motivations of clients and volunteers, and the social identity dynamics involved in foodbank helping transactions. Specifically, our aim is to identify the processes that might overcome negative and stigma-focussed 'Social Curse' outcomes, leading to more positive outcomes where clients feel supported, humanised, and willing to return if necessary, thereby paving the way for potential 'Social Cure' processes. This is not to say that we will not explore instances where individuals discuss negative experiences: indeed, we will highlight points of both convergence and divergence across client and volunteer accounts to develop a fuller, rounded view of the transaction. Ultimately, we intend to advance theoretical understandings of social identity processes within the helping transaction by extending the theory into the as-yet unexplored domain of foodbanks, as well as seeking to remedy the dearth of literature exploring the nexus between Social Curse/Cure processes. While we hope that this will suggest ways in which foodbanks can foster positive transaction outcomes, we also intend to draw conclusions that could contribute to the enhancement of other helping transactions.

Method

Design

The study involved semi-structured interviews analysed with Thematic Analysis (TA). TA can be applied inductively or theoretically, and from realist or constructivist perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We adopted a theoretical and realist approach because we were interested in particular questions influenced by existing theory, and in topics relating to foodbank experiences, feelings/emotions regarding foodbank use, and client/volunteer perceptions. Separate interview schedules were constructed for clients and volunteers (see Supplementary Materials). TA was deemed appropriate because it enables in-depth exploration of experiences and the identification of common themes representing meaning, emotions, and cognitions relating to those experiences (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants and Procedure

Eighteen clients (ten men, eight women) and twelve volunteers (seven men, five women) were interviewed in one of two TT foodbanks in two distinct (yet both relatively impoverished) local communities in Nottinghamshire, England (chosen due to their proximity to the researchers' institution and the willingness of the managers to engage in the research). Participants ranged from 20 to 79 years (see Table 1 for demographics). Interviews took place in relatively private foodbank areas (e.g., kitchen, sofa positioned to the side of the room). The setting impacted interview length: the bustling environment encouraged individuals to stay for the duration of a cup of tea, after which they were keen to leave. Moreover, interviews were sometimes interrupted by other clients or volunteers. Nonetheless, interviewees engaged deeply with the process, and were able to guide the

discussion due to the semi-structured design. All interviews were conducted by the same female interviewer (a white British woman with interviewing experience), who proactively approached individuals offering the chance to take part at a point in the transaction where discussion would be appropriate (e.g., clients relaxing and having a cup of tea, clients waiting until their food-parcel was ready, during volunteers' breaks). Males were more willing than females, and the majority were White Britons without dependants (consistent with TT data on 'typical' clients: Loopstra & Lalor, 2017). Participants were informed that their data would be anonymised and institutional ethical approval was obtained.

(TABLE 1 HERE)

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded (M_{length} = 23 minutes). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) steps for conducting TA, interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. To ensure methodological rigor, analysis involved in-depth reading, note-taking, and discussion across the research team, before initial codes from the entire data corpus were generated and organised using NVivo software. These codes focussed on data pertaining to identity processes/interactions. The first and second authors used these codes to generate explanatory themes representing the nature of participants' experiences. The client data-set was analysed, then the volunteer data-set was analysed and integrated into the entire data corpus, paying particular attention to any points of convergence/divergence. The themes were named, evolved, and refined through examination of their meaning and fit with the relevant data-set, and then shared and discussed across the research team to reach agreement on the thematic structure. Below we define two broad themes that represent

participants' experiences, and present extracts that demonstrate these themes (note that ellipses (…) are used to indicate word omission for brevity).

These themes (Table 2) describe clients' experiences of receiving help, volunteers' feelings about providing help, and the nature of the help given. They reveal the difficulties clients face before entering the foodbank and their experiences once inside. They also give voice to volunteers, highlighting how they relate to clients. Theme 1 explores participants' conceptualisation of the foodbank and its volunteers, exploring how perceiving volunteers as possessing a genuine desire to help promotes positive experiences. The supportive and personalised nature of the help is also addressed. Theme 2 relates to participants' conceptualisations of clients as recipients. It illustrates how being seen in terms of a 'legitimate recipient' identity allows clients to perceive transactions as relating to 'help', not 'scrounging', whilst also exploring how volunteers interpret and assign this legitimacy.

(TABLE 2 HERE)

Results & Discussion

Theme 1: Here to Help

Most clients described a sense of shame about attending the foodbank. However, clients showed consensus in their beliefs that volunteers display traits indicating their genuine desire to help, and talked about how these traits challenge stigmatisation fears, thus making the help feel genuine and encouraging positive transactions.

Sub-Theme 1: An Unexpected Lack of Judgement

Many clients described experiencing fear regarding foodbank attendance, often related to their awareness of the judgement and stigma they may face once categorised as a 'foodbank user':

Extract 1.

Ethan: *I sort of thought 'oh no not the foodbank'. I mean you've heard about it on television(…)news reports say that people sort of take advantage of the scheme. Erm, I was sort of apprehensive of coming along. And I was, I was struggling last week, okay. Just as bad. And I got a voucher to come, and I was that scared of coming, nervous. I didn't come. And I really, really, had a really, really, bad week.*

Ethan's account highlights the dread associated with realising there is a need to visit a foodbank, reflecting existing literature (Douglas et al., 2015; Garthwaite, 2016a). He explains how this stopped him coming in the past (even during a 'really, really bad week') and acknowledges the role of the media in reinforcing the image of clients taking advantage of foodbanks (in line with Wells and Caraher's (2014) review of UK media's foodbank reporting). This reticence is consistent with the IHSR model, which highlights lower-status groups' refusal to receive help from higher-status groups in order to avoid confirming incompetence (Halabi & Nadler, 2017). This is especially true in the context of foodbanks' *dependency-oriented help*: the provision of an immediate solution to hunger, which implies chronic dependency (Nadler, 2002).

Thus, when clients do visit the foodbank, it is often with a real sense of discomfort. However, most clients describe their surprise at the positivity of their experiences. One reason for this is that they experience the foodbank as non-judgemental and in stark contrast with their expectations:

Extract 2.

Jack: *When you go down here you are not judged (…) they don't judge you for who you are, what colour you are, where you are from. You know, you are an individual. They judge you as a person. Which is nice…*

Interviewer: *Why do you think the foodbank needs to be like that?*

Jack: *Erm, why? Well I mean, if you go there and it is like. If you go in, no matter what situation you are in to come down to the foodbank, it shouldn't matter really.*

For Jack, being seen simply as a human in need is key to receiving foodbank help. Instead of volunteers categorising clients into particular groups, 'they judge you as a person'. Humanising healthcare is known to reduce barriers to health-related help-seeking (Faria, Gonçalves, & Silva, 2016), and this also appears to be the case for foodbanks: the humanised and non-judgemental service provided by volunteers encourages Jack to engage, and to view the helping experience as 'good'. This humanisation, as we will discuss later, is likely to influence the extent of the perceived social distance between clients and volunteers.

Volunteers' accounts converged with clients' in recognising the importance of non-judgemental interactions, and the way they benefit clients:

Extract 3.

Ben**:** *A foodbank itself can be more than food (…) We, you know, be encouraging to them, hopefully not make them feel depressed or being judged, but be actually being welcomed here which is part of our creed, of how we want to see people come in. With a bigger smile when they walk out than when they walk in.*

Ben describes non-judgement as the TT volunteers' 'creed': an action-guiding group norm (Turner, 1982). Ben perceives this welcoming, non-judgement ethos as a way to enable clients to obtain more from their visit than simply food: instead, the transaction is elevated into an event with the potential to enhance their emotional state.

Other volunteers' views diverged, however. Some recognised complexity regarding how 'non-judgement' is performed. Hannah describes how she responds when she suspects a client may not be in need:

Extract 4.

Hannah: *Well you still treat them with respect because our image is to be caring, we are charged to be caring, giving, loving. And, as I say, not to judge. And you can't, you can't let anything like that show. You have got to treat them in exactly the same way as you will treat anybody else. And, and you know it is just something you have to live with.*

Despite her concerns, Hannah appears guided by the TT's ethos (the 'creed' of which Ben spoke), indicating that letting her doubts show would be anti-normative (potentially resulting in ingroup derogation; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). This appears to be a norm central to her TT volunteer identity. Thus, while the non-judgemental aspect of the foodbank may seem uncontentious to clients and essential to most volunteers, some volunteers experience conflict between personal feelings and the TT ethos. Stevenson et al. (2014) note how clients' awareness of judgement from service providers means that their stigmatised group identity can become a Social Curse that can deter service use. Despite their initial stigma consciousness, we saw no evidence of foodbank clients being aware of the conflict experienced by this minority of volunteers, suggesting they are less at risk of experiencing these Social Curse processes.

Sub-Theme 2: Being Viewed as an Equal

A second dimension of foodbank experiences that made clients unexpectedly feel they were being provided with genuinely-intentioned help, was how volunteers made them feel they were perceived as fellow human beings, rather than members of a lower-status outgroup. While this is related to the idea of lack of judgement outlined in the previous sub-theme, it is distinct in that being viewed as an equal involves particular emphasis on the perceived social distance and power dynamic between client and volunteer. This is reflected in Rachel's recounting of her foodbank experience to her neighbours:

Extract 5.

Rachel: *I says, 'They don't look at you down their noses at you, and they don't look at you as if you are an alien that has just walked in because you've got to go there'. 'They are really nice people, and they are really helpful. 'You get a cup of tea while you are there'. Because when my daughter came with me she said(…)'yes, I can't believe I've got a cup of tea'.*

Interviewer: *Why did she say that?*

Rachel: *She says (…) 'When I've been anywhere such as the Job Centre sent me, they don't so much as offer you a cup of tea. They just look down their noses at you and say there is a water [dispenser] there if you want a drink of cold water' (…) She says, 'a lovely cup of tea. And I can even have as much sugar as I want'.*

Rachel contrasts her foodbank experience with her daughter's feelings of being treated as 'alien' by government services. This latter experience highlights how help-seeking can contribute to feelings of inferiority and exclusion and reveals the sense of inequality that can be inherent in intergroup helping transactions where a resource-wielding higher-

status group assists a lower-status group (Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Rachel's daughter's account of government-based aid delivery echoes the client interview extracts in Stevenson et al.'s (2014) exploration of the stigma-related Social Curse processes inhibiting service use. These social curse processes do not appear to be part of Rachel's foodbank experience. Instead, Rachel describes a humanising encounter, where the offer of sugary tea is a symbol of welcome and equality, evoking the comforting feeling of being offered a supportive cup of tea from a friend (Hannam, 1997).

Volunteers were also aware of this status issue and talked about two ways in which they attempted to promote a sense of equality/similarity between themselves and clients. First, various volunteers highlighted how their own life-events provide them with a sense of empathy for clients' situations:

Extract 6.

Hannah: *To me it wasn't just a coincidence that I thought of coming here [to volunteer]. It is a blessing to be here, and of course you meet all sorts of people with so many problems, but when you've got problems yourself you find that you can talk to them on the level of understanding. Most of them are just very pleased to be able to talk, you know, rather than keeping it all to themselves. Because they do come often in a very distressed state, they are embarrassed that they have had to come, you know, and to feel that they are received with respect and what have you, really I think, hopefully, it does help them.*

This sense of having something in common with clients has also been noted by Garthwaite (2016a, 2017). The intergroup similarity and friendliness created by mutual problem-sharing is likely to promote humanisation (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2011), paving the way for empathy (Costello & Hodson, 2010), an increased desire to help (Taylor & Hanna,

2018), and perhaps a shared sense of identity that may promote Social Cure processes such as social support.

It is also interesting that Hannah describes her volunteering as ‘a blessing’. While some volunteers professed no religious faith, others (including Hannah) described how Christianity was an important motivator of their helping behaviour. For Hannah, being able to help others is ‘a blessing’ in that it allows her to enact her faith, as well as sharing her problems with others.

The second way in which volunteers highlighted this sense of commonality was by acknowledging that the current climate of austerity means they could easily be in the clients’ situation in the future, thereby denoting a sense of potential common fate:

Extract 7.

Lily: *I had a family came, oh quite a few months ago now. And I think they'd been abroad, good jobs abroad, came over here, thought they'd get work quickly and they didn't.(…)And erm, that was very hard for them. And they seemed quite quiet to begin with, but they had to come two or three times you know and, got to know I suppose that nobody is looking down on them. It could happen to any of us. You know, any of us could end up needing to come to a foodbank.*

Lily highlights commonality between the family, her, and everyone else regarding potential need for foodbank aid: a commonality emphasised by the word ‘us’. In drawing upon this potential common fate, she reduces the social distance between volunteers and clients, and argues that ‘nobody is looking down on them’: a process she implies to have encouraged the family to return to the foodbank due to continuing need. This focus on common fate also fosters a sense that she and the family belong to the same social

category: a context within which help is more likely to be received in the spirit it was intended, rather than with suspicion (Jetten et al., 2012; Stevenson et al., 2014). This is in contrast to the accounts of statutory service providers interviewed by Stevenson et al. (2014), who often talked of clients in stereotypical terms. This turned a potentially supportive intragroup context (fellow community members giving/receiving assistance) into a conflict-ridden intergroup context with a focus on the social distance between providers and clients, thereby leading to Social Curse processes underpinned by stigma consciousness.

Lily's 'it could happen to any of us' narrative also suggests that reasons for foodbank use may be external (outside clients' control) rather than internal (indicative of clients' personal shortcomings), thereby reducing the need for guilt/embarrassment. Nadler and Chernyak-Hai (2014) showed that low-status help-seekers' needs tend to be viewed as being due to permanent internal factors such as laziness, while high-status help-seekers' needs tend to be viewed as being due to temporary external factors, such as unfortunate events. Thus, by externally attributing clients' reasons for attending the foodbank, it could be argued that Lily locates clients in a higher-status position.

The way in which help was presented appeared to play an important role in allowing clients to feel viewed as an equal. For example, clients highlighted the importance of having choice regarding the food-parcel contents and how this made them feel they were being genuinely helped, rather than receiving hand-outs, which might be more typical in a dependency-orientated helping transaction:

Extract 8.

Interviewer: *What were you expecting [the foodbank to be like]?*

Ethan: *I was expecting it to be a lot less friendly. I was expecting it to be a lot more sort of military sort of 'right OK, voucher number 258 yes that is yours, go', you know. And off you go. Erm, but it is very sort of, it is nice atmosphere. People are nice, pleasant. They have given me a choice of what sort of food that I would like or don't like. If there is any specific allergies that I have or et cetera. So I am really, really grateful so far. My first impressions are, I am, absolutely amazing, and I feel very very, I sort of feel lucky to be able to use it(…)I mean, I am just quite overwhelmed(…)It is good quality, good variety. Erm, I think that is important as well. If they are just throwing rubbish at you, the worst of the worst of everything, then you, you sort of would be like OK, it is what it is. But it is not. It is sort of, gone the extra mile to provide a variety, and a decent product really. Erm, which is great.*

Ethan describes how he expected the foodbank to be rather militaristic, with clients identified as numbers rather than as people (a system perhaps more akin to government services; Stevenson et al., 2014). His assumptions were challenged by the unexpectedly high levels of friendliness he found amongst the volunteers and the fact he was given choice over the (high quality) food he wanted. By providing this choice in a friendly context, the foodbank volunteers have 'gone the extra mile' and actively humanised him: they emphasised that, in their eyes, he was a person with unique needs and preferences who deserves good quality food, rather than just a number on a voucher who gets what they are given. As discussed, this humanisation promotes positive interactions, reflected in Ethan's evaluation of the foodbank as 'absolutely amazing'. By listening to clients' opinions volunteers could promote a more successful transaction allowing clients to experience a sense of control (a situation known to promote positive helping transactions; Nadler & Fisher, 1986), thereby helping to dispel the dependency-oriented nature of food-aid (Nadler,

2002). Responding to clients' needs is also likely to promote a sense of friendliness/similarity, which itself fosters humanisation and empathy (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2011).

Sub-Theme 3: More Than Food

Numerous participants discussed the foodbank's social dimensions. Clients explained that the companionship and social support they received from volunteers (as well as from fellow clients in interactions facilitated by the welcoming atmosphere created by volunteers) played an important role in their lives, and was offered as an important reason for attending:

Extract 9.

Paul: *But it gets some people out of like, staying indoors all the time. You can meet people and talk to people. You might go back home, you don't feel so depressed and you think, oh well. Sometimes there might be someone in a worse position than you.*

Paul describes the mental health benefits he obtains from interacting with others. For him, the ability to connect with members of his community (and thereby gain a sense of perspective on his problems) is a key benefit of the foodbank. Other clients agreed, but talked about how social support may be more meaningful when received from others with whom one already shares a group membership:

Extract 10.

Albert: *But it is not just a case of coming here to collect your food. It is coming here to have a chat. Because I am alone you see. I go out early in the morning, I go out on my bike, I go walking. And I don't talk to people, full stop*.

Interviewer: *But you say it is nice to come here and cha*t?

Albert: *Yes*.

Interviewer: *Why is that*?

Albert: *It is like, it is like you have achieved something in your life. Instead of being in a room doing the same thing every day, day in, day out. When you come to somewhere like here you just unload or whatever. I mean, I, not so much that chap [male volunteer] who sat with me [during this foodbank visit], there is another lady [female volunteer] who works on a Friday. I have seen her twice. And she lives in [name of Albert's local community]. And she makes you feel, you want to be alive, you know what I mean. [crying*].

As with Paul, Albert describes how the foodbank provides a social context that facilitates relationships which make him 'want to be alive' (a phrase with particular poignancy due to his previous suicide attempts). However, he also notes that the most valuable social support he receives is from a volunteer who lives in his local community: someone with whom he shares a pre-existing group membership. This commonality appears to help reconceptualise the helping transaction from intergroup to intragroup, thereby moving away from potential Social Curse processes and paving the way for Social Cure processes observed in bonded groups (Cruwys et al. 2013; Jetten et al., 2012). This is in stark contrast to Stevenson et al. (2014), who argue that service providers should share a community identity with recipients, but shows they were unable to do so because of stigma.

It seems that this focus on companionship is possible due to the nature of the identity dynamics outlined in previous sub-themes. The lack of both judgement and perceived social distance between volunteer and client is likely to foster supportive contexts where relationships can be cultivated. Being receptive to companionship could also be seen as consistent with the 'legitimate recipient' identity: something explored later.

As mentioned, this supportive nature of volunteer-client relationships is consistent with the Social Cure perspective (e.g., Jetten et al., 2012) which argues that one of the key processes through which social groups impact on well-being is via the receipt of social support, and the knowledge that such support will be available during crisis (e.g., Haslam, Cruwys, Milne, Kan, & Haslam, 2016). Situations where participants describe perceptions of social distance between volunteers and clients as small may hold greater potential for supportive interactions.

Volunteers also recognise the importance of companionship, and the benefits it brings to clients. Moreover, they consider the provision of such companionship as central to their helper identity:

Extract 11.

John: *We don't want people just to come in and sit there. We want to welcome them in. We want to have a conversation with them, if they want to speak to us. If they don't, fair enough. But we also like to think that we are an outlet for people because, you know, I have heard some quite dramatic stories within my time, and what has happened to people. And since I've been doing it, it has opened my eyes considerably*.

For John, companionship is at the heart of the TT ethos. He actively encourages clients to offload the burden of their stories onto him and other volunteers who he sees as representing 'an outlet'. These disclosures have broadened his understanding of client circumstances, perhaps increasing his empathy towards them. There is thus a shared consensus between clients and volunteers about the important role that this social bonding plays in successful foodbank helping transactions: views that are consistent with the

transformative power ascribed to supportive group-based interactions within the Social Cure literature (e.g., Sani, Herrera, Wakefield, Boroch & Guylas, 2012)

Theme 1's analysis highlights ways in which clients' fear/reticence about help-seeking are transformed into positive transactions: a transformation that appears to relate to volunteers' behaviour. Volunteers' accounts of non-judgmental, equality-based, and humanised interactions appear linked with clients' sense that volunteers have a genuine desire to give help that is thoughtful, personalised, and effective, rather than simply to provide a generic hand-out. This seems due in part to the TT ethos and the volunteers' norms regarding helping, but volunteers also describe understanding clients' reticence, as well as their motivations for seeking help. These understandings, together with the awareness of a common fate and shared experience appear to contribute to clients' experiences of the impact of stigma consciousness. Moreover, volunteers talk of an increased sense of empathy that may contribute to reductions in the social distance between clients and volunteers. While such help-giving processes are likely to help prevent negative foodbank transaction outcomes, successful transactions also require the client to both make sense of and come to terms with their help-seeker identity. It is to this that we now turn.

Theme 2: The Legitimate Recipient

For those clients who successfully overcome the barriers and attend the foodbank, it may not just be the identity-related behaviour of the volunteers that have the potential to influence their experiences: their own sense of self (i.e., how they self-categorise), may also play a crucial role. There was consensus regarding characteristics that can be considered integral to a 'legitimate recipient' identity–an identity that allows their part in the helping interaction to also be considered 'genuine'. As we shall see, professing membership of this

category involves distancing oneself from certain 'anti-normative' traits (Sub-Theme 1) and aligning oneself with 'pro-normative' traits (Sub-Themes 2-3).

Sub-Theme 1: I'm Not a Scrounger

Clients and volunteers often made sharp distinctions between clients they considered to be 'scroungers' (those seeking help to enable a 'lazy lifestyle') and clients they considered to be legitimate. Clients distanced themselves from the Social Curse of the stigmatised 'scrounger' category, as seen in Jane's account of her reasons for needing foodbank assistance:

Extract 12.

Jane: *I've always worked, and I've, I've you know contributed as such to everything. You know, myself. And I've done, you know, sort of charitable things myself. But people, when they hit hardship. I don't know, because there is a fine line between erm, getting help because you need it, and then people thinking you are like a scrounger. You've got that stigma. So there is a fine line between that. If you genuinely know in your heart like me that I am not a scrounger, then you can pass that pride barrier, and know that you are just getting help. And there is no shame in getting help, you know. That is what they are there for.*

The stigmatised nature of the foodbank user identity troubles Jane. Driven to seek foodbank help because of being unable to work during medical treatment, she worries that her help-seeking might lead others to categorise her as a 'scrounger'. Her eventual overcoming of this psychological barrier was supported by her efforts to distance herself from the stigmatised scrounger identity and to embody a 'legitimate recipient' identity. This

explicit 'othering' of foodbank clients she considers undeserving (Garthwaite, 2016b) helps her to simplify what could be a complex and fraught help-seeking experience driven by Social Curse processes and transform it into 'just getting help' from a charity which exists for that very purpose.

Although the topic will be explored in more depth in the following sub-themes, Jane also overcomes her psychological barrier by recognising she possesses traits she considers prototypical of a legitimate recipient identity (e.g., continuous work despite illness), thereby conferring her membership of the group (Turner et al., 1987) and allowing her to 'pass the pride barrier'. This is also achieved through reflections on her contributions/charitable giving: activities inconsistent with the 'scrounger' identity.

Volunteers also express views about clients they perceive as more or less deserving. Consistent with clients' views, their perceptions regarding 'undeserving' individuals also tend to relate to the 'scrounger' identity:

Extract 13.

Robert*: But I think sometimes there is, when you get young women coming in here with babies, the chap [a client the volunteer considers 'undeserving'] is outside with a cigarette and a can of beer, you know sometimes. But you do get genuine people(…)One lady in here, she was crying(…)And we've got a young lad, coming in(…)He has hit a hard patch and there is nowhere to turn. We even had a soldier in here(…)And he come here, got no food. He hadn't eaten.*

Robert's categorisation strategy is clear: those who can afford cigarettes/alcohol are 'scroungers'. Like Jane, Robert has clear ideas about the prototypical traits of a 'legitimate

recipient': visible emotions due to the nature of their situation, and circumstances outside their control ('hit a hard patch'). Mothers, the young, and soldiers are also described as legitimate, by virtue of their membership of particularly 'vulnerable' or 'worthy' subordinate groups. Overall, such comments suggest consensus between clients and volunteers regarding the prototypical behaviour of a 'legitimate recipient', and how this distinguishes them from the 'scrounger' identity. Clients' attempts to reinforce their 'legitimate recipient' identity therefore appear justified: even within the context of TT's non-judgement ethos, clients volunteers categorise as distinct from scroungers are potentially further enabled to experience positive helping transactions.

There was divergence in volunteers' views, however. Some volunteers, such as Daniel, actively avoided categorising clients, and instead focussed on the trait he believes all clients share: a real need to which volunteers should respond:

Extract 14.

Daniel*: Well if you've got that mind-set that people in need are in need because of their own actions, you know, then it's OK you can just say that. Where, you know, it's, it's not true. You know, because people who are in need, it isn't always their own fault you know. And I mean sometimes they are, but even then, that really isn't a reason to turn them away because you know, they've obviously got needs and fairly complex needs sometimes that we can't give them [help for]. Or can't sort out for them but they can be pointed in the direction of people that can.*

For Daniel, dividing clients into subordinate groups is largely futile. Instead, he perceives all clients as people in need of help, and feels that labelling some as unworthy is

an excuse for not helping. Various volunteers considered the complexity of clients' needs, and, like Daniel, doing so helped them see beyond client categorisation, and instead perceive all clients simply as people in need of help. This helps to reduce the social distance between clients and volunteers: as Hannah discussed in Extract 4, clients and volunteers both experience hardships, and can experience a sense of commonality by reflecting on their mutual problems, encouraging empathically-motivated helping by fostering client humanisation (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2011), or even a shared sense of humanity.

Sub-Theme 2: Real Desperation

Clients often attempted to highlight the legitimacy of their help-seeking by conveying a sense of genuine need, thereby justifying their help requests. Consistent with the reticence to attend the foodbank explored in Theme 1 in the context of stigma consciousness, clients often described waiting until they were in dire circumstances before visiting:

Extract 15.

Paul: *Because they [Government] have cut my benefits, and they push you in a corner, you know what I mean. So prime example is this Bank Holiday [UK public holiday]. I should have been paid on Friday. They are not going to pay me till Tuesday. Prime example. Went to the cash point this morning, no money. Got back indoors. Sat down for an hour. What am I going to do? Then I thought, the foodbank. And I was fighting with it, and then I thought I've got no choice. I have to come to the foodbank.*

Paul describes his extreme situation which left him with no other options. By reinforcing the acute and genuine need that precedes their visits, many clients reinforce their 'legitimate recipient' identity. Existing research would suggest that Paul's claim that

his need is caused by temporary external misfortunes outside his control (rather than personal shortcomings) may have increased his likelihood of help-seeking (Nadler & Porat, 1978), and potentially afforded him in a higher-status position (Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2014). It also helps reinforce his membership of the 'legitimate recipient' category by suggesting that he possesses no negative personal traits that might make him 'underserving'. Even during his crisis, however, Paul explains that deciding to attend was not easy: he pondered the situation 'for an hour' before considering the foodbank, and even then he was 'fighting with it'. Recounting these mental struggles helps clients express their legitimate need by acknowledging the difficulties associated with seeking this stigmatising form of help.

Although unusual, some volunteers did reflect on clients' circumstances, and expected 'legitimate' clients to experience the dire levels of need described by most client participants. Having doubts about the severity of a client's circumstances potentially risks them being categorised as 'illegitimate':

Extract 16.

Martin: *Also, sometimes you, you get an inkling that people aren't always being particularly open and honest and truthful about their circumstances. And I find that frustrating as well. It is, I think in a situation you are going to find, erm, people that will seek to manipulate it for their own gain, rather than being genuine clients.*

Clients' desperate circumstances thus not only drive them to attend: they also help clients justify (to themselves and others) their position as being genuinely in need of

foodbank help, thereby separating them from those who may be perceived as having more choices available to them.

Sub-Theme 3: This Is Temporary

Finally, a number of clients reinforced their legitimacy by highlighting that their need for foodbank help is temporary, and that this assistance will eventually enable them to become self-sufficient:

Extract 17.

Edward*: At the end of the day, like I say, they are not judging, they are not making assumptions of you. They just see you've fell on hard times and giving you a little helping hand. Getting you over the hard times. Making the transition from the hard times to the smooth times a bit better, so you are not struggling or, like I say, going out and doing crime. So, it is nice, I am glad it is here.*

Edward attempts to simplify the potentially complex helping transaction by conceptualising the foodbank as 'a little helping hand' help during hard times. He thus implies that his state is not permanent, and caused by external influences. 'Transition' also implies agency: moving towards the 'smooth times' is something he will do for himself, albeit with foodbank assistance. This is consistent with the idea of autonomy-oriented helping, where the recipient uses what they have received to become more independent, thus needing less future help (Nadler, 2002). The 'legitimate recipient' identity is therefore an inherently temporary (and thus non-self-defining) identity: one should be seen to be taking active steps to eventually relinquish the identity and become self-sufficient. For

Edward, this temporariness allows him to frame the helping transaction in positive terms, describing it as 'nice', and feeling 'glad' of the foodbank's existence.

The importance of the temporary nature of foodbank use in claiming legitimacy is also expressed in clients' desire to give something back once they are back on their feet, acknowledging the culturally-engrained norm of reciprocity (Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercolani, 2003). Consistent with this, various participants attempted to highlight their legitimacy by voicing their desire to reciprocate:

Extract 18.

David: *I could even bring in a shop [groceries], or bring in the money for them to do it. I don't know. I will ask them when we are in that position, down the road(…)Because when I get back dated pay, for what they've [Government] stopped, get my debts cleared, I'm sure I will be able to do something. Maybe not as much as I've been given. It would just help to know that you've given a bit back when the situation improves. It is not going to stay like this.*

Equity theories of helping (e.g., Greenberg, 1980) posit that reciprocity norms have a major role to play in helping transactions: the perceived inequity caused by receiving help creates discomfort, which is alleviated through reciprocation – a process apparent in David's discussion.

Volunteers also valued this idea of transition/temporariness, with various interviewees discussing their enjoyment in seeing clients 'moving on' successfully after receiving assistance:

Extract 19.

Interviewer: You say that the [clients'] comments make you feel humbled. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

John: Yes, if I can go to one, one instance I use quite often is that erm, we had a lady come in, and she came in with, it must have been £100 worth of food.(…)Sat down with the young lady and said 'do you mind me asking, why us? How did you find us?'. And she said well, two years ago my husband became abusive, I had to leave him, had nowhere to go, had no food, and I came to the foodbank. And you helped me out with food. I just want to repay you. [begins to cry] You can hear in my voice now, I went home and burst into tears. The people here, that marvellous gesture. As you can see, I am one of those that, I take pride in my work and I am just pleased that I can do it.

By reciprocating, the woman reinforced her gratitude (another hallmark of a 'good' recipient; Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995), as well as her desire to 'repay' the kindness she had experienced. Such reciprocation helps reinforce her 'legitimate recipient' identity to volunteers, and enables the mutually satisfying transactional experiences described by equity theorists (e.g., Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983).

Other volunteers' diverged, however. Felicity explained when she felt help should be denied:

Extract 20.

Felicity*: … it's not a permanent crutch. It is something that, you can have three referrals of three days' worth of food, and then after that there needs to be some sort of move on from that. You know, you can't keep relying on the foodbank all the time.*

Felicity conceptualises foodbank help in strongly dependency-oriented terms (e.g., Nadler, 2002): rather than a tool to help clients' transition, she sees it as a 'crutch' that removes clients' need to grow and that volunteers must prevent clients becoming dependent upon. This conceptualisation of the helping transaction implicitly stigmatises clients by positioning them within a stereotypical 'scrounger' identity: as individuals who have no desire to alter their situation, and are happy to rely on the short-term solution of food parcels. While not voiced frequently, this view did feature in a number of interviews, and highlights how the potential success (or otherwise) of the helping transaction depends upon how it is perceived by its participants (Gergen & Gergen, 1983).

Theme 2 highlights client/volunteer consensus in terms of what constitutes a 'legitimate recipient' identity. Moreover, there is evidence of clients attempting to claim membership of this identity in two ways. First, by distancing themselves from traits considered prototypical of the highly-stigmatised 'scrounger' identity, thereby helping to prevent Social Curse processes (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2014) where membership of stigmatised groups impacts negatively on well-being and precludes group members from receiving support. Second, they achieve this by aligning themselves with traits considered prototypical of a 'legitimate recipient' identity (genuine need, belief that circumstances will change, desire to reciprocate). Clients able to claim membership of this identity are more likely to experience the helping transaction in positive terms: as 'just getting help' from a charity designed for that purpose. Furthermore, volunteers tended to feel more positive towards clients they deemed 'legitimate'; something that may also have the potential to enhance helping transaction perceptions.

Conclusions

We adopted a social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to explore UK foodbank use as a particular example of stigmatised helping transactions. In doing so, we aimed to investigate identity dynamics that promote positive food-aid experiences, thereby helping clients overcome the Social Curse of stigmatised identity. We deemed this study necessary due to stigma preventing uptake of UK food-aid (Purdam et al., 2016) in the context of increasing food poverty (Trussell Trust, 2018). This study is also vital from a theoretical perspective, as existing research has revealed how Social Curse dynamics can hinder successful transactions (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2014), but has not identified how this may be overcome. We were particularly concerned with exploring: a) the implications of status-related social identity dynamics integral to Nadler's (2002) IHSR model, and b) the role of Social Curse/Cure processes in hindering/facilitating foodbank transactions. Through offering this particular theoretical advancement, we sought to demonstrate the transferability and potential application of our findings to stigmatised helping transactions in multiple contexts.

We analysed accounts from clients and volunteers and identified two themes that allow us to shed light on these issues, thus providing, to our knowledge, the first social psychological analysis of foodbank interactions. We adopted a realist approach to facilitate investigation of participants' experiences from their own perspectives, thereby extending this work beyond recent survey-based sociological studies (e.g., Purdam et al., 2016).

Theme 1, 'Here to Help', concerned the way volunteers were perceived as providing what was defined as genuine help. Data suggested this was achieved in three ways: by allowing clients to feel they were not being judged; by allowing them to feel they were

treated as equals; and by the provision of more than food, which clients described as providing access to social relationships and multiple forms of support. For most volunteers this behaviour was stated as being born out of empathy, group boundary permeability, and common fate that paved the way for potential identification with the clients. These humanising experiences were at odds with the stigma consciousness that can lead clients into extreme food poverty. According to both sets of interviewees, this specific nature of the help-giving appeared to prevent the stigma- and power-laden transactions that clients often expect, and which can prevent help-seeking in foodbanks (Purdam et al., 2016) and elsewhere (Halabi & Nadler, 2017). Theme 2, 'The Legitimate Recipient', evidenced the role of self-categorisation processes in facilitating helping and allowing clients to express their identity as a legitimate client distinct from stereotyped 'scrounging' foodbank users. Clients and volunteers alike recognised this distinction as essential. Clients argued for their legitimacy by describing their desperate food poverty, its external causes, and its temporary nature and these features were also reflected in volunteers' accounts.

These themes evidence the essential role of identity in promoting successful foodbank transactions, both in terms of the volunteers' genuine helper identity and the clients' legitimate recipient identity. By defining the helping transaction in terms of legitimate need and a genuine desire to help, clients can overcome the Social Curse of stigma observed in existing studies of community-based service provision (e.g., Stevenson et al., 2014). Moreover, the behaviours associated with these social identities facilitated interactions that were humanising, and characterised by reductions in social distance and a relaxation of the sharp status differentials proposed by the IHSR model (Nadler, 2002). Our

work thus speaks to Stevenson et al.'s (2014) call for researchers to explore how to promote harmonious helping transaction experiences through identity factors.

Relatedly, our work suggests that these processes of humanisation and reduced social distance may pave the way for Social Cure processes, especially when combined with a sense of shared community identity (facilitated by the placement of foodbanks within local communities). The discussions of shared experience, perceived similarity, potential common fate, and received social support we observed in the interviews are well-established health/well-being antecedents within Social Cure literature (Jetten et al., 2012). Indeed, volunteers and clients recognised the bonded social relationships that can co-occur within foodbanks, as well as the mutual benefits such relationships promote.

Ultimately, our work sheds light on the complex social identity processes occurring within foodbanks, as well as providing evidence of the role of particular helper and recipient identities in facilitating positive transactions, and how Social Curse processes can be circumvented through the navigation of self-categorisation away from a stigmatised version of a particular social category towards a non-stigmatised one. By drawing upon insights from social psychological theories of helping behaviour to extend the existing Social Curse literature (e.g., Kellezi & Reicher, 2012), our analysis also reveals how Social Cure processes (Jetten et al., 2012) might be facilitated.

While the foodbank transaction is but one of the many types of helping transaction, our conclusions could be applied to all intergroup helping transactions played out within a stigmatised context. This may include governments providing services for their own communities (Stevenson et al., 2014), but could also include international aid-giving. Anthropological research has explored how recipient communities may attempt to cope

with the stigma inherent in such transactions by responding to donations in ways that are seen as ungrateful by donor countries, leading to conflict (Carr, MacLachlan, & McAuliffe, 2005). Our work suggests that such conflict may be reduced by thinking more carefully about the identity dynamics inherent in such transactions, and how to use them in sensitive/humanising ways.

Limitations & Future Directions

Our work is not without limitations. Most notably, we did not interview people who chose not to seek food-aid. However, various clients did discuss the factors that stopped them seeking help, as well as how bad their situation became before they eventually did. This informs us of the nature of the barriers to foodbank attendance. Nonetheless, future work should explore the accounts of those who receive a voucher but never enter a foodbank. Interviewing those who distribute vouchers (e.g., doctors) may provide insight into these barriers (e.g., the impact of stigma consciousness on people's willingness to accept the judgement that they need to use a foodbank), because these professionals are directly involved in that judgement and interaction. Moreover, both foodbanks were in the same English county: it would be beneficial to explore foodbanks within other areas/countries to get a sense of whether these accounts are typical of other regions and countries. Additionally, our sample may be influenced by whom the interviewer was able to approach, and which individuals chose to participate. It may be that those with positive experiences of the foodbank or weaker stigma consciousness were more willing to talk, thus impacting on the nature of the accounts given. However, we obtained a demographically diverse sample, and participants voiced positive and negative opinions.

A final avenue for research involves identifying the specific features of helping transaction contexts that allow intergroup helping transactions to become intragroup (facilitating Social Cure processes), and when the context precludes such shifts in identity dynamics, thereby potentially promoting processes inherent in the IHSR model. This may include situations where helpers and recipients are affiliated with structurally different social status groups, different communities/sectors, or have a history of conflictual relations. While it is possible to invoke a sense of shared humanity in any interaction (which may facilitate such dynamics), this is more likely in some contexts than in others.

Implications & Conclusion

Although these findings offer distinct theoretical contributions, they also provide valuable observations regarding food-aid provision. Our evidence suggests that foodbanks should continue to value their non-judgemental and supportive ethos and provide help in-line with that ethos. Food-aid delivered in a manner that allows for enhanced empathy and mutual understanding appears to be associated with more positive client experiences and may reduce the stigma consciousness that inhibits foodbank use. Moreover, delivering food-aid in a way that enables clients/volunteers to draw upon shared experiences and social groupings (e.g., fellow community members or similar life experiences) is especially valuable, and should be fostered. There is also a need to explore and improve how society interprets what foodbanks provide to clients, and to increase societal understandings of foodbanks' roles and functions. It is common to hear the UK media praise foodbanks for providing much-needed food-aid, yet simultaneously condemn society's need for them, and, by extension, criticism of the Government for not providing adequate services (e.g., Garthwaite, 2016a; Lang, 2015). While it is undeniable that UK austerity measures are at the

root of rapidly-rising foodbank use (Trussell Trust, 2018), this perspective risks neglecting the myriad ways in which foodbanks help their clients, many of which go far beyond emergency food parcels. For instance, the companionship volunteers provide (bolstered by the organisation's ethos of non-judgement) helps isolated clients experience much-needed social contact. Even when the food-provision aspect of the helping transaction is explored, it seems that clients are treated as unique individuals with specific needs and wants and that recognising this benefits the client.

Ultimately, while the burgeoning need for UK foodbanks is putting immense pressure on charitable/community organisations, it would be incorrect to think that a governmental agency could simply begin to militaristically hand out food parcels to those in need and expect clients to experience the transaction in the same way as they experience foodbank visits. This is because foodbanks like those run by the Trussell Trust offer much more than this: they provide a space where people experiencing extreme life events can feel listened to, understood, empathised with, and ultimately humanised. These processes take the foodbank helping transaction far beyond the provision of food, and elevate it to a more socially meaningful level. While it would be incorrect to assume that all foodbank transactions are uncomplicated (we have shown they are not), this paper highlights the important social identity processes taking place in foodbanks, and how these can help to improve the lives of the most vulnerable within our society.

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Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Relationship Status	Dependants
Clients					
Michael	64	Male	White British	Divorced/Separated	None
David	61	Male	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	1 child
Paul	54	Male	Black British	Divorced/Separated	None
Mary	Unknown	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	1 child, 2 grandchildren
Henry	53	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Lisa	49	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Jane	54	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Jack	42	Male	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	Partner, 5 children
Ethan	35	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Ian	34	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	1 child
Samantha	49	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	Ex-partner, 3 children
Eleanor	41	Female	Black Caribbean	Single/Never Married	None
Alexander	52	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Florence	43	Female	Romany	Divorced/Separated	None
Albert	60	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Rachel	62	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Edward	36	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	1 child
Zoe	29	Female	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	Partner, 3 children
Volunteers					
Felicity	57	Female	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Thomas	20	Male	White Caribbean	Single/Never Married	None
Sarah	68	Female	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Ruth	77	Female	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Hannah	79	Female	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Daniel	69	Male	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	Partner
George	63	Male	White British	Divorced/Separated	None
Lily	60	Female	White British	Single/Never Married	None
Ben	65	Male	White British	Single/Never Married	None
John	67	Male	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Robert	76	Male	White English	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	None
Martin	41	Male	White British	Married/Co-Habiting/Civil Partnership	1 child

Table 2.
Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
1.Here to Help	1.An Unexpected Lack of Judgement 2.Being Viewed as an Equal 3. More Than Food
2.The Legitimate Recipient	1.I'm Not a Scrounger 2.Real Desperation 3.This Is Temporary