The Educational Experiences of Children in Care

A qualitative study of stories recalled across five decades of local authority care experiences.

Submitted by Karen Kenny to the University of Exeter

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ……..

Abstract

This project aimed to explore the educational experiences of 'looked after children' in one local authority in England. Young people, in the care of the state, have consistently lower educational achievements than their peers who live with their birth families. This situation is not unique to the UK context; it is replicated across Europe and North America. Aiming for an ethnographic study, the project generated much needed qualitative data in order to consider the educational experiences of children in care in Devon. To date much research in this area has focussed on statistical analysis of measured outcomes, and contributory factors which show a bleak picture of underachievement and poor adult outcomes. The design allowed for a more rounded picture of the full educational experience, not just in terms of achievement, but a view of wider educational experiences, giving an in-depth insight into the value that a looked after child places on 'education' in its widest sense. The results of this study add to the small body of research in this area which takes a more sociological view.

The researcher worked with young people and older alumni of care, with participants' ages ranging across five decades: 11 to 59, allowing an element of temporality to be considered in a relatively short term project. Experiences were gathered by means of qualitative interviews, focussed on the present with the young people, and using a life history lens when working with adults. The findings were analysed in such a way as to identify educational themes across generations, for those young people who are in the care of the local authority.

The study found that for young people in local authority care education is perceived as occurring across their life experiences, a much wider definition than that which happens within formal ‘school’ environments. This broader view of education encompassed life skills, social skills, sporting skills and digital skills. Participants storied themselves as achievers within this wider view of education. The study showed that young people in care could be reflexive in their learning, they storied themselves as agentic, and exhibited a habitus which helped them to learn who they were, and to recognise their achievements.

The study adds to current understanding about the way children in care learn. A visual model of ‘Conditions for Learning’ has been developed, based around the three theoretical constructs: reflexivity, agency, and habitus. This model has the potential to be applied to larger groups and other young people, to explore the conditions which support their learning. These findings provide important insights which could inform decision-making within both the care and education professions.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

As a foster carer, I work with young people aged 16 and older. Foster placements can be of any duration, from one night, to several years. Young people in the care system come into care for a wide variety of reasons, and with a multitude of individual life experiences, and differing abilities.

The idea for this study emerged from a maths revision class, conducted with one of the young people whom I fostered. This was not the first supplementary maths class I had given, and it certainly was not the last. Without exception, the young people who I have fostered have struggled with some element of their school work. Often this has been mathematics, although this is not the only stumbling block for youth in care. At the time of writing, in the UK there was a benchmark applied to young people, stipulating a minimum requirement of grade C in GCSE English and Mathematics. This benchmark has altered with the implementation of a new grading system in 2017, so future young people will be required to achieve a grade 4 or above (Ofqual, 2017). Failure to achieve these grades rules out many future paths, vocational as well as academic. Many employers also require this minimum level of qualification before offering any type of employment (CA4P, 2014). Government funding requires that each student who does not hold this level in Maths and English, must continue to study these subjects (Education Funding Agency & Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2014); for the young person, this means they must continue to attempt these qualifications, with each academic year putting them further behind their peers, or excluding them from employment.

It seemed to me that this inevitability should be questioned. I had planned to carry out my research in a different area of education, but here was a real issue, literally on my doorstep. The inequity of this situation struck me forcibly. These young people have already experienced upset in their lives, both in the set of circumstances that preceded their removal from the family home, and in the disruption occasioned by this removal. It should be the case that they are then supported by professionals to ensure that these early experiences can be overcome; their future should be secured. The 'corporate parent', which is the local authority, has access to experts in their fields in key developmental areas. I believe that it should be the case that a child in the care of the local authority has an equal, if not greater, chance of educational success than their peers, when the attention of so many experts is focussed upon them. I wanted to ask the young people themselves what was happening, it struck me that there is little to be learned from asking the professionals. They are doing their job, in most instances to the best of their ability; they are not letting young people down knowingly. With this intention in mind, I planned this project, to foreground the voices of children in care and to learn, from them, what their educational experiences were.

1.1 Project description

This project aimed to explore the educational experiences of 'looked after children' in one local authority in England. Young people, in the care of the state, have consistently lower educational achievements than their peers who live with their birth families (DfE, 2017). This situation is not unique to the UK context; it is replicated across Europe and North America (Johansson & Höjer, 2012; Pecora, 2012).

The interpretative design generated much needed qualitative data in order to shine a light on the educational experiences of children in care in Devon. To date much research in this area had focussed on statistical analysis of measured outcomes, and contributory factors which showed a bleak picture of underachievement and poor adult outcomes. This design allowed for a more rounded picture of the full educational experience, not just in terms of formal academic achievement, but a view of wider experiences, aiming to give an in-depth insight into the value that a looked after child places on education.

The project worked with young people in compulsory education, as well as older alumni of care. Their experiences were gathered by means of qualitative interviews. The findings were analysed in such a way as to produce a narrative description of the educational experience which spanned five decades, for young people who were in the care of the local authority. These findings have the potential to provide important insights which could inform decision-making within both the care and education professions.

1.2 The background of the project

The fact that children in care gain fewer qualifications than their peers who are not in care is not news; the statistical data is produced by the UK government, and published by the Office of National Statistics. The education of children in care is a current research priority of the Department for Education (DfE, 2014a), however, their focus is on quantitative findings. This is, perhaps, understandable: quantitative findings lend themselves to governmental policy initiatives, illustrated with graphical representations of ‘what works’, however, as I intend to illustrate below, they are unlikely to give an insight into the lived experience. Where

government mentions the ‘voice of the child’ it is immediately followed up by statistics concerning the number of children asked, and the different demographic groups the children come from – without any mention of what they said. The voice has been heard, but perhaps the words not listened to.

Local government is aware that there is a problem with the education of children in their care, and have established a ‘virtual school’ aiming to help to close the attainment and progress gap between children in care and their peers (Devon County Council, n.d.). Children in care are identified as a part of the population of vulnerable children, alongside those with special educational needs (SEN) and those with adverse family or economic backgrounds. In Devon the ‘Championing All Our Children’ initiative (Lowes, 2014) aimed to improve the outcomes for all vulnerable children in the county. It is concerning though, that these children were taken together as a whole population – all of the vulnerable together – rather than being studied as distinct groups in need of different levels of support.

My early reading confirmed my initial thoughts to a large extent. There are young people in care who achieve well at school, but they are in the minority. The overwhelming majority of young people, in the care of the state, do not achieve, academically, as well as their peers (DfE, 2017). The situation seemed to be mirrored internationally, with papers being written in the US (Pecora, 2012), Australia (Cashmore, Paxman, & Townsend, 2007), Europe (Johansson & Höjer, 2012), and Canada (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012) as well as in the all of the UK constituent nations (Cameron, Connelly, & Jackson, 2015; Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2008; Mannay et al., 2017). This is not to say that the area is heavily researched, it is not. I will show below the paucity of research endeavour;

however there are common themes in the methodologies of the research conducted to date.

In much of the work carried out in the USA, a quantitative approach has been taken, with statistical analyses utilised to try to identify correlation and causality. This is understandable, given the US Department of Education's underlying belief that 'Scientifically Based Research' should be the basis of educational research (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This paradigm position was reinforced by the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB), essentially focussing research design towards the positivist end of the paradigm spectrum.

Methods, too, are somewhat limited, with a strong preference for the tried and tested semi-structured interview and questionnaire (Bryman, 2006), which produce data well suited to quantitative analysis, but with little room for qualitative consideration. The voice of the young person is constrained within the questioning framework of the researcher.

1.3 Existing research overview

When a child can no longer be looked after by his or her birth parents, it is necessary for them to be cared for by someone else. In an ideal world, a close family member, or friend would be appointed guardian, and the child's upbringing would continue in as supportive a way as possible. Unfortunately however, it is often the case that when a child must be removed from the care of parents, the responsibility for his or her upbringing is taken by the state. There are many names for young people who are in the care of the state, but they are commonly referred to as 'looked after children' (LAC) (NSPCC, 2014). This is an odd

identifier, suggesting that other children are not ‘looked after’, when in fact the majority of children who are taken into care have not been ‘looked after’ very well at all. Research shows that these children have often experienced traumatic life events. Nationally, in 2013 the majority of LAC, 62%, of those who entered the care system, came to be in care because of abuse or neglect (NSPCC, 2014). Children in care can be categorised into those who are in foster care, which amounts to roughly 75% of the total; those in residential special schools; those who are placed for adoption; and those in children’s homes.

The act of taking children and young people into care is done with the best of intentions. Government legislation has been drafted to try to ensure the best possible outcomes for those young people for whom the state has assumed responsibility. This level of attention ought to ensure a better outcome for a child in care; however, the reverse is often true. Children and young people who are brought into the care system typically have poorer educational outcomes than those children who are brought up with their birth family (DfE, 2017).

This project aimed to explore the educational experiences of looked after children in one local authority in England. This research was carried out in Devon, where all children’s homes have been closed by the local authority (Carpenter, 2014), as the County Council believe that children fare better in a family environment, either biological family or foster family, therefore they intend to focus their financial resources on improvements to the fostering service (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

As a foster carer, I am faced, on a daily basis, with a requirement to support the education of the young people in my charge. I am a teacher, so this is a relatively straightforward task for me; however, that is not the case for all carers. In support

groups, and carer training, it became increasingly apparent that most carers were aware that education was a major issue for their charges, however many of these carers do not have the ability to help the young people in their care, but there is an expectation that they will be able to support their foster children in a way that many birth parents would not be able to achieve, foster carers are expected to be 'super-parents. The measured educational outcomes of children in care in England are considerably lower than their peers who are not in care.

1.4 Tensions between educational and economic perspectives

One can take the view that education has the potential to improve the overall life of an individual. The fact that these young people, having already experienced some level of trauma, are then not always able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by a good education is an indication of a failing in the education system. Whether we are considering the informal education which has always occurred, parents and elders teaching children to take their place in society; vocational education, whereby a child learns the skills necessary to earn their living; or, an academic education, designed to expand the mind, and facilitate greater depth of knowledge and understanding, education is an important part of the life experience. Since 600 AD (Gillard, 2011) schools have been set up in order to guide young minds towards professions, with the earliest church schools teaching the skills necessary to join the clergy. This early education was focussed on preparation for a productive adulthood. The state system of education developed in a rather slow fashion, and has been shaped by differentiation, with two types of school: church schools to train the priesthood, and schools for the sons of the gentry (Gillard, 2011). The industrial revolution highlighted a need for a better educated workforce, which spurred the state into

providing for a universal education system (Clayre, 1977). In Victorian England, the children of the working classes were sometimes exempted from attendance at school, this practice being addressed in the Acland Report in 1909 (Gillard, 2011). There was an economic imperative for children to earn an income to contribute towards family upkeep. Children on the margins were always at risk of slipping away.

In the 21st century the state funded compulsory education system in England is being continuously reformed, in order to “allow every child the chance to take their full and equal share in citizenship, shaping their own destiny, and becoming masters of their own fate” (DfE, 2010 :6). These are laudable aims, but the same white paper confirms the gap between achievers and non-achievers, but relates this gap solely to wealth/poverty. It seems that receipt of free school meals is the headline reason for lower achievement in formal education, and there is no means to assess educational achievement outside these formal measures.

It is, of course, not guaranteed that good formal qualifications will lead to a positive life experience. In 2016-17, 10% of those young people, aged between 16 and 24, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are educated to GCSE or above (Powell, 2017). Their academic achievement has not resulted in an early step onto the career ladder.

An economist may take a more cynical, less humane viewpoint: investment requires a return. A government economist perspective may focus on investing in education with a view to improve the skills base of the country, in order to facilitate economic growth, but children in care are not producing the required return. Legislation over the past 30 years has been put in place to try to improve

the outcomes for children in care, but the same key issue seems to recur: poorer measured outcomes for looked after children (Finnie, 2012). As mentioned above, it is now becoming impossible to progress in life without the benchmark C grades in English and Mathematics.

This is by no means an issue which is limited to the United Kingdom. Studies across Europe and North America show similar situations (Johansson & Höjer, 2012; Pecora, 2012). Increased tuition fees in the UK has encouraged UK universities to invest increasing sums of money, £141million in 2012-13 (Cheung, Lwin, & Jenkins, 2012), to try to assist disadvantaged young people into Higher Education. However, while many children in care are leaving school with few, or no, recognised qualifications, there is a substantial group of disadvantaged young people, for whom university entry qualifications seem to be unattainable. It is estimated (Hibbert, 2006) that as few as 1% of care leavers progress to higher education, compared to approximately 37% of all young people. The return on investment is poor indeed.

This economic perspective can of course be applied to all young people, but if we retain a focus on educational outcomes amongst children in care, there is a risk of overlooking entirely their social and psychological needs. The next section will discuss the quantitative research which supports this narrow focus.

1.5 Quantitative analysis

Statistical data shows that the educational outcomes of LAC are lower than those of young people not in care (DfE, 2017; NSPCC, 2014). The wealth of quantitative data available on accessible databases encourages scientific study

of these measured outcomes. Research has been conducted, internationally, into the education of LAC. It is largely retrospective and focusses on quantitative analysis, identifying causal relationships between adverse experiences and educational outcomes. Currently in the UK the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education is conducting a project which examines relationships between statistical databases in order to identify factors which influence educational progress (O'Higgins, 2014). The study will be complemented by a series of interviews, however the main focus is on the scientific identification of causal relationships between collected data sets. In other research at the centre O'Higgins conducted a systematic review of international literature (O'Higgins, Sebba, & Luke, 2015), in order to form hypotheses for further testing. Each of these studies focussed on that which is lacking, the education which is not achieved.

International studies show that this phenomenon is not restricted to the UK context, the same issues are apparent in France, Canada and the USA (Dumaret, Coppel-Batsch, & Couraud, 1997; Harris, Jackson, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2009; Legault, Anawati, & Flynn, 2006; Pecora et al., 2006). While not all LAC fare badly, in Devon, in 2016, only 13% of LAC achieved A*-C in their English and Maths GCSEs, this compares with a national figure of 59% of non-looked after children (DfE, 2017). We do not know why some LAC are able to surmount their troubled home life and do well in high school, but it is certainly the case that a small percentage of LAC exhibit a resilience which allows then to focus on their educational objectives. Research priorities for the current government (DfE, 2014a) include exploration of the factors that affect educational attainment, and evidence of specific interventions which have proven to be effective in improving

attainment. What remains to be explored then, is what the children think about their education. What is the lived experience of education for a child in care, in the English education system?

1.6 A qualitative approach

Much research in this field has been quantitative in nature, around external assessments founded, for example, on data concerning educational outcomes. The aim of this project is to investigate the experiences of children in care, in their own words. By adopting a qualitative approach, exploring how children in care experience the education system, how they might achieve differently, how they feel about these achievements, this study showed how children in care narrated their educational experiences.

Young people in care are subjected to a vast array of questionnaires and interviews during their school life. These can seem to be little more than 'box ticking' exercises, gathering little information which would be useful in improving the lot of the child. This project aimed to allow the participants to explain the elements of their education which they construed as important.

In England most young people in the UK sit GCSE's at the end of year 11, when they are 15 or 16 years old. There is nothing subjective about their outcomes; they are baldly presented from the highest possible grade, through to 'U'. A 'U' grade signifies that there was nothing worthy of merit in the student's paper. The system of grading changed in 2017, with numerical grades 9-1 replacing the previous A* to G (Ofqual, 2017). Based on these measurements, young people in care in England do not fare well in school. These measured outcomes show that

there is a substantial attainment gap (DfE, 2017) between a 'looked after child' defined as being a child who has been in the care of the local authority for at least 12 months, and a non-looked after child. (Figure 1).

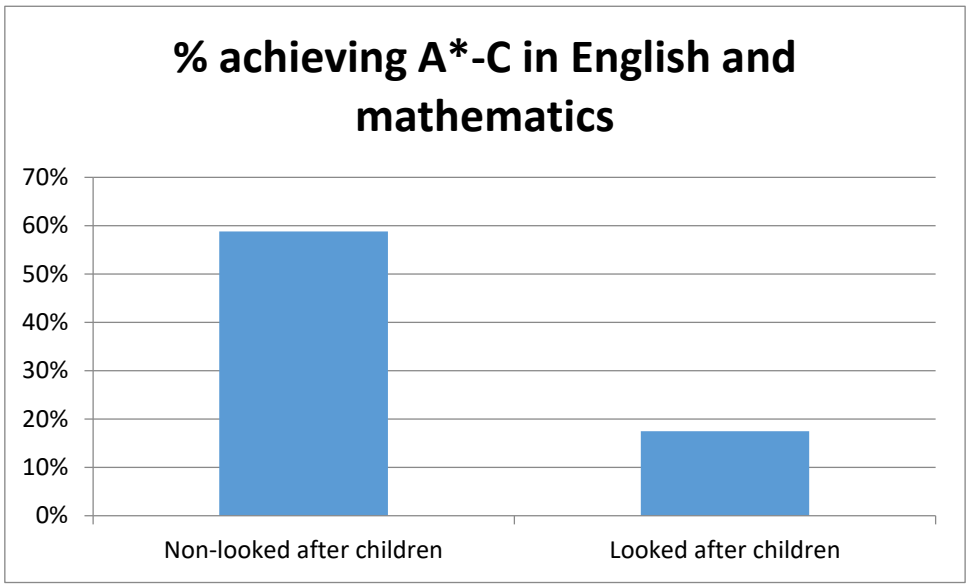


Figure 1 Comparison at Key stage 4. Source (DfE, 2017)

These statistics present a bleak picture of performance. It could be said that the data provided by statistical analysis paves the way for a more in-depth analysis of the social reality behind the numbers (Biesta, 2007). Our standard qualification framework has been constructed to measure that which successive governments have deemed worthy of measure. This does not negate other educational attainments, but relegates them. There is no attempt made to measure a young person's ability to deal with traumatic life events; to negotiate problematic family dynamics; to interact in formal settings, or to carry on with day to day events in spite of devastating change. Each young person has a very different life experience, which affects their educational experience; Dewey talks of the 'experiential continuum' (Dewey, 1948) placing great importance on the external conditions impacting on education. It is difficult to measure, or graph these

experiences in any scientific way, but they are undoubtedly a part of education for each child. This research attempted to illuminate the more subjective element of the educational life of young people in care. This life is that which Dewey (1916 :2) describes as:

> *(A)n account of social antecedents; a description of early surroundings, of the conditions and occupation of the family; of the chief episodes in the development of character; of signal struggles and achievements; of the individual's hopes, tastes, joys and sufferings.*

The authorities do attempt to discover more about children who are in the care system. Young people in care in the United Kingdom are interviewed and questioned by professionals on a regular basis. The Children Act 2004 has tried to ensure that various agencies communicate in order to prevent tragic outcomes, such as the abuse and death of Victoria Climbié (Jackson, 1988; Jackson & McParlin, 2006). Due to its provisions multi-agency meetings take place as a matter of law. Young people attend regular meetings, where their views are sought on many aspects of their lives in care. The process is managed by means of checklists, diarised meetings and standing agendas.

These procedures are in place in order to try to ensure the best possible outcomes for the young people involved, but nevertheless there is a real risk that the young person is overwhelmed by the process. As a foster carer, I have attended a meeting where the young person was surrounded by two foster carers, his birth mother, his step father, his social worker, a community care worker, a representative of the police, a representative from a training agency, a

representative from school and a representative from a ‘restorative justice’ group. It would be a rare young person who was able to truly express themselves in such a situation, but their reports of their own experiences are a vital piece of the jigsaw of their lives. This meeting is an example of a regular review to which all LAC are ‘invited’. In an attempt to provide a holistic view of the life of the child, what is in fact produced is a narrow picture, defined by lists, and focussing on what is missing, rather than celebrating what has been achieved. This project was designed with a view to exploring the experiences of children in care, in their own words. As a teacher my main interest was in their educational experiences, aiming to uncover the human story behind the government statistics detailed above.

Changes in legislation and thus policy in the past forty years have undoubtedly impacted on the way the ‘care experience’ is managed, however identifying and documenting these changes was not the purpose of this project. Instead I aimed to identify themes in the stories of the participants, in order to shed light on their experiences, as storied by themselves.

1.7 Thesis structure

This introduction has contextualised the research project, and shown how this project connects to my roles as a foster carer and a teacher. In chapter 2 the literature review begins by considering the literature around the substantive topic: the education of children in care, and goes on to examine the key theories which framed the analysis of interview data. It also sets out the research questions. Chapter three addresses the methodological process involved including the

epistemological perspective, participant selection, data collection, quality concerns, analysis and interpretation, and concludes with ethical considerations. The following three chapters contain the findings and discussion, each addressing one area of the theoretical frame: reflexivity, agency and habitus. Chapter seven draws together the findings, and presents conclusions, as well as considering limitations of the project, and making recommendations for future research and policy.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The education of children in care is an issue which has periodically hit the headlines in the UK, typically drawing on statistical data which highlights the low academic attainment of the majority of care leavers (e.g. Northern, 2011; Pigott, 2015). This review of the literature will commence with consideration of the definition of a 'child in care'. The act of taking children into the care of the state is an assertion that the state and its representatives can raise this child 'better' than the birth parents.

Having considered the nature of care, and the state's part in this process, this chapter will consider research carried out to date on the education of children in care. This research falls into four main areas, which will each be addressed in turn. Firstly, the educational attainment of children in care, it will be suggested that this literature has a rather narrow focus on the grades achieved by young people in the care system around the world. This will be followed by consideration of research where interventions have been conducted, in order to try to improve the attainment of these young people. Next the chapter will consider the wider policy context and the legislation which has been introduced in order to address issues relating to the education of children in care. There have been some important sociological studies carried out which aimed to explore the experiences of children in care, including their educational experiences, and they are considered, before finally the chapter addresses literature which relates to the

educational outcomes for looked after children, including reasons identified for 'poor' outcomes, as well as factors supporting improved outcomes.

As will be shown below, the literature surrounding the education of children in care is focussed on education in a school context. This study contributes to knowledge by considering a wider view of education, drawn from the testimony of children in care and alumni of care, it considered what they believed 'education' to be. With this in mind the sociological literature is also reviewed, considering as it does the ordinary lives of children in care, which includes, but is not limited to, their formal education.

In the second part of this review the theoretical framework is outlined, initially considering concepts of resilience with a particular focus on educational resilience, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

The next section begins with a consideration of what is meant by a 'child in care' in Western society at the beginning of the 21st century.

2.2 What is a child in care?

In modern Western society, it is often assumed that it is the norm for children to be raised by one or both of their natural parents, often they are supported by grandparents. Glaser et al. (2013) suggests that in Britain 63% of children receive regular care from their grandparents, but the birth parents retain overall responsibility and accountability for the upbringing of their children. This responsibility is codified in the law of the land. Under the Children Act 1989 all mothers, and fathers who are either married to the mother, or have their names registered on the child's birth certificate, have 'parental responsibility' for their

children. This means that the ‘natural’ parent retains responsibility for decision making about the child, including decisions about welfare and education.

Sometimes circumstances occur which necessitate the removal of a child from their parents, and sometimes the parents ask for the removal of a child. If a child is removed from their natural parents to be raised by others, it is said that the child is ‘in care’. When a child or young person is removed from the care of their ‘birth parents it can happen for a myriad of reasons, although by far the most common reason recorded is abuse or neglect (DfE, 2014b). In 2016 0.6% of all children in England were considered to be ‘looked after’ (King, 2016), this equates to 69,530 young people.

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is legally defined as ‘looked after’ by a local authority if he or she:

- is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours
- is subject to a care order; or
- is subject to a placement order.

If a child or young person is ‘looked after’, then the local authority has a duty to promote the welfare of the child. While the law has recognised that the natural parents’ ‘parental responsibility’ included responsibility for education since 1989, it was not until 2004 that the same duty of care was applied to local authorities. The educational aspects of welfare were not specifically legislated for until the Children Act 2004.

The term ‘looked after child’ has been criticised by some, as its acronym, LAC, suggests a deficiency, or lack of something in the young people (Holland, 2016). This is a legal definition, and as such is the term used to identify these children and young people in official reports. During this study however, I prefer to use the term ‘children in care’, and will only refer to ‘looked after’ children when referring to official reports and statistics.

The arrangements made for the provision of ‘care’ to children and young people of necessity leads us to rethink the ‘norms’ around educational relations and educational provision, as well as the conventional framework in which there is a clear compartmentalisation of roles between school and home. This might lead us to more fluid and flexible definitions of caregiver and educator. When a child enters the ‘care’ environment there are numerous professionals involved in devising a ‘pathway plan’, each has their own area of expertise, and specific duties to carry out. It could be said that many aspects of state intervention in the raising of a child bears close resemblance to the communal childrearing of the past, where a community took responsibility for the upbringing of the children (Cosgel, 2000). Cameron et al. (2015) identified a report on children’s homes in 1993 which introduced the term ‘corporate parent’ to emphasise the extent of the duty of local authorities to act in the best interests of the children and young people in their care. Essentially the departments and employees of the local authority assume responsibility for the young person communally.

2.2.1 Community childrearing

The practice of taking children into care, to provide ‘corporate parenting’ has links to the, now largely historical, practice of communal, or community childrearing.

Shaker communities (Cosgel, 2000), Kibbutzim (Snarey, 1984), and Inuit tribes in North America (Tagalik, 2011) have historically entrusted the rearing of the next generation to the community rather than relying solely on the birth parents.

In communal childrearing communities the responsibility for future generations is often deemed too important to rest solely with the natural parents, the whole village or tribe is regarded as responsible (Imoh, 2012). Children, seen as gifts from god, (Imoh, 2012) are to be shared. The joint responsibility is viewed as a privilege, not a burden. The overused quotation 'it takes a village to raise a child' can be found in many African languages (Healey, 1998), but it does clearly reflect this view. In the Ga tribe in Ghana, for example, it is deemed that birth parents may be too attached to the child to properly mete out discipline, so children should be fostered in the community. Care was taken to protect the welfare of the child, if polygamy was practised, it may be that the mother believed her child to be safer if they lived far away from co-wives (Imoh, 2012). In other instances a carefully considered process was followed, to try to ensure the welfare of the child, whereby a girl would be fostered to the father's sister, and boys to the mother's brother (Imoh, 2012). Education was at the core of the arrangement in these communities, with children being taught both skills for living and essential social skills by the greater community as a whole (Cosgel, 2000; Healey, 1998; Imoh, 2012; Snarey, 1984; Tagalik, 2011).

Shaker communities established their childrearing practices on an ideological basis, stemming from the religious beliefs of their founder, Ann Lee (Cosgel, 2000). Natural family ties were cut, girls and boys separated, and all children were reared communally, with the entire community being responsible for

educating them. Children lived in separate homes from their birth parents, much like the children's homes where young people in care live in the UK today, where children and young people live together, separate from their families, with a team of local authority employees responsible for their day to day care. They were expected to view all adults in the community as authority figures to be respected

The Israeli Kibbutzim system also promoted communal childrearing, grounded in a religious and ideological backdrop. Children were often removed from the care of their birth parents, to be raised in communal quarters, cared for by designated caregivers known as 'metapelet' (Dror, 2004; Scharf, 2001). From the 1920's the theory of communal education was discussed and formulated within the Kibbutzim communities. The educational system which was developed was progressive and informed by the work of, among others, John Dewey (1948). Over the decades since the 1920's the practice of communal living for children has diminished, with most children now living with their natural parents, but progressive educational systems remain (Dror, 2004).

The commonality between these communal arrangements was the over-arching belief that theirs was a 'better' way to rear children, not the exception when things had begun to go wrong. Scharf's quasi experimental study (Scharf, 2001) suggested that some children reared communally on the kibbutz, although not all, experienced long-term negative social and emotional effects seemingly as a result of their lack of attachment to a primary caregiver. These young people were found to cope less well with imagined separations than other young people who did not spend their entire childhood in a communal setting. Perhaps, though,

this was less important in their community, as when the children grew up they remained in the community, gradually becoming adult members.

Although there are similarities in the practices outlined above and the care system in the UK and elsewhere, there are also considerable differences. The obvious difference is that children who are taken into care are the exception, something has happened in their lives, which means that their birth families cannot or will not look after them. A less apparent distinction is that of the phenomenon of 'leaving care'. In a communal system the child does not leave, there is an expectation that they will stay in the community. For a looked after child, however, from the date of their entry into care there is the assumption that they will become a 'care leaver'. Successive legislation has moved the date of this event, and financial support is now available, however, the fact remains that these young people and everyone who works with them, are aware that a day will come when they are no longer 'looked after'. Thus the experience of being 'in care' is one of a bounded duration, commencing when the child or young person enters care and ending, typically at age 18, although legislative changes has allowed for some young people to remain with carers, to 'stay put' until the age of 21 (DfE, DWP, & HMRC, 2013). The legal framework surrounding the lives of children in care is covered in the following section.

2.3 Policy

Since the Children's Charter in 1889 there has been considerable legislation aimed at improving the lives of children and protecting them from harm. Often updates to this body of law came after tragic circumstances, names such as Victoria Climbié resonate across the UK, tortured and murdered by her guardians. Unsurprisingly, legislation focussed social services towards child

protection, thus welfare and protection from harm were at the forefront of decision making (Atkinson, 2010). Education did not have a high priority, and indeed did not appear on a social worker's checklist (Jackson, 1988). The Children Act 2004 began the process of change, when it placed a duty on local authorities to promote education when working with looked after children. The Education Act 2005 further integrated legislation by stating that schools must prioritise looked after children for admission, even when the young person was outside of the school's catchment area. Most recently the Children and Families Act 2014 imposes further responsibility on local authorities to make sure education, health and social services work together. The day to day impact of legislation is managed at local authority level in England. As the UK has devolved power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the policy framework is gradually diverging, as each government attempts to address the issues faced by these vulnerable members of society. The two 'extraordinary lives' projects in Scotland and Wales are testimony to the attention that these two devolved governments are paying to this issue. Attempts made in Scotland to assess whether the more responsive approach facilitated by the devolved government can make any improvements to the education of looked after children has proved inconclusive (Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2007) suggesting that seeking a purely 'structural' solution to the issues is not the answer. The following section will review the research undertaken into the education of children in care.

2.4 Research background

Looked after children continue to have lower academic attainment than their 'not looked after' peers, as well as poorer employment trajectories, and less positive adult outcomes. Up until fairly recently, little research had been carried out into

the educational experiences of children in care. Periodically there has been a flurry of endeavour, but in each review of literature that has been conducted the paucity of work (both in the UK and internationally) has been noted (Barbour, 2010; Dumaret et al., 1997; Flynn, Marquis, Paquet, Peeke, & Aubry, 2012; Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Jackson, 1994; Jackson & Cameron, 2012). The Rees Centre (O'Higgins et al., 2015) found only 28 papers internationally when searching the period from 1990 to 2015 which examined the relationship between education and children in care. This review searched nine academic databases and 18 websites. Studies were included on the basis that they produced quantifiable results and that they were written in English. Jackson (1994) suggested that until 1983 no single book had been published on the subject of the education of children in care in either the UK or the US. When Melmotte (1979) studied social workers' decisions regarding the placement of fifty six children, there was no consideration of their education. Jackson (1994) suggested children in care were a hidden group in the system, with little data available:

> *Children in care as a category are entirely left out of the extensive literature on inequality and disadvantage in education, nor do they appear in research on children with disabilities or special needs. (Jackson, 1994 :268)*

There was a presumption that children in care would not succeed academically, they would leave school at the first opportunity, and they would not prosper (Jackson, 1988). In a review of the literature carried out for the Welsh Government, Mannay et al. (2015) reviewed centrally held statistics in England and Wales, electronic databases, as well as electronic academic sites and books,

for studies focussed on achievement, attainment and aspirations. The review also considered quantitative studies since 1989, where participants were eighteen years or younger. They found a similar situation, with social workers showing ambivalence about the educational attainment of Looked after children. This is in spite of the Children Act 2004, which placed a duty on local authorities to promote the education of those young people for whom they are in loco parentis.

In mainland Europe the story appears to be similar; in France Dumaret et al. identified only eleven studies conducted within in the previous thirty years when they reviewed the findings of studies into the adult outcomes of children in care (1997). They found only eleven studies, two in the USA, two in Scotland, three in England, one in Germany and three in France. The 'Young people in public care: Pathways to education in Europe (YiPPEE)' project, showed a similar situation in Denmark, Hungary, Spain and Sweden (Jackson & Cameron, 2012), care leavers tended not to stay on at school, they found that there was a general lack of interest in education by social workers, thus reducing care leavers academic aspirations, and financial barriers were also influential in preventing these young people from taking up their academic opportuniities. In Sweden this dearth of work was confirmed by Forsman and Vinnerljung (2012) when they searched the research literature across England and Scandinavia; they found only eleven studies which were evaluating interventions in the education of children in care. Their search criteria looked for quantitative projects, which evaluated an intervention aimed at improving the school achievements of children in care aged between six and fifteen.

Although there is relatively little literature on this subject, what has been carried out can be grouped into four main categories: attainment or achievement; interventions; sociological studies and studies related to outcomes. The following sections will consider each of these categories in turn.

2.4.1 Attainment and achievement

The terms attainment and achievement are often used interchangeably in the literature, however a baseline definition of each may be helpful as they are viewed quite distinctly in school governance. Attainment is often defined as the result of testing, while achievement attempts to measure progress made (Whetstone, 2011). In the care system however, there are predetermined expectations of educational 'success'. As Stadler (2007:11) suggests: "success in the care system is measured by 'attending' school – maybe leaving with a handful of NVQs without being pregnant or on drugs". It is well documented that children and young people who have experienced care do less well (in traditional terms, and particularly in terms of measured attainment) in school (Berridge, 2012; Jackson, 1988).

Essen, Lambert and Head are regarded as some of the first to have highlighted the poor educational attainment of children in care. They utilised the National Child Development Study [1]data, which allowed them to "examine the relationship between being in care and school attainment" (Essen, Lambert, & Head, 1976:339). They found that children who had spent time in the care system scored lower in both reading and maths than those children who had never been in care. In addition they identified that the age at which a child entered and left

[1] The National Child Development Study is a longitudinal study which follows the lives of all those who were born in Great Britain during one week in 1958. https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=2000032

care correlated with deteriorating scores – in particular they found that entry into care before the age of seven was particularly bad for academic progress, measured by a reading test and an arithmetic test. This age differential suggested that weaker relative educational progress is not solely caused by care experience, but may have been impacted by their early removal from their families. It could be argued that it was not until the late 1980's that scholars like Sonia Jackson (1988) were able to draw attention to the particular issues around the education of children in care in their work, which in turn aroused further political and academic interest.

Jackson is often considered to be one of the key researchers in this field in the UK. Since her first attempt to highlight the poor educational outcomes associated with being 'in care' and the absence of work in this area (Jackson, 1988), she has continuously published work on the subject. Indeed, Jackson herself revisited her early work in 2007, noting what had changed in the intervening twenty years, and also what had yet to change (Jackson, 2007). She noted how the Government had changed policy most notably with the Children Act 2004 which placed a statutory duty on local authorities to promote educational attainment in children they look after. At the time of writing, this legislation is currently 13 years old. However, the most recent statistics for England show that the measured academic results for 'looked after children' still lag far behind non-looked after children (DfE, 2017), with only 17.5% of looked after children achieving A*-C in English and Mathematics in 2016, compared with 58.8% on non-looked after children.

It is the case, however, that changes in the method of reporting this data (from 2016 onwards) mean that comparisons with previous years are no longer possible. GCSE's in English and Mathematics will now be graded from number 1, the lowest, to number 9, the highest. Although an approximation of the old measure – i.e. pupils achieving A*-C in English and maths – does show that 17.5% of looked after children achieved this measure, compared to 58.8% of 'non-looked after children'. The situation is not limited to England; research shows us that looked after children achieved poorer results than their classmates in the other UK countries (Mannay et al., 2015; Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006), as well as internationally (Dill, Flynn, Hollingshead, & Auriole, 2012). In Canada (Cheung et al., 2012; Gharabaghi, 2012) the US (Pecora et al., 2005; US Department of Education & US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016), Germany (Jackson & Cameron, 2012), Sweden (Jackson & Cameron, 2012) and Australia (Cashmore et al., 2007) those children who are being looked after by their national states attain lower grades in school than their peers who are not 'in care'.

In Canada Cheung et al. (2012) focussed on the effect of placement factors on the academic achievement of young people. Placement is the term used to describe the process whereby a new home is found for a young person. Statistical data on 687 young people, which had been collected centrally to monitor the development of children in care, was analysed to consider whether the placement, and specifically the caregiver, influenced academic achievement. The study concluded that only 15% of differences in academic achievement could be attributed to the placement, whilst 85% of the difference is child specific, this

suggests that, while factors associated with the placement are important to academic outcomes, more emphasis should be placed on working with the young people themselves. If this finding were replicated in the UK it would suggest that work to improve the academic achievement of this group of young people needs to have its major focus on the young people themselves, not their caregivers. This finding concurs with the review conducted by the Rees Centre (O'Higgins et al., 2015), detailed above, who found that being in care itself was not detrimental to educational outcomes, the risk factors were associated with the individual, their family and the environment. Essen, Lambert and Head (1976) had come to this same conclusion almost 40 years earlier. This view, largely drawn from scientific studies of data is not universally held however. Frequent placement moves are seen as a risk factor (Children's Commissioner, 2017b; Mallon, 2007). In the year to 31st March 2016 71% of looked after children had experienced a placement move according to official statistics. These statistics do not record the informal inter family moves which children often experience prior to their entry into the care of the local authority. 10% of children had multiple moves; these often coincide with changes in school.

In Canada there is a very high proportion of children in care from the indigenous aboriginal community (Brownell et al., 2015; Yükselir & Annett, 2016), unlike England and Wales, where the majority are white (King, 2016) however, minority groups are over-represented when compared to the general population. Educational outcomes are worse for those children receiving support from the state, and worse yet for those in care. Gharabaghi (2012) explores the extent of research in Canada, focussing on young people in residential care in Ontario,

finding that there is still resistance to change, in spite of evidence that change is necessary. Unlike England, where the Education Act 2004 required local authorities to prioritise education as well as care, and the Education Act 2002 on the care provision, with educational priorities being limited to that of being an advocate in times of trouble.

In the US the same issue with educational attainment is well reported (US Department of Education & US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016), with foster children struggling academically and less likely to graduate high school, only 65% by age 21, compared with 86% of all children aged 18-24. Recent US Department of Education guidance aims to improve educational stability, in a similar move to that instigated by the Children's Commissioner in England (2017b).

Jackson noted (1994) that the specific area of the education of children in care was not a research priority. It seems that this topic fell between the foci of research interests. In England, where most research appears to have been conducted, there has been research related to Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Norwich, 2008), where the population of young people with SEN most likely includes looked after children, as a large proportion of LAC in England have special educational needs; in 2016, 57.3% of looked after children in England were classified as having special educational needs, compared to 14.4% of all children (DfE, 2017), and the number of LAC with SEN is rising (Mannay et al., 2015). In a recent study conducted in a pupil referral unit (PRU) examining the outcomes of pupils in a PRU, there is no distinction made between those young

people who are in care, and those who live with their families (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). This means that we cannot isolate the results into those children who are in care, and those who live with their birth families; it is evident that some have ‘carers’ rather than parents, but the specific educational challenges of each group are not recorded separately, so it is impossible to assess the opinions of the separate groups.

Studies considering the educational achievement of children in care often utilise a quantitative methodology (Coulton & Heath, 1994; O'Higgins, 2014; O'Higgins et al., 2015). Government statistics in England expedite these approaches; there is a wealth of data gathered annually, from schools, and decennially, in the census. Schools report on the educational attainment of young people, with those young people in care being an easily identifiable sub set; the census records lifestyle information about the population at large. These analyses confirm that the attainment gap between LAC and non LAC children is widening (Mannay et al., 2015). While official government records of data on outcomes are recorded, no such information is collected regarding the feelings and experiences of children in care (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017). These databases allow the identification of correlating factors, with a view to suggesting causal links between life events and attainment, moves of placement and school are given as likely barriers to educational achievement (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007). Official statistics facilitated the backtracking of three cohorts of children, to identify school and placement moves, and link these to educational ‘grades’, this study, while suggesting that moves are a barrier to education, also highlighted the difficulty of gathering comparable data across different authorities. It is also the case that

official statistics cannot include the informal moves, within family and friendship groups, which have often occurred before a child is formally brought into ‘care’. While quantitative studies are helpful, allowing us to identify trends, locally, nationally and internationally, they can also highlight gaps in our knowledge, which then need to be filled with other types of research.

Given the apparent universal educational underachievement of children in the care system, it is not surprising that various interventions have been undertaken to increase attainment. But once again, the research literature on these interventions is sparse. The next section of the review will look into this particular body of work.

2.4.2 Interventions

Mannay et al. (2015) reviewed 11 interventions which involved Randomised Control Trials (RCT) and quasi-experimental studies, which included participants aged under eighteen years, and who were, or had been, in care. The projects utilised discrete interventions, aiming to measure improvements across a range of academic outcomes: academic skills, academic achievement, homework completion, attendance, relationships and behaviours. One intervention which was ongoing in 2015, and therefore was not included in the report was The Letterbox Club.

The Letterbox Club (Griffiths, 2012) trialled a scheme, in England, whereby educational materials were sent to children once a month for six months, at their foster placement; the young people’s reading and maths ability was tested before

and after the trial period; there was modest gain in reading and mathematics measured over the period. Reading ability was assessed using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, and national curriculum mathematics levels were used to show progress in counting, place value and mental arithmetic. At the time of writing, Spring 2017, the Letterbox Club was thriving (Book Trust, 2017). It has been implemented in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and reported that young participants had made significant gains in reading and maths (Griffiths, 2012). It could be argued that because the young people were receiving the extra attention they would change their behaviour in the short term, which is known as the Hawthorne Effect, whereby their behaviour has changed as a result of being observed, rather than as a result of the intervention itself.

Reading interventions are not new, (Menmuir, 1994) found that the PRAISE (Partnered Reading Activities Involving Social Services and Education) paired reading activities could benefit children in foster placements or residential homes. The project worked with young people in respite care, aged 12 to 17, as well as twelve foster families, of children between 5 and 14 years old. It is unfortunate that this intervention measured weekly reading logs, as opposed to actual reading ability; therefore its impact is difficult to ascertain. This failing led to a follow up study (Osborne, Alfano, & Winn, 2010) which aimed to revisit the methodology, but with pre and post measures of reading ability. The study did result in improvements, with an average improvement in reading age of 12 months over a sixteen week period, suggesting that paired reading activity was a useful intervention with looked after children. As with Letterbox however, it could be argued that the improvements were attributable to extra attention, rather than

the intervention itself. Jackson and Cameron (2012) found that interest being shown by social workers and carers had a positive impact on academic achievement. The lack of such interest was identified as a major obstacle by participants in their study of young people, aged 18 – 24 across England, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, and Spain. Vosniadou (2001) suggests that learning is a social activity, requiring interaction and participation. It should perhaps not be surprising that working together with interested ‘others’ promotes learning. In parts of continental Europe this social aspect of learning is well established, with the role of social pedagogue being a professional one, requiring degree level qualification (Petrie, 2007).

Not all countries place social pedagogy within their foster caring practice, but it is emerging in the UK as a therapeutic approach to help young people, with the Fostering Network in the UK now actively promoting social pedagogy approaches in their Head Heart and Hands initiative (McDermid et al., 2016). Social pedagogy promotes notions of a broad education, extending learning out of the classroom, and including a wider view of learning than that which is measured in schools. This approach has much to offer children in care, who have been deprived of the traditional family learning experiences which are often taken for granted.

The main cause for concern which prompts interventions of all kinds are the poor outcomes for those who have been in the care of the state. Mannay et al. (2015) concluded that there is a high risk of bias across the interventions, which, coupled with small sample sizes, rendered the results unreliable. As noted above, these studies do offer the possibility of opening up new avenues for research. In

the section which follows I will outline the sociological studies which have addressed the wider experiences of children in care.

2.4.3 Sociological studies

The traditional discourse in the media paints a particularly negative picture of children in care. Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers (1992) suggest that they tend to be viewed as either 'victims', or as 'out of control delinquents'. To counter this impression research has also been carried out which examines the lives of children in care, part of which touches upon education as part of the overall life experience (Happer, McCreadie, & Aldgate, 2006; Holland, 2009; Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2008; Renold, 2010; Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006).

In Scotland a study spoke to adults and young people about the successes in their lives, focussing on two specific areas of 'success': social success, the ability to build and maintain social relationships, and; employment success, measured by work or training. Formal education was an element of this study, but not a main focus, as the stated aims of the study were to focus on positive aspects of life, whether they were education or other areas. The study identified five factors which were critical to the success children in care: having caring social networks; having stability; others having high expectations of them; encouragement and support; and, the ability to participate (Happer et al., 2006).

In Wales a similar project, (Extra)ordinary Lives also focused on the everyday lives of children in care (Holland et al., 2008; Renold, 2010), which encompassed education, but also developed a fuller understanding of how the young people addressed their social relationships; their identities, as 'looked after'; their

geographies and their perception of positive settings. The two year project promoted participation and creative methods to enable the young people to control what they shared, and how they chose to take part.

When a young person rejects academic achievement in favour of remaining with a peer group, it is not necessarily the case that the young person is not resilient. Renold (2010) draws on the Welsh '(Extra)ordinary Lives' project (2006-2008), which explored the everyday lives of children in care, to explore supposedly 'aggressive femininities'. Renold introduces Keely as a potential high achiever, however during the 18 month project Keely's fight to maintain her friendship group and do well at school proved impossible to manage, violent episodes, often encouraged by friends, pushed her to exclusions, and finally to an alternate provision, studying a reduced curriculum. When Keely punches a wall as hard as she can, she is proving a point to her friend, in order to maintain her supremacy in that peer group (Renold, 2010). Her resilience is directed towards survival; she sacrificed academia, in favour of retaining her reputation with her peers. Had Keely been born into the legendary Amazons, her pugilistic behaviours would have been celebrated; it is unfortunate for her that what was expected of her was more sedentary and studious. Keely's disposition, structured by her past experiences, had not prepared her for academic endeavours, for her 'success' became centred upon aggressive supremacy.

Although Renold (2010) does not argue this, I suggest that Keely's struggle to survive could evidence a type of resilience, which equipped her for a different future to the one that others would have promoted for her, *viz.* academia.

Mannay et al. (2017) worked with young people to explore their lived experiences, in school settings, and how they are alienated by the stigma associated with their position as 'looked after'. They found that the young people they worked with had academic aspirations, which had not been identified, or capitalised, thus the young people were not adequately supported in their ambitions. The stigma applied to them as looked after served to distance them from discourses of academic success, with teaching professionals avoiding exerting academic pressure.

Selwyn and Briheim-Crookall (2017) used anonymous questionnaires, to assess the wellbeing of children and young people aged 4-18 years. The study was prompted by the prevalence of negative reports based on the poor outcomes recorded in official statistics. They point out that there is no information collected on how children feel about their own lives. The study found that the majority of the young people surveyed, 83%, were positive about their care experiences, however their 'well-being' scores diminished with age, so that nearly 20% of secondary school aged young people reported low well-being.

As noted in these sociological studies, there is a body of work which considers the outcomes of children in care. The following section reviews this area of research.

2.4.4 Outcomes

Several international studies have concentrated on what happens to LAC after school. In France Dumaret et al., (1997) attempted to measure the effects of adverse childhood relationships on life outcomes. Researchers in the USA also

studied the adult outcomes of foster care ‘alumni’ (Harris et al., 2009; Pecora et al., 2006), both studies used highly scientific methodologies with large numbers of respondents. Dumaret interviewed 63 young adults, who had been in care for a minimum of 5 years, and used multiple regression analyses to find that, while it was possible for foster carers to overcome some of the negative experiences associated with parental rejection and associated cruelty, they can seldom compensate for all of the adversities the children suffered. Harris interviewed 708 adults, aged between 20 and 49, to measure the differences and similarities between two racial groups, (African American and White) in adult outcomes, including education, they found that the only significant differentiating factor was economic, finding that white adults were more likely to have income above the poverty level, and to own their own homes when compared to African Americans. In another scientific study, (Pecora et al., 2006), 659 young adults were interviewed and surveyed, to identify causal relationships between factors affecting educational and employment outcomes, they found that two elements of the care experience significantly reduced undesirable outcomes: placement stability and preparation for independent living. However, in a 2005 study Pecora et al. Gypen et al. (2017) confirmed that children leaving care struggle in all areas of adult life.

In 2006 Barnardo’s (Hibbert, 2006) surveyed 66 children in care. They found a range of negative outcomes from education; looked after children had poor experiences of education; poor academic achievement; 79% had no GCSEs when they left school, reduced incidence of higher education uptake; and increased likelihood of exclusion from school, they were more likely to have been

the victim of bullies than their peers. Hibbert's survey aimed to identify factors contributing to the low outcomes; they attempted this by comparing the young people's responses to those of 500 parents and carers of children not in the care system. It is hard to see how this comparison is helpful however, comparing two such different groups. It would perhaps have been more helpful to compare the views of young people both in and not in care, or the parents' views with foster carers' views. Interestingly though, the study (Hibbert, 2006) suggests that LACs did value their education highly, and understand that their low achievement could contribute towards disadvantages in adulthood. It did not go on to suggest how this disconnect could be addressed. In England, the number of children in care is rising of whom more than one third are not in education, employment or training (NEET) when they leave care (Morse, 2014). Education should be the key to improving quality of life, but research shows that children in care consistently fall behind those young people living with their own families, and leave school with few, if any, qualifications (Cameron et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2009; Jackson, 1994).

Internationally the main emphasis in literature has also been on outcomes. These range from the relatively poor academic measures, highlighted above, to other, identifiable negative outcomes, including, in the short term: truancy, substance misuse, offending behaviours and bullying (Cheung et al., 2012; Flynn et al., 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2012; Hibbert, 2006; Legault et al., 2006; Trout, Tyler, Stewart, & Epstein, 2012; Zeller & Köngeter, 2012). In the longer term, largely unrecorded, are issues relating to poor adult outcomes such as poor employment prospects, homelessness, substance misuse, and an increased likelihood of

having their own children placed in care (DfE, 2017; Dumaret et al., 1997; Flynn et al., 2012; Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Harris et al., 2009; Pecora et al., 2006; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003); This list of 'outcomes' can easily be read through without comprehending the misery it masks, the words reflect their statistical source. A homeless person, describing the other homeless in a hostel in Cambridge gives a more graphic description:

> *The usual stereotype figures so beloved by people who write about low-life: the crackheads, the dope fiends, the Irish drunks, the nonces, the whores (but don't read that word in a Raymond Chandler voice – think instead of pallid girls with fungal infections, and grandmothers who'll let you feel their varicose veins in return for a mouthful of half-digested beer), the burglars, the shoplifters, the ambitionless, the self-disgusted, the weak of will and, very rarely, the just plain poor.*
> *(Masters, 2006:47)*

In recent years there has been research into the educational outcomes of LAC, and in particular the increased challenges they face when entering tertiary education. In the UK, 129 care leavers, who had progressed to university, were studied over a three year period (Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2005). This was stated to be the first ever research into how care leavers experience university, although it is likely that there have been many studies included within widening participation studies, involving other groups of disadvantaged young people as well as care leavers. The report produced at the end of this study has had an impact on policy in relation to care leavers, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 Recent work has been a collaborative project with teams from across Europe, examining the routes into post-compulsory education taken by children who have been in care (Jackson & Cameron, 2012). This was the largest European study conducted, to date, looking at the education of young people in

care, a three year project, conducted in England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary. Over the project period literature was reviewed, statistics analysed, public bodies surveyed, and interviews were conducted with professionals and young people. In all countries, despite differences in the national education systems, the young people had experienced disruption to their schooling, which subsequently prevented most of these young people from following the 'conventional' pathway through school to college or university. Disruption to their schooling, which subsequently prevented most of these young people from following the 'conventional' pathway through school to college or university.

2.4.5 Reasons identified for 'modest' outcomes

Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital' is often used to suggest that we each bring our early experiences into our academic identity. Children who are brought up with different life experiences will therefore arrive at 'education' with different expectations, different needs, and different tools. Delpit (1988) highlights the impossibility of communication between groups with different heritages in the USA, she specifically suggests that power imbalances make it impossible for those with less power to be heard. Her paper specifically considers black and white educators, but the same differences can be extrapolated to other disadvantaged groups, Freire would suggest that those with power oppress those without (Freire, 1993). Freire argues that education can change the experience. (Masters, 2006) spoke of his frustration when he encountered completely different understandings of words in his dialogue with a care leaver:

> *What a classy misunderstanding. This is what I love about my friendship with Stuart: even the simplest words can spring surprises. It has turned out*

that we don't understand each other's use of 'good' and 'bad' (Masters, 2006:237).

When people with similar backgrounds identify their shared culture, they can be united, but 'cultural capital' can exaggerate inequalities, as well as helping groups to cohere. For children in care it may be that the care element of their background places them in a particular social class, or they may have missed out on life experiences which others, teachers and classmates, take for granted. Young people in the care system are not being provided with the necessary support to augment their 'cultural capital' (Johansson & Höjer, 2012), thus keeping them on a repeating cycle of under-performance.

Jackson (1994) reviewed early longitudinal studies which suggested that the social background of a child in care is the main factor influencing their educational attainment. It was shown that most came from large families, living in poor housing, often from one parent families, and that disabilities were prevalent. These studies however were limited, in that they ignored those young people in long term care, and also in secondary education. In addition they were all historical - reflecting child-care practice which has been superseded by new methods.

Children in care, as stated previously, have a greater likelihood of being assessed as having Special Educational Needs (SEN). However, there is doubt expressed about the diagnosis of SEN, with some evidence suggesting that low achievement itself is being equated to SEN (Berridge, 2012). Important funding is also available when a young person is designated as having special educational

needs, leading to suspicions that the label may be applied to children, by schools, in order to gain funding. Schools may even support the statement process in order to gain hours for a dedicated teaching assistant, when it is an inappropriate measure for a child with behavioural problems (Webster, 2014). In England SEN statements began to be replaced by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) from September 2014. These plans are designed to focus on the current needs of the child, and allocate budgets to address those specific needs (UK Government, 2014). At the time of writing, it remains to be seen if this change in policy will be beneficial for young people or will merely hide problems in a different set of statistics.

Disruption to education, often caused by a change of school, has also been shown to adversely affect educational attainment. In a recent study there was shown to be a direct correlation between the number of school moves a young person in care has and attendance at school (Weinberg, Oshiro, & Shea, 2014). At a very basic level, a change in school could cause a young person to study the same topic twice, and miss out on another key area of study altogether. However, the stress created by such a major upheaval could be considered a cause for impaired exam performance. This should, though, be viewed alongside the potential benefits of a ‘fresh start’.

Many young people are in groups whose education is disrupted. Gypsy and traveller children have traditionally been nomadic, meaning that their attendance at school has been sporadic at best. Changes to their traditional practices, including moves towards a more sedentary lifestyle, as well as parents’

perceptions of the need for literacy, have meant that attendance levels have improved (Bhopal, 2004; M. P. Levinson & Sparkes, 2005; Myers, McGhee, & Bhopal, 2010), but there are still many gypsy and traveller children for whom schooling is not regular. For some children, 'in-school' issues such as bullying by non-gypsy children, and a perceived cultural erosion, resulted in their removal from school altogether (M. Levinson & Silk, 2007; M. P. Levinson & Sparkes, 2005; Myers et al., 2010). Bhopal (2004) cites several writers (Swann, 1985; Liegeois, 1987; Kiddle, 1999) documenting the academic underachievement of gypsy traveller children. It may be that there are parallels with the factors which inhibit academic success in children in the care system.

Some barriers to success seem to recur in the literature: young people feel marginalised; they do not receive the support that they need; education can be neglected in the care package which is developed for them (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012). A project carried out against a backdrop of government investment in education, highlights four possible main elements to which poor measured outcomes could be attributed: educational instability; placement changes in foster care; grade retention; and, negative external influences caused by, or causing, the necessity to place a child in care (Pecora, 2012). Gharabaghi (2012) found that care workers felt the division between care and education was limiting the progress of young people's education in residential homes. This is almost a quarter of a century after Jackson's original findings (Jackson, 1988). The Yippee project (Jackson & Cameron, 2012) also found that some of the fault lay in the structural arrangements surrounding a young person's placement. It appears that social workers and carers still separate care and education, with their main attention being given to the welfare element, meaning that education does not

attract the same level of priority (Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, & Epstein, 2008). In the UK this concern had already been identified some twenty years earlier (Jackson, 1988), but it seems to remain an important issue, and although legislation has attempted to address it, the divide remains.

In Canada it is suggested that finance is the biggest barrier to post-compulsory education, and following this, for children in care, there is a cultural imperative which denies access to this next level of education (Finnie, 2012). A young person will almost certainly give consideration to the opportunity cost of post compulsory education. If he or she stays in education, then they cannot take up full time employment. The opportunity cost can be calculated as the difference between full time earnings, and whatever part time work is possible alongside a course of study; a young person who has not achieved very highly at mainstream education, may doubt the long term benefit of further education. Culturally there is also a cost, if a young person comes from a background where higher level education is expected, they are more likely to engage in further and higher education (Roth & Salikutluk, 2012). A report by the National Audit Office suggests that the majority of children in care come from families with significant intergenerational problems including mental health issues and drug and substance misuse (Morse, 2014), if children in care come from backgrounds where higher education is not the norm, they are unlikely to have the academic expectations which Roth and Salikutluk (2012) identified.

Whilst it is apparent that the majority of young people from a care background do not fare well in education, this is by no means a foregone conclusion. Some

young people excel in spite of having had the same negative life outcomes as their peers. Indeed the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) spent his childhood in a foster family, during the depths of the American depression. He was fostered at the age of three, and went to a village school in Northern California with the children of the local farmworkers. In a biography, he is quoted as saying that he learned "early that 'brightness' was my passport out of exile and into the great world" (Inglis, 2000:4). His upbringing was not a shackle, instead it gave him the inspiration to forge a career of some renown. Geertz is of course not alone in this respect, the young people who contributed to the YiPPEE project have also 'bucked the trend', however little work has been done to discern exactly how many young people progress to higher education after spending some of their childhood in care (Jackson & Cameron, 2012). This ability to rise above adversity has been termed 'resilience'. Some young people seem to possess a level of educational resilience which marks them out for success.

2.4.6 Factors supporting 'good' outcomes

This section considers some of the factors which have been identified as supporting good outcomes for children in care. The educational level of the carer was found to be a key factor in the educational success of the young person (Cheung et al., 2012), but this is not an important factor in the recruitment of foster carers. Other factors which promote good academic qualifications were identified as: high personal motivation, the presence of a close supportive adult, stability of placement, satisfactory accommodation and financial support. These are mirrored in the USA, where studies identified the importance of a positive role model or mentor and stable education and residential placements in achieving

academic success (Pecora, 2012). Pecora (2012) also drew on the findings of two alumni studies, which used regression analysis to identify predictors of academic success as well as interviews and informal conversations with care workers, foster carers, birth parents and alumni of care, identified some factors which contribute to academic success: mentoring; stable placements; assessing strengths; pursuing educational supports and treatment for mental health conditions.

The importance of the foster placement was also identified as a major factor in the achievement of LAC (Cheung et al., 2012), with some 15% of the influence being identified here. Cheung's highly scientific report, made some questionable claims to causality. There is a suggestion that foster carers with a more positive attitude to academic achievement were more likely to care for these young people with higher academic achievements, ignoring the fact that foster placement decisions are made by social workers, who will normally place high achievers with more academically focussed carers, the academic success causes the placement. There is a national shortage of foster carers, at the time of writing there is a requirement for 8600 more foster carers in the UK (The Fostering Network, 2014). It is not always possible to prioritise educational ability, children with a variety of individual needs must be supported, and specific fostering skills are needed across the range of needs.

It has been suggested that resilience can be developed in schools (Newman, 2004), by promoting social networks, offering good educational experiences, encouraging agency and boosting self-esteem. This list is perhaps unhelpful, and

it seems to be a baseline for the provision in any school. Given that one of the problems associated with children in care is poor attendance at school, then the answer to boosting resilience might be better found elsewhere. Petty (2014), too, identified resilience promoting behaviours which may help children to 'bounce back' after negative experiences. These studies however do not show that these activities will foster resilience; they merely identify traits which resilient people possess, and extrapolate from there that by promoting these traits resilience can be forged. While resilience can be a positive force, allowing a young person to overcome negative experiences, and strive for success academically, it is also possible that resilience could manifest itself in a manner which could be perceived more negatively, as noted previously, when Renold (2010) described the actions of Keely.

2.5 Conclusion

The preceding section has reviewed several areas of literature which is of relevance to the education of children in care. Research shows that children in care fare less well in their formal schooling than children and young people who live with their birth families (DfE, 2017; Jackson, 1988, 2007). O'Higgins et al (2015) conducted an international systematic review exploring the association between being in care and education outcomes, they found that this situation is not unique to England, evidence of this disparity in attainment is evident from research across Europe, and the USA, Canada and Australia). Their findings suggest that the disparity in attainment may be partly the result of pre-care experiences, however being 'in care' is also a factor.

The literature reveals a gap in our knowledge about the educational experiences of young people in the care of their local authorities. There is much statistical evidence to show that outcomes are not good, educationally, emotionally and behaviourally, however the lived experience of these young people is little understood. In order to address the attainment gap between those young people in care and their peers, there have been a number of research projects which reviewed interventions aimed at improving these formal educational outcomes for children in care. In a review of interventions, Mannay et al. concluded that the evidence base was weak, requiring "more scientifically robust evaluations need to be undertaken before recommendations about implementing interventions for policy and practice can be provided" (2015:113).

There have also been sociological studies conducted in Scotland and Wales. These studies explored the experiences of children in care, notably the (Extra)Ordinary Lives project in Wales (Holland et al., 2008) and Extraordinary Lives: Creating A Positive Future For Looked After Children and Young People in Scotland (Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006). Each of these projects explored the life experiences of children in care, which included education as an element, but were not focussed on education. Also in Wales, 'The consequences of being labelled 'looked-after': Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales' (Mannay et al., 2017), examined the lived experiences of children in care in school settings.

Poor educational outcomes for children in care are well documented. The Children's Commissioner for England has commissioned a report into the outcomes for vulnerable children which will address four key outcome areas:

Educational, Economic, Social and Behavioural (Bright, 2017). Care leavers have been shown to have disproportionately poor outcomes in each of these areas (Hibbert, 2006).

To my knowledge there has not yet been a qualitative research project which specifically asks both children in care and care leavers about their experiences of education, allowing each participant to construe their own meaning of the term education, and what it means to them. This study was therefore designed to fill this gap in knowledge, to explore experiences of education, and also to work with both adults and young people, allowing both current experience, and memory shaped by experiences to inform the study.

This study aimed to describe the culture of being in care, from the perspective of those in care themselves. It provided unique perspective on the issues that they saw as important. This can then be situated in the landscape of the English care environment. In order to address these questions, a theoretical framework was employed which allowed a focus upon how children in care spoke about the development of their learning identities. The following section will introduce this framework.

2.6 Theoretical framework

This thesis is significantly informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his concepts of Habitus and Agency (Grenfell, 2012). Alongside this Bourdieusian approach, a focus on reflexivity will allow an examination of how the participants in this study position themselves in relation to their experiences.

Thus the framework consists of Reflexivity, Agency and Habitus, considering the predispositions of children in care, and whether they exhibit reflexivity and agency. This part of the thesis begins with consideration of the theory of reflexivity, which has been linked to Habitus as a means of understanding identity (Adams, 2006; France, Bottrell, & Haddon, 2013), as well as being described by Archer as fundamental to agency (2007).

2.6.1 Reflexivity

This section will consider the theory of reflexivity, and its usefulness as a concept when working with children in care. Winkler (2014) suggests that reflexivity develops in a child who has a secure attachment to their primary caregiver. The caregiver recognises and reflects the infant's feelings back to them, so they learn, through this process, how to reflect upon themselves. Bowlby's seminal work on attachment theory showed a link between children being separated from their mothers and later attachment disorders (1944). Bowlby's work provided a foundation for the 'strange situation' research which introduced levels of attachment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). This work focussed on the 'attachment' between mother and child, ignoring other connections, and retained the inevitability of poor attachments. Bowlby's emphasis on maternal deprivation has been critiqued, with Rutter (1972) emphasising the difference between deprivation, i.e. losing something which one once had, and privation, which he suggested meant never having had something to begin with. He identified that early life disruptions, such as having a series of caregivers, and family discord can impede attachment. More recently Harris (1998) has disputed the overriding importance of parental influence on children, suggesting that peers and a need to 'fit in' are more powerful influencers of behaviour. Sunderland (2015) too

questions the inevitability of Bowlby's theory, suggesting that therapeutic interventions with adults can help to overcome adverse childhood attachments. Sunderland suggests that it is never too late to develop plasticity in the frontal lobe, the area of the brain which she suggests may be partially developed through attachment. Sunderland's work argues against the deterministic position on attachment, and thus its impact on reflexivity. In this study I wish to maintain flexibility in the way attachment is viewed. The importance of 'attachment' is recognised, but the effects are not viewed in a deterministic fashion. This weaker attachment in infancy is not perceived as predetermining reflexive capacity.

This study will consider the existence and extent of reflexivity in the participants, reflexivity can be defined as:

> *(T)he regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa. Such deliberations are important since they form the basis upon which people determine their future courses of action.*
> *(Archer, 2007:4)*

Here Archer is describing the internal conversation as actively agential. For Archer 'reflexivity' makes 'agency' possible, allowing 'normal' individuals to 'determine their future courses of action'. France et al. argue that "the ability to be reflexive represents a form of embodied cultural capital, whose acquisition is difficult for those young people at the bottom of the social structure" (2013:11). While France et al. worked with young offenders, who were negotiating a future outside of the criminal justice system, the participants in this study are negotiating a route into their adulthood, and they have had a childhood marked by the

intervention of ‘structure’ of the social services system, in the form of state intervention in their care. This notion of reflexivity, as capital, has value for this study as it enables us to consider the acquisition of this form of cultural capital, and consider how it is narrated by the participants, a disadvantaged group, in their understandings of their educational lives.

Reflexivity, although being an inescapable element of the human condition has been underexplored in the literature (Archer, 2007), in an effort to redress the balance, she suggests four modes of reflexivity:

Communicative reflexivity and social immobility –the individual is compelled to share their reflexive thoughts with others. Individuals, who are communicatively reflexive according to Archer, need to share their thoughts in order to receive confirmation from others. Communicative reflexives place their trust in others.

Autonomous reflexivity and social mobility – these individuals are compelled to reflexively consider how to overcome structural obstacles which prevent them ‘getting on’. Autonomous reflexives, according to Archer, are self-reliant.

Meta-reflexives and moving on – meta-reflexives have a clear ‘value’ which informs their reflection, and decision making. Their social mobility takes second place to the value that they espouse.

Fractured reflexivity – those individuals whose internal conversation leads to further distress rather than any purposeful conclusions. (Archer, 2007:93).

Archer’s application of reflexivity to agency was utilised by Hung and Appleton in their work examining the transition of young people leaving care (2016). Their study, involving qualitative interviews, found that these four categories were too discrete, however they are a useful starting point, allowing an understanding of

the effect of reflexivity on social contexts. These four modes of reflexivity will be applied in this study, as a means of locating reflexivity, if it is apparent, on a scale of social mobility.

When considering reflexivity as it relates to social mobility, a focus on reflexivity as it relates to class formation will also prove a useful perspective. Skeggs (2005) suggests that the reflexive ability to construct identity to refute labels, and restory the 'self' is more available to those from socially, economically or politically advantaged positions, and can be seen as a means of accumulating value. Thus for Skeggs the middle classes are able to appropriate elements of working class culture, to re-story themselves, as, for example, 'cool' (Skeggs, 2004), but, those who do not have the advantages associated with 'middle-classness' will struggle to reflexively rewrite their stories, hampered by the stigma of their position. When she considers possible transformation narratives, she discusses the notion of 'working-classness' as of no value, something which needs to be left behind in order to move on. A child in care is unlikely to be able to claim any class advantage so could be considered to lack this possible source of 'value accumulation', thus precluding reflexive change.

The concept of fractured reflexivity is seen as a particularly useful starting point for young people whose lives have been marked by fractured relationships. Archer's theoretical base (2007) is a relevant starting point for the framework in this study, both in its application to the possible categories of reflexivity to participants, but also as it relates to agency, and thus to Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

2.6.2 Agency

Two major influences of social phenomena are social structure and human agency. Theories around the relative importance of each broadly fall into three categories: those who see the individual as autonomous, acting independently of structure; those who view structure as constraining human choice, and those who recognise that agency is constrained to some degree by structural impositions.

Within education, children in care have been shown to perform below their counterparts, who live with their birth families. In spite of this differential, and numerous structural policy changes, the different educational outcomes which were identified by Essen in 1976 remain. Structural remedies alone do not appear to be addressing the disparity.

Chris Barker (2008) defines agency as “the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices” (2008:448). This idea of independence was confirmed by Chin and Phillips (2004) who suggest that agency is an individual’s ability to control their lives independently of social structure, their work was aimed at identifying how children utilise their ‘capital’, defined as values and temperaments, to influence or impede their parents’ efforts. In *this* study the participants have all been in the care of the state, a situation which is defined by structural impositions. The care experience is based upon fragmentation of ‘family’, with new ‘parents’ having been selected by the local authority. A focus on agency allowed me to view the possibility for agentic behaviour within structural constraints.

Through exploring their “subjective understanding of significant changes in their life course” (Aaltonen, 2013:376), this project aimed to add to the discussion on the relationship between agency and structure by examining the ways in which participants talk about how they exerted agency within the context of their circumstances, and the restrictions imposed by the social structures which surrounded them.

Putnam (1995) identified the diminishing of social capital in America, both in formal settings, such as churchgoing, and also in measures of ‘neighbourliness’. He suggests that successful outcomes in education are linked to civically engaged communities, with homogeneity (Putnam, 2000) being a key factor in the building of social networks. Putnam’s view was that diminishing membership of community groups was linked to declining civic participation, blaming, amongst other factors, the increased use of digital technologies. Recent research has shown that digital technologies can play a part in encouraging civic participation amongst young people (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2014).

Berlant (2011) introduced the notion of ‘cruel optimism’, whereby an individual attaches themselves to a notion of a ‘good life’, a fantasy which makes the unliveable day-to-day life more liveable, but which may be injurious in the longer term. When a child or young person has been taken into care, it is easy to see how such cruel optimism may manifest itself, where the individual attaches themselves to what Berlant terms ‘an object’, but the object is actually a threat to flourishing. This could represent a form of agentic striving which will inhibit future success. This cruel optimism could be driven by the unrealistic expectations of

others, which become embodied by an individual, but which cannot lead to fulfilment.

Bourdieu attempted to reconcile the two concepts, structure and agency, by means of his concept of habitus, whereby structure is internalised, and thereby informs agentic action, within the potential afforded by the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977).

2.6.3 Habitus

The concept of habitus springs from the conundrum around why we do what we do; without specific rules to suggest conformity to a particular gendered or class based norms, why do we, as social animals, continue to behave in the ways in which we are 'expected' to behave? Bourdieu asked the question, "how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of adherence to rules?" (1990a:65). Here 'behaviour' refers to the practice of individuals. Bourdieu's theory suggests that the interaction of capital with 'habitus' and field, defines practice, Bourdieu argued that the actions (practice) of an individual were not predicated upon the social arena (field), or the position in the social order they had acquired (capital), but by the interaction between these elements (Bourdieu, 1986b). It could be said that practice is negotiable at liminal points, when the field changes, practice will change, without some amendment to habitus, or capital. For a young person in or entering the care system, changes of field can occur often, and without choice; the field could be a physical change of place, or a new set of routines occasioned by a change in support around the child. Consideration of the manner in which habitus is structured by events, and how internalised learning occurs at these liminal events, could prove insightful.

Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of ‘habitus’, as a tool to help understand how it is that human beings follow what appear to be regulated patterns, without adhering to a set of ‘rules, (Grenfell, 2012). Bourdieu describes habitus as “system(s) of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1977:72). This definition suggests that the habitus of an individual is a lasting (durable) tendency (dispositions) suggesting a proclivity towards particular actions, but does not preclude deviance (transposable) from them, experiences in the past structure habitus, which in turn influences behaviour. As we have seen, research into the education of children in care has tended towards examinations of the circumstances which led them into care and the outcomes for them when they leave care, structural changes. The element between these two areas of research could be viewed as the ‘structured and structuring’ habitus.

This study is considering the experiences of children while they are in care, and in education, but viewed both concurrent with the experience, by young participants, and through the lens of remembered history.

Grenfell (2012:51) defines habitus thus:

> *it captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring our history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others.*

This definition is useful here as it allows us to focus upon choices made at specific moments in time, and assess how the participants’ histories have influenced their disposition.

Thus, habitus is the individual's propensity to behave in a particular way. It is made up of experiences, and therefore predisposes future actions based on the individual's history, giving "disproportionate weight to early experiences" (Bourdieu, 1990b:54). The habitus of a child is formed through their experiences; it is the sum of what they have learned from those around them, both formally and informally, and subsequently informs their future life paths, it is "a virtue made of necessity" (Bourdieu, 1990b:54). Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be defined as a 'system of dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1977:214), Keely's experiences to date had equipped her to survive in a world outside of academia, she exhibited, what Bourdieu (1977) would have referred to as, a disposition towards aggression. Bourdieu saw disposition as both emanating from experiences, and in itself designating a *way of being* (Bourdieu, 1977).

The habitus is dynamic, being a product of early childhood experience, as it has been influenced by subsequent events, including, specifically, schooling:

> *(T)he habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences…;the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences…and so on, from restructuring to restructuring.*
> *(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007)*

This interplay provides a clear rationale for the use of habitus in the analysis of the life stories in this study. The effect of early childhood is here clearly part of the construction of the habitus, but with the possibility of new experience transcending the social situation in which it was constructed. This aspect of habitus is helpful in that it foregrounds the changing of fields each influencing the habitus of the young person.

Analysing the concept of habitus in relation to the education of vulnerable young people is not unprecedented; it has been shown to be an appropriate tool when working with young people managing pathways out of crime (France et al., 2013); in working class adolescents' transitions as they move towards employment (Borlagdan, 2015; Christodoulou, 2016); or into higher education (Davey, 2009; Smyth & McInerney, 2012). The notion of a habitus is therefore a useful device for examining how broad educational experiences lead to construction of habitus, and thus contributes to the structuring of outcomes for this vulnerable group of young people.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the literature relating to the substantive topic, 'the education of children in care', as well as identifying three theories which will help to explore their lives. The official figures and the related literature show that children who have been taken into the care of the state are less likely to do 'well' at school. Their grades, in measured testing, lag far behind their peers (DfE, 2017). In adulthood they are less likely to continue in education (Jackson et al., 2005), and have poorer adult outcomes (DfE, 2017). Over the past decades governments have legislated to attempt to improve the situation, but there has been no discernible change (Cameron et al., 2015). Small scale interventions have made some improvements, particularly in reading skills, however these projects are rare, and typically short-lived. Studies have identified some possible reasons for poor outcomes, as well as factors which have supported improved outcomes, however it is still the case that a young person, taken into the care of the state, is considerably less likely to fulfil their academic or life potential.

This study, into the experience of children in care, over five decades, attempted to address this gap in our knowledge and understanding. The study used an interpretative methodology and focussed on what the participants themselves construed as their 'education', in order to attempt to learn more about the education of children in care: in doing so it addressed the two research questions:

What is 'education' for a child in care?

How do children in care story their learning?

These questions emerged from the theoretical aspects of the literature, while the underlying research area, the education of children in care, presented itself in the substantive literature. My perception of education draws on the social pedagogic interpretation of education, the wider view described by Cameron et al (2015). This social pedagogic mindset (McDermid et al, 2016), drawing as it does on concepts of experiential learning, such as those developed by (Kolb, 2014), provided a form of framework for identifying the many varied educational experiences related to me. The participants in this study come from a sector of the population, as described in the introductory chapter, who do not achieve the required 'measured outcomes' of a 'narrow' academic educational view, nonetheless education of some sort does occur, but there is no means to capture these experiences. For this study I felt that there were alternate ways of understanding experience, and so my focus on personal narratives allowed me to capture 'experience' in the form of personal stories.

The findings are important to add to the academic debate, as they open up the field of education to a wider arena than that which is currently constrained, in England, by the National Curriculum, and also attempt to identify how children in care themselves describe their learning behaviours. The following chapter will explain how this study was planned and carried out.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

There have been some attempts to address the inequality in academic outcomes between looked after children, and those who are not in the care of the state. Both government policy and practice have been changed, to take account of the research findings available. Change to date has largely been led by statistical analysis of measured outcomes, and objective 'facts' gathered about the child in care. In an educational context, there are facts available about age, gender, number of schools attended, level of ability and measured attainment; in the care continuum this would relate to placement changes, time in care, reasons for entry into care system, and social worker contacts.

This thesis describes a research project carried out over three years in the South West of England. Data was collected from seven participants aged between 11 and 59 years, using interviews and observations. In this methodology chapter, I will first outline the research aims, and explain how these influenced the epistemological stance of the research, and how this informed the research methodology. I also examine the role of the researcher, and describe the selection of research participants. After this I explain and justify the use of the specific methods used during the fieldwork, as well as highlighting difficulties encountered with the chosen methods, before describing how the data was analysed. The chapter will go on to explain the ethical considerations relating to the work. Finally I summarise the limitations inherent in the approach and consider the possible impact of the findings.

3.2 Research aims

A very quick look at the statistical information available from government highlights a contrast between the educational achievement of a child in care, and that of a child who has been brought up in his or her birth family. My review of the literature has shown that children in care, across the Western world, attain lower qualifications in compulsory schooling. It is little wonder that those who wish to research the situation have, in the main, adopted a quantitative approach; the 'problem' is reported as a statistical one; fewer qualifications, lower grades. It is also true to say however, that although each of these children has a name, and a care history, as well as a series of numbers, included in their government record, they are individuals, with unique stories, and infinite future possibilities. Their current experiences and potential futures may not match those recorded in 'outcomes' data already on file, but this complementary data remains underutilised.

There is a gap in our knowledge of the experience of education for a young person in care. This project learned from young people and older 'alumni of care', about their understanding of their own unique educational journey. The findings are highly subjective, drawing on the words of the participants themselves, and working with their utterances to construct a picture of their own, individual, experience. As Geertz (1973) reminds us, behaviour does not have an ontological position, the young person, whose culture we wish to understand, has an existence which transcends distinctions of dual paradigms. Their experience is made up of both objective and subjective knowledge. As outlined above, this project sought to develop understandings of the life experiences of the participants, as related by them. The ontological approach of the project therefore

is a relativist one; understanding that there are multiple possible 'realities' and not seeking one 'objective' reality. In order to arrive at an understanding of the data, the project took an interpretivist approach to knowledge, viewing reality as socially constructed.

3.3 Epistemological perspective

Research in education is notable by the variety of possible approaches to be taken, dependent upon the question being asked, Pring (2001) reminds us of the importance of being eclectic in the search for 'truth', however he goes on to unpick the nature of the 'truth' that may be being observed. Traditionally research has been divided between two concepts of knowledge: one aiming to identify relationships between variables; the other striving to understand human 'culture' (Alexander, 2006). This division between the objective and subjective has driven debate in educational research, however Pring suggests that this is a 'false dualism' (2000). He asserts that "the very possibility of the negotiation of meanings presupposes the very existence of things (including 'person things')" (2001:53). He suggests that both approaches intertwine, and do not require opposition. We can seek to understand the world from the perspective of another, while at the same time acknowledging that there are some elements of that perspective which are open to generalisation and quantification. A quantitative study can highlight an area which would benefit from a qualitative exploration. In this instance quantitative work has exposed an apparent disparity between the measured educational attainments of children in care compared to the rest of the young population. This disparity is evident across other countries and continents, and persists in spite of legislation aimed at addressing it. In order to explore further this anomaly, this study was planned to explore the lives of children in

care, from a qualitative perspective, striving for a complex and nuanced description of the life experiences of these young people, as they 'story' themselves. McAdams (2008) suggests that individuals, from adolescence, begin to construct narrative of their lives in order to make sense of who they are and how they fit into society. This 'storying' of life is compatible with Bourdieu's theory of habitus (Barrett, 2015), being reminiscent of Bourdieu's notion of 'social trajectory', a consideration of positions occupied within a social space. By understanding interview data within the 'fields' in which it is being recalled, i.e. the social fields of being 'in care', 'in education' and 'care leaver', this thesis presents narrative 'stories' constructed by participants and re-presented by the researcher, in narrative form.

3.3.1 Ethnographic interviewing

The ethnographic approach is a dynamic one, which has been reinterpreted over the years since it is considered to have evolved from anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Its emphasis on long term engagement, natural settings, everyday contexts, and unstructured, informal data collection is ideally suited to working with these young people who are, in other aspects of their lives, subject to highly formal data collection (Holland et al., 2008). The lives of young people in the care system are subject to continuous record keeping; in a care setting there is an underlying assumption that events must be recorded or they are deemed not to have taken place. In addition to the daily recording, there are regular child in care meetings, which are minuted, regular surveys and opinions to be submitted, and the governmental requirements for educational data to be maintained. The life of a child in care is formally documented in a multitude of ways.

Whilst an ethnographic study could encompass scrutiny of this documentary archive, the social care record of a child in care contains a vast amount of detail about topics which the participant may not wish to share, and which have little or no relevance to their understanding of their educational experiences. Such study may be likened to the accusations of 'meddling in people's lives' which have been directed towards Margaret Mead (Shankman, 2009). In addition, the formal record is maintained by different people involved in the total care package of the child. Some of these would know the individual well, long term foster carers for example, but some have a more focussed interest in specific aspects of life, for example a mental health professional. In addition, the questions asked in these reports tend towards the professional; they are adult centred, and intended to answer specific adult focussed questions (Holland et al., 2008). This project aimed for an ethnographic description, using an ethnographic approach to data collection, but not claiming a full ethnographic methodology.

The project was small scale, with only seven participants, discussing their own view of their educational experiences. The features of ethnographic study which worked for this project were the focus on everyday contexts; informality in communication; unstructured data collection; small scale and in-depth study; and, interpretation of meaning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In this study, the focus was on how education was understood in the everyday life of young people who have had their 'everyday life' disrupted. Data was collected in informal settings, and using unstructured conversation. Meaning has been interpreted by the researcher; the interpretation process will be discussed later, in the analysis section. Thus far an ethnographic stance can be claimed. However ethnography is also seen as a process of long term observation of a 'culture' in the 'field'. For

children in care it is difficult to identify a ‘place’ wherein their culture could be observed, and their mobility ensures that a long term study is difficult. Holland et al. (2008) did succeed in observing young people in care, by means of working closely with a charitable organisation and organising a fortnightly club over an academic year. In this way it was possible for the project to encourage a participatory approach, and facilitate observations. My project, working as it did with only two young people, and over a much shorter timescale, did not allow for a structured programme of events to facilitate observation. Qualitative interviewing was also the technique employed with the older participants.

In the case of this project observation is limited to that which could be observed during interviews. All interviews were conducted ‘in the field’, with me, as researcher, going to whichever location the participants chose. The choice of location was important, with some participants favouring their own homes, and others choosing more ‘neutral’ locations. Ethnographic understandings are dominated by spatial metaphors; field, setting, site. Virtual ethnography relies on constructing a ‘virtual field’, while Marcus’ (1995) stated that ‘multi-sited’ fieldwork merely suggests tracking locations across different field sites. Notwithstanding the lack of a designated physical place in which to work, this project aimed for an ethnographic understanding of the experiences related by the participants, augmented by reflections from ‘the waiting field’ (Mannay & Morgan, 2014). They suggest that observations, noted in a reflective diary prior to the formal research event; reflections upon the data and the process; and thoughts related to unforeseen interruptions and disruptions in the interview encounters allow an extension of the interview encounter, into the ‘field’ in which the interview takes place.

The approach, outlined above, required research methods which supported a study that captured the meanings and understanding of research participants. In this project, aiming to learn about the educational experiences of this often overlooked group of people, a qualitative, ethnographically orientated approach allowed the participants to story their lives, giving a rich description of their memories of their own experiences.

3.3.2 Memory and Stories

When participants tell their stories, they are inevitably being selective both about what they tell and how they tell it. In this study I have taken the stance suggested by Treacher and Katz (2001) whereby I did not judge whether a story was either true or lacking reality, rather each story revealed clues about how the individuals perceived their circumstances, past and present.

These stories are rehearsed episodes in the personal narratives of the narrators, and as such they reveal that which the narrator wishes to share of an element of their life. The sharing is dependent upon their audience; I, as researcher, was hearing a story which was crafted specifically for me, and may have had nuanced differences from stories told to someone else, in a different setting, or at a different time. This resonates with Bourdieu's theory of practice, outlined in the theoretical framework and simplified as (Grenfell, 2012):

$$\text{PRACTICE} = (\text{HABITUS} \times \text{CAPITAL}) + \text{FIELD}$$

In this study reminiscing is 'practice', with the 'field' being the research encounter. In the research meetings I was careful to ensure that the participants' knowledge, their 'cultural capital', was accorded respect. Thus the disposition, or 'habitus', of

the participants was key to the stories they chose to tell, and their interpretation of their 'truth'. Truth itself is an impossible concept to define; it has been the subject of philosophers' endeavour for millennia (Glanzberg, 2016).

Memory is also a filter, and individuals' narratives are of those small incidents which have remained in their consciousness, while the memories of the majority of their life events have faded. These cameo events may be those 'fateful moments' described by Giddens (1991) as events which demanded reflexivity on the part of the individual, they must have considered the consequences of their actions, or a 'critical moment, an event which, on narration, seems to have important consequences (Thomson et al., 2002), but which may not have required consideration at the time.

The interpretation process can be framed as:

> *(T)he participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.*
> *(Smith & Osborn, 2008:53)*

While this definition comes from interpretative phenomenology, it is relevant to this study which utilises memory, in the form of narrative, to attempt to add to our knowledge. The participants storying is their way to make sense of their lives, while I as researcher then shaped the resultant narrative with my own understandings, in essence the narratives became jointly authored (Bruner, 1990).

3.3.3 Time

The issue of children in care attaining lower educational outcomes than their peers has been documented since the mid 70's, some 40 years ago. Changes in policy and practice since then have been aimed at redressing the balance (Cameron et al., 2015), and helping these young people to achieve their educational potential. In spite of 4 decades of change, the attainment gap remains (Devon Virtual School, 2017; DfE, 2017). In order to gain an insight into the experiences over time, participants were recruited from a range of age groups, spread over five decades, and ages from 11 to 59. This allowed themes to emerge across the decades, as stories were recalled and related by participants and analysed thematically to construct narrative renderings of experiences.

The notion of temporality is also important here because it is intrinsically present in Bourdieu's concept of habitus; "habitus is the presence of the past in the present which makes possible the presence in the present of the forthcoming" (2000:210). Reay further explores this point when she talks of habitus as "a complex interplay between past and present" (2004:434). By working with a range of ages it was possible to develop themes which were intergenerational in the 'care' experience, a collective experience of this class of people, but recalled and storied individually (Bourdieu, 1990a; Reay, 2004).

In order to capture the stories of participants this study utilised life history work, where participants told their stories following prompts. Life history can be described as a story told:

> *in a particular way for a particular purpose, guided by their understanding of the particular situation they are talking about, the self/ identity/*

impression/ image they want to present, and their assessment of how hearers will respond (Sikes & Goodson, 2017:62).

The stories in this project could be described as 'researched life stories' (Plummer, 2001) as they were not told naturalistically in an informal setting, but were constructed in order to address the themes suggested by me. As the events happened in the past, the tales told to me were memories; the participants selected what to tell, from their store of events. They have identified events which have a 'plot', not the mundane day to day experiences, but the sad moments, the exciting moments, the stories which participants deem worthy of telling, and which have remained as memory over years. It was possible to identify stories which had been well rehearsed, re-storied many times. This selection of what to tell is an inevitable element of a method which is as "unapologetically subjective" as the life history approach (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). The subjectivity continued into analysis, when I, as researcher, analysed the gathered stories, and re-presented them to answer my questions.

3.4 Researcher Reflections

As detailed in the introduction, my role as foster carer and my experience of supporting young people educationally led me to this research area, I was however mindful that this intimacy with the research area could pose problems in the research process. As I planned the research, I mistakenly assumed an 'insider' status, due to my "culturally definable" role in the care of foster children, which undoubtedly helped me to gain access to participants (Johnson, Avenarius, & Weatherford, 2006:114). However, the 'insider/outsider' concept is a controversial one, which ignores the multi-faceted possibilities in the research

relationship (Crow, Allan, & Summers, 2001; McNess, Arthur, & Crossley, 2013). This is not to say that my knowledge of the area was irrelevant, I did possess privileged knowledge, which informed my perspective on the stories I was told; "(t)aking a perspective means taking a position on knowledge" (Skeggs, 2004:7). There are inevitable differences between me as researcher, and the participants in this study, but my understandings as a researcher, a carer and a teacher inform my understanding of what I witness. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that researcher reflexivity is an essential component of social research, allowing the researcher to account for their influence on both the study and its findings. Throughout the research process I maintained a reflective research journal, allowing me to record my thoughts, and return to them later in the project to revisit and review my understandings.

Having considered my role in the research process, it is now appropriate to move on to discover more about how the participants in the project were recruited.

3.5 Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Number of recorded interviews	Total minutes recorded
Gordon	59	Male	4	192 minutes
Susan	49	Female	4	174 minutes
Helen	44	Female	4	191 minutes
Gary	37	Male	4	349 minutes
Debbie	21	Female	4	210 minutes
Anne	14	Female	4	141 minutes
Julian	11	Male	6	239 minutes

Table 1 participant demographics

3.5.1 Young people in Secondary education

I made contact with the head teacher of a local secondary school, to whom I had mentioned my project some 18 months earlier, to enquire about the possibility of working with a group of their students. I followed up this call with an email, the deputy head teacher replied, and we arranged to meet on the following day. This was a positive meeting, during which I outlined my research and arranged a date when I could meet the children who may wish to be participants. My plan was to meet the young people wherever they felt comfortable, over a 6 week period. I was introduced to five young people, who were 'in care' who attended the school. We met in an office on the first floor of the school, with a boardroom style layout. The young people had been asked to register in their tutor rooms, and then come to this office. They arrived individually. I explained my project, chatted about the ways we could work together, including creative journaling, artwork and interviewing. I also spent time explaining the nature of informed consent, and distributed consent forms (Appendix 1) for the young people as well as their parents or carers. Two of these young people returned consent forms, so I arranged to meet with them on 6th January, at the school again. These two young volunteers were an eleven year old boy, Julian, in key stage 3, and a fourteen year old girl, Anne, in key stage 4. It was interesting that this opportunity sampling produced a sample which spanned the two age ranges I hoped to work with, and included both a boy and a girl. Both of the young people were in foster care when I met with them.

3.5.1.1 Anne

When we met Anne was a 14 year old girl, who was in Keystage 4 at a mainstream secondary school. This was the third secondary school she had

attended, and the one she liked least. Anne was introduced to me through the school and she agreed to take part in my study. Anne lives with carers in a small hamlet some 3 miles outside a major city in the South West of England. She spends some evenings and weekends with her birth mother. Anne spent some time living with an aunt before she entered the formal care system, but this arrangement broke down. Anne had previously severed links with her mother, causing considerable division in her family; Anne told me that her grandfather broke contact with her when she stopped seeing her mother. He subsequently passed away, causing Anne additional distress. Anne now attends weekly counselling sessions with her mother, and she said she is happy to be in care, as it is helping her to repair her relationship with her mother.

3.5.1.2 Julian

Julian was an 11 year old boy, who lived with foster carers in a deprived part of a city in the South West of England. We were introduced at school, by the deputy headmistress and the Child Protection Officer, when I was introduced to all of the Children in care in the school. As soon as I described my project Julian was keen to take part. Julian was in his first year at secondary school when we first met in December, so he had been at the school for one term. Julian told me, proudly, that he had done well at primary school, having won an excellence award for his maths. He had attended several schools already; he listed two pre-schools and four primary schools before he progressed to this, his first secondary school.

3.5.2 Adult participants

The five adult participants were all volunteers, who had heard of my project either from myself, or from one of my colleagues in social services.

3.5.2.1 Debbie

At the time of our meetings Debbie was a 21 year old student. Debbie had been in care from approximately age 12 until age 18. She is now designated as a 'care leaver', and receives financial support from the local authority, and her university. Our meetings were held during the summer break before she returned to university to enter the second year, over a one month period. I phoned her, and we arranged to meet at a city centre coffee shop. This was not the first time I had heard about Debbie, approximately one year before she had been mentioned to me in my role as foster carer. There was a suggestion that she would live with me during university holidays, and maintain a base in the West Country with me. As a foster carer with an educational focus this would have been a suitable 'placement'; in the event I was told that funding had been approved to allow Debbie to have a small flat.

3.5.2.2 Gordon

When we met Gordon was 59. He had been in care from approximately 12 months old until age 18. His mother was an unmarried teenager when he was born, and she found it impossible to keep him. Gordon was adopted as a baby, but then he was returned to care. He does not know the circumstances which caused his adoption to break down, and had requested his care records, hoping to find out what had happened, but there were gaps in the paperwork. Gordon was subsequently fostered at around age five by a couple, who he refers to as Mum and Dad, however he spent much of his childhood in children's homes and boarding school, as his carers found him difficult to 'manage'. Gordon is the husband of a social worker associate, although I had never met him before the research interviews.

3.5.2.3 Susan

When we met Susan was 49, she worked for the local authority, with a particular remit involving the education of care leavers. I was given Susan's contact details, and arranged our first meeting, at her home. Arrangements were made by phone or SMS message. Susan was completely unknown to me. She worked in social services, so we undoubtedly have contacts in common. This made me particularly careful during interviews, as I wanted to make sure that I maintained something of an arm's length connection. I avoided commenting on people or places that I had prior knowledge of. This was particularly pertinent when we discussed a children's home in which Susan had worked, as I know several people who had worked there prior to its being closed down in 2014. This caution was mirrored by Susan, who took care to avoid mentioning the names of colleagues or young people.

3.5.2.4 Helen

At the time of our meetings Helen was 44, she worked with young people, supporting their educational development, and hoped to resume her studies, intending to pursue a PhD in the near future. Helen was placed in care during her adolescent years; she lived in residential homes during this time, never having been fostered. Helen is of mixed race; her father was Indian, and her mother English. I have known Helen since 2012, when she and I were fellow students. During our studies I had not known that she had been in care – and I had also not realised that she was of mixed race.

3.5.2.5 Gary

As noted above, Gary was 37 years old when we met. Gary has been diagnosed as autistic, and has moderate learning disabilities. I was given Gary's phone number, and called him to introduce myself and arrange a meeting. Our subsequent meetings were held at one week intervals over one month, and were arranged face to face. Gary was unsure as to when he entered care, sometime around age 8 or 10, his mother became ill and could not look after him, so he was placed with foster carers. He left care before his 16th birthday, when he ran away from his carers to find his mother.

The five adults, Debbie, Gordon, Susan, Helen and Gary, and the two young people, Anne and Julian made up a sample that included the range of characteristics which I had sought in terms of age and gender. They were born in each decade from the 1950's to the present day, they each spent time in care during their time in formal education, and thus their recollections can illuminate the educational experience of children in care across several decades. These

seven individuals were interviewed between four and six times each, generating 25 hours of recorded interview (Table 1).

This small scale study did not aim for generalisability; the sample however facilitated in-depth analysis of interviews, identifying common themes across the participants.

3.6 Research Methods

3.6.1 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative life history interviewing was the main data collection method in this project. The interview has been the most common qualitative method when working with children in care (Holland, 2009). Interviewing is an easily understood method, meaning it can be utilised across age ranges and ability levels, the interview is part of the common culture of the age (Kvale, 2007). This very simplicity however belies the complexity of planning and carrying out in-depth research interviews, as Silverman (2017) points out, the qualitative interview is not a route to understanding experience, without careful transcription and robust analysis. The six part analytical framework is explained in depth later in this section.

The idea of speaking to someone, in order to draw their thoughts from them is not a new one, and guidance in the most sensitive way of doing so has been written since the middle ages (Dennis, 2010). It could be claimed that there is a “continuum of formality” within the interview method; at one end of the continuum the encounter is strictly regulated, this can be compared to the highly structured market research interview, which takes place on every high street. In these encounters there is no flexibility. The interviewer is typically not the researcher, merely a contracted field researcher, paid for one or two days’ work, their voice

forms no part of the research. At the other end of the continuum is the type of conversation where the interviewee is prompted to talk about what they feel is important to them, this type of interview may be used in a counselling session, where the aim is to help the interviewee address issues of a more personal nature. In this project, semi-structured, to unstructured interview techniques were utilised in order to capture the experiences of participants in their own words, and from their own perspectives (Kvale, 2007). This technique allowed the participants to frame their recollections in the way which was most comfortable for them. Each research encounter had a theme, which was communicated before the meeting, so the participants were able to consider how they would address the theme.

In the planning stages of this project it had been hoped to utilise a participatory and creative data collection methodology with the young participants, giving them the choice of which method to use, as it has been suggested that this level of participation would help to generate quality data (Hill, 2006). I hoped that this data collection technique would generate data which was outside of my understanding of the care experience as suggested by Mannay (2010) as participant created visual data may help to 'make the familiar strange'. Initially I had hoped that they would create some type of artefact, whether a written journal entry, or an image or cartoon strip, which we could then discuss, It has been suggested that this use of creative participation helps to minimise the power imbalance between researcher and researched. In the event both Julian and Anne preferred to talk, and they wanted me to visit them at their homes to have these conversations, they did not want to engage with creative methods, their refusal was shaped as a choice to engage in interviews, however this is not

unusual. Scherer (2016) found that primary school children also resisted using creative methods, she found that the use of drawing did not enhance data collection, labelling the results as ‘art that didn’t work’. I was glad that I had offered choice to the young participants, as this negotiated participation (Hillman, Holland, Renold, & Ross, 2008) allowed Julian and Anne to engage with the project in the way in which they were most comfortable.

Life history interviewing was used with the adult participants, with minimal researcher influence on the telling of stories. Life history work is individual to the groups with whom it is employed (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), in this project, which aimed to capture recollections, a life history approach was the appropriate choice to allow the participants to locate their memories of education, to help me to answer questions such as ‘what’s it like?’ or ‘what does it mean to you?’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Participants told their story in the way they wanted it to be heard, based on their assessment of what I, as researcher, wanted to know.

3.6.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

With the young people in this study, Julian and Anne, a semi-structured interview format was used. Each week Julian and Anne were given a stimulus sheet (Appendix 2) to allow them to prepare their ideas. When the project was planned to encompass creative methods, I drew up these stimulus sheets thinking that it would help the young people to visualise their responses. When the project became interview based the stimulus became a loose structure for the ensuing conversations, informing the discussion but not curtailing it. This semi-structured interview helped to address some of the issues raised by the interview method, discussed above; I had a schedule, which could be varied as the interview

progressed in order to react to the interviewee's responses. This also helped to redress the power imbalance, giving the interviewee more influence over the interview session than in a more structured interview; the main topics were addressed in the way best suited to the interviewee. However the power asymmetry could not be completely erased in such a formal setting, where I, as interviewer, set the stage, controlled the content and used the outcome for my own purposes (Kvale, 2007). The young people themselves chose where to meet. Both decided that they did not wish me to continue to visit them in school. Julian chose that I visit at the carer's home where he lives, and he asked me to arrive shortly after school. On each occasion we sat in a small conservatory, by the kitchen. Anne varied our meetings, between her mother's house, her carer's house, and twice she asked me to pick her up in town, and drive her to her carer's house. At our first meeting Anne took me to her bedroom, in her mother's house, for our conversation. Subsequent meetings, in the carer's house, were held in a lounge area. Although I had endeavoured to allow the young people to select the location of the interview, it was apparent that the rooms were approved by the adults in the house, rather than the young people.

The use of this semi-flexible structure, communicated in advance via the stimulus, was not only introduced to gain an understanding of the perceptions of Julian and Anne of their educational experience, but also to allow them to prepare what they wished to share, and how they wished to share it, under a series of themes. I decided to establish these themes in order to allow all parties connected with the interviews (young people, school staff, carers, parents) an element of comfort regarding their content. As Heptinstall et al. (2001) found, young people in care can be reticent in an interview setting, giving short answers,

by giving each prior knowledge about the themes, and some suggested questions, I enabled them to decide in advance how much they wanted to share. The themes were:

- School – the place
- School – the people
- Schoolwork
- Obstacles
- Want, Need and Expect
- What is it for

These were chosen to try to mirror the adult discussions, allowing for comparison. The young people spoke about the main themes each week, but the discussion also allowed a wider interpretation of their educational experiences, including for example sports clubs and other societies of which they may be members. This allowed a more holistic view of the young people's 'social space' to be considered. Because they are currently in school and experiencing formal 'education' each day, Julian and Anne largely discussed the present and fairly recent past. In order to allow these young participants to create an environment in which they wished to share their thoughts, they were given freedom as to how they shared. Both young people chose to share their stories with me through interview, meaning that this was the main data collection method across all seven participants.

I met Julian and Anne in school on a total of four occasions; twice to establish the project, and twice to discuss the theme for the following week. I asked if they were happy to meet here; at first both agreed that this was comfortable for them, however on the second research visit they asked that we stop the school

sessions. Anne told me she did not want to be seen coming to the meeting, and Julian did not want to miss his tutor session. From this point we met only outside of school.

I had intended to have six recorded interview meetings with Julian and Anne, focussing each time on one of the main themes outlined above. This number of encounters was chosen as there are typically six weeks in a school half term. I did meet with Julian for the full number of meetings, however, Anne cancelled one meeting, due to ill health, and her participation was then stopped by her carer, who told me that her behaviour at school was suffering because of her participation in the project and that Anne's mother and carer both felt that cessation was appropriate. This was disappointing, particularly when my contact at the school, the Child Protection Officer, advised me that there had been no deterioration in Anne's behaviour. Given the ethical agreements made at the beginning of my relationship with Anne, I felt it was the correct thing to do to withdraw at this point. I had promised that participant involvement could end at any time, and also that I would take steps not to cause anxiety. I acceded to the carer's request, and therefore I did not contact Anne again. Anne had my contact details and could therefore have contacted me if she wished. There was no request that I refrain from using any of the data collected to date, so I was comfortable to represent Anne's story in this thesis. During our four meetings Anne and I had discussed all of the key themes in the project, so her voice is represented across the project.

These young participants were narrating their stories of the recent past, a history of sorts, but largely a narrative of current events. For the adult participants, stories were memories of time gone by, life histories.

3.6.1.2 Life history interviews

Work with alumni of care took the form of life history interviews, where the interviewees are 'informants' (Spradley, 1979) helping me to discover their culture as it related to their memories of their time in care and the educational experiences they recalled. Each participant was told about the alternative methods being suggested with the younger participants, and could have adopted creative ways to participate, however the adult participants were comfortable with the interview approach, and chose to participate in the project in that way. It is interesting to note that two of the adult participants did choose to provide artefacts to augment their words (Table 2).

These were relatively unstructured, as a formal structure here would have risked imposing my understandings on to their experiences, thereby losing the authenticity of their experiences. This method, which originated in early anthropology helped to counter the untested opinion of those professionals, who have formed their own body of 'knowledge' (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), making it important to use in this study.

I met with each participant four times in total, at their chosen locations. Each interview had an overarching 'theme: Tell me about you; Places; People; and, Helps and Hindrances. These themes emerged during a conversation with my supervisor during the early part of the project. The initial session allowed the participant to frame their experience in its totality, before focussing on other areas. After the first, general interview, participants were told the theme for the next session at the end of the preceding one, to allow them to gather their thoughts ahead of our meeting. Each conversation was recorded, using an

application on my mobile device, with the express permission of the participants. This allowed me to focus on what was being said, as opposed to taking notes. Between meetings I engaged with the recordings, and made brief notes to help me to relate to the next interview theme. I also used these notes as a prompt when required, for example at the 'Place' interview, I could prompt with the places which had been mentioned in the first session. I told each participant that the meetings would last somewhere between 30 minutes and an hour. In the event they tended to last around an hour.

Life history research is a useful method when attempting to find meaning and to understand events (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Germeten (2013) suggests that "Narratives will be the "little stories" that show personal perspectives on schooling and education, different from the stories told by official statistics", making them an ideal tool for this study whose aims are to examine personal perspectives on education, which are often represented statistically.

3.6.1.3 Narratives

In line with the epistemological stance outlined above, this project sought to gain an insight into the how the participants themselves understood their educational experiences. The nature of the interviews allowed participants to construct their own narratives of the stories they wished to share. The approach I took in these encounters was to limit my interventions to the minimum, and allow participants to story their own experiences, around four overarching themes. The themes for the adult interviews were: 1) tell me about you; 2) places; 3) people; and, 4) helps and hindrances. Dewey (1948) suggested that the criteria of 'experience' were interaction and continuity; in this study the sociality suggested by interaction was facilitated by allowing participants to focus on people, while the focus on place

allowed individuals to consider the continuity of their experiences in spite of their geographical location. This procedure generated many hours of storied recollections, rich in experience, and communicating participants understandings of their education, both the intended 'school' education, but also what Dewey (1948) termed collateral learning, that which is learned outside of intended outcomes, the attitudes, likes and dislikes which become embodied traits.

3.6.1.4 Truth

A recognised difficulty with life history work relates to 'truthfulness', we can never be absolutely sure of the veracity of the life history, as it is related to a researcher.

> *Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken*
>
> *(Austen, 1816/1994:326)*

Austen's distinction can be compared to the distinction between truth and fidelity, where truth represents what actually happened, and fidelity is related to what the event means to the storyteller (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). For me, the notion of 'truthfulness' was not a useful concept, the stories which were related to me were the constructed narratives of the participants; they told me what they wanted to say about their educational experiences. Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) was writing about narrative research, a method which is about understanding the whole life. In working with children and young people the life story technique is often used to help the child gain an understanding of who they are, and what their extended family looks like (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995),

however this project was not aiming to view social nertworks in isolation, but a view of education, so a life story approach woould have been limiting. The entwining of remembered stories from 50 years ago, with retelling of current educational experiences, into narrative representations produced a compelling series of narratives, illuminating the lived experience of Gordon, Susan, Helen, Gary, Debbie, Anne and Julian.

3.6.1.5 Artefacts

Hill (2006) suggested that young people's research involvement can be more focussed when they are given a choice about how they participate in a project. True participation is difficult to achieve, however, I wished to encourage a level of participation in the way that the young participants engaged with me. In order to allow the young people to make a choice around the method they used to participate in the project, they were provided with a package containing a selection of materials: a journal, a sketch pad, pens, pencils and a USB memory stick (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Young person's pack

In the event Julian and Anne engaged with interview more readily than any other means of contributing. Although they spoke about drawing, painting, cartooning

and journaling, they did not produce such material for the project. Each made some brief notes once, but used them as an aide memoire, reading them to me during the interview. This use of an informal diary has been used in longitudinal research (Denham, Taylor, & Humphrey, 2017), as a means of helping participants to recall events ahead of interviews. The young people here also seemed to find this beneficial in their interviews. Both, when asked, said that they had not had time to do this. Julian however seemed to be keen to engage with sharing of artefacts. He showed me several pieces of his handiwork, and he was particularly keen to show me his school 'report' detailing his teachers comments on a lesson by lesson basis. He also used my iPad to show me his website, and some digital videos he had produced (Table 2).

3.6.1.6 Documentation

In addition to the participant data, collected by means of interviews, observations and artefacts, some documentation was also available to me (Table 2). During our first meeting, Gary produced his medical records, and much of this first meeting involved him working through the various reports and letters, and augmenting this with his recollections of the events surrounding the medical intervention. The paperwork associated with Gary's medical history was used during the interview, as an aide memoire for Gary, in a similar way to that observed by Denham et al (2017) when they explored women's medical experiences.

In contrast, at our final meeting, Gordon gave me a package which contained his care records, for me to read, copy and use, if they proved helpful. I scanned these documents, and returned them to Gordon. Gordon's records, detailing his

time in ‘care’ provided a fascinating window on the record keeping of the time, which allowed me to compare with the contemporary record keeping which I undertake when I am fostering a young person. The ‘indirect’ (Finnegan, 2006) use of the material helped me to gain an understanding of processes from almost 60 years ago. The records are mostly subjective accounts, written by professionals involved in care, as part of their statutory recording duties, supplemented by copies of related correspondence between social care professionals. Reading this material allowed me an insight into the formal recordkeeping of half a century before, but the formality of the recording did not enhance Gordon’s narrative, and so was not used further in the project.

Participant	Artefacts	When
Gordon	Copy of care records	Given to me to read at the end of final interview
Susan	None	
Helen	None	
Gary	Health records	Used as aide memoire during interview 1
Debbie	None	
Anne	Brief Journal	Read through in interview 1
Julian	Brief notes about schoolwork School report Small felt monster Cross stitch poppy Felt YouTube logo	During interview 4
Julian	Website	Interviews 4 and 5

Table 2 Artefacts and documents

3.7 Thematic Analysis

I used a thematic approach to data analysis in order to identify, analyse and report the key patterns emerging from across the interviews. The process aligns closely with the model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This six phase model is drawn from the psychology field, however, the challenges associated with analysis of qualitative data transcend discipline boundaries, and the model provided a useful framework. As a novice researcher it was important to identify the phases of coding, as without such a model it would have been possible to continue to 'code' without moving on to analysis.

Each interview was recorded, with the express permission of participants, on a tablet computer. These interviews were transferred to the university server as soon as I returned to my desk, and deleted from the mobile device. I transcribed each interview, using the NVIVO software, in this way I was able to retain a link to the audio file, which allowed me to easily access the original audio to listen again during future analysis.

NVIVO 10 was deployed as an organisational tool, as it allows data of all types to be stored and accessed with ease. The software allowed all interviews and transcripts to be stored, and coding to be manipulated as my understanding of the themes progressed. The software also retains a digital record of the project, enabling an audit trail to be produced. The use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) has been criticised, Taylor et al. (2005) list concerns regarding potential large datasets, quality of analysis, implications for researcher creativity, distance between researcher and data and a favouring of thematic and grounded theory analytical processes as being concerns, while Woods et al. (2016) address suggestions that CAQDAS can force analysis into a grounded

theory mode, as this was the model for which many of the software packages were designed. This project is using a thematic analysis design, and the use of such a tool has affordances in both the trustworthiness of the procedures, and the ability to store and access data efficiently. During analysis however, more manual methods were also employed, in order to allow a more hands on interaction with the data. The six phases will now be discussed in more detail.

3.7.1 Phase 1 Familiarisation with the data

3.7.1.1 Thematic maps

This initial phase of familiarisation was carried out in a number of ways. As noted above, I listened to the recordings of interviews prior to subsequent interviews, in order to ensure a level of familiarity with the data. At this point fluid thematic maps were drawn up for each individual interview (Appendix 3), identifying interesting ideas, quotations, events and meanings. These took the form of mind maps (Buzan, 2003), a creative tool which helps to organise thoughts in a visual way. This active immersion helped me to gain a familiarity with the interview data, which helped to inform the following interview, but also helped me to begin to consider possible patterns which were emerging. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that active reading and re-reading is a vital bedrock for the rest of the analysis. In addition, for me this process helped me to begin to identify initial codes. This step was carried out before the formal transcription of each recording began.

3.7.1.2 Transcription

Recordings were uploaded into a new project file, and transcription was carried out within NVIVO, allowing the transcriptions to be digitally linked to the source

material. I transcribed each interview, a lengthy process, but one which allowed me to revisit the data, and begin the interpretative process. The transcription of oral material of necessity results in reduction in the meaning making possibilities, as the material moves from a multi-faceted recording, rich in the nuance created by the spoken word, with hesitations and repetitions, laughs and groans, to a two dimensional written text. The rewriting of the transcription, according to Bourdieu (1996) imposes infidelities; the written word does not capture meaning in the same way as the recording. In order to capture some of the nuance of the interview encounter (Wellard & McKenna, 2001), I included some elements of supporting information – for example recording 'laughs' when the interviewees laughed. The use of NVIVO 10, with its permanent link to the audio file, helped to allow access, during reading, to the original recording, enabling analysis to revisit the recorded voices as well as the transcription. This affordance of the technology was useful to me throughout the analysis of my data, as it allowed me to step away from the cross sectional segments of data, and return to the original context of the words.

3.7.2 Phase 2 Generate initial codes

In the second phase of the analysis process Braun and Clarke suggest that initial codes should be generated. These initial codes were largely descriptive, summarising or condensing content. This was accomplished by reading the transcripts of each interview, alongside the mind maps from each interview. These materials allowed me to produce a 'code map' (Appendix 4) a visual representation of the initial codes for the project. These codes were created in the NVIVO 10 software, and an initial code book created. The software allows this process to happen very easily, and once created, these codes can be applied

systematically to the data set. This is a straightforward, if time consuming process, whereby the transcript is displayed on screen and each section of data is considered as to which code or codes are applicable. At this early stage as many potential themes and patterns were coded as possible, so as to ensure the retention of items which may prove interesting later (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this process there were a total of 224 codes within the project file.

3.7.3 Phase 3 Search for themes

From coding, the next phase was to identify themes from the data. The theme of agency began to emerge very early in the analytical process, appearing in the initial code map as a category of codes. Using the codes themselves as heuristic devices, this next phase involved a move away from the digital into the physical world. Codes were written on hexagonal pieces of paper, in order to allow them to be physically manipulated, with a view to identifying major themes (Appendix 5). At this stage the themes were broadly addressing the research aims. For example a key theme emerging here was that of 'learning to be me', where participants were discussing their identity, as the project proceeded this discussion became a theme of 'habitus'. The results of this analytical process were incorporated into the NVIVO project, by creating subgroups of codes, under the overarching themes. CAQDAS software allows this manipulation of categories and subcategories very easily, whilst retaining the original structure of the transcriptions, and the original coding. This allowed the creation of documents which brought together the data which related to codes within a particular theme, to facilitate data display, thus allowing me to explore the themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

3.7.4 Phase 4 Review themes

At this stage in the process initial write up of the identified themes helped to continue the analytical process, integrating the themes into arguments to apply to the thesis. This allowed me to engage in a reflexive process, whereby I returned to the literature, as themes emerged which seemed to be important.

As I wrote about the emergent themes, I was able to refine my thinking, and to identify the main arguments which informed the findings, while at the same time discarding those which did not contribute to the overall story of the data, or which were subordinate elements of the three main themes: Reflexivity, Agency and Habitus. Reflexivity was a later theme which emerged, necessitating a return to the data and a further round of coding. This return to the data is recognised as an essential element of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.5 Phase 5 Define and name themes

When the final three themes were identified, I undertook a process of capturing the essence of each. I returned to the transcript data, and identified the elements of the participants' 'story' that the theme emerged from. Each theme contained sub themes, which collectively formed the arguments in the thesis. When this phase was complete, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006:22) I could "describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences". This was an important step for me, allowing me to capture the essence of the themes and facilitating a clear definition of each. I was then ready to move on to the final write up of the thesis.

3.7.6 Phase 6 Write up

Using a narrative representation, I wrote the story of the data, under the thematic headings I had devised, arguments were developed by focussing on individual participants. Their stories were traced through their stories of critical incidents. The narrative write up is a way to explain experience, because “it is the way humans understand their own lives” (Richardson, 1995:218). The write-up included extracts from the data, across all seven participants, capturing the essence of my arguments. Each quote is attributed to the participants by use of their pseudonym, and also identified with a particular interview encounter, and date. I was fortunate in that I had developed a good rapport with the participants, and had generated a wealth of data, allowing me to identify examples which helped to illustrate my arguments in the words of the participants.

A study which explored the use of quotations by researchers found that there were differing views on how quotations should be used, and how many quotations to use (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). They argued that personal philosophical beliefs influence the manner in which researchers present quotations. This use of quotations not only highlighted the analytical points in the thesis and allowed readers to assess my analysis, giving evidence of my processes, but also served to give a sense of the participants, and, as suggested by Corden and Sainsbury (2006) they add to the diversity of the text, making it more engaging for the reader. This underlines a key factor of this study, the analysis and writing up of the data creates a new reality of my construction (Richardson, 1995).

The project findings were written up in three chapters, each devoted to a strand of the argument: Reflexivity, Agency and Habitus. Each chapter presents the

findings, followed by a thematic discussion of one strand of the argument. These chapters are followed by a conclusion chapter, which draws together the three arguments, and presents conclusions, with recommendations for policy and future research.

The following section will specifically consider the ethical and quality considerations which were employed within the project.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Within this project ethical considerations were a constant priority for me. At each stage of the process ethical reflexivity informed my decision making, these are discussed at the end of this section. However there were a series of formal ethical procedures which were essential to address at the commencement of the project.

3.8.1 Formal approval process

The University of Exeter's ethical procedures were followed, and an ethics application form was completed and submitted to the Graduate School of Education ethics committee. A Certificate of Ethical Approval was received, Ethics Committee Approval Reference 201415-084 (Appendix 6).

3.8.2 Ethical working with human participants

This section will discuss the fundamental ethical procedures observed during this project, using the framework suggested by Marvasti (2004). He suggested that there are four basic principles which should be observed when involving human participants in research:

- *The participants should be volunteers.* In this project all of the participants were introduced to me by third parties. Each had the project explained to them fully, and each volunteered to take part. Many potential participants did not take part, highlighting the ease with which those who were not interested in participating could express this choice.
- *The participants should be protected from harm.* Throughout the interviewing process the participants led the conversation, with limited prompts from me to keep them on topic, and to avoid missing important meanings. By recording the encounters it was possible to focus on the discussion, and the participants, and be alert to possible distress. There were no occasions where I believed that any distress was being generated.
- *Research should be mutually beneficial*. The research detailed in this thesis aims to explore the educational experiences of a group of people, with a view to informing support for this group in the future. It was this aim which encouraged the adults to participate. The young people, when asked, said that they thought it “might be fun” (research journal 6th January 2015). Perhaps giving young people a ‘fun’ activity does constitute a benefit, however in order to ensure that these young participants gained in the longer term, I produced Certificates of Participation for each, giving one to the school, to be included in their final year’s ‘Record of Achievement’, and sending a copy to them individually. This participation may allow them to add to their CV’s or to include details on a future personal statement for university.

- *The participants' privacy should be protected*. The participants were referred to by their pseudonyms in all documentation, digital materials and in conversation with supervisors. Signed permission slips, which revealed real names, were locked in a metal filing cabinet, and they did not have any cross-referencing detail on them which would link them to the pseudonyms. In addition to paper documentation, the project produced digital files in the form of audio recordings of interviews. These digital records were retained on the university server, in my OneDrive, as recommended by the university. This is a secure, and backed up area of the university server

3.8.2.1 Ethics with adult participants

BERA guidelines advise that "educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom" (BERA, 2011:4), While the University approval consisted of an eight part approval form, which covered the basic elements of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent as well as allowing for anticipated requirements, which could be foreseen before data collection commences. The formal ethical approval fulfilled the ethical requirements as a starting point; however it was not a reactive document, the use of a reflective diary helped to document the ongoing process, in order to ensure that any ethical dilemmas were recognised and addressed immediately and appropriately. These dilemmas are discussed later in this chapter. This touches upon BERA's concern for the ethic of respect for the person. Another early ethical dilemma was around travelling to visit male participants in their own homes. I believed it was important to allow all participants the choice of where to conduct

our interviews, this wish for democratic values also potentially put me at risk. I had promised confidentiality, however I was travelling alone to unknown places to meet unknown men. I wondered how to keep myself safe, while at the same time preserving the anonymity of the participant. I decided to leave a note containing my intended destination hidden in my office, but with instructions to my husband around where to find it, should I not return home. These small ethical decisions were frequent throughout the study.

3.8.2.2 Ethics with young people

3.8.2.2.1 Vulnerability

Young people in care are vulnerable. They are part of an unquantifiable group of children who have difficulties which will make a good future harder to achieve (Children's Commissioner, 2017a). They have been placed in care due to a range of complex circumstances, often involving abuse or neglect (Devon County Council, 2015; Riggs, King, Delfabbro, & Augoustinos, 2009). Holland et al. (Holland et al., 2008) talk of research which presents looked after children as ‘innocent’ and ‘at risk’ or as ‘out of control’ and ‘dangerous’, neither polar extreme is helpful. Children in care are as diverse in their personalities and behaviours as any other group of children, and all children are entitled to both care and respect in a research context. Nonetheless children in care are recognised as being particularly vulnerable; as well as the need to negotiate a world which is defined by adults, in which they are members, but without suffrage, a child in care has an added uncertainty about their life. They have moved from their family context, into a world of strangers. They need to start again, but without the certainty that they will not move again (Ridge & Millar, 2000). They may be stigmatised by their care experience, Farmer et al. (2013) found that this stigmatisation occurred even

when young people were living with members of their kin family rather than their parents. The participants in this study were bullied as a result of their home circumstances. This stigmatisation of those with a care background is not new, Michell (2015) documents stories told by Australian's recalling their time in foster care. They all had in common stigmatisation, with its associated bullying and isolation, from an early age. In Anne's first interview she referred to this phenomenon, and recorded it in her journal. The other girls picked on her because she was 'different'. They knew that she was 'in care' because there had been a time when she arrived at school in a taxi. With this in mind it was important to ensure that the young people were happy to meet with me in school. I did not want the project to be responsible for causing more stigmatisation. I asked at each school meeting, and when Anne and Julian each said that they wanted to stop the school meetings, I immediately ceased them. By this point I had visited them both at home more than once, so it was a straightforward amendment to the data collection process.

As discussed in the literature review, around 70% of children in care have Special Educational Needs (SEN), the most common type of SEN for this group is 'behavioural, emotional and social difficulties' (DfE, 2013). This is particularly significant in light of the findings of Govindshenoy and Spencer (2006:556) who found that "(c)hildren with psychological and emotional problems, particularly conduct disorder and learning difficulties appear to be at greatest risk" of abuse and/or neglect. Many young people enter care as a result of abuse in their birth family (DfE, 2014b). Both Susan and Debbie experienced abuse before entering care. As part of the ethical approval process I drew up a safeguarding protocol (Appendix 7) showing the procedures I would adopt if either Anne or Julian made

a disclosure to me during our interviews. In the event neither young person disclosed any information which caused me to be ethically challenged; the protocol was not called into service.

I had initially taken the view that the participants in this project, being 'looked after children' needed some form of special treatment, but on reflection realised that this was not the case. Anne and Julian are young people who have the same concerns as other young people. They have areas of their lives which are difficult for them to talk about, but so do all children. Children in care have the same right to both protection and participation as other children and young people (Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Consideration of possible vulnerabilities at the planning stage of this project, coupled with an ongoing reflexive approach to the project allowed me to balance protection and participation issues.

3.8.3 Informed consent

> *The essence of the principle of informed consent is that the human subjects of research should be allowed to agree or refuse to participate in the light of comprehensive information concerning the nature and purpose of the research.*
> *(Homan, 1991:69)*

This definition of informed consent appears straightforward on first reading, the researcher must tell the potential participant about the project, in sufficient detail to allow the participant to agree or not. This simplicity masks two underlying assumptions: Capacity to 'consent' and the meaning of 'informed' (Marvasti, 2004).

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Wales that people are deemed to have capacity to enter into contracts. There was no reason to suggest that any of the adult participants, Gordon, Susan, Helen, Gary or Debbie, were not competent to participate. Gary has learning disabilities; however he lives independently, engages with technology and takes a keen interest in both his care history, and the social care support he currently receives. There was no indication that he lacked competence to participate. A child cannot be deemed to lack capacity merely because of their age, however extra protections are necessary in order to work with children. In this project access was gained to children via a series of gatekeepers: the local authority; the school head teacher; the school's child protection officer and the parents/carers. That people are deemed to have capacity to enter into contracts. There was no reason to suggest that any of the adult participants, Gordon, Susan, Helen, Gary or Debbie, were not competent to participate. Gary has learning disabilities; however he lives independently, engages with technology and takes a keen interest in both his care history, and the social care support he currently receives. There was no indication that he lacked competence to participate. A child cannot be deemed to lack capacity merely because of their age, however extra protections are necessary in order to work with children. In this project access was gained to children via a series of gatekeepers: the local authority; the school head teacher; the school's child protection officer and the parents/carers.

3.8.3.1 How informed were the participants?

In a qualitative project such as this, the nature of the research was dynamic, and outcomes could not be fully anticipated at the outset, consent was therefore also an ongoing process. At the first meeting with each participant I explained what I

anticipated, and the nature and purpose of the study. I explained that they could each withdraw from the project at any time, and could specifically withdraw certain sections of their contributions at any point. Each participant was also given the opportunity to receive copies of the recorded meetings. This would allow them to identify any area of discussion which they were concerned about, and also gave them the opportunity to revisit their contributions, perhaps to augment or to refute some of their earlier words. Of the 5 adult participants, only Helen wished to receive copies of her interviews. She asked to receive copies of the transcribed interviews, and these were sent to her electronically once the transcription process was completed. As she had expressed an interest in receiving this material, Helen was also sent a copy of the findings and conclusions chapters before the write up was complete, to allow her feedback to form part of the final thesis. The young people had an abridged consent form and information sheet (Appendix 1), but their parents and carers were each provided with the full version which went to the adult participants. This abridged form was devised in order to make the language as accessible as possible to them. I did not wish to assume that they would have the same level of comprehension as the adult participants. At the same time, each young person also had access to the paperwork provided for their parents and carers. The young people's forms included detail of all of the creative methods which they could employ. All of the informed consent paperwork was provided in duplicate, so that participants could refer back to it. My contact details, as well as those of my supervisory team were also provided, and participants were assured that they could contact any of the team with questions relating to the research. Informed consent was a continuous process such as that developed by Renold et al. in their 'Extraordinary Lives'

project (Renold, Holland, Ross, & Hillman, 2010). Although the participants signed the ethical consent form at the outset of the project, this was not a 'once and for all' consent, instead consent was revisited often following interviews, ensuring that the participants were reminded of their right to withdraw. It was apparent to me that the participants took note of this ongoing process, for example, during conversation there were several incidents where a participant mentioned a name, and then immediately confirmed that I would anonymise the transcript.

3.8.4 Consent forms

The consent forms varied in content according to participant group, however all documents contained assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. The form devised for young people is considerably more visual than textual. In part this was done to model the type of creative journaling I hoped that the young people would engage with, but it was also hoped to simplify the paperwork, to allow a better understanding of what was involved. The standard consent form, (Appendix 1) is a particularly wordy document, which is not particularly engaging. I wanted to try to ensure that they young people in the study would engage with the key elements of the consent. At my first meeting with potential participants at the school I explained who I was and what the project entailed. I went through the consent forms with the young people as a group, and gave them an envelope containing a parent/carer consent form and a young person's consent form (each in duplicate), and asked them to think about whether they would like to take part in the project, and if they would I asked that they speak to the person who normally gives consent to them taking part in things, and ask them to read the paperwork, and sign and return the form to the school. The CPO kindly collected

the responses and let me know when they arrived. When I had received consent from the relevant adult for each young person, I then arranged to meet them in school, and explained the project again. I also explained about the concept of ethics, as both young people were unsure of what this meant. I asked them to sign the young people's consent forms; I had condensed the research questions, and the ethical priorities into 4 key questions (figure 3).

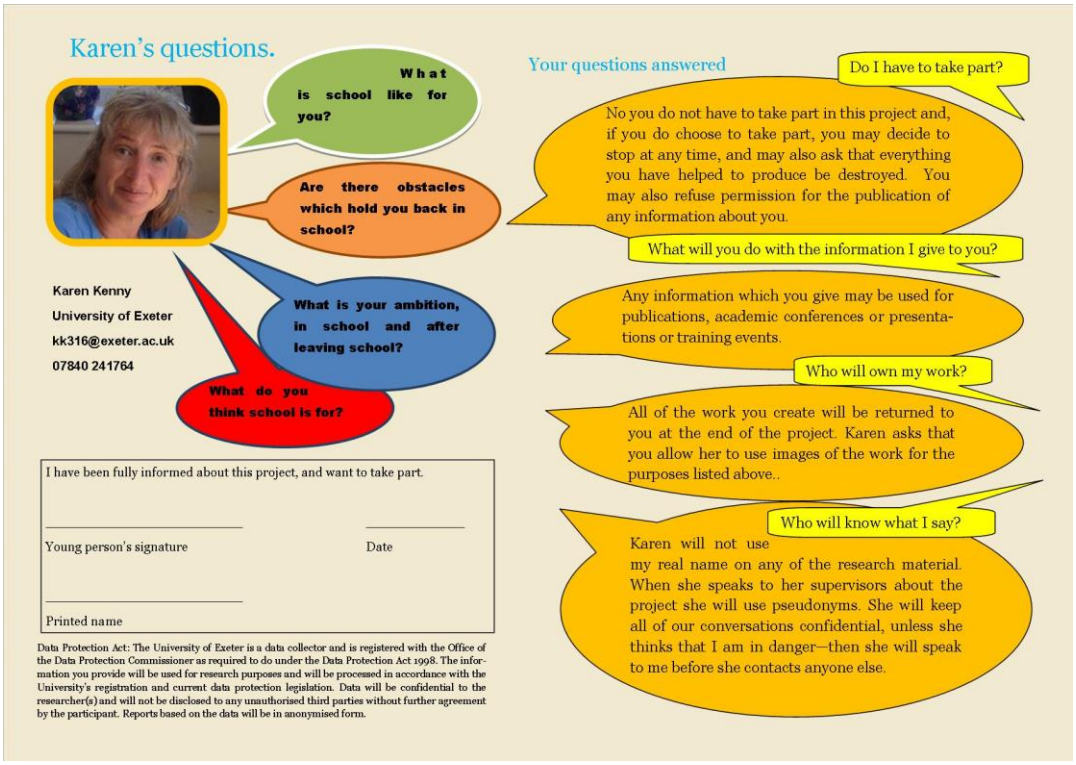
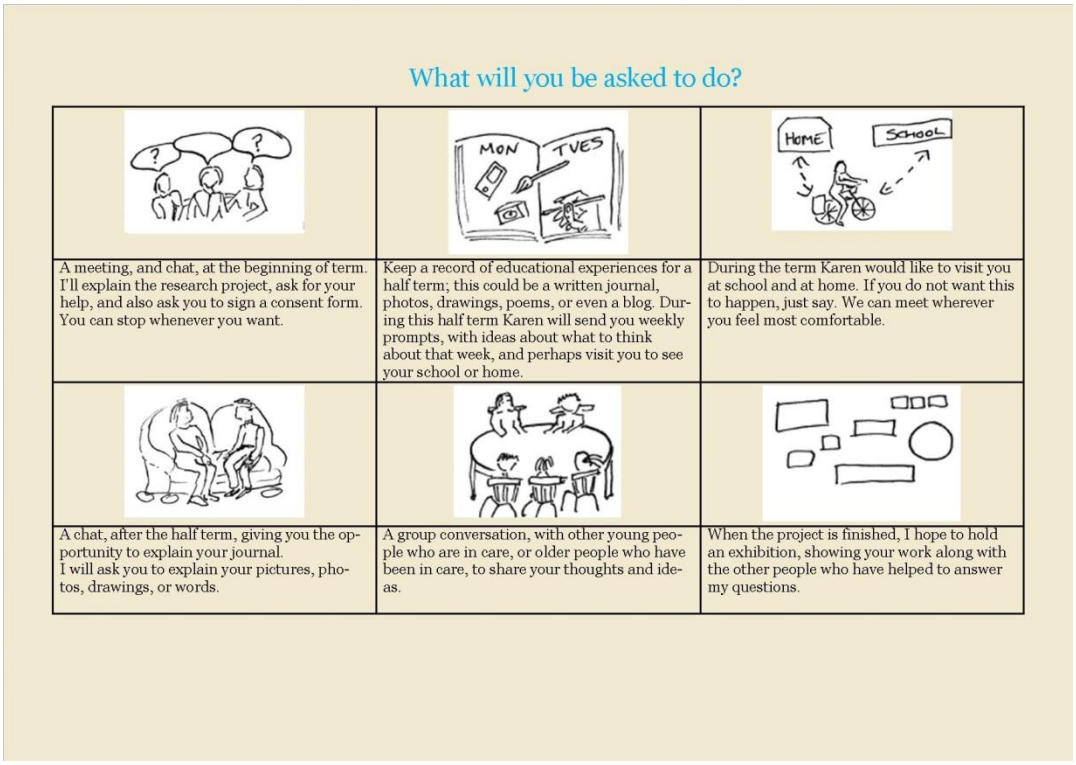


Figure 3 Young person's consent form

The proposed research events were suggested in a cartoon strip format on the reverse (figure 4)



What will you be asked to do?

A meeting, and chat, at the beginning of term. I'll explain the research project, ask for your help, and also ask you to sign a consent form. You can stop whenever you want.	Keep a record of educational experiences for a half term; this could be a written journal, photos, drawings, poems, or even a blog. During this half term Karen will send you weekly prompts, with ideas about what to think about that week, and perhaps visit you to see your school or home.	During the term Karen would like to visit you at school and at home. If you do not want this to happen, just say. We can meet wherever you feel most comfortable.
A chat, after the half term, giving you the opportunity to explain your journal. I will ask you to explain your pictures, photos, drawings, or words.	A group conversation, with other young people who are in care, or older people who have been in care, to share your thoughts and ideas.	When the project is finished, I hope to hold an exhibition, showing your work along with the other people who have helped to answer my questions.

Figure 4 Young person's consent form – reverse side

The adult participants had the project explained to them at the beginning of the first interview, and signed their consent forms at that time.

3.9 Quality

Historically quality assurance in quantitative research was often associated with claims of reliability and validity (Seale, 1999). It was claimed that reliability and validity allowed for transferability and generalisability of research findings, evidencing that the results of the research would be the same when repeated on different occasions or with different participants. This study, with its small sample, and qualitative methods, did not aim for generalisable truths, rendering these concepts of reliability and validity inappropriate, the sample is insufficiently large to allow for claims that it is representative of the entirety of children in care, the individuals who participated were not chosen at random, and our interview encounters were structured around an informal conversation, with narratives co-

constructed. A more useful measure of quality and rigour for this project is provided by Lincoln and Guba's concept of trustworthiness (1985), which they suggest is a measure of whether or not the findings are worthy of attention. Lincoln and Guba suggest that the following four criteria can establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.9.1 Credibility

For Lincoln and Guba the credibility of research is a measure of how believable the conclusions are (1985:296). They suggest that it is possible to demonstrate credibility through sound project planning and by demonstrating that the findings are true to the intentions of the participants. As a foster carer I was in a privileged position, with sound knowledge of the field, and an understanding of the issues which may face a child in care. This familiarity with the field enabled me to build rapport with the participants early in our research encounters, generating an atmosphere of trust, where difficult experiences could be related. I met with each participant on at least four occasions, allowing an element of prolonged engagement. This blend of trust and engagement enabled me to detect potential misunderstandings in the data, and to ask for clarification, an ongoing element of 'member-checking'.

In addition I shared my findings and discussions with one of the adult participants during the final stages of writing up the thesis. This participant had expressed an interest in reading the final document during our third meeting:

> *I'm really looking forward to seeing the write up on it actually, what angles you bring out of it.*
>
> *(Helen 3rd interview 01/10/15)*

Lincoln and Guba (1985:296) suggest that this 'member checking 'is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility". Helen's feedback (Appendix 8) confirmed for me that my interpretation was appropriate; it was particularly pleasing to read how she engaged with the words of the other participants.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is a measure of how well the findings can be applied in another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:298). Every individual and group is unique is some respects, but not in every respect. In many ways the participants in this study are not unique, they "share with other human beings certain typical emotions and feelings, aspirations and hopes, needs and wants" (Pring, 2001:107).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that transferability can be achieved by means of describing phenomena in sufficient detail, by means of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). In order to produce a thick description, the findings chapters have utilised direct quotations from interviews, and then, staying close to the participants words, I situated my findings in a wider social context. Findings from their experiences can inform the practice of those working with similar groups of young people, as well as adding to our knowledge of the educational experience, as suggested in the conclusions chapter.

3.9.3 Dependability

For Lincoln and Guba, dependability is a measure of how well the project findings could be repeated (1985:299). As stated above, this study was not planned as one which could be replicated across other contexts. For this study dependability could be developed through taking steps to ensure that there was a clear record of the project processes. Lincoln and Guba suggest that dependability can be

demonstrated by external audit, (1985:299). Throughout the research process my work has been examined and supported by two experienced academics. This process could be viewed as a form of external audit, meeting the requirement to have a researcher who is not involved in the project examine both process and product. An audit trail was produced by keeping a researcher diary, to record events and ideas, and by using CAQDAS software a digital record of the coding process was maintained. In addition, throughout the research process photographic records were kept to illustrate how my thinking had developed. The processes within this study have been reported in detail in this thesis, enabling future researchers to repeat the design. This coverage allows readers to gain a thorough understanding of my methods of data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004).

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a way to exhibit the neutrality of findings, evidencing that results are not shaped by researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail above helps to provide confirmability, allowing another researcher to revisit my decision making processes, and to evaluate how findings were reached. Throughout this thesis the researcher position is explicit; decisions taken around methods and analysis have been explained and theorised in this methodological description, producing this 'audit trail' (Shenton, 2004). The use of NVIVO 10 to store and manage data augments the audit trail by preserving a time line of analytical process (Taylor et al., 2005). In addition, researcher reflections are provided which give an insight into how I positioned myself during the research process, and some of the questions I grappled with during the process.

3.10 Researcher reflexivity

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) suggested that reflexivity is an essential part of the research process, allowing the researcher to account for the effect they have on the data collection, analysis and findings. This section addresses my reflexivity specifically, but I hope that throughout this document my critically reflexive approach is evident. This project is firmly rooted in my life outside of the research environment, drawing on my fostering role, as well as my interest in education. It has been argued that the researcher's background will always influence both the topic of study and the means of study (Malterud, 2001), however perhaps this project fulfils this claim more than most. This section will highlight some of the reflexive moments I encountered during this project.

My researcher reflections truly began with a note in my researcher diary, made some four years before the submission of this thesis. This was the point when I realised that my PhD project should carry out research into the education of children in care. I had just finished supporting a young person in their revision; as noted in the introduction to this paper, this was when I realised that an area for research was presenting itself to me. This diary, across several volumes now, records many internal conversations. Sometimes I was required to think quickly, and react to an immediate situation, while other dilemmas allowed me to consider my options carefully. The careful planning which informed my application for ethical permission to conduct this project allowed me to consider potential issues, but the experience of being 'in the field' exposed new dilemmas.

Ethical concerns regarding the recruitment of participants have been addressed above; however my ongoing relationship with participants also required reflexivity. Data collection caused me to consider my position, I had planned the

project to allow participants to select where and when each interview took place. The majority of meetings were held in the homes of the participants themselves. I took steps, detailed above, to ensure my personal safety; however, whilst in the homes of participants, I found that my role was a difficult one to define. As detailed by Yee and Andrews (2006), the building of rapport during interviews required a level of sociability, but it was difficult to identify when the line between 'professional researcher' and 'good guest' was reached. This was clear during the first meeting with Susan; when her son and husband arrived home she quickly moved our conversation to a different room, she requested that future meetings be held at my house. I considered the ethical appropriateness of meeting in my home, and decided that Susan's wishes were most important. My ethical approval allowed for meetings to be held wherever the adults requested, so I agreed to this. For Susan the interview was an event quite separate from her family, and she did not welcome its intrusion onto her family life. Gordon, on the other hand, was considerably more relaxed with me in his home, to the point that he introduced me to other family members on two occasions. My presence and the purpose of my presence clearly impacted on the nature of the research encounters. As Yee and Andrews (2006) found, the challenge before me was to maintain my research focus, when rapport with participants was strongest. In meetings with Helen, who I knew before the project, each meeting was held in a neutral location, a café or restaurant. She chose these venues, and I am sure that this choice helped us to maintain a professional distance, allowing a different relationship to be established across the four research encounters, and enabling us to resume our previous relationship when the project ended.

More obvious challenges presented themselves to me, requiring a reflexive approach. At my first meeting with Debbie, which was incidentally the first research interview of the project, I was faced with an ethical dilemma. We met in a coffee shop and when we sat down Debbie removed her coat. Her arms were very badly scarred; these were obviously self-harm marks. I debated internally, whether I should mention this directly, or wait for her to talk about them. I decided that the scarring and the cause of the scarring were outside the realms of this study unless she related them to her 'educational experience'. During our conversations Debbie did talk about her self-harm, without prompting from me.

Power imbalance also caused me some consideration, I did not wish to place myself in a position of power over the participants; since they held the stories which I wished to hear, it would be more appropriate for them to be 'in charge'. The project was planned to allow participants as much choice as possible, however some occasions caused me internal difficulties. An early example, again coming from the first interview with Debbie, but repeated across other encounters with other participants, was the issue of who should pay? We met in a coffee shop, so I of course paid for two coffees, but by paying I immediately put myself into a power position. I believe I was correct to pay, Debbie had made time to meet with me, so she should not have been financially out of pocket, but the situation did remind me of Levinson (2010), when there was some consideration of 'buying' access by means of buying drinks.

When working with Anne and Julian, the young people in the project, I was most aware of potential power imbalances, and although I tried to minimise this, I was aware that their stories were constructed with a particular view of me and my project in mind. In addition, both of these young participants had other adults in

their lives who took an interest in the stories they told. This was apparent when Julian's carer chose to sit in the next room, able to overhear everything that was said. When I considered the situation from her perspective, I could understand her imperative, she is employed to 'care' for this young man, and so she ensured that nothing untoward was happening to him. There is no doubt that her presence had some effect on Julian's conversation, but it was not a situation I felt able to change. With hindsight I believe I should have taken more care to ensure that Julian was happy to be overheard in this way.

Whilst analysing and writing up the project I am aware that I present a positive perspective regarding the participants. My aim was to identify their understandings, and these were positive, their stories, as outlined in the following chapters, were ones of success. This positivity however also perhaps stems from my own attitude to education and achievement. I am a teacher, and I have a strong motivation towards helping young people who find themselves in the care of the state, these two imperatives have undoubtedly informed my decision making. I have presented in this chapter the reasoning behind my methodological choices, and made explicit my choices as I worked through the project.

Throughout this project I maintained my diary, which weaves reflexive considerations alongside practical comments relating to the fieldwork and ideas emerging from the data and from reading. This diary has helped me to reflect upon issues in the project, and allowed me to record the development of my ideas.

3.11 Presentation of findings

This project did not set out to uncover a ‘cure’ for the weak educational outcomes of children in care; it set out to shine a light on the experiences of young people in care, over a period of some 50 years. In this aim it is successful.

This chapter has explained the methodological processes which have structured this thesis. I began by explaining the philosophical reasons for selecting an interpretive research design. Following this the chapter outlined the research methods employed, gave a brief ‘pen portrait’ of the participants, and explained the analytical procedure. It concluded with detailed consideration of the ethical elements of the project, including consideration of the quality of the findings. It finished with a brief overview of the essential elements of reflexivity which have been important throughout the project.

The findings section which follows tells the stories I have constructed, of the educational experiences of young people in care. The findings are presented across three chapters, each addressing a key argument, through the narrative representation of themes which emerged during analysis (Figure 5). This diagrammatic representation of the themes will be augmented through the findings chapters, in order to present a model for learning.

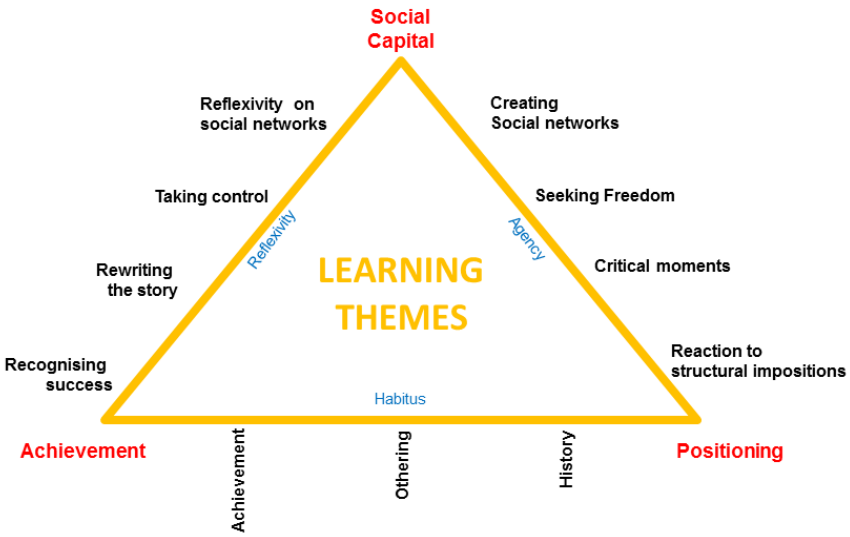


Figure 5 Themes

The first of the findings chapters addresses reflexivity, and is represented by excerpts which show participants reflexivity across four main areas: taking control, rewriting their stories, recognising success and, building social networks. This trait is described in relation to educational experiences across a range of life experiences. This chapter argues that children in care have a capacity for reflexivity which may be seen as surprising given the disadvantages they have experienced.

The next chapter considers how participants narrated themselves as agentic within the highly structured care system. The four themes in this chapter are: creating social networks, seeking freedom, demonstrating agency at critical moments and, reacting to structural impositions. The chapter argues that children in care identify areas in which they see possibilities for agency, and construe their actions as agentic.

The third findings chapter considers the way that participants' habituses emerged across three themes: othering, achievement and history. This chapter argues that the experiences of 'care' form the basis of the structuring of an educative habitus, preparing children in care for the future life which they will experience.

Chapter 4 - Reflexivity

4.1 Introduction

Reflexivity in research is traditionally considered to be part of the role of the researcher, involving the researcher understanding their impact on the research encounter and foregrounding that effect (Malterud, 2001). It is less common to consider the reflexivity of participants in the research process (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2015). During analysis of the interview data participants' stories emerged as encompassing both reflection and reflexivity. Reflection involves examining an action after the event, with a view to learning from the experience and adjusting future behaviour, as such reflection involves consequences (Dewey, 1991). Reflection is a useful means of informing future behaviour, it is a learning tool, however reflection can be one dimensional, where the social actor does not consider the 'objective conditions' in which their actions occur. Being reflexive is more complex than being reflective (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2015); reflexivity is an interactive process, whereby participants consider the context in which they are operating, and the relationships between themselves and the others in their stories, this social element is intrinsic to reflexivity (Archer, 2007). Reflexivity is a form of 'internal conversation', where participants are able to locate themselves in the stories they relate and to appreciate how their actions influence the social field in which they are located, this idea of 'location' resonates with Enosh & Ben-Ari's visualisation of an epistemological map, co-created by researcher and participants (2015). The stories told in this thesis are tales of childhoods spent 'in care'; they are the selected memories of a group of care experienced individuals. Spratt et al. (2012) found that children who had experienced early neglect experienced disrupted cognitive development, perhaps limiting their potential for

reflexivity, this conflicts with Bourdieu's suggestion that times of crisis may promote reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990b). This chapter shows participants stepping outside of their remembered experiences, and relating them for the purpose of the project.

Childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon, with children being represented as vulnerable and also dependent upon adults (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). For children who have been taken into care, their faith in adults has been disturbed, perhaps irretrievably so. These findings suggest the existence of a mature mind-set in this group of society, contradicting the potential 'victim' discourse, and refuting the media representations of young people in care as troublesome, violent criminals (Clark, Ghosh, Green, & Shariff, 2008; Gordon, McAlister, & Scraton, 2015). These findings are important, as they show how young people not only learn by reflecting on their experiences, but also take a step back from their 'reality' in order to understand and effect change.

During analysis 15 basic codes were identified as addressing 'reflexivity' (Appendix 5), using NVIVO these codes were grouped and transcripts revisited, along with a return to the original recordings, to identify the sub-themes which demonstrated 'reflexivity'. The initial codes were disaggregated, and the final themes emerged. Reflexivity was apparent in a number of ways, which are grouped in this chapter under the following sub headings: Recognising success; rewriting the story, taking control; and building social capital.

The data which follows show how young people in care reflected on their lives as they recognised what 'success' meant to them, and reflexively strategized to narrate personal 'success'. They re-storied their lives, focussing on the positive, and using their experiences as a force for good. They reflexively talk of taking

control, both in forging change but also in postponing behaviours. This group of people experienced loss at an early age, and have learned to reflexively retell their stories in positive ways. The findings indicate reflexive building of social capital, both in perception of family, and in the strategic exclusion of individuals who no longer 'fit'.

4.2 Rewriting the story

This theme arose in the earliest coding cycles, in its first iteration this was where it appeared that the participants were 'embellishing' a story. As the analysis continued the theme developed to encompass nuanced considerations of the context of the storytelling. When the participants told their stories, they were not narrating historical truth, if indeed such a thing as historical truth could be said to exist. They claimed two motivations: they were 'helping' me, the researcher or they wished to improve the educational situation for future children in care. They were telling their story in a particular way, for a particular purpose, and their every word was being recorded. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) remind us, we are constantly storying our lives, to fit different contexts, and the story changes dependent on the conditions of the telling. Stories are also dependent upon memory, particularly relevant in this project, as some of the memories are from many years ago, and are viewed through the lens of time, while others are recent recollections. Each participant was selected because they spent some or all of their adolescence in care, they told the stories of the 'care experienced', a particular nuance which will have influenced the story which was told, and the way they were told.

Participants selected stories to tell, from the lives they remember, in the few hours we were together, in order to meet what they perceived as 'my'

requirements. I was open about my background as both a teacher and foster carer with each participant, so their stories were influenced by their perceptions of those roles, as well as the research process. These stories each contained a plot, told in a neat and coherent way, real life does not occur in this tidy manner, so the stories are, by their very nature, reconstructed accounts. This section considers some of the reframing which was apparent during analysis, and attempts to construe the significance of the stories. The participants were reflexively viewing the research process, and selecting tales to tell.

Some stories seemed to be told with a view to passing on sage advice to others; participants know that I will write a thesis, and evince hope that their experiences can help other young people. The following excerpts from Gordon and Debbie are telling a clear story to care professionals, 'Don't ignore these signs!' Gordon retrospectively blames a lack of guidance for his foray into crime, and also for his lack of social skills, which persists to this day. He avoided going to the polytechnic, as he believed it would be just like the boarding school he had just left. He reflects that he did not know how much more there was to be gained from attending college:

> *I did regret it at one point in my life, you know sort of eh, not going to what was then polytechnic. When I came out of boarding school I think I did have an opportunity to go there, and at the time I just well because you know at that age I wasn't thinking clearly or hadn't had any sort of real guidance in what you should or shouldn't do, really, to get on. So I just sort of associated it with going back to school again. You know I didn't, sort of, have the knowledge to understand that it would become, you know, you would actually make sort of, you know, good friends and have a social life and all the rest of it that all got wrapped up with it. So that I look back on it sometimes and kind of regret doing that, because I think once I got into it*

and realised what it was all about, I would have actually done ok. You know I went sort of the other way, sort of the college of crime really, and I was pretty hopeless at it.
Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15

With hindsight Gordon sees that there was more involved in his decision to leave full time education when he did, but at the time he chose a different route. Here he is reflecting on missed opportunities, realising that life could have been different. But the blame is shifted, it was not his fault, rather a lack of guidance precipitated his decision. This is more than mere reflection though, as Gordon is considering the different route he could have taken, he tells me of his 'internal conversation', recognising that 'he would have done OK'. The research project is Gordon's way of communicating with a wider audience that his choice was poor, and the other one, that of staying in education, would have worked out. His participation in this project suggests an element of what Archer (2007) would term meta-reflexivity, where his 'value' is to help others to avoid his path.

Like Gordon, Debbie too reflects on past behaviours, and considers who was 'at fault'. She views the books of Jacqueline Wilson as hastening her eating disorder. It is worth noting that in the book which Debbie refers to, the heroine stops her experiments with dieting when she visits a friend in a hospital for girls with eating disorders and sees the reality of that life choice. Debbie developed eating disorders, along with other mental health conditions, and spent much of her time in care in hospital:

I swear right, cos I had an eating disorder, like with throwing up and everything, I literally learned that through Jacqueline Wilson cos there's one of the books, Girls Under Pressure, and like all behaviour is learnt and

the whole idea of throwing up is, like I never knew about it until I read that book, and then you know when you're like really young, I must have been about, still at primary school, and then you try it once and then it becomes an addiction and a behaviour. But if I didn't read it in that book, it might have been a few more years before I'd even heard about it, so I think Jacqueline Wilson has a lot to answer for.
Debbie 2nd interview 16/08/15

When Debbie was in hospital, recovering from mental health issues, she found it was useful to exhibit particular behaviours, in this case anger, in order to allow the nurses to 'cure' her:

They thought that there was something wrong with me because I wasn't ill, or like showing any upset or anger, so I used to just make up these problems of like, oh I'm feeling very angry at those girls, like who I'm living with, even though I wasn't. It was just something so that they thought that I was like, I don't know it's what they were looking for.
(Debbie1st interview 13/08/15)

Here we have a suggestion of action designed to achieve a particular outcome, she talks of providing symptoms, so that she could later exhibit a cure. Bev Skeggs (2004) suggested that working-class women are made to 'tell themselves' in particular ways as they strive for 'value', where value is integral to their self-worth. Debbie had to be reflexive in this particular way, in the story she told, she was compelled to invent emotions to give reasons for her actions.

As with Gordon, Debbie framed an experience of hers into a cautionary tale for a wider audience of other young people, and for those who care for them. The media portrayal of children in care is not often positive. Jacqueline Wilson's books, the most famous of which are the Tracy Beaker series and its spin off 'The

Dumping Ground' are perceived by young people as a negative portrayal (Cockett, 2017). When Debbie reflected on her mental health, she identified when her behaviour started to become a problem, but she took care to point out, that she did not know at the time, at age nine, that something was wrong.

> *I was nine or something, and the school nurse had come in and doing the height and weight checks and stuff, and then I completely freaked out and locked myself in the bathroom like in the toilets. And the teacher had to get a screwdriver and unlock it and get me out cos I wouldn't be weighed. And that's the first time I knew about having a problem. Like well I didn't realise I had a problem but looking back …*
> *Debbie 2nd interview 16/08/15*

The story Debbie told here rather refutes her claim of ignorance; why would she have 'freaked out' if she did not perceive that there was a problem with weight checks? Debbie, as a young adult, looked back and saw the beginnings of her mental health problems. She exhibited a reflexive conversation with her young self, trying to locate the reasons for her problems, and she believed she had identified when they started. She seemed to be, like Gordon, pointing out when intervention may have helped. She deployed one of her life experiences in order to advise others. While Debbie spoke about her own mental health issues, which she viewed as a symptom of her childhood, Helen entered care, in her opinion, largely as a result of her mother's mental health.

Reflecting on the reasons for her entry into care, Helen considers her mother's reasoning and worry, and then overlays a series of reasons why this was not really the cause, concluding that in fact her mother could not cope;

I think she was worried for my safety, but she couldn't cope either, and she used to have like anxiety attacks. Actually this is one of the reasons I didn't want to be at home as well, because we used to go out, and we'd be in town, she'd have a massive panic attack, and I was really young, I was like 12, and I remember her making me hold her hand and look after her. So I was having that going on as well, I was having to look after my mum. I was in the house once and she did it and we had to call an ambulance, and it was like a lot of pressure for me, a lot of responsibility, with my mum not being able to cope, basically.
Helen 1st interview 10/09/15

There are two stories here, a mother with mental health issues, and a young girl, a pre-teen, who is resenting her role as carer: she was too young, it was a lot of pressure she tells it as too great a responsibility. At 12 years of age, Helen remembers that this should not have been her role. When Helen tells the story, she is telling of a young girl reflecting on her life and choosing to escape it. She narrates a series of events in a vignette, piling responsibilities one on the other, suggesting that she took all of this into consideration before she decided to run away from home. Mum's story, about concern for safety is rewritten in the space of the paragraph.

Helen also reflects upon the reasons for her poor academic results. At primary school she had been predicted great things, she passed her 11 plus, and was on track for a good set of GCSE's and then A levels. This is not what happened though, and Helen places the blame for this on the closure of her school:

I was still top of the class in maths, English and all that, but what happened, the big bombshell, for education anyway. I think if I'd have

carried on with the education I'd have done alright, possibly. I don't know, because what's the future? I did end up in care so that changed things, but the massive thing with the education was the school decided to close, and they did it, in a way I was settled, I was bored in school, I remember in maths looking out the window, bored, it was too easy, but you know I had my friend groups for that. But they didn't allow people to finish school, they just stopped it in year 2, so in year 3, which is now year 9, so year 9, I was moved again, and everybody had to choose schools. And the school we were going to was a comprehensive, but it was really small, so, and all the others in the area were massive, so all the friend groups split up because of the parents' decisions on where to put them, and - did I actually go to the school there? I think at the moment I got put in care. My mum put me in voluntary care because of my safety, because I just kept on going away. Helen 1st interview 10/09/15

Here we have, condensed, a story of change and disruption. A girl who saw herself as academically clever, she complained of boredom in lessons because they were too easy. She recalled having a social circle, a group of friends, but everything changed simultaneously in her recollection. Her school changed at the same time as she was put in care by her mother. Being put in care is not viewed as the major disruption; instead it is the change of school which caused her changed academic outlook. But there was some doubt as to which school she actually went to. Helen showed an element of reflexivity here, she is empathising with her mother's position; she blamed her educational setbacks on the structural change, the closure of the school and the ensuing upheaval that this caused, rather than placing blame on her mother's actions. In order to do this, she has examined the fault that she seems to believe lay with her mother, and changed the narrative, her mother is re-storied as a victim too, when Helen reflexively rewrites her history, to tell her mother's tale in a favourable light.

There is also a reframing of punishment, to make it seem a desirable event. Both Gary and Anne talked of punishments they have received, which they can 're-story' in a positive light. They have agentically reframed what happened to them, they reflected upon the 'punishment' that was meted out to them, but refute the notion that it is indeed punishment. Gary talked of being left alone at the zoo, or the park, by his foster carers, who he disliked. When he reflected upon their motives, he believed that they wanted to make him feel sad, but he turned the experience into a happy one. In a kind of re-reflection, he feigned unhappiness, so that those who wished him ill would not realise that he was enjoying the experience. Here we see an indication of reflexivity, where Gary reflects on both his position and his actions, but also the effect of his actions on others. He had little opportunity, as a child, to change his outcomes, but he could change the way he was perceived by the carers who he disliked. He tells a story of overcoming adversity in his small space, and coming out on top.

> *I used to imagine like they'd leave the zoo and I'd be left in there. You now that was 'happy thoughts'. So like going to the zoo and being purposely left; and parks, they used to just leave me in the park. They always threatened to leave me as well, but it's like...they can't make me happy, I know they were doing it to make me sad, but it made me happy that they were threatening to just leave me wherever. And you know, anything that you know like, we'll leave you there, take you to this place and that's the end of it. It's like I learnt not to smile because I thought if they start picking up that I'm actually happy then they'll stop doing it.*
> *Gary 2nd interview 26/01/16*

Gary had learnt here that while he could not control what happened to him, he could control his reaction to it. By reflexively examining his context he was able to make changes happen in the small spaces that were available to him.

Anne too re-storied an isolating punishment into a boon. At her school there was a room where students were sent when they were in trouble. They were removed from class and had to spend the rest of the day isolated from their classmates, tasked to work on whatever material their teachers had provided. The room had a duty member of staff, so they were not totally alone. Anne admitted that she was sent to this room often, but when she talked about this punishment, it became a useful aid to her studies. She claimed that she didn't get on with people in her class, so being sent out allowed her to work.

> *I get most of my work done in there though, more in there that what I do in the lesson.*
> *There's so many people in my lessons that I don't get on with, and they start arguments, and then I get kicked out*
> *Anne 1st interview 13/01/16*

In the excerpt there was an undertone of injustice too, it's not fair, that 'they start the arguments' but she was the one who was punished. She reframed this injustice, so that she got what she wanted from the situation 'most of my work done'. In the same way as Gary, above, reflexively rewrote his 'punishment', here Anne did the same thing. Within the structural confines of the school environment, Anne narrated this story which shows her 'winning'. By reflexively considering her position, she was able to story herself into a better place, of course there was no actual change for either Gary or Anne, only that they had reflexively decided to change the way they viewed their situations.

Children in care are labelled by their experiences, the stigma attaching to them because of their 'care' status. Gordon found himself labelled, but the solution for him was not in his hands when he was a boy, he was unable to position himself physically, he does say that he was asked about going to boarding school, and he agreed to go.

> *I wasn't a trouble maker, I just seemed to be in the middle of whatever trouble was going on and you kind of get the blame. So I think between the county council and my foster parents they sort of ' agreed, and I think I had to agree at the time, I think I was asked whether I'd like to go to the boarding school, but it was a school for maladjusted kids.*
> *Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15*

Gordon was sent to boarding school, in his story he refuted the 'trouble maker' label, but had another imposed, a 'maladjusted kid'. This took him away from his carers during term time, and he told me that he stayed at the school over the holidays too. When he describes his time at boarding school, it is a bleak existence; he narrated a list of hardship, with nothing more than the government provided:

> *I always remember sort of clothes, I seem to remember at boarding school that I would have to have sort of council issue clothes that the school provided. I was never bought clothes from home, it was always sort of you know they'd give you the horrible shoes and things like that, the government issue stuff which was really horrible. It was almost as if they were just doing their duty and what they don't have to do they're not going to volunteer to do anything more. I hope I'm not being too unkind to them, because I'm sure they meant well, I'm sure they did, but... I suppose I was just a bit too much for them really, I mean you know I think I was a little*

shite.

Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15

At the end of this last extract Gordon both blamed and exonerated his foster parents, before reflecting that it was probably his fault, as he was a 'little shite'. He has narrated his tale of hardship, but then takes ownership of the behaviour which brought it about. The boy, Gordon, had little opportunity to do anything other than that which was imposed by those in charge: his carers and social services. When he tells his story he can reframe it a little to allow himself some autonomy.

4.3 Recognising success

This theme emerged during analysis, when it became apparent that participants viewed educational success more widely than the measured outcomes generally associated with 'success'. It is defined in my analysis notes as "They come to a realisation of what they can do and use this knowledge to seek successful outcomes".

The brief excerpts which follow highlight the importance of reflexivity in the way young people in care learn to succeed. In a school or traditional academic setting reflexivity was evident as a means to strategise for success, a way to identify behaviours which promoted success. Outside of the school setting reflexivity around success and failure were evident as a way to identify and foster behaviours which the participants viewed as successful. As well as this reflexivity however, participants were considering their position in relation to others in a more reflexive way. The opinions of others were important in this process, inspiring change through both positive and negative rhetoric.

For the participants 'success' was a goal across all areas of their lives, within the small spaces in which they had some degree of agency. Much of their lives after

they entered care were a product of local authority regulation, but within these confines there were signs of participants reflexively considering their position, and striving for that ‘successful’ persona. Success meant different things to the participants, but it was clear that they had reflected upon what success was and how it could be achieved. Debbie saw academic achievement as success, winning a place at university and maintaining it were important to her. For Julian, success involved his reputation amongst his peers, rather than the imposed version of success which his adult support network advocated for him. He repeated their words, but they were not his words, or his opinion. Gordon talked of reflexively changing his life, for him ‘success’ became freedom, both his immediate freedom from incarceration and also the freedom of a nomadic, self-sufficient lifestyle.

For Debbie, ‘success’ was academic success. She had achieved her goal of attending university, but now she talked of how she could maintain this. In her academic endeavours, Debbie showed her strategic understanding of her study preferences. She avoided others by studying in the night, claiming that the presence of others was a distraction:

> *I came up with the perfect system at uni, that I’d sleep from about 6 till 9 or 10, wake up do about 4 or 5 hours of work and go back to sleep, and wake up and go to my lectures. So it’s like sandwich my study in between sleep cos I work best at night when no-one else is up when it’s all quiet and there's nothing to distract me. So that, it’s a good system.*
> *Debbie 2nd interview 16/08/15*

She went on to tell me that she had identified that her most productive time for work was between 11pm and 3am. It was important to her that there is nobody

else around ‘to distract her’; success here is promoted by solitude, a solitude which is largely guaranteed by working overnight. Lectures are the only time where Debbie admits to studying with her peers. In her narrative Debbie’s success is a lonely business, sought in the small hours of the night. Of course this was not her whole university life; she spoke of membership of many university clubs, but they were ancillary to her main story, that of study and achievement.

Julian too reflected on how to achieve at school, not with a practical solution, but a more attitudinal change. We were discussing obstacles to learning, and Julian read to me what his English teacher had written in the report card, on 29th January, and related this to an earlier conversation we had had, about his overall attitude:

> *‘Becomes distracted by other people’s behaviour. Stay focussed.’ I think the biggest obstacle is not trying to, what we’ve talked about, [carer named] talked about to me, ‘don’t be a follower’, like following other people, ‘be a leader’*
> *Julian 4th interview 03/02/16*

The report card that he showed me was a tool often used in UK schools as a disciplinary measure. Misbehaving students were required to carry with them to each class, at the end of which the teacher would enter a comment on their conduct for that class. Usually the student was required to carry the card for a week. Julian made sure to tell me that this was not the case for him; he had the report card because his carer wanted to keep him ‘on track’. According to Julian, his carer and the school had decided that he needed this regular feedback on his performance, in order to ensure that he ‘performed’ appropriately. Julian’s

support network, here the school and his carer, seem to have focussed on his tendency to be distracted by others in school, with the carer suggesting that he is a ‘follower’ Julian often referred to this label given to him by his carer, particularly when we talked about his behaviour in school:

> *Sometimes because I, [carer] says I’m a follower and I would agree sometimes that I just follow different people’s behaviour*
> *Julian 4th interview 03/02/16*

Here we see Julian accepting the tag of ‘follower’, agreeing with his carer. It should be noted though, that the carer was in the next room throughout our interviews, and Julian was in no doubt that she could hear our conversation. On several occasions she intervened in our conversations. Julian’s readiness to be viewed through her lens is likely to be affected by her proximity. At our next meeting, one week later, this ‘follower’ label was shown to be inaccurate when Julian talked about his reputation with his peers where technology is concerned. He had developed a webpage, which he showed me at the end of interview 5, with videos that he had produced. He told me that he helped his classmates to do the same, sharing his expertise. In this digital arena, Julian was the leader, not a follower:

> *I’m the one who near enough made them all accounts, and that lot. I’m the one who I’ve been sent...at school they gave me a usb to like edit their video.*
> *Julian 5th interview 10/02/16*

Julian narrates himself as the ‘go to’ person in class to help set up YouTube accounts, produce animations and videos, and generally construct an online persona. This is where Julian storied himself as ‘in charge’ and successful, his personal success seemed to emanate from his abilities with technology. Julian talks about his place amongst his peers through his abilities. Prowess in this digital side of life is ‘success’ to Julian, he has reflexively positioned himself, in opposition to the role of follower which the adults around him have assigned. Julian talks of the pressure to succeed here though, which comes across very clearly when he told me:

> *Sometimes you fail at it, and, you know you’ve failed, but you don’t really want to tell your friends that ‘Oh I messed up’ because you know they’ll ask you ‘Could you try again’. I tried as hard as I can.*
> *Julian 5th interview 10/02/16*

Again Julian’s reflexivity is being told here, his reflection on failure, and despair at the thought that he should try again sounded heartfelt, and seemed to come from direct experience; he had been in the situation where he believed he had failed his classmates, and they had asked him to try again. Julian was struggling under a weight of self-imposed expectations, he wants to exceed them, but sometimes finds he cannot. He is reflexively learning the extent of his abilities, in the same conversation he shared with me how he adds to his skills in this digital arena. Julian told me how he had acquired his expertise through perseverance:

> *Well sometimes … you can’t really plan it because it can go terribly wrong. I remember we made about 20 videos, 12 of them went up, 8 of them we were ‘right, ok’ we were half way through it, it autosaved, and then we*

died, and like the game froze, so we had to fit it all back up, get it all back out then make it again, make it again, make it again.
Julian 5th interview 10/02/16

The 'game' Julian talked of is Minecraft;[2] he recorded the game session so that he could upload the recording to his digital channel. At the end of our fifth interview Julian was keen to show me this channel, and particularly wanted to point out how many 'likes' his videos had received, exhibiting the importance of this form of validation.

This reliance on the opinion of others was also evident in Gordon's success. Gordon talked of how he had not been praised in his life until he was in prison at age 22. He was given a job in the kitchen, and learned how to cook; he worked his way up to number two in the kitchen, and was very proud of his achievements:

I got governor's compliments on several occasions for what I produced, and you know and it was the first time really, you know looking back on my life, that people would say, I was kind of lifted, because I'd kind of achieved something a little bit and I was getting a bit of praise which was nice. Up until that point I didn't really get a lot of praise, but then I don't suppose I deserved a lot of praise [laughs]
Gordon 2nd interview 25/08/15

Receiving formal praise was new to Gordon, and it 'lifted' him. He talks of this as a turning point in his life. He told of how he had left school without qualifications, and had fallen into a life of crime. This excerpt tells of Gordon both reflecting on

[2] Minecraft is a computer game where players build virtual worlds from blocks. It is similar to Lego in appearance, but players can walk in their virtual worlds, and play with others online.

the point in his life when he suggests that he changed his direction, but is also reflexive. He explains his examination of what he perceives he deserved, while also admitting to enjoying the praise he received from the governor. This part of the interview tells of how successful learning and external acknowledgement of the learning was a boost to his esteem, and enabled him to perceive his life differently. At our next meeting Gordon returned to his final spell in prison, and explained his reasoning.

> *I could see my life headed that way and I thought no I don't want that.*
> *Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15*

This excerpt shows Gordon putting himself in the shoes of those around about him, and changing his behaviours. He goes on to elaborate on this reflexivity:

> *I kind of had to work it out for myself I think and make that decision. Like I say when I left [name of prison], that was it: I came out of prison, I thought I'm not going back in there again, that is it I'm going to go and do something else, and then my life changed. I slipped up a few times afterwards, but generally speaking I sort of you know I kind of worked my way out of the situation that I found myself in.*
> *Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15*

This was Gordon's turning point he told me: he left prison, packed a rucksack, and moved to the South East to pick strawberries. This was the beginning of a life spent largely outdoors, learning 'on the job' and preparing for the 'Good Life' existence which he now enjoys. My field notes record the jars of pickles and chutneys, and demijohns of wine which abound in Gordon's home. The cookery

which Gordon recalled as being his first success, and the catalyst for his changed life, is still an important element of his life, almost 40 years later.

In this section we have considered how participants recognise and strive for success. Gordon talked of experiencing a small taste of success, and how that was a catalyst for him to change his life, he was able to radically change both his attitude and his geography. Debbie and Julian related smaller changes, to allow them to find what the viewed as success. On some occasions participants told stories where they were able to influence their situations in a more concrete way. They identified 'critical moments' (Thomson et al., 2002) when their stories changed.

4.4 Taking control

This theme in many ways introduces the following chapter, dealing as it does with control. It is dealt with as a separate category here however, because of the inherent reflexivity which emerged from the participants narratives. The theme emerged during the disaggregation of codes described above, and can be defined as occasions where "participants use their experiences to exhibit control over their circumstances".

During interviews participants told stories of occasions where they were able to make change, by identifying the routes that were available to them. In order to do this they exhibit a high degree of reflexivity, considering their own position, but also assessing the situation of those around them, in order to both identify scope for taking control, and to take advantage of that small space. Five of the seven participants told stories which put themselves in a reflexive position regarding their surroundings, and saw them take advantage of the possibility to change

their lives. These are positive stories of taking control, these narratives are telling not of victimhood, but heroism, winning against the odds.

Susan recalled taking control when she was around 13 years old. She had spent her primary school years moving in and out of care, attending at least seven different primary schools. At age 13 she had been returned to care, and her social worker had suggested that she move to another town, which would have meant starting at another secondary school; she had been placed in that town before, and did not have fond memories of living there, and did not want to move back again:

> *They were trying to find somewhere for me and I think I was being slightly awkward in where I wanted to be. And I was being slightly awkward. I think I said to my social worker, cos I remember she said to me 'Susan there's two roads you can take the shit road or our road,' and I went 'I'll take your road when you get me the right placement' I said, 'but if you send me down the shit road I'll make your job really difficult', and you could see her, say 'Oh god'. I can remember saying it to her I said 'you'll have to work really hard if you send me down that road'*
> *Susan 1st interview 26/08/15*

Susan was successful, her words show an understanding of the difficulties she could make for the social worker, she realised that it was possible for her to wield power, and she used that knowledge to influence her educational pathway. There is rhetoric surrounding a young person's right to some choice surrounding their placement, but the reality is often that there are insufficient foster carers, so the choice becomes academic. Children in care move 'placement' regularly. Susan here said that she refused to change school, and so eventually a placement was found which enabled her to stay at her current school. At age 13 she had found

an element of control. This is relatively young to have been quite so insistent, she remembers before then not being able to speak out. Susan recalled her brother, who did not find coping with his early childhood so straightforward, and, she says, still struggles with life. She took charge in a small way even then though, taking care of her brother and bossing him around:

> *I think when you're a child you don't have a voice do you? When you're a child you don't have a voice, so I think what happened was I accepted, I didn't like it, but I accepted it. And also I had to look after my brother who was very much... I don't want to call him weak, but... 'She always used to boss me about and look after me'.*
> *Susan 1st interview 26/08/15*

Susan talked of being able to take an overview of her situation at a very young age, her brother needed her to take care of him, and she took charge. Susan identified the small ways that she could change her life, and effectively used them. There was considerable reflexivity apparent here, with Susan telling a story of wresting control from those 'in charge' of her care, she relates it to the concept of the 'voice of the child', which as a worker in social services she now encounters, perhaps on a daily basis. When she was 13, in 1979, she almost certainly did not know that she had a 'voice' in the terms suggested by UNCRC, the notion of promoting children's voices came later, but she did see a way to make sure that she was listened to, and she used it. This early understanding of the power to control elements of their lives was not realised by all participants.

Debbie did not feel that she had the ability to stand up for herself until she was older, she considers that she found her 'voice' at around age 17, although even then there is a suggestion that her opinion was not welcome:

There's always like fences that everyone's got to jump over, because there's all these rules and everything and then it seems that it's more about protecting them than it is about protecting us. And so then they're like but we can't do this because you're only on a voluntary order, and then it's like yeah. I was too young anyway to really stand up for myself. I only got gobby at about 17.
Debbie1st interview 13/08/15

Debbie does not tell a story where she is in control, she recalls rules, and protection, she had spent her teenaged years suffering from, and being treated for, her mental health problems. Until she became 'gobby' she recalls that there were rules, putting obstacles in her way. Her use of the word 'gobby' seemed significant. It is a term which carries with it a suggestion of inappropriate speaking out; the Oxford English Dictionary definition of gobby includes 'impudent' and 'rude'. Debbie relates her story as if to imply that until she was 17 there was nothing she could do, and even at 17 her voice was not legitimised, it was still rude of her to stand up for herself. Here she implies that she could begin to overcome the rules when she reached 17. This coincides with the time when Debbie was reaching the end of her treatment. She was able to return to her education, and make progress towards attending university, this was Debbie's goal, and she achieved it. She became 'gobby' just in time to enable her to accomplish this life changing ambition.

Life changing reflexivity was a feature of both Gordon and Helen's stories also. They narrated themselves as authors of their choices. Gordon talked about what

he saw other inmates doing and he made an active choice to ‘go straight’, while Helen made the decision to start a new life after the breakdown of a relationship. Gordon looked around him in prison, and what he saw taught him that he did not want that future for himself.

> *You know that’s cos its secure, it’s safe there, you don’t have to deal with all the stuff that you can’t deal with or you haven’t got the ability to deal with or the support to deal with on release. I saw it time and time again in my time in there, you know you get some of the old boys they just go out and smash a window to come back in again, because they get three square meals a day, they know everyone, its familiar, it’s like a little lock up hotel for a lot of them. I thought ‘I don’t want to be that’. You know it’s like being the oldest swinger in town in the bar in the pub, isn’t it. You know and it’s that kind of thing, you reach a certain point where you - you know I felt like that then and it was a bit of an enlightenment to me.*
> *Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15*

Like Debbie and Susan, Gordon told of a point in time when he took control, this story was an important one for him to tell me, and he returned to it across our four meetings. Gordon’s reflexivity is apparent in this extract, where he talks, not only of his own situation, but also of what he observes, and the possible future that would await him if he did not make a change. He narrates this as ‘an enlightenment’, he said that he saw the perceived insidious benefits of prison life, but rejected them. Gordon is telling himself as a reflexive success story, like Susan and Debbie, he tells himself as a winner, wresting success from a difficult situation.

Gordon talked about the moment of epiphany, whilst incarcerated, but Helen too related a story of reflexive awakening. She recalled coming home after splitting up with a boyfriend. She recognises that she ‘forces’ herself to do things, she

actively controls her responses. She traced this trait back to this early upset. She came home, when she considered her situation she decided that she had to start again. Like Gordon above, this was the beginning of her taking charge of her own life; she told me about how she learned how to grasp independence.

> *He dumped me, the one I was in [named city] with, and I was quite in love with him, and I came home crying, 'oh what am I going to do', and again it was a couple of days of that and I was like 'right I better get on with my life I need to do something', and so I actively went and found a room in a strange house, you know just forced myself to do it. And actually this is funny, because this comes into what I'm doing now, the way I say yes to everything, and then I'm like, what have I said yes to, and then I have to do it. I force myself to do things kind of thing, because I know that it's not as bad as I think it's going to be and I know that I can overcome it.*
> *Helen 1st interview 10/09/15*

Helen's told me in her story that she knows that she can overcome adversity; she took control in a purposeful way, she considered her position, and her potential outcomes, and strategized a route to a successful outcome. She had learned that this is a way to control her life; Susan too had to discover how to manage her life, her experiences had taught her that her past may intrude on her future life unless she made a stand.

In Susan's story she was clear about what she believed was her motivating force; she wanted to overcome the influence of her mother, to succeed in her life. Again she talked in this extract about a common theme in the social care arena – resilience. I took this to mean that she took care to use the language that I would understand, as well as to underline her knowledge of the area we were

discussing. She worked in this field, and framed her narrative in terms that she knew were appropriate, but she was also writing herself as taking control.

> *I didn't want to be a statistic, and I wasn't going to let her beat me, and that was it I didn't want her to win.*
> *I probably was resilient. I think because I'd seen, in between being in care, what families were like, and I knew, I mean it was incredibly hard to reach that and you do crash at certain stages in your life, but I didn't want to be a statistic of what she was, I didn't want that to happen. So I knew that it would be really hard … I think I started to take control the last time I went into care.*
> *Susan 1st interview 26 Aug 15*

Susan reiterated her decision at age 13, not to move school, and therefore town. That was when she recalls being 'in charge'. She also spoke here, in our first interview, about crashing, the reflexivity which was apparent above is more explicit now, it continued into adulthood, with Susan now maintaining her equilibrium by means of seeking professional help:

> *I think what happens as you get older and you have certain stages in your life, things can come back and I think that's when you probably need to address them. But I think that's probably the same for all adults, not just kids that have been in care but all adults… it's a bit like if somebody had an illness when they were younger, it's a traumatic event that happened and i think you have to accept that traumatic event, and how you choose to deal with it i think is down to the individual and the people around you.*
> *I mean I realised I'd need counselling when I got older, I knew I would. Because you can't just go through that and expect to tippy toppy along, and I've had it at various times in my life…and that's what's got me through, you know.*

Susan 1st interview 26 Aug 15

When Susan tells me that she knew she would need counselling as she got older, she is sharing her vulnerability. Her story before was about being strong, but in the extract above she is sharing some of the impact of her childhood on her adult life. However much she stories herself as a winner in her childhood, the effects of that time stayed with her, and she is careful to make sure that I know this. Susan's story of choices included a forced choice, she could not take A-levels, as she had to find a job, she reflects on this:

> *I wanted to go to university, I got told by my social worker that I needed to go to college and get a course in hair and beauty or home economics, like catering which is what I did*
> *Susan 1st interview 26 Aug 15*

Later in interview 1 Susan returns to the subject of what she did when she left school. She is telling me about an injustice which she still feels, she did what she had to do, and but did not forget what she aspired to. In this next extract Susan rehearsed an imagined future, which she did not have the opportunity to live in the normal course of life:

> *I was upset I couldn't do A levels or go to university, because I would have liked to have done that. Whether I would have ever achieved it if I'd been with a family just living normally I don't know, but I probably might have had more opportunity and so I just got on with it.*
> *Susan 1st interview 26 Aug 15*

At a later stage in life the opportunity to take a degree in social work was offered to Susan, but by this time it was inconvenient, she suggests that bringing up her

sons was the reason for not taking this opportunity. Research in HE which would have been undertaken at the same time that Anne was making this decision, Archer et al. (2002) concluded that both financial and personal costs as barriers to entry to Higher Education for working class groups. It is worth noting that at this time social services would have funded the degree and given her time off work to study, this highlights the complexity of the decision for Susan, and the importance of the personal cost which, for Susan were too high. This struggle also suggests a gendered perspective, with Susan focussing on her role as a 'mother figure', the role which her story tells us that her own mother had not fulfilled. Susan's words also perhaps point to a predetermined age which is right for study, it is too late now to study.

> *When I had the boys, my main focus then was on the children so I thought I'm not going to uni. and sitting studying, because I need to focus on them, so I think what I've done is I've left it too late now, and I know that I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing but I think young people a lot of young people they need to have that opportunity when they're young*
> *Susan 1st interview 26 Aug 15*

This extract shows another element of Susan's reflexivity. When she talked about her missed chance to attend university timing was key, in her story she should have gone at the correct age, later was not an option for her. She then inserts her experience into her understanding of other young people, and concludes that they all need to have educational opportunities at the time when she herself was denied them. This is particularly relevant when we consider the next extract,

where Anne talks about her educational options after school.

Anne is at the age now to make a choice about what to aim for after school, she is 14 years old. The legal situation in the UK has changed, meaning that Anne must stay in education or training until she is 18, where Susan did so voluntarily, however the choice offered to her seems remarkably similar to that presented to Susan some 35 years earlier. The interview was around 'schoolwork', but our conversation had extended into what Anne intended to do after school. This resonated with Susan's choice – 'hair and beauty or home economics'. The local further education colleges had a wide range of available courses on offer, and entry was possible at many levels, meaning that a young person could have embarked on almost any course of study that they imagined. Anne relates her possible future as a vocational one; she told me her future choices in quite a limited way. She tells the story as though her tutor has limited the choice to two, and she further cuts this down to one:

> *I'm going to do health and social care, because we had this thing in tutor and we had to like sign, highlight things that we want to do at like college or apprenticeships, and they did health and social, or hairdressing, but I don't want to do hairdressing.*
> *Anne 3rd interview 28/01/16*

Some of the reasoning behind this choice was evident from this excerpt from our first interview, where Anne explained why she may want to be a carer. She talked about her own future as part of an inherited 'trade'.

> *I guess I've just been brought up with it because Mum was a nurse and a*

carer, my sister's a nurse and a carer so, my Nan was a carer, so I guess I've just been brought up with it, and it seems quite interesting.
Anne 1st interview 13/01/16

It seemed that Anne's reflections on her future have limited her potential; her choice has been reduced to one course of action. When I spoke to Anne about university she appeared interested, however she had refused to go to a university taster day:

I got asked to do this university day, school text mum and I said no, I don't want to go.
Anne 4th interview 09/02/16

When I asked why she had refused, her response was:

I don't really want to go when like the whole group of people from school go, because not many of my friends are doing it so it's just like all the popular people and they really, really intimidate me.
Anne 4th interview 09/02/16

Anne's experiences at school have caused her to reject the academic life course, in favour of the predetermined, inherited, vocational route. There is reflexivity here, where Anne sees her possible futures, and embodies the choices. She has 'learned' that university is only for the popular people, and she does not tell a story of herself as popular. The future that she relates to me is the one where she follows in her family footsteps; she comes from a family of carers. Her form of control here is to avoid the possibility of change, she will continue in her family footsteps.

Most of these adults' stories came from the first interviews. They were asked to tell me about themselves in this first interview, with little structure, beyond the introduction of the project, which of course addresses educational experience. I said very little in these encounters, the transcripts are largely commentaries by the participants. It is interesting that there are so many narratives of taking control in small ways, participants telling me how they beat the odds, and were not mere victims.

The participants reflected on both their own experiences, and those that they perceive others are having. This reflexivity allowed them to position themselves in their own stories. Sometimes experience was used to forge change, or to take control of circumstances at critical moments, when decisions taken had an impact on future outcomes, but there were also signs of control in the form of postponing endeavour.

4.5 Reflexivity on Social Networks

This theme emerged from participants' comments around their families, friends, carers, teachers, social workers, and other key individuals in their lives. Initially in the analysis these individuals were coded discretely, as well as being encompassed into wider groupings related to social competence. As the analysis progressed the theme crystallised into this theme which can be defined as "Participants' building of social structures. How they perceive 'family', and how this perception shapes behaviour".

A young person who enters 'care' has a disrupted social network. Their position in the family home is changed, perhaps irretrievably severed. Their friendship groups can be ruptured when they move house or change school; the wider network of social connections is disordered. Participants reflexively considered

their perception of family, and how they managed their social networks in the contexts in which they found themselves. Some narratives are of building networks, while others are tales of postponement. Within the confines of their lives, these participant stories suggest they were able to reflexively consider their social position and make strategic decisions about how to act.

Most children in care have memories of their birth family, and some level of contact with them. This was not the case for Gordon, having been adopted as a baby, and then returned to care, by his adopters, in infancy. He had no memory of his mother. Gordon met his mother when he was in Borstal; the meeting had been set up through the Salvation Army, at the behest of his foster parents:

> *Unfortunately at the time, when everything sort of came together I was actually locked up in [named] Borstal and she came to visit me there. Which was a weird sort of thing, because, I was 20 I suppose, and it was really odd, it was just meeting a complete stranger that I had no connection with whatsoever, and you know we chatted for an hour or so, and what have you. And when I got out I went up to [named town] to visit her for the day. And really except for the odd letter or note a few years afterwards, never had any real contact. There was no bond, there was no attachment, there was no, it was just nothing really, it was all a bit emotionally dead really. I am a bit like that actually; myself you know that's just the way I've turned out.*
> *Gordon 2nd interview 25/08/15*

This extract is extremely reflexive, with Gordon considering the connection he felt to this 'stranger', his future actions regarding contact with her, as well as how this impacted upon himself emotionally. Gordon met his mother while he was incarcerated. The meeting did not awaken any of the family blood ties which Gordon expected, he said it was odd that there was no 'connection', but it is hard

to imagine what connection he could have expected. Visiting time in an institution is a very unnatural space; it would not be conducive to re-establishing a long lost emotional attachment.

When I met Anne for our first interview, we talked about her entry into care. She had a spell in kinship care, living with her aunt in a neighbouring county, and then returned to live with her mother for five months, before coming into foster care. When I asked her what she thought about living with a foster family she said:

> *It's helping me and mum get back on track.*
> *Anne 1st interview 13/01/16*

For Anne, her relationship with her mother is important, quite the reverse of Gordon's sentiment. This comment suggested a maturity of thinking in Anne, she has considered what her care experience is for, and has identified a benefit. Anne is more akin to Helen, who also endeavours to rebuild her relationship with her mother.

> *I think actually though my mum and me are getting closer and closer, because we always were really, we always were very close. But I think I had a lot of resentment for ages. In fact if anything, if there was anybody I would say that I still probably sometimes have a little bit towards her and I know again it's not her fault*
> *Helen 3rd interview 01/10/15*

Both Helen and Anne show reflexivity here, they know that they value their mothers, but equally are aware that the relationship needs work in order to improve it. Anne admits in her story that time in care is 'helping', suggesting that she is aware that the relationship is not close yet. Helen, looking back over the

years can reflect upon the changes in their relationship. She is also able to have the inner conversation with herself to admit that all is not well yet for her also. None of these participants have direct experience of what it means to have a 'normal' parent/child relationship; their reflections are based on what they have experienced outside of that familial bond. A lack of 'normal' family experiences can mean a lack of knowledge about what a family actually does.

Susan talked about how she watched other families when she was fostered and how she used those experiences to help her to create her own family culture. Here we have Susan explaining how she learnt to 'be' a family. She tells her story in a polarised, class based way, attributing 'value' to the working class experience, in that they are 'loving', while those she views as having cultural capital are valued for that. Susan tells the story as if she, as a child, was reflexively considering what was to be learnt, and selecting the 'best' options for her future growth.

> *I got the bits that I thought were good. And the most loving families are the families that live in council houses who've got no money, they're the most loving families they fight and argue a lot, and you think they're going to kill each other…and that was another thing I learnt, fighting arguing isn't the end of the world you know. So the more well off families teach you a little bit about culture which is good.*
> *Susan 3rd interview 16/09/15*

It is interesting how she refers to class here, as signified by economic means (money), location (council estate), and noise and violence (fight, argue, kill) as opposed to middle class (culture). There is a transformation narrative (Skeggs, 2004) unfolding; in the confines of short term fostering, Susan is telling a story of

how she became the woman she now is, she represents herself as bridging the social classes, as an adult looking back to identify how she could have become who she now is.

When Susan talked about relationships with her peers, she relates a story of loneliness, echoed by Gordon's story. Both told me about struggles with peer groups:

> *So I just went through a lot of education, a lot of primary schools, never really made any friendship groups, I didn't make friendship groups till I got to college because I didn't have the opportunities to, because I was always being moved, and even in high school, I think by then looking back on it now, I was probably so traumatised, I just kept my head down and did the best I could, but it was a real struggle because I'd missed so much of my formative years.*
> *Susan 1st interview 26/08/15*

Looking back Susan identifies the trauma that she believes she was living through, but at the time, at day to day level, she was reflexive in her behaviours. She recalled the stigma she felt, both as a neglected child with her birth mother, and after her move into care. She relates the two experiences, as if there is little difference between them:

> *When we were living with her, we were really, you know we looked awful, so that wouldn't have helped because it doesn't, because kids are - They go by what you look like, and when we were foster families I mean you used to turn up in your foster family clan, so that was another thing, that you know... So I just remember reading my books and keeping to myself really. And thinking well my time will come when I'll be able to socialise*

and be where I want to be, but I'm not going to worry about it at the moment because I've got to just survive this bit.
Susan 2nd interview 02/09/15

Susan clearly recalled how she viewed both what was happening to her, and how she took action, in the moment, and in her future planning. When she told this story she was telling me about her 'inner conversation', perhaps justifying her lack of friendship groups. Her inner reflexive conversation allowed her to accept her social isolation, in favour of surviving. She did what she could to 'survive', while strategizing how things would be better in the future.

Gordon talked of his 'social understanding', like Susan, he missed out on early socialisation opportunities through the institutions he attended. He related the loss he suffered, and brought that forward to his current life. Gordon did not merely refer to missing out on opportunities here; he used the term 'social understanding', he was making it clear to me that he still, at age 59, did not understand how to behave 'socially'. There was an underlying inevitability expressed here, transferring from one institution to another, perhaps without any real space in which to reflect until after age 21. Gordon spoke several times about how his upbringing had impacted on his ability to operate socially. He went on to explain how he has rationalised this:

All that sort of teenage from sort of 18 to 21, that period just sort of didn't happen for me at all, it's just all locked up. So yes that was my social understanding, and I still struggle with that today I do. Well simply because you are like a plant really, if you don't give it the right stuff to begin with it ain't ever going to be OK, it's that kind of thinking really isn't it. It was all a bit late in the day really, because all my social skills were all sort of institutional really. Even children's homes, they're all institutions; they're all

much of a muchness I went to a few of them. And then the boarding school and then the sort of the prison element of it all
Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15

Gordon's plant metaphor was interesting, 'if you don't give it the right stuff to begin with it ain't ever going to be OK'. Here he talked about not being given the 'right stuff', although he does not identify what the 'right stuff' would be. What plant food would have worked for him? Gordon had a plethora of 'mothers', none of whom gave him what he said that he needed, 'the right stuff'. Gordon is a plantsman, he takes pride in his garden and his vegetable patch, for him the plant metaphor is a strong one. The growing of plants is a structured affair, plant the seed, water the seed, and transplant the seedling when it is big enough, feed and water till maturity.

All children in care have been 'uprooted' from their birth families before they were adults, this chapter has shown that they are able to be reflexive in the small spaces which their care experience affords, they can look not only at what has happened to them, but also reflect on how they have impacted on others, and the environment around them. The stories in this chapter indicate reflexivity where Gordon's metaphor would suggest that none was possible.

4.6 Discussion

These narratives on reflexivity gave a fascinating insight into how the participants talked about their inner conversations. Their testimonies were not objective facts; they are not accurate renditions of events as they occurred. Instead they are recollections, shaped by their perspective of their relationship with me as researcher, as well as their understanding of the research topic and purpose (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; McAdams, 2008). They are

recalled through time, some from over fifty years, and others in the last few days, but the 'time frame' for each participant remains the same: the period of adolescence. In addition the extracts recorded here are those in which I, as researcher, have considered that inner reflexivity was evident. In selecting the extracts I was aware that the motivation to tell these stories may have led to a nuanced recollection, designed to proffer advice to others, or to reframe the stories in a favourable light, and I have reflected this in my interpretations.

This chapter argues that these participants were highly reflexive. These are not professionals who are taught to be reflexive in order to improve their practice (Schön, 1995); these are the recollections of troubled childhood and adolescence, a time when reflexivity is perhaps unexpected (Winkler, 2014).

These young people were the objects in a series of events which they did not choose. They had little control over where they lived, which school they attended or who they interacted with. These factors notwithstanding they were able to consider their situations, and their impact on those around them, and their narratives tell of the process and the results. This reflexivity allowed participants to 'learn' about themselves and their environments, to develop an understanding of themselves as autonomous beings, with the ability to reflect on their own behaviour and relate to other people's actions (Winkler, 2014). This knowledge and ability allowed them to be reflexive within the confines of their lives in care.

Participants in this study constructed their own stories, shrugging off imposed external narratives. These participants are 'experts' in their own lives, and told their stories to raise awareness of the 'care' experience. These extracts show

reflexivity in the recognition of success, with 'success' being construed in different ways by the participants, this was not the imposed success of a research objective (Happer et al., 2006) it was a personal perspective. In our early conversations participants told stories of control, eschewing the role of 'victim', they set the scene in our conversations and also in their personal narratives. Inherent in a life in care is the reality of fractured relationships. For these participants reflexivity in this area allowed them to see how their networks were damaged, and to strategize as to whether to repair social connections, or to set them aside.

4.6.1 Rewriting the story

These results are broadly consistent with Skeggs (2004) suggestion that reflexivity can be deployed as a tool to refute labels. Skeggs is discussing class and gender, but the same marginalisation which she identifies is also applicable to other vulnerable groups. When the participants in this study told of their 'selves' they were transforming their experiences into a form of property: transferable, valuable property, what Bourdieu would have termed cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986a). They differentiated themselves through reworking their story into a form "of their own making" (Skeggs, 2004:134).

When Cockett (2017) spoke to care experienced young people, there was a clear narrative around the stigmatising effects of being 'in care'. Her findings suggested that media representations of children in care reinforced these negative stereotypes, and reported statistics in the media tend to promote a negative attitude towards achievement. A similar finding emerged in Wales (Mannay et al., 2017), where the debilitating effects of stigma were compounded by well-meaning professionals who did not wish to add academic pressure to the already

difficult lives of young people. This study found that while this stigmatisation was present, participants could restory their experiences in small ways, so as to present themselves in the way that they prefer. This autonomy was not always to exonerate themselves from blame, choosing to accept blame was apparent. Cockett writes that “everybody has a responsibility to change the narrative” (2017:13) these participants storied themselves as doing just that.

This restorying of life is not new, Polkinghorne talks of the emplotment of life stories, “(p)lots mark off a segment of time in which events are linked together as contributors to a particular outcome” (1995:7). It is the human condition to tell a story in neat episodes, with events unfolding in order to come to a tidy conclusion. The reality of lived experience is rarely so neat and well ordered. When participants reflected upon their lives, and the role they played, their memories constructed a linear timeframe, which allowed them to tell the story. The narrated lives became a series of vignettes, defined by a temporal range which was imposed by me, as researcher. Within the confines of the research project, participants reflexively narrated the lives they wished to share, and imposed their priorities upon the process. This suggests an element of autonomous reflexivity, whereby the stories told are the result of reflection upon the structural obstacles of participants’ lives in care.

4.6.2 Recognising success

For the participants ‘success’ was a goal across all areas of their lives, within the small spaces in which they had some degree of agency. Stories told exhibit elements of Archer’s meta-reflexivity (2007), whereby success is a goal, which is not necessarily related to normative measures of getting on. Much of their lives after they entered care were a product of local authority regulation, but within

these confines there are indications of participants reflexively considering their position, and reaching for that ‘successful’ persona. For the youngest participant, Julian, success was measured not by peers’ perceptions of his abilities, or the significant adults in his life, but by his own understanding of how he measured up to the perceptions. He had a self-imposed performance target, which allowed him to transcend the labels imposed by those around him. He wanted to transcend the stigma associated with his situation as a child in care (Cockett, 2017), he exhibited a type of reflexive resilience, (Winkler, 2014) where he made use of positive experiences, so as to be able to repeat his success. Julian’s ‘success’ is associated with others, with his peers and the significant adults in his life. For some participants success was a more solitary endeavour, involving the avoidance of social situations, portrayed as a self-sufficient strategy.

Both Debbie and Gordon told stories of seeking solitary success. This rejection of the social world could be a symptom of their care experience, whereby the trauma of their childhood creates a fear of relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Although attachment theory also suggests a lack of reflexivity, these participants talked reflexively about their decision making, and the reasoning behind it. Gordon turned his back on a particular social environment, that of institutional incarceration, in his search for a new way. He told me a story of criminality and redemption, sharing information which would normally be hidden. He told me these details at our first meeting, making his background clear to me. He storied himself in the way that he wished me to see him.

These findings concur with those of Del Quest et al. (2012) where young people talked about how they had overcome challenges. They spoke about how they

had coped with barriers, and what steps they took to overcome them. Their stories of resilience spoke of both success and taking control.

4.6.3 Taking control

The traditional view of children in care marks them as a 'vulnerable' group who are in need of help and support to ensure they have "healthy, happy, safe lives" (Children's Commissioner, 2017a:3). In contrast to this view, participants in this study told themselves as in control. Giddens identifies 'fateful moments' as "transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct, but for self identity" (1991:143). Susan's final transition into care marked just such a transition for her, she narrates herself as taking charge, in a similar way Gordon tells his story of putting prison life behind him. Of course, as Thomson et al. (2002) remind us, I had no way of reconciling the differences between the lives that were lived and those that were told to me, but the telling itself is a reflexive process, where the tellers crafted room for reflexivity within the confines of the structure imposed by 'care'.

Moments of epiphany were often told in early interviews, suggesting that the participants wanted to frame themselves as in control from the beginning of our encounters. These moments could be termed 'critical moments', as defined by Thomson et al. "an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee sees as having important consequences for their lives and identities" (2002:339). Their identity became a reflexively constructed 'choice' (Skeggs, 2005), organised to fulfil the participants' understanding of the research objectives, as well as to ensure I, as researcher, interacted with the identity they wished to share. Thus reflexive control transcended the narrative and became an

integral part of the research process. Participants told themselves as strong, capable and in charge. As Thomson et al. (2002) point out this positive ‘can do’ attitude did not necessarily come with the resources to be fully in charge, traditional academic narratives featured as areas where a reflexive attitude was insufficient to allow for control. Susan in the past, and Anne currently both faced critical moments in their academic lives, and both have been beaten by the ‘system’.

These narratives of control track the ability of the participants to give ‘voice’ to their wishes. The UNCRC requires that every child should have the right to express their views and to have their views taken seriously, in domestic law, the Children Act 1989 (s.1) requires that “the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child” are sought in any care proceedings. Of course older participants would not have had the benefit of these important pieces of legislation, only Gary, Debbie, Anne and Julian are young enough to have been impacted by the rights enshrined in this way. Of the participants, only Susan and Debbie talk specifically about their ‘voice’, and the age at which they believe they gained the ability to be heard. It is interesting that both believe that ‘voice’ comes with age, there is no suggestion that this important right accrues to all children. Across the participants there are indications of voices being overlooked, or not sought, making the narratives of taking control all the more reflexive. Within the constraints of the care experience, participants showed that they could be reflexive and give voice to their wishes, and thus exert control over their situations.

The UNCRC also enshrines children’s rights to social networks, whether that of family, “right to a family life” or other social groups, these rights are included in

the Human Rights Act 1998. During interviews the participants' reflexivity in relation to building and maintenance of social networks was apparent.

4.6.4 Reflections on social networks

As Rogers (2015) found, children in care go to lengths to maintain their social networks, in an environment where their networks are disrupted. The value inherent in relationships did not become apparent until they had been disrupted, and then a reflexive process showed how much value was placed on them. Rogers identified that digital social networking was an important feature of communication in his study with children who were in care in the first half of the 2010's. Participants in this study showed that they were reflexive in who they chose to have as family. The fragmented life which they lived gave them the opportunity to be selective; they could choose which family to 'be'. Rogers work assumed that the family would have a value; however the narratives in this story show that it is equally possible for children in care to decide that some family relationships have no value, and thus familial links can be broken as well as reforged.

Bourdieu & Wacquant (2007:119) define social capital as:

> The sum of resources, actual or virtual, accrued to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

Social networks of peers are subject to fragmentation when a child enters care, thus the durability of the network is tested. The narratives told in this chapter tell a story of broken networks, with participants struggling to maintain their friendship

groups in contrast to Rogers (2015) who found that the children he worked with could deploy digital tools to preserve and build their social capital. He suggests that young people in care will persevere to build networks, but findings here show postponement of this effort. Susan admits to postponing that area of her life until she was older while Gordon tells that he never learned how to be social. The metaphor of a plant which is not given the right treatment to thrive graphically illustrates Gordon's view of his 'social understanding'.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that children in care, over the past fifty years, exercised reflexivity. They have identified the small spaces in their otherwise highly structured lives, in which reflexivity was possible, and they narrated their experiences of how this impacted on their educational experiences. Reflexivity was a learning process across not only formal education, but all aspects of their lives. Conditions which seemed to promote reflexivity in learning were identified as receipt of praise, the presence of labels, altruistic gestures, evidence of purpose or personal goals, choosing advantageous solutions, and identifying homogenous groups. Figure 6 shows these conditions added to the learning themes.

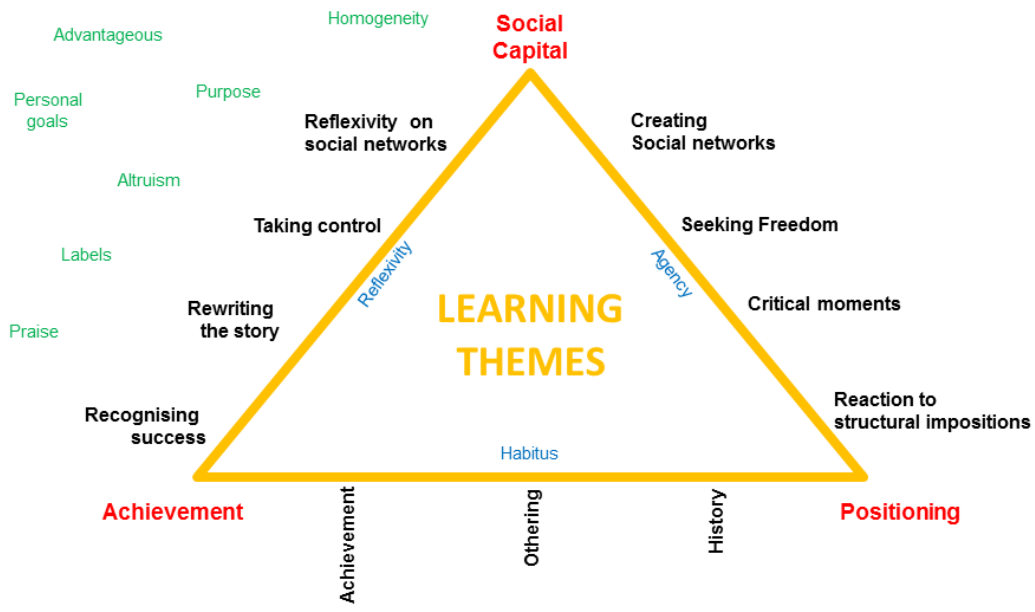


Figure 6 Conditions for reflexivity

The reflexivity described allowed them to exert agentic change, the next chapter discusses further how these participants narrated the agency they were able to show.

Chapter 5 - Agency

5.1 Introduction

As discussed above, agency is the capacity of an individual to act independently, to make decisions based upon free will, regardless of structural imposition. In the narrative renderings of experience, as detailed here, the belief of agency is viewed as agentic in itself. There is evidence to show that individuals will claim agency when they know, or suspect, that they did not take action (Metcalfe, Eich, & Castel, 2010), dependent upon the desirability of the outcomes, and the age of the participant, however, narrative framing of oneself as agentic can be viewed as agentic action in itself. This is important when one reads the participant feedback (appendix 8) where Helen reconsiders her agentic behaviour, and wonders whether she was as agentic as she had previously believed.

The Agentic argument emerged from the data as an early category of 'code', initially encompassing codes entitled: achievement, choice, control, and truth (Appendix 4). Disaggregation of these codes and revisiting of the original transcripts and audio files associated with the coded data allowed the agentic themes to be developed as described in this chapter.

I examine how children in care adopt an agentic stance in spite of the structural impositions which can limit or prevent any real agency. The participants in this study took a particular view of their memory and thus the narrative framed them as agentic. They did not want to be seen as victims or as failures; they storied the successful elements of their lives, when they perceived that they had taken control in spite of the structural impositions of a life in 'care'. There is an underlying suggestion in the literature that children in care are vulnerable

‘victims’, in need of interventions in order to avoid the outcomes which await the care leaver. The narratives described here tell of agency in the face of adversity.

These stories told were about ‘educational’ experiences, the participants related these commentaries as describing their ‘education’. This education was that of the broader sense suggested by Cameron et al. (2015:10) “Education is about helping people form their thinking and action”. The stories discussed here are those where the participants talked about their thinking and action.

Entering the ‘care’ environment was imposed upon each participant. Due to factors beyond their control, their lives were changed irrevocably by external structure, in the shape of local authority ‘care’. The care experience itself is highly structured, with ‘carers’ being employed and receiving payment from the state, and being subject to a requirement to record and justify their actions. They are also subjected to a vocabulary of ‘care’, requiring them to learn about social workers, review meetings, placements and the multiplicity of other impositions in their lives. Children in care know that they are a form of employment, and they are aware that their daily behaviours are recorded and shared with the team of professionals around them. In a sense their everyday life is a version of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, where they are under constant observation by the state, their life stories recorded by a succession of professionals. Within this restrictive environment, agency was identified in the stories that were told.

The participants storied themselves as the driving force in their own development. They did this through creating relationships, redefining their own identities, weighing up the structural obstacles they faced, taking agentic action to overcome the obstacles, strategically selecting the ‘battles’ to fight, and rejecting the structural way in favour of a new way. Within the limitations of ‘care’ these are

surprising examples of how agentic behaviour is described as a means of striving for what Berlant (2011) would call the 'good life'. Aaltonen (2013) suggests that young people are agentic to 'cope with', 'escape from' or 'respond to' circumstances. Berridge (2017) suggests that children in care exercise agency in four areas of their lives: by exercising choices; by developing coping strategies; by engaging with support, or not; and, by judging the quality of support offered. Here the thesis highlights ways in which the young people were agentic in coping with their lives, outside of both the restrictions and the supportive mechanisms of their 'corporate parents'; how they used agency to escape from the structures imposed upon them, and also responded to circumstances in an agentic way. Susan sums up this agentic imperative:

> *I didn't want to think I'd been dealt a bad hand, because I knew then I wouldn't, so I just thought I'd been dealt a hand that I've got to really fight to try and keep going.*
> *(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)*

Susan clearly described herself as a winner; the gaming metaphor underlines this distinction. It is also interesting that this was said in our final interview, as she considered the obstacles she had faced. I asked if she knew at the time that her hand was 'bad':

> *I knew it was bad, and I didn't like it, but I had no choice.*
> *(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)*

We will consider the nature of the choices that were available to the participants later in this chapter, however here Susan seemed to wish to stress to me that

there were no other options for her, but of course there were choices, she chose to tell me about her fights, not the occasions where she could not fight.

The following section discusses occasions where participants spoke of their agency in relation to their social networks; in the previous chapter I examined reflexivity as it was related to social networks, whilst here I expand that discussion to illustrate agentic behaviours.

5.2 Creating social networks

As was apparent in the previous chapter, the theme of social networks was prioritised in participant narratives. It emerged as a theme both in the construction of networks, and avoidance of unwanted social connections.

In this section of the findings I argue that while it is difficult for children in care to build and maintain social networks; participants storied themselves as agentic in this process. The building and maintaining of social networks are essential to the development of social capital, (Bourdieu, 1986a). Participants spoke of difficulties in establishing a social network despite the structural obstacles impeding them, however often they claimed responsibility for these difficulties. Some participants postponed the making of friendship groups until a future date, structural issues were mentioned as contributing to these decisions, however both Susan and Gordon have construed them as self-determined actions. In our first interview, detailed on page 157, Susan talked quite strategically about her decision to postpone friendships until she was older, as if she were conscious of it as an adolescent, but has since come to consider that there was a strong structural element in the decision. She storied herself in a better light when she related this to me; essentially she blamed her small social network on her circumstances, while pointing out that the decision was her own, she is the subject of her

sentence, In her narrative it is clear that Susan stories herself as the person who did not ‘make’ the friendships, not her circumstances “I didn’t make friendship groups till I got to college”, however her multiple school and home moves would have mitigated against the forming of stable friendship groups. The difficulties of maintaining social connections is well reported in the literature, e.g. (Children's Commissioner, 2015), inspiring the development of a ‘Stability Index’ (Children's Commissioner, 2017b). Susan’s multiple moves during her primary years would have prevented her from making long lasting friendships, and perhaps impeded her ability to form stable relationships. Bright (2017) suggests that this type of isolation can be an outcome associated with being a member of a ‘vulnerable’ group during childhood.

Susan also described strategic behaviours which she remembered from her time in different foster families. Susan talked several times about how she learned what a ‘family’ was; in hindsight she describes a strategic procedure to endow herself with what she perceived as the necessary traits for her future life. The excerpt from interview 3, detailed on page 156 shows how Susan talked of cherry-picking “I got the bits that I thought were good”, from the evident love in some families, to her perception of culture in the more affluent people with whom she engaged.

Susan talks of an independent journey towards her goals; but these goals are described in a classed way, she denigrates the working classes as loud and violent, while favouring the culture of the middle class. In a form of transformation narrative (Skeggs, 2004), reminiscent of *Pygmalion*[3], Susan described the loudness of those without economic capital, and the refinement that she could

[3] Pygmalion is a play by George Bernard Shaw, in which a cockney girl is transformed into a ‘lady’ by means of elocution lessons. It has been adapted for screen as My Fair Lady.

learn from those who were ‘well off’. She attributed taste to herself, and showed me that she understood its importance. Bourdieu (1986a) suggests that taste classifies the classifier; Susan classifies herself as one who acquired taste. She is transformed.

By the time Susan was at high school her disjointed existence had stopped. She attended one high school, and lived with one set of foster carers. The adult Susan looked back and gave her younger self a reason for her lack of friendship groups, ‘trauma’, which the young Susan may not have felt. This decision to avoid social interaction could be explained by Putnam’s assertion (2000) that homogeneity is a form of sociological glue, essential to the bonding of social capital; Susan’s life experiences were not sufficiently similar to her peers to allow social interaction. She told me about a type of censorship which she now operates within her family, whereby she avoided discussing the ‘difference’ inherent in her history.

Susan has learned to limit her family’s exposure to her past. She talked about how they do not want to hear about her childhood, her husband does not understand she said, and her sons do not want to hear.

> *I mean I said to my husband, because he finds it really, he doesn’t like it, he doesn’t like it because he comes from a very middle class family, had a lovely upbringing. The only memory he’s got that was bad is he got the wrong bike one Christmas, and got a very loving family, and he just finds it all- I mean he’s fine but he does [Susan makes grumbling noises]. My boys don’t like it, if I mention something, you might mention something...’oh mum don’t talk about it, we don’t want to hear’, they don’t want - .you know they don’t want to.*
> *(Susan 3rd interview 16/09/15)*

This was further apparent during our first interview, when Susan's son arrived home during our conversation. Susan asked if we could move to the lounge to continue without disturbing her son, then shortly afterwards her husband came home. She left the room to talk to him, but asked that our future meetings be at my home rather than hers. Susan has set aside her childhood experiences, focussing on the family that she has created. She told me that she now talks of her memories with her brother, she suggested that this is for his benefit, but she too shares the same past, and needs her brother.

> *He can't talk to anyone else about it because no-one else can share that memory so he needs to talk to me doesn't he?*
> *(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)*

Her words speak of the neediness of her brother, but this is also Susan's story, he is the only person with whom she can share her story.

Gordon also claims responsibility for his lack of social opportunities, but he too told his story in a way that emphasised the environment in which circumstances had placed him. Like Susan, his childhood had been marked by instability, with multiple moves of home and school. His choice of solitude could have been viewed as a defence. Goffman (1990) suggests that stigma, associated with being part of a particular group, can cause individuals to use their stigma as an excuse for lack of success. However, in his story Gordon clearly narrates this as a choice, he stories this choice agentically. In the quotation on page 126, from the first interview with Gordon, he explicitly linked his opportunities to make friends to formal education environments. Although friendships can be formed in other places, Gordon's perception was that college was where he missed out on

the necessary social skills “not going to what was then polytechnic”. The making of friends was, in his narrative, related to attending this college. If he had progressed to further education Gordon would have had more formal education, and he would have been in a position to develop social skills, and a network of friends. As he did not go to college, he forged a different set of social contacts, with whom he engaged in petty criminal activities. In his story however, Gordon was clear that his route into petty crime was also a learning experience for him (the college of crime), again a broader view of education than that which is typically considered. Gordon’s spell of criminality is not unusual for care leavers; young people who have experienced care are overrepresented in the criminal justice system in the UK (Bright, 2017).

Susan went to college, and began to make friends, but Gordon did not, and still finds his social skills hindered. His social isolation however began at a much earlier age, although when he talks of this time, again Gordon stories this as a choice, but within his words there is a clear indication that his circumstances created the situation whereby he was labelled as a bad influence, and was therefore to be shunned.

> *There were no kids really in the village, it was only a very small village, kind of my age really that I can remember. There was one lad down the road, that I used to hang out with a bit, but then I think his parents sort of curtailed that sort of thing because I was seemingly always a bit in trouble, so I was probably not a good influence on their child, so that was kind of curtailed I think. But other than that no there weren’t really anyone in the village of my own kind of age that I can really remember. I guess there would have been, but they probably didn’t have much to do with me,*

because like I say I was always in trouble for one reason or another. I can't remember what I did so wrong. I spent a lot of time on my own, just wandering around, you know in the countryside, which I loved. I'd spend a lot of time being on my own, exploring, because when you're a little boy everything's, it's all new and it's a mystery. And it was lovely.
(Gordon 2nd interview 25/08/15)

Here Gordon's love for the countryside became the focal point; he chose to narrate his story as coming full circle, his current rural lifestyle shown to me to be rooted in his past. Both Susan and Gordon grew up before the advent of 'social networking' as a digital tool. Young people today place a strong emphasis on the size of their 'friends' list. Anne, the teenaged participant, could be termed one of Prensky's 'digital natives' (2001), she was growing up in the digital age, and was at home with digital technology. She explained her strategies for allowing 'friends', and also blocking them. She told me about friend requests she had recently received, and how she dealt with them:

I've had like fifty in the last two days and I'm just like 'don't know you, don't know you, don't know you'. If they have under like seventy mutual friends I won't accept them. If they have over seventy then yes I book them.
(Anne 2nd interview 20/01/16)

I asked if the number seventy had significance to her, but although she repeated the number, it was without explanation of the significance.

Yes I must have met them somewhere along the line, or spoke to them like through people. But yes if they've got under seventy mutual friends I won't accept them, that's just a massive no no.
(Anne 2nd interview 20/01/16)

Seventy is also quoted as the number of blocked friends. Blocking is a mechanism whereby a user of social media can ensure that another user cannot interact directly with them in that area of the digital environment. Anne also has no compunction about removing ‘friends’:

> *My block list is so long. I’ve got about seventy people on them, just because I don’t like them.*
> *(Anne 2nd interview 20/01/16)*

Here we see Anne’s digital agency, she has designed a set of criteria for ‘friendship’ in this digital world, which allows her to have considerably more connections, labelled as ‘friends’ than she has in real life. Anne exhibits a strong level of control when she talks about her digital social network, and indeed the recording from interview one is punctuated by the ‘pings’ of a digital conversation in which Anne is involved. This digital network however does not match Anne’s ‘real life’ social network, which is much smaller, although equally highly controlled. We spoke about friends in our first interview:

> *I only have like four because like most of them are just really bitchy and horrible, so I just keep my circle small.*
> *(Anne 1st interview 13/01/16)*

Anne’s small circle, described in her school environment, includes another girl who is victimised in school. There is a shared experience here, the type of homogeneity which Putnam (2000) identified as social glue. When she explained how she supported her friend, she storied herself as an agentic saviour, whether

or not her friend needed it :

> *One of my best friends and we're both getting it from the same people, and it's not fair, because we don't do anything to them, and like if this person starts, she'll stick up for me, and if he starts on her I'll stick up for her. Like if she doesn't hear it I'll shout do you want to like shut up and just watch your mouth?*
> *(Anne 1st interview 13/01/16)*

Gary too spoke of difficulties building a social network. Like Susan, he moved placements often when he was a child, with the result that he lost friends that he had made. He talks quite plaintively about how he wanted friends, but circumstances did not allow him to maintain the relationships.

> *I just wanted somewhere where I could at least say was mine. I had somewhere where, you know other people, they make friends with the neighbours they make friends with this, when I started speaking and making friends I was then moved to some other people.*
> *(Gary 1st interview 19/01/16)*

When we met Gary had recently moved house himself, from another city, so again he was rebuilding his network. By the time of writing this thesis, some 12 months later, Gary has again moved house, to another city. In adulthood, he appeared to have recreated the nomadic circumstances which caused him so much difficulty as a child; he would now need once again to rebuild his social network.

As part of creating a social network, Julian storied himself as a mediator, he described two occasions when he acted in a particularly unifying way. In the first excerpt he took steps to right a wrong which had been perceived, in the second when he took steps to stop a classmate believing that he had been discriminated against because of his race.

When a boy thought that Julian had said something about him, Julian took steps to repair the damage. He explained how he had taken the initiative in order to prevent bad feeling:

> *'Sorry if I've done, if I've done anything what might have hurt your feelings', and he said the same thing and we just shook hands and forgot about it.*
> *(Julian 2nd interview 20/01/16)*

He also described this mediator role in another situation; he explained how he spoke to a boy who is ready to accuse others of racism, in a way which Julian finds unfair. Julian's readiness to act in order to avert possible accusations of racism also suggests an agentic control of the situation he described. In a similar way to the concept of homogeneity as social 'glue' discussed above, here Julian talked of his attempt to homogenise, identifying the similarities and setting aside difference. Julian talked of a boy in one of his classes, who was inclined to assume that any negativity he perceived was related to his race:

> *He is he's black. I think because he's black he thinks he has an advantage, whenever he get in trouble he goes like 'that's racist'.*
> *I sat next to him, I said, 'half the other people are getting told off as well, it's not because of your skin colour'. He's silly and really stereotypical.*

(Julian 4th interview 03/02/16)

In pointing out this action to me, Julian was storying himself as the ‘good guy’, he created an image of himself as neither ‘silly’ nor ‘stereotypical’. While this conversation was happening however, we were being overheard by Julian’s carer, in the adjoining kitchen, so his story was not merely for my ears; his carer was also an audience. Julian demonstrated a wish to repair and maintain his social network, he described himself in a unifying way, prepared to take action to ensure that rifts were prevented or healed. Julian, at a young age, showed a clear ability to address difficult subjects, in order to improve social relations. His way to agentic control was to act as a mediator, intervening with his peers, in order to make his network more cohesive. While telling himself in this way, Julian allowed me an insight into the way he saw himself, the identity he wished to portray. Anne too talked about how she controlled her behaviour, in order to achieve her desired identity, the identity that she told me she aspired to. Anne focussed on a school persona which she wanted to adopt, that of ‘boffin’, or academically gifted person. This was an interesting exchange, as often young people wish to avoid being labelled in this way. The term ‘boffin’ when applied to largely white middle class men and boys could be viewed as privileged, however, Mendick and Francis (2012) found that the same privilege does not extend to most secondary school pupils, for whom the label was one to fear, as it is often used in peer groups in order to ostracise. Anne told me that she used her social media to advertise her ‘boffin like’ behaviour, so as to leave her online network in no doubt as to her desired label:

I was on facetime and people are like why are you still writing? I was like

because I have an essay, they were like you're such a boffin, and I was like yes, yes I am, I know, but I want a good grade. But I haven't backed it up so I'm not going to get a good grade.
(Anne 3rd interview 28/01/16)

Here we clearly have Anne desiring a specific outcome, a reputation as a 'boffin', however, her performance in the essay she describes was not what it needed to be. Anne said this, and told me what she should have done to improve it, but adds that she did not do it. There were contradictions here, where Anne identified herself as a boffin to her social media network, but then immediately her narrative tells me that she is not going to achieve the required 'boffin' grade.

5.3 Seeking freedom

A recurring theme in the interviews was that of seeking and finding freedom. The theme emerged from the data from previous coding, which could be construed as overcoming obstacles, and seeking mental and physical escape. Again, the process of returning to the original data allowed this theme to take shape. The structural impositions of 'care' imposed many obstacles to freedom, but participants storied themselves as overcoming these, using a variety of means.

In their talk about how they felt they had actively shaped their own lives, many of the participants chose to speak about the obstacles which they had faced, and the strategies they had used to overcome them. Gordon, Susan, Helen, Gary and Debbie spoke retrospectively about overcoming the obstacles they faced, they recalled the actions they had taken in order to address structural hurdles in their lives. Some obstacles seemed to be inevitable, with participants identifying ways to respond to them. Participants spoke of escaping from difficult circumstances; both mental and physical escape mechanisms were discussed. Surmounting

problems could be difficult, with perseverance being a useful character trait to adopt. I shall begin by giving examples of some of the inevitable hurdles which were discussed.

Both Susan and Gordon spoke of the inevitability of structural impediments, Susan talked of having no choice but to find employment. Her opportunity to stay in education did not exist:

> *You got told you were leaving care when you were eighteen, you were told that. That was how it was, there wasn't, I don't ever remember there being an option. And I think the difference now, because obviously care leavers can, they can have all their stuff put into storage; they can have their accommodation paid for when they came back. You didn't have any of those options. I got, because I was eighteen in the November, and I was still at college until the June because I was obviously a late school, my social worker said to me when you finish college you need to get a job, and I remember being really scared thinking 'oh I've got to get a job, I've got to get a job straight away otherwise I'm not going to have anywhere to live, I've got to get a job, I must get a job oh my god I've got to get a job' I remember being, - And I ended up getting 3 jobs because I was so frightened. Because I had a bedsit then I'd left my foster parents. I was so frightened I wouldn't have anywhere to live.*
> *(Susan 1st interview 26/08/15)*

The repetitive nature of her words serves to accentuate the plea which underlies it, 'I've got to get a job, I must get a job, oh my god I've got to get a job'. This rhetorical device gives emphasis to the line, I was left in no doubt that Susan remembered her panic and her manner of telling the tale emphasised it for me. The job hunt was Susan's priority; obtaining work was her means to escape. Susan can compare her situation to that of young people today, as she works

with young people in care, supporting them in education. Her only choice was work; she expanded on this a little further in our final interview:

> *What would I do in the holidays, where would I go? Where would my belongings that I had when I left care? What would I do with them? And my social worker told me that I had to get a job when I was eighteen, so it wasn't a choice, you didn't have a choice; you had to get employment. So I wanted to do A levels.*
> *(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)*

Again repetitive language, this time questions: What? Where? Where? What? The questions are lined up in Susan's story, as barriers to ambition. At age 18 Susan overcame this particular difficulty by getting three jobs, for her there was no decision about what to do when she left college, she entered employment. Her decision was merely what work to get.

Gordon on the other hand had no interest in the academic life; he drifted into a criminal fraternity, which threw up barriers in front of him, while at the same time offering a social bonding opportunity. His move to boarding school, which he had agreed to, became another barrier to his freedom. It seemed impossible to stay out of trouble, part of the excerpt from our first interview, quoted in full on page 134, underlines a deterministic attitude, when he talked of his brief time at the local secondary school "I was in trouble there as well." "I wasn't a trouble maker, I just seemed to be in the middle of whatever trouble was going on".

When Gordon says that he "couldn't stay out of it", there is an inevitability about his future. He exhibited an attachment to the people and behaviours which were disadvantageous to him, but he does not recall understanding the effect of his behaviour on those around him. This predestined future aligns with the typical

narrative of a child in care, where their futures are associated with poor adult outcomes. He talked of disappointing his foster father, and the result of this disappointment was a boarding school. The 'trouble' of which he speaks had become an integral part of his life. Gordon tells a story where he had no agency, this part of his story is one where he did not remember having control, he recalled being asked if he wanted to go to boarding school, and he said that he imagined Billy Bunter, this was not what he got. He was sent to the 'school for maladjusted kids'; the name of the establishment was not likely to provide him with any hope, there was no suggestion of inspiring him or promoting optimism. Berlant's theory (2011) about young disadvantaged people being given false hope, part of what she terms cruel optimism, is not apparent here, instead the attachment to injurious behaviour, is a self-imposed cruel optimism. Gordon went on to relate what happened when he left his 'school for maladjusted kids'; it was apparent that the 'trouble' had escalated:

> *You know it's going from bad to worse, and then sort of an old friend who I'd kind of grown up with or hung around with after I left school, he was in the same sort of village or just down the road, a couple of brothers and they were all drug influence, and having a good time influence, and you know at that age you're kind of checking everything out anyway, but then it started to get into, sort of, a bit like gang warfare and all this kind of stuff, and bad deals going down and I heard one day that another friend who I'd known had killed this other guy, and it was even more reason not to go back to [named prison]. So yes sphere of influences, they were all bad really [laughs] yes they were.*
> *(Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15)*

Here Gordon has been constrained by the circumstances around him, but there is

social capital to be gained from such negative encounters. Here is a social network, of the type which Gordon had previously suggested he did not have. His childhood misdemeanours saw him drift into a circle where criminality was the norm, and the crimes became serious. It is at this time that Gordon spent most of his life in prisons, borstals and detention centres. He maintained connections within a criminal network, these are not positive encounters, but are by no means unique to Gordon, care leavers have a high incidence of association with the criminal justice system (Children's Commissioner, 2017a).

Susan escaped her world with books, taking advantage of the criminality forced upon her by her mother, in order to help her to escape:

> *[(m)other's name] used to make us steal. She was horrible like that, if you didn't do it she'd beat you up, and I then worked out that even though I had to get stuff for her, and I didn't want to do it, that I could get the books I wanted to read. So I used to get the books from WH Smith.*
> *(Susan 2nd interview 02/09/15)*

Here Susan was also talking about criminal behaviour, however this was not her choice, as it had been for Gordon; she relates that she had little choice but to steal, of course there was some small element of choice, but Susan's story does not suggest that she had much room to manoeuvre; her mother forced her, under threat of violence, to commit crimes. She was quick to say that this was against her will, but it gave her an opportunity for escape of sorts, by stealing books she was able to escape from her reality using her imagination:

> *I used to read at home. I honestly can't remember a lot about. I mean I used to read, you know I used to read and everything, because a lot of the*

times we didn't have any electric or heating or anything, so you had to do something.
It was escapism for me, reading, and I read now. I know what tools to use if I'm struggling, you know, if I'm feeling stressed. I know exactly what tools to use.
(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)

Susan's use of the term 'tools' was interesting, it seemed a very pragmatic way of describing her actions. When I asked her to expand on this, she explained:

I'll go for walks, I'll read, I won't use alcohol or drugs, which a lot of other people self-medicate don't they? They self-medicate and I can understand why they would. So I'll read, and one of the things I used to tell myself as a child. 'Right Susan, now you've got to really focus here because you're struggling. So what you've got to do is you've just got to think today is today, and tomorrow is a different day. And so you're just going to keep doing everything and it will change' and that's what I used to do 'you're going to go and walk, even though you feel really rubbish and its horrible,' and that's what I used to do because I used to think tomorrow will be a different day.
(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)

The idea that 'tomorrow will be a different day' comes from Susan's favourite book, Gone with the Wind. Susan talks of a considered 'toolbox' of techniques to help her to deal with her life, of which mental escape is one. She eschews chemical support, and takes up a fictional external discourse to enable her to escape. She is not the only participant who could escape into their thoughts in order to surmount their circumstances. This agentic use of imagination in order to transport, them, however briefly, into another world, was narrated as a powerful means to make life bearable. Other participants spoke of reading, but Gary had a

particularly effective escape mechanism, he imagined himself to be travelling. He would sit in the railway station, watching the buses trains and ferries:

> *I used to like sitting there, because from the station you could also look and see the buses go along the alleys and you know the wider spaces that open. And that was happy. I didn't like going back home to the other people, but it was like you're just happy and content to be there. Because partly it's like you could get on the train and go, you know, even though they'd never let you on the train.*
> *It's just I could go anywhere I like if I could get on the train. That's like I could go anywhere. Like when you see ships, in [named port] I used to see [name] ferries going in and out, back then you saw all that frigates going out as well, so I used to think that would be nice. They were happy places, it was like, I think it was because you could escape, you know. And anything that wasn't with them was actually happy.*
> *(Gary 2nd interview 26/01/16)*

Here I saw Gary's choice to escape the situation in his foster home, and imagine himself in another place, mobility was key to this memory, he imagined himself getting away, by train or boat, and he could escape. His imagination allowed him to create a happy place in which to spend some time; a way to escape the trap which was his foster care experience. There is an empowering narrative here, with Gary narrating himself as agentic, even when he could only escape in his imagination.

Susan talked of actively putting her care life behind her when she left care at age eighteen. One of her friends was claiming benefits in order to help finance a holiday; Susan did not want to follow this course. She talked of being free of control, likening benefit claim to the regime which she had just left:

I used to go on holiday. Always saved up and went away on holiday. … I could have claimed some top up rent thing. I remember my friend [named] claiming it. But I didn't want to claim any benefits because I wanted to be free of having to...and she lied because she was working as well. And she said why don't you do it Susan, and then you'll get that as well. And I said 'no I don't want to, I don't want to be involved with benefits', I said. I just want to do it on my own.

I just didn't want to do it; I just wanted to be free of all that I didn't want somebody saying can you do this. I thought I just want to do it myself.

(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)

Susan's control of her independence evolved from her care experience, she wants to show that she has achieved things by herself, to 'do it on her own'. She was no longer dependent upon the state, and did not want to return to being financially dependent. Her use of the term 'free', and the consideration that someone else would be able to control her actions was sufficient to prevent her claiming. There is no consideration in Susan's story that she disapproved of the dishonesty of her friends claim, only the personal aspiration for freedom.

Gordon also used his small amount of agency to control where he lived. He stayed at boarding school over the holidays in order to avoid going back to his foster parents. This option could only have been available to him if his carers and the local authority agreed; however, Gordon recalls this being his choice. In his life there followed a number of years where correctional institutions filled the place left by school, until Gordon fled from this background to establish a new existence far away:

A lot of kids went back at weekends and things, but I mean I would, even

some holidays, I would just stay on at the school, I wouldn't actually go back because I didn't want to, because obviously I didn't feel particularly happy or wanted or needed there really. So sometimes, not all the time, I would stay at the school during the holidays, which was more fun, because everyone else had gone home, so I had the whole place to myself. I could run around, you still had your food and everything, and you know all the cooks would still be there, on a smaller scale, and you know I quite enjoyed that. I had the run of the place.
(Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15)

Here Gordon shows an early affinity for the institutionalised life, which became his norm. He stayed at school to avoid the necessity to return home. When he talked of the school in holiday time, there is a sense of freedom in his words; he could run around, he had the place to himself. He imbued the description with a very positive tone. He said that he did not feel 'happy, wanted or needed' by his foster parents, as they allowed him to stay at school, perhaps he was correct in this feeling. He escaped that by staying at school. School for Gordon has become a happy place. It was not until he was 22 years old that Gordon decided the institutional life was not for him, and he escaped again, this time with a rucksack.

It's that age group, you know you're destined to get yourself into a lot of trouble, you know one way or another. Mine was all sort of you know sort of institutions prisons and borstals, and detention centres and probation hostels. I mean they threw everything at me to try and make a difference and eventually you know sort of in my early twenties, I think twenty two, I just packed a rucksack upped sticks and left my home town and things started to improve after that really. It's getting away from what you're used to and the trouble you used to get in. So yeah it worked for me, I wouldn't say it would work for everybody, but it worked for me:
(Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15)

He went on to explain why he thought this change had made such a difference to his life.

> *Yes it was a different atmosphere, a different feeling; it was more it was light-hearted. I was doing something completely different that I never thought I would do, and it was just exciting new life …you could find somewhere to live down there, you could find somewhere to stay. Even if it was in your tent in an orchard, you were allowed to do that. You know. Accommodation was one of my things I think which made life very difficult, there was no base. There was no substance. It was always transitory, everything. And you know you sort of couldn't put down sort of roots really, whereas I did in Kent:*
> *(Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15)*

Here Gordon has constructed his new base, by the simple means of pitching a tent in an orchard. He has put the institutions behind him, in order to embark on a new life. Unlike Gary's narrative above, Gordon was seeking a 'base', he did not dream of movement. For him the freedom he sought was to be found when he had his accommodation, this gave him the freedom to change. He talked of the difference he experienced, a different atmosphere, different feeling and a different life.

Gordon learned more slowly that his life was better when he was in control. He talked of learning how to 'conduct' himself. After he had left the West Country to take up an itinerant lifestyle, Gordon's story changes from the 'college of crime' discussed above, to one of conformity and contentment. He spoke of how he gradually stopped his criminal behaviours, and reaped rewards.

I still got into trouble after that, but it just started to get less and less and I started to behave myself, and discover how to conduct yourself in life really. You know in a more constructive way. You know, which is great actually. Yeah I did. It was good times, happy days actually, real happy days.
(Gordon 1st interview 13/08/15)

Adapting his behaviour to a more law abiding regime was highly positive for Gordon, he was serenely nostalgic as he said this 'happy days' indeed. This change process described how Gordon perceived his journey to the life he now enjoys. His story is not one of instant salvation, but a process which took time. For Debbie, Susan and Gordon an element of change was necessary for them to forge their adult identities. They each told a story of how they set aside their past in order to move on in a new life.

As well as mental escape, some participants spoke of physical escape. Each in their own way physically removed themselves from the circumstances which they did not like, striving for a better setting. Helen ran away from home before she entered care.

The thing is I had started to run away from home, because I didn't want to be in that environment, even with her there or not. I mean my brother was beating me up. So I started to sleep rough at the age of 12, right. In old houses.
(Helen 1st interview 10/09/15)

Helen was unhappy at home, her mother was suffering from mental health problems, and her brother was physically hurting her. She preferred to live on her own in derelict buildings. Again, although Helen stories this as agentic, she was

not in control; she was evading physical violence and her mother's mental health problems. She was not searching for a 'good life' in the way it would be commonly understood, but Berlant's 'good life', "which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it." (2011:27). The running away, Helen told me, was the final behaviour which caused her mother to place her 'in care'. Running away from home in this way eventually caused the sending away from home, in a way Helen achieved what she set out to get.

Debbie freedom involved the achievement of her academic dreams. She listed the study stages she had worked through in order to get the qualifications she needed to progress to university:

> *I went to [school] in [named town] for a little bit, like literally a month and then I went to [named town] but didn't study for a year, like I took resits which I didn't get any help with. And then waited a year and then started again at [same town], then I went to [named city] which I tried self-studying, and you can't self-study maths it's hard. And then I did came back here and I went to the tutorial college and then to university.*
> *(Debbie 2nd interview 16/08/15)*

Debbie's said that ambition forced her to continue to study, when it would have been easy to stop. She persevered, as she said that she knew where she wanted to go.

Susan too talked of a commitment to study, but for her, there was no real attempt to appeal to her ambition. She did what she had to do:

> *Well I had to do the course and I did the course. And I can remember my*

lecturer [named teacher] saying 'Susan I do not know where you are going to end up', he said 'because you definitely don't want to do this course'. And I said '[named teacher] don't you worry I'm going to end up just fine'. He said 'but you're not interested', I went 'no, but this is all I can do so that's what I've got to do', I said 'but I will be fine'.
(Susan 2nd interview 02/09/15)

There is no question here about Susan's ability, merely her motivation. She tells a story which shows a very definite agency, her choices were limited, but she selected a course and made it work, in spite of her preferences. For Gary the learning journey was more difficult. He has learning disabilities, so educational attainment is more of a challenge for him. He spoke about learning to read, and linked this to how he now learns to use his computer:

I sit and I keep going at things, and I get angry sometimes, I swear a lot. Sometimes I get memories flooding back in my head of being called retard, thicko and stuff like that and sometimes just, it does put me off sometimes, so I back off it for a while, but then I stubbornly start you know I've got to get back into this because otherwise I'm not going to learn nothing.
(Gary 4th interview 09/02/16)

Again, a story of perseverance in the face of structural obstacles: Gary's learning disabilities are a real obstacle to learning, but he tells a story of perseverance in the face of difficulties. Gary labelled himself as stubborn, but he used the term in a positive way, this is his way to say he perseveres. During each of our four meetings Gary was working on backing up his DVD collection onto the hard drive of his computer. His digital literacy in this task was fairly advanced, and would have needed to be learned. Gary showed me how he has persevered, as an

independent learner, to enable him to secure his digital library, and thus allow him to continue to escape into his imagination.

5.4 Agency at critical moments

This theme emerged from the apparent selectivity of participants in their narratives around agency. There appeared to be consideration given to people, place and timing, initially annotated as who, when, what and where, when agentic actions were discussed. These separate categories then evolved into this theme, where critical moment involves timing but does not exclude other elements. Thomson et al. (2002) identified the relationship between timing, opportunity and identity as key to the ability to exercise individual agency. These participants, like other children in care, were faced with structural obstacles, limiting their opportunities to be agentic. Despite this they made claims to agentic choice. Although participants took control of their circumstances in agentic ways, they were also clearly not agentic in all areas of their lives. They talked of strategically timing choices, decisions were made about when to act, action was postponed until a future time, when control may be possible. Physical location was also an area where participants exhibited control, choosing where they could be located, although often this was only a choice within the small spaces where they could exert control. Strategic choices were made around what to act upon, and what to ignore. There is also testimony to show that participants exercised control over who they engaged with.

For example, controlling the timing of events was clearly important, for Helen a key decision was when to engage with formal education. She described a series

of failed attempts to re-engage with formal qualifications, before finally deciding to return to study:

> *I did go back and start doing A levels, but I gave it up. I don't think I was ready really. But that was me starting to think that I wanted to do something, but it took me when I had kids really to actually do it. To start thinking about education again.*
> *(Helen 3rd interview 01/10/15)*

With hindsight Helen said that she was not ready to exercise this 'choice' until she had a family of her own. Debbie was more aware of her choices, and exhibited a level of pragmatism, we were talking about how her education had been stalled when she entered secure residential accommodation, she became quiet as she replied:

> *[Becomes quiet] Well I couldn't do anything about it. You've got to kind of pick your battles when you're in that environment. You can't just fight everything; you've just got to like fight the things you're more likely to win.*
> *(Debbie 4th interview 27/08/15)*

The quiet tone suggested sorrow at this enforced choice; for Debbie the loss of her education was traumatic, but here she was unable to fight for it. She had to wait till she moved to her next placement in order to resume her studies. Timing and opportunity restricted her choices.

Debbie talked of adjusting her goals, she aspired to attend university, but her time in residential care, and hospitals had both delayed this future, and also changed the topic she could study. In her narrative she endeavours to underline

her own agency, retelling her tale so that the outcome matched the circumstances.

> *I always wanted to go to university, like the goals have changed slightly, like what degree I want to do, but I still wanted to go to university. And I just don't like failing. [laughs] The idea of failing an exam probably drew me on more than anything, yes.*
> *(Debbie 4th interview 27/08/15)*

Debbie's future has altered, but not by much, she was at university, her undergraduate studies were delayed, and adapted, but she tells a story of agency, she controlled her future in order to achieve the main goal. Postponing a goal was not limited to Debbie and Helen, or purely to formal education, postponement for Susan was related to optimism. When Susan was in care she established techniques to help herself to get through bad times, knowing that life would improve in the future:

> *I used to think to myself, right Susan, today is today but tomorrow is tomorrow. And you're going to feel rough and horrible but there's nothing you can do to change it. You've got to keep your head down and keep going. So you've got to try and find things to do that will occupy you so that you're not feeling horrible. And that's what I used to do.*
> *(Susan 4th interview 01/12/15)*

One of the postponing tactics described was reading, as noted previously, Susan used reading as a tool to help her to escape her 'present', in this excerpt from the fuller quotation on page 157 she describes how literature helped her to postpone building her social network.

> *So I just remember reading my books and keeping to myself really. And thinking well my time will come when I'll be able to socialise and be where I want to be, but I'm not going to worry about it at the moment because I've got to just survive this bit.*
> *(Susan 2nd interview 02/09/15)*

Susan talked about choosing to postpone socialising. This postponement of a network was discussed above, but warrants consideration here, as it was clearly a forced choice. Susan tells a story of lacking the opportunity to form a social group, but in fact she could have done as Gordon did, and mix with young people who were also disadvantaged in some way. She talked of electing to wait. The structure around her had created the environment in which the choice was made, but Susan was agentic in her decision to put off an element of her life, socialising, in order to 'survive this bit', she makes the best out of a bad situation.

There were occasions where participants could choose locations; they could elect to be somewhere which was more conducive to their needs. Helen exercised this ability when she chose to attend secondary modern rather than grammar school. Her mother allowed her to choose, and so she chose to avoid the academic route.

> *I decided not to go to grammar school. My mum gave me the choice. So I went to the local secondary, which was kind of all right, but the change of home life was completely different.*
> *(Helen 1st interview 10/09/15)*

At the same time as she made this decision however, her home was also changing, without her being offered any choice. This was one of the catalysts for

her to begin running away and sleeping rough. She stayed in empty old houses, often on her own, while in her early teens.

> *I don't remember being scared sleeping rough, I just remember it was better than being at home, you know what I mean. I would be now.*
> *(Helen 1st interview 10/09/15)*

Looking back Helen realises how scary the old houses must have been, but at the time they were less scary than home. Again this choice does not appear to be a very good one, while Helen is telling a story of agency; in truth her choice was limited. Within the school setting Julian too told a story of limited choice, where he tells himself as agentic, but in reality his choices are enforced. We had been talking about the various school penalties for misbehaviour. Julian told me that he had once asked to be allowed to work in the room which is traditionally a place for punishment, as this is where he was able to work best when another boy was disturbing him:

> *I've been there before but...this person was being mean so he was in most of my classes, so sir said I can do work in there, not as a punishment.*
> *(Julian 2nd interview 20/02/16)*

This has striking similarities with Anne, who also finds she works best in this place, however when she is sent there it is as a result of some misdemeanour: This is clear in the excerpt recorded in page 133, where Anne reframed her punishment as a benefit to herself. The reason for the punishment, in Anne's story, told in interview one, lies with the others "that I don't get on with, and they start arguments". Anne points out that it is not she who is to blame; however she

tells the result as the one that she wants. Both of these young people are able to transform negative situations, in the cases outlined above punishment scenarios, into benefits. Their life narrative turned the negative experience of punishment into positive peaceful places to work. While the structural imposition of the punishment room was unavoidable, these young people tell the story as an agentic choice.

Gordon too, some forty years previously, told a story of exerting a small level of agency, within the confines of his life in care. He told me that his foster parents were required, by the local authority, to ensure that Gordon attended church. They however were not churchgoers, and he was not inclined to the religious experience, so he said that he feigned obedience, by setting off to go to church, but he did not actually enter the building. He stayed outside during the service and then went home. In a small village it is unlikely that this behaviour was unnoticed, but it was not challenged:

> *Fortunately my parents weren't religious folks, so they didn't press too hard on that one. I think they did their bit by sending me to the church but if I chose not to turn up or go, well there's nothing they can do about that is there. It probably suited them really. [laughs] Yes I remember going to the big church the Church of England school at [named village] a big step up from Sunday school, it was scary actually, I didn't want to go in there, you know.*
>
> *I had to go on my own, you know I had to walk through this church on my own, and I just used to sit outside and waited for the service to be over then went home.*
>
> *(Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15)*

Within the constraint of being required to go to church each week, Gordon told a

story of how he could exercise his small amount of agency by not actually entering the building. Again this was a narrative of forced choice within a highly structured environment. He foregrounded the choice he was able to exercise, rather than the limitations imposed upon him.

This ability to foreground one element of experience over another was also apparent in relation to formal academic endeavours. In school, both Helen and Debbie maintained their academic performance for some time after their lives became traumatic. Debbie talked of the time when she had first entered care

> *I was still getting the grades; it was just all the emotional stuff*
> *I still really did all my homework and everything I just didn't sleep.*
> *(Debbie 2nd interview 16/08/15)*

There is a very clear decision here to maintain concentration on academic work, at the expense of 'emotional stuff' and 'sleep'. Debbie told a story of prioritising educational targets, but at the expense of her physical and mental health. Debbie was clear that her schoolwork was the most important factor. For Helen too, just preceding her entry into care, when she was suffering both in the family and being bullied outside, schoolwork was a priority for her:

> *I'd never had any racism before that so it was a real big shock. So that was basically the end of my road that I was beaten up. From then on it was every time I went out somebody would beat me up. In the meantime I started at a school, a secondary school, and I was doing well there, I was top of the class there for two years. But I was having this emotional turmoil in the area, because I was getting picked on and things like that.*
> *Helen 1st interview 10/09/15)*

Helen was attending her choice of school, and was making that work, in spite of turmoil in the rest of her life. She chose to withstand the bullying, so that she could get to school and do well. There was an element of delayed gratification here, with both Debbie and Helen being able to invest in their educational progress, in the hope of later success. Since the Stanford Marshmallow project in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the ability to delay gratification has been linked to improved outcomes for young people, notably in education (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990) and health (Schlam, Wilson, Shoda, Mischel, & Ayduk, 2013).

Participants were also spoke of being agentic about who they interacted with, although this could have unwanted consequences. Again this was a forced choice, as it could only be chosen if they had contact in the first place, as with Anne, when she suspended contact with her mother:

> *Christmas 2014 I stopped contact with my mum because stuff was going on, and then my grandad just didn't want contact with me because I couldn't see my mum.*
> *(Anne 4th interview 09/02/16)*

When Anne decided to stop seeing her mother, she did not expect this to mean that she lost other family members. She later started working on rebuilding her relationship with her mother, and is undergoing counselling to this end. I met both Anne and her mother after one of these sessions, when I collected Anne to take her to her foster carer's for a planned meeting. She showed me a report card which she had been given at school. It is required that she have a signature from home each evening, but she had chosen not to give it to her mother to sign,

instead bringing it to her foster carer for her signature:

> *You've got to say like that you've seen it in that box, I didn't get it signed yesterday because I didn't bring it home, because I got an S and my mum would have killed me. So I was like, no, I left it at school. So I'll go and make [foster carer] sign it.*
> *(Anne 3rd interview 28/01/16)*

An 'S' is apparently not a grade to be proud of, so Anne does not want to share that with her mother. She does not mind her carer knowing that she misbehaved, but her mother should not know. Anne was able to take advantage of the possibility of lack of communication between the different areas of her life. Her carer would undoubtedly make a record of having seen and signed the 'report', but that would not be shared with her mother. The structure in her life created agentic gaps for Anne, allowing her to continue her exclusion of her mother, but at a level which was only apparent to herself.

As with Anne's choice to exclude, and then readmit her mother to her personal network, other participants also made agentic choices about who to include, and who to exclude. Unsurprisingly perhaps, mothers were most likely to be excluded; both Susan and Debbie have cut their mother from their lives.

Here we have seen young people, in care, being selective about when they exercise agency, within the structure in which they were placed. They were strategic, and pragmatic about what they could do and when and where they could do it. They chose from amongst their inner circle who they would associate with, and elected to distance themselves from others.

5.5 Reaction to structural impositions

Any discussion of agency must include consideration of structure. The narratives related in this study included coding of structural elements from the earliest mapping of initial themes. The common thread was not recognised until the original data was revisited, examining the original utterances which had been identified as relating to 'agency'. This facilitated identification of this theme which addresses participants' responses to certain structural impositions which they recognised and reacted to. Helen's feedback (Appendix 8) highlights unnoticed structural factors, which Helen now believes affected her life choices, but which previously she had not recognised.

Participants showed an ability to identify and turn aside from structural impositions, which may have constrained their adult lives. In career and family lives, there was a suggestion of agentic refusal to take the recommended route. In career choice Gordon took a very definite stance against a prescribed route, while Julian is currently finding his way towards the future he envisages for himself. Helen on the other hand said that, the care experience was a temporary 'madness', which could now be set aside:

> *When I look back now, what I think is that I always was who I am now, kind of thing, and that there was a little bit of a muddle up at the beginning, and it was kind of just the situation that I was in that made all that madness happen. Like do you know what I mean because there's things like, when we were being brought up, that I think about now, that are much more like - my grandmother was very conscientious about other people, and disturbing them and all that kind of stuff. So I'm very I'm really like that, I don't like upsetting people, and I'm always conscientious about noise. Even when I was a bit older having parties and the neighbours. Things like that. So I think I've always had that ingrained in early life. So*

that - I was always that conscientious person. But then I'd do, with that situation that I was in, the mad situation, I'd do things that came across as not conscientious. But it was the situation, do you know what I mean.
(Helen 4th interview 02/12/15)

Helen talks here of how it was the situation she was in which caused her to behave out of character; she claimed that her true identity never changed. She focussed on a character trait which she was proud of, conscientiousness, and relates that back to her upbringing, and importantly, her grandmother. She set aside the time of her life which was out of her control, and downplays its importance, 'a little bit of a muddle', a temporary phenomenon, which she puts behind her now. She chose to depict herself, to me, as a product of her grandmother's interventions. She chose her grandmother as the family member who she most emulates, the matriarch of the family, which effectively removed her mother from a position of influence. Helen stories herself as a 'conscientious person', one who considers the feelings of others. She wanted me to know that she was just like her grandmother.

Helen also stories herself as very much on her own, she learned early in life to encourage herself out of what she saw as unhelpful thought patterns. She referred to an attempt at suicide, during her time in a PRU:

The suicide thing. Yes so even though like I had those moments of 'oh I can't cope with this'. I'd kind of go like talk to myself, and be like convince myself that I was stronger than that, do you know what I mean? And actually it is the way I deal with things now, when I feel myself going a little bit on a downer, I talk to myself in that way.
Helen 4th interview 02/12/15

Helen does not believe that support can come from anyone else; she has a loving

family, but does not rely on them for this kind of emotional support. Children in care learn very early in life that the adults around them may not be constant in their lives. They are removed from birth parents; they often experience multiple placement moves, and changes in social worker. The effects of this lack of stability were the subject of an initiative by the Children's Commissioner for England, early findings showed that around 70% of children in care experience some form of instability in their care experience (Children's Commissioner, 2017b), resulting in an inability to trust others. Helen's story suggests that this early instability caused her to become self-dependent:

> *It doesn't matter how much your family support you or not, because they have their own problems to deal with, and not - they don't always understand your situation and all that kind of stuff. So it's completely and utterly on your own, so you have to deal with that. So that's what I taught myself, out of all that shit that's gone on.*
> *Helen 4th interview 02/12/15*

Helen's lesson from care is that it is essential to be independent; she is the only person who can help herself. The various members of her family are busy writing their own stories, and cannot be relied upon. Her choice of words was interesting, she said that she taught herself, a particularly agentic manner of speaking. She was not the mere object of someone or something else's teaching, she tells a story of taking control.

As an adolescent in care, there was a preconceived idea that Gordon would leave boarding school and enlist in the army. This was not a route he wished to follow:

I think they just basically thought right stick him in the army, that's problem solved. You know but I wasn't having any of that I knew straight away that I did not want to join the army and be shouted at by people, it just wasn't for me at all.
So I was kind of yeah I wasn't going into the army, no way but I think that's what they had in mind for me, because I didn't do well in the exams and stuff like that so they probably thought well that's the best place for him, but no I wasn't having any of it. Best decision I ever made, it wouldn't have suited me, not at all.
(Gordon 2nd interview 25/08/15)

Although Gordon did not like the idea of 'being shouted at' he did spend most of the next 6 years in various detention institutions, where it is likely he was shouted at a great deal. The suggestion that poor academic outcomes equipped Gordon for little in adult life is one which still prevails, and Julian apparently felt pressurised by it. He exhibited a clear idea of what he would like to do in the future, however he had discovered that perhaps academic excellence was not needed, and he appeared to have accepted this possibility:

Well I want to be like a YouTuber, like making videos, editing them, not just for me to enjoy, for other people...our teacher showed us a video that I didn't really want to see. Like successful people don't need good grades. She said the creator of Microsoft he had appalling grades, and now has a multi-millionaire, he's saying Lionel Messi, the, near enough the greatest footballer of all time, got kicked from his local school football club.
(Julian 6th interview 23/02/16)

It is evident here that Julian sees his future in digital creativity, and has now been shown, by a teacher, that good grades are not the essential element he had assumed. Julian said that he did not want to know this; however, he retained the information, and repeated it more than once to me. Julian can now envisage his

choice of futures regardless of educational success. Again, Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (2011) seemed to be apparent here. In reality very few people get 'discovered' in this way and most people in the world of technology are highly qualified.

5.6 Discussion

In this chapter I have highlighted occasions where the participant's stories showed agentic behaviours. This agentic endeavour is selective however, with circumstances for control limited by the environment. The structure imposed by the care experience, whether this was enforced changes of home and school, the increased scrutiny involved in being 'cared for', or the sense of 'difference' created when a child is raised outside of their birth family, reduced the possibility for agency in many cases.

5.6.1 Creating Social Networks

Family and school can be seen as the main structures in which children become socialised (Oswell, 2013), for a child in care the concept of 'family' becomes a negotiable term, and school is often not a constant. This study has demonstrated that, while that the establishment and maintenance of social networks was a goal for participants, this was also an area where they found difficulties. However they storied themselves as agentic in their social networks. Susan clearly narrated her lack of a social group as her choice, a deferred goal, when an external view of this reality may have been one of stigmatisation and difference. While Julian, for example, storied himself as the creator of social cohesion, viewing potential discord and taking autonomous steps to create a harmonious solution.

The structure of ‘care’, and the stigma associated with care both mitigated against these participants in this key area. Putnam (2000) suggests that homogeneity is a key to building social networks, a type of sociological glue, but ‘difference’ is an element of the care experience. When Gordon was prevented from playing with another young person, as he was viewed as a threat, he was clearly identified as ‘different’ to his peers. He storied this incident as an introduction to a preference for solitary endeavours, his choice, and later the association with criminals rather than attending college was also a choice. This kind of criminal connection would be viewed as the dark side of social capital (Putnam 2001), although Gordon storied this as a support.

The sociological glue to which Putnam refers (2000) is not that which Julian exhibited, when he told stories of his attempts to mediate within his network. This was not the dark side; rather it was the positive potential of sociability. Julian told his story of positive intervention, to both me, the apparent audience, and his carer, a less evident listener. Nonetheless he told stories of cohesion, with himself as the glue. His story was one of positivity and community cohesion, with himself as the ‘hero’.

Young people maintain their social networks in the digital arena as well as in real life. Social media is an important ‘place’ for young people to interact when physical proximity is impossible (boyd, 2014). For children in care, the mobility of their lives can lead to increased physical distance between themselves and their network. In this study only Anne was fully integrated into this digital space, Julian being too young to have a profile, or perhaps too young to admit to me that he had one, and Debbie, at 21, told me that she did not like digital environments. Anne relied upon her phone and tablet to interact with friends, having limited

possibilities to meet friends after school. It is problematic for those of us born before the digital age to fully comprehend the phenomenon of social networking, or to stay abreast of its ever-changing spaces, however it was apparent that Anne used her digital tools to allow her to have many more 'friends' online than she claimed to have in real life. This allowed her a small space to be agentic with her circle; she was limited by her 'difference' in real life, but the digital environment allowed her to create homogeneity through her rules of access. Her, seemingly arbitrary, acceptance level of seventy friends in common allowed her to be one of a group.

5.6.2 Seeking Freedom

These narratives were ones of agentic choice, whatever the reality of a situation was; the participants storied themselves as being in control. They rewrote narratives in order to show their agency. These became stories of a 'good life' sought: from Gordon who sought a self-sufficient idyll, away from the imposition of family or friends; Helen ran away from a troubled home life, where she was both victim and carer; Susan wanted to escape from state control, and find financial independence. Participants storied themselves as taking charge of their futures, to achieve their goals of freedom. Berlant (2011) suggests that young disadvantaged people are 'fed lines' about success being easy to achieve. She terms this a form of 'cruel optimism'. These participants do not demonstrate that optimism, their agency comes from a need to escape the cruel reality, rather than conform to a suggested better life. By contrast, Julian, the youngest participant, told a story which supports Berlant, he related that his teacher had told the class that academic success was not necessary, and had given two aspirational

examples – Lionel Messi and Bill Gates. Such advice, if taken, is likely to become an obstacle to flourishing, rather than encouragement to succeed.

At a more ethereal level Susan sought escape and solace in fiction, this private act was narrated as a 'tool' to escape and Susan's telling of it also showed the importance to her of fiction on the adult identity which she now told to me. Francois (2013), in a relatively small scale study, showed that reading allowed students to negotiate their identities, both in and out of the school setting, and Susan's story supports this assertion. In a space where she was beset by external imperatives, Susan was able to escape into history, and discover a mantra to help her to survive and thrive. Gary too used his imagination to escape, but his mental travel took him to imagined mobility. He could watch the vehicles leave and transport himself in his own imagining. Gary's story suggests that it is not only the harnessing of written fiction which helps to develop identity; the development of all imagination can be a tool to allow transcendence from the structural obstacles of disadvantaged youth.

5.6.3 Agency at critical moments

The findings here are broadly consistent with those of Thomson et al. (2002), who suggest that the relationship between timing, opportunity and identity are key to the ability to exercise autonomous agency. However their notion of 'mapping' critical moments according to the possible agency of the young person is countered by the way the participants in this study restoried themselves as agentic, claiming agentic control where it would appear true control was lacking. There were surprising stories of agentic moments, in the face of little apparent choice.

5.6.4 Delayed gratification

Another surprising finding was the willingness of some participants to 'delay gratification' for a time, in order to maximise potential benefit. Both Debbie and Helen were prepared to delay their academic endeavours until a later period, while Susan talked of deferring the creation of a social network until the timing was more advantageous. Children and young people are deemed to be bad at delaying gratification, with disadvantaged youth being particularly poor at this form of self-regulation (Evans & English, 2002). The Stanford Marshmallow Experiment (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1972) found that children who were able to wait longer for a treat, the marshmallow, had better adult outcomes than those who could not wait. The key to this patience was the ability to distract themselves from the treat. The tests have been revisited, and recent research, (Kidd, Palmeri, & Aslin, 2013) has shown that the ability to wait can be affected by the young person's experience of the reliability of the potential reward. The young people in this study came from backgrounds where they have seen the unreliability of family and systems, and their lives had been disrupted as a result. According to Kidd et al. (2013) they would be unlikely to be able to wait for satisfaction, but this study shows that they can buck this popular stereotype, when the conditions were right for them.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the agentic behaviours of the participants in this study, across key areas of their educational experiences; they described their 'education' in terms of their wider life contexts. This chapter has shown agentic behaviour which 'bucks the trend' of popular discourses. The participants were agentic in building the social support mechanisms which they needed; they

sought ‘similar’ individuals with whom to connect. They were able to delay gratification when the circumstances of that delay seemed to them to be worth waiting for, and the opportunity was right. However there was also the tempting prospect of cruel optimism, whereby the goal that was offered or sought was one which would not be advantageous over the longer term, potentially affecting longer term outcomes.

The importance of social capital acquisition is highlighted here, as it progresses from reflexively considering social networks, to agentically creating them. This element of social networking was seen as an important area in the learning stories in the thesis. Other conditions associated with agentic learning were identified here, including understandings of ‘family’, victim narratives, escape, both physically and mentally and emergent resilience. Figure 7 shows these conditions added to the growing model.

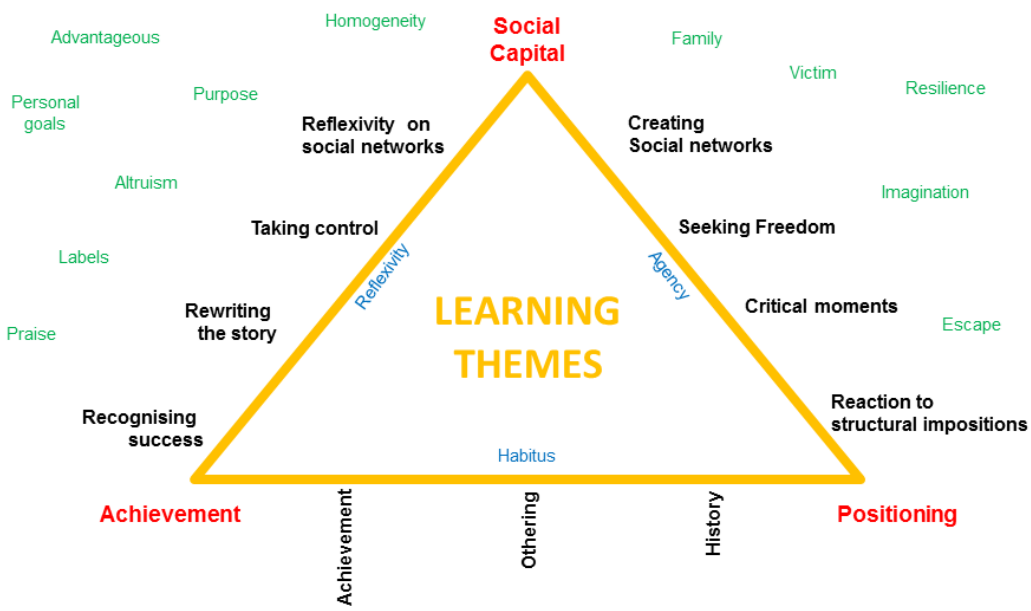


Figure 7 Conditions for reflexivity and agency

The thesis continues from this consideration of the agency of participants, to a review of the way participants storied their habitus, both structurally and agentically, as they navigated their educational journeys.

Chapter 6 - Habitus

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the ways in which the participants narrated their habituses. The themes in this chapter developed from early coding around concepts of identity, as I revisited codes, and original recording and transcripts, three main aspects of 'habitus' emerged. The chapter explores how they spoke of differentiating themselves, from a young age, and how this process impacted upon their identities in later years. Participants also narrated stories of achievement, across different activities. This achievement was not limited to formal academic endeavours, but was a source of pride, and a sense of identity. Finally the chapter addresses how the participants told stories of their histories, and how those histories impacted upon their habitus.

Habitus is a dynamic set of dispositions, which act with 'capital', to inform practice in the 'fields' in which social actors find themselves. Put simply, habitus is the way of 'being' which individuals adopt, not necessarily in a conscious way, and not through having been formally 'taught', in order to make the 'best' of the hand they have been dealt (Barrett, 2015). It is an intrinsic element of their identity. Bourdieu's tools were defined by him in such a way as to allow them to be applied to a variety of social situations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007; Grenfell, 2012; Maton, 2014).

Bourdieu's description of habitus has been accused of being poorly defined, (Grenfell, 2012). It has been accused of a latent 'determinism' (Reay, 2004), however this was refuted by Bourdieu himself, who was clear that it was possible to learn to "master one's inheritance" (Bourdieu, 1999:340), he stressed that pedagogic action can help vulnerable groups to develop their habituses. Grenfell

(2012) points out that the habitus itself cannot be 'seen' instead its nature must be 'excavated' by searching for the effects of habitus on the actions of those under scrutiny. Where there are choices of courses of actions, which version of 'habitus' is in play? In the context of the education of children in care, it is the habitus which allows individuals to deploy their 'capital' in their journey towards the 'future' which Bourdieu suggests, they already know (2000). The future that they are preparing for is the one that they perceive will best fit them. The first section identifies areas in the narratives where participants differentiated themselves, seeking an identity.

6.2 Othering

The major theme in this chapter is about how a sense of 'othering' and being different is so strong in participants' narratives. The theme was apparent from the earliest coding, with 'escapism' and 'labelling', as well as 'belonging' being amongst the earliest codes in the project. These concepts appeared on the initial code map (Appendix 4) and were combined and modified when I iteratively returned to the original transcripts, and recordings. Othering seems to have been clearly taken into the sense of self from an early age and it relates to relational othering as well as physical and spatial othering. This seems to have a real impact on who participants felt they could be and what their possibilities were in the future. However their responses were not uniform to this. For some the important thing seemed to be to blend in and be normal, others seemed to thrive on playing up the difference. Othering can be a way to reaffirm identity within a group (Stahl, 2017), to become part of a group. These participants have narrated stories of difference, which do not relate to their 'care' status. They did not claim an identity as a 'care leaver', but sought an identity outside of this label.

For two participants, ethnicity was a key part of their habitus, singling them out as different, and being a source of both trauma and pride. Both Gary and Helen attributed negative life experiences to their nationality, and how others perceived them. Gary wore his nationality with pride, while Helen recounted trying to disguise her heritage. This study was conducted in the South West of England, and each of these participants claimed a different heritage.

Gary was proudly, and unashamedly Scottish, his family came from Scotland, and he talked of his home country with nostalgic affection. His conversation was peppered with the Scottish vernacular, and he recounted tales of kilt wearing, backing this up with a photo of himself in a kilt. He also attributed some of the negative experiences in his life to others perceptions of his 'Scottishness':

> *The confusing bit for me was I spoke Gaelic first, you know some people they are taught Gaelic, you know, but it was confusing for me because like Gaelic was my first language, then it was Doric, you know the north east for Doric. So it was so confusing because I didn't know how to communicate properly I kept trying to speak to the people in charge, that I wanted to go home, and they put the me in classes that they tried to force to get rid of my accent, tried to force me to get rid of dialect, and I always felt scared, that nobody was doing anything, I felt frightened, I really felt alone.*
> *(Gary 1st interview 19/1/16)*

While Gary spoke of his pride in his heritage, Helen recalled mixed feelings with regard to her nationality. Helen was of mixed heritage, having an English mother and an Indian father. As a child in the Midlands of England she remembered being victimised because of her racial heritage. She spoke of hiding this element

of her background, and inventing a different story. Helen talked of a self-loathing, and also of how she hated her father, for being Indian:

> *When I look back I know that I really really hated myself, and I hated my dad. I hated my dad for being Indian, even though I didn't know him. I hated him because of all the stuff over that. And I hated myself because I was half Indian.*
> *(Helen 2nd interview 18/9/15)*
> *I had a brother in the school, but he hated me as well, and he … although he did experience the racism part, we both used to pretend we were half Italian, because we didn't want people to know.*
> *(Helen 1st interview 10/9/15)*

Despite the fact that both Gary and Helen spoke of adverse responses to their nationality, their stories show that their heritage inspired them to different habituses, they embodied their heritage, and continue to do so, Gary through his manner of speech, and Helen through her appearance. In later years Helen appeared to embrace her background, and talked of a visit to her Indian family, she said that she maintained close relations with her 'sisters' who lived in India. From exhibiting a need to disavow her heritage in order to blend in at school, Helen now enjoyed this difference, and spoke about it several times. The difference engendered by their ethnicities allowed Gary and Helen to lay claim to a different 'symbolic capital'. Following the struggle in childhood with the stigmatisation of their ethnicity, when Helen denied her ethnic history, and Gary was victimised, they both told stories of rejection of stigma. Later in this chapter I will show how Helen's attachment to her Indian heritage informed her current sense of self.

Helen also recounted a memory of feeling forced to conform, in order to thrive. Before she entered care, Helen talked of being forced to adopt a pugilistic style in order to minimise the bullying which she was subject to:

> *You do it or you die, because you had to fit in. So you had to do what everyone else was doing otherwise you were going to get bullied even worse than you were in the first place. So I was doing that to stop myself being bullied. So I was like, 'I've got to act hard, I've got to do this and this'*
> *(Helen 1st interview 10/9/15)*

In order to fit in Helen became a bully herself, her way to protect herself from aggression was to become an aggressor. In her recollection she had no choice, she changed her behaviour to meet the expectations which she perceived others held. Of course in reality there was a choice, but Helen's telling of the story suggests that she felt compelled to conform 'I've got to…I've got to…' Julian too spoke of changing his outlook in order to cope with perceived threat. Instead of changing how he behaved though, Julian changed where he went. He had attended a summer school before starting his secondary school. School had been a quiet place, with only a dozen or so pupils in view.

> *When were in it we saw the astro and there was only about 10, 11, 12 people on it. And then we see it now and there's about 200 people on it. That's why I don't go round the astro that much.*
> *(Julian 1st interview 13/1/16)*

This changed dramatically when term started however, and the artificial playing field, the 'astro', became crowded. Julian's mechanism was the opposite of Helen's, where she opted for 'fight', Julian chose 'flight'; he talked of avoiding the

area where the crowds were. When asked about the number of people at the school, his response was stark:

> *You mainly see black people, and the black coated blazers. That's the most you see.*
> *(Julian 1st interview 13/1/16)*

Julian is not here referring to skin colour when he talks of 'black people'; the colour of the school uniform blazers is the 'black' to which he refers. When coupled with his avoidance of the area where there are now many people, Julian's use of the colour black here underlines his fear of the large group. The colour black traditionally signifies evil deeds; it is a colour which denotes the absence of light (Allan, 2009). Julian embodied his fear, when he talked of moving to another location, 'I don't go round the astro that much'.

The fields in which the participants found themselves were also significant influences on their habitus, and there were signs to show the effects of being 'fish out of water', when the 'field' did not fit their current way of 'being' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). Susan's narrative here described how she was marked out as different from the beginning. The field itself imposed expectations in the way of clothing, appearance and economic capital, which Susan remembered not being able to fulfil. Susan did not 'fit in' to secondary school, the reasons she suggests are the trappings of neglect prior to entering care, and the stigma of being in care.

> *I was never really integrated, you know I started school, I hadn't gone on the first day, I didn't have a proper school uniform, my hair had been cut appallingly, and I think [named] the sewing teacher paid for me to go up to*

> *[named salon] in [named village] to have my hair cut. I never had the right clothes, never had any lunch money, it's you know the usual historical things that happened with kids in care.*
> *(Susan 1st interview 26/8/15)*

Susan told this story as an explanation of her inability to fit in throughout her schooling; she used the description to show her membership of a different social grouping, 'kids in care'. The difference which excluded her from one group, gained her access to another. Anne too told a story of difference, and was explicit about how this difference affected her decision-making. Anne had been invited to a university open day by her local university; the invitation was rather impersonal, having been delivered by means of an SMS message to her mother's mobile phone as detailed on page 151. I enquired further, asking Anne why she did not want to visit the university. Anne's perception of her own difference and fear of being with "popular people" has caused her to reject an opportunity which could influence her future education, and her access to capital which could impact on her future. Anne's self-image is such that she believes that she would not fit in, this is sufficiently powerful to force her to avoid the experience. She rejects the opportunity to try the experience. There is a "structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them" (Hardy, 2012:129). Anne's habitus is not open to stepping out of her comfort zone in this way. Bourdieu suggested, when he talked about the relationship between expectations and possibilities that "expectations tend universally to be roughly adapted to the objective chance" (Bourdieu, 2000:216).

Anne's story suggested that her expectations in fact have affected her chances, she believed that she would be out of place among the 'popular people' so she

turned down the opportunity to consider a university career. Of course the future will hold more opportunities for Anne to consider higher education, but her reticence at this stage in her life has meant that she will not be among her peer group if and when she decides to take this chance.

Social positioning was important to Anne, who found that she needed to regulate her behaviour in school in order to avoid the derision of some of her classmates. Again, she identified these other girls as the 'popular' ones, she repeats the intimidation that she felt, effectively othering herself:

> *You just get some really intimidating girls, and if you do something wrong then they'll just mock you for it for ages…I'm in the group with all the like really popular outgoing girls, and there's only like 2 of us who're just really you know.*
> *You kind of have to walk through it all to get to a place where we go.*
> *(Anne 1st interview 13/1/16)*

Anne's belief in her difference and the 'unpopularity' behind it caused her to want to avoid places at school, but that was not always possible. This was not a positive aspect of life for Anne, it was a trial which she faced each day, she did not react in the same way as Helen, described above, by fighting, she reacted by withdrawing.

The concept of social 'fitting in' also applied to Gordon's time in school. He perceived that there were many things that he had not learnt which he believed his foster parents should have supported him with. As a result he did not feel 'set up' for life:

When I came back from when I left school, and I came back to live with them, I just can't remember them actually being terribly helpful in any way really. There was no sort of setting you up for the like the process of life, what you actually need to achieve to get on because you've got to do things in a certain order. Like a simple thing, like getting a driving licence and all that kind of stuff. You know it's a process, and it's only later on in life that you kind of understand that, because you can't do certain things before you do other things first.
(Gordon 3rd interview 8/9/15)

Gordon described here how little prepared he was, his boarding school prepared him for an institutional life, and that is what he found himself propelled towards, there were no other expectations for him. There was no prospect of 'change', no suggestion of doing things differently. He stories himself as a victim of others expectations, not as an independent entity able to write his own future. He said that the preparation for life just wasn't there for him and there was little he felt could be done to make up for this lack. This is interesting given that this is also the stereotype, and mirrors the acronym applied to Looked After Children, LAC, discussed in Chapter two. Of course, the data shows that many participants weren't lacking, that many were proactive and agentic too, but when they felt this lack, the possibilities for them were much reduced. Gordon's story suggests that Bourdieu's 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) starts very early in life and remains into adulthood.

Being taken into care involves much change; one of the more obvious disturbances is that of changed geography. The child in care moves into someone else's 'home', the carers are called foster 'parents', there is an underlying assumption that a 'family' experience is going to be provided. Here

Debbie describes her treatment in one of her foster placements, where she shared her belief that the carer, her foster mother, actively sought out young people about whom she could boast:

> *She'd have pictures of them and stuff. Literally trophy kids, but she, she didn't work it was just her. But then she'd have like a separate dining room for her and her family and us, and like she had her lounge, and then the em, what's the glass thing like extension of the house … which was frigging hot.*
> *(Debbie 2nd interview 16/8/15)*

Although Debbie viewed the photographs she saw of other young people as a negative indication of the carer's motivation, she applied the 'trophy kid' label to herself, being a grammar school girl. This excerpt however also highlighted a particular form of 'difference', the carer had physically located the young people for whom she 'cared' in a separate area of the house. This was not a description of a family life, and the conditions described for the young people were not comfortable. While Debbie was adopting the 'trophy kid' identity which she perceived, she was also aware that she was 'different'; not a part of the family. The physical barrier of the separate room echoed the social barrier. This separateness from the family was also experienced by Gary, who recalled being isolated:

> *They take you places and then they stay with their kids and purposely leave you to be isolated. Or whenever I was at, well I use the term home loosely, but whenever I was at home with them, it's like I'd be sat in the corner all on my own, with the light off, and they'd laugh and take the mick out of me.*

(Gary 2nd interview 26/1/16)

These two stories told of separateness, with the young people having no place to call 'home'. Their sense of self was not nurtured in a caring family environment; they were left in isolation to develop.

Gary said that he suffered bullying behaviour at the time due to his separateness; Gordon however believes that the segregation he suffered at school may have been instrumental in limiting his life chances.

> *I mean in those days it was all a bit of segregation … because the boarding school I was at they had two parts in the school, they had the old house which was an sort of manor house bit, and then they had a new house which was built on to it, and it was called the old house and the new house for obvious reasons. And I always wanted to get a room in the old house, because I just liked old houses, old buildings, you know with all the beams and the woodwork, and the cranky staircases, I just loved all that. And I could never ever get them to put me in the old house. It was only years later that I realised that the reason why was because the new house was for council paying kids and the old house were private paying kids. But I didn't know that at the time, and that's why I never ever got in there, so which was a shame really, because it would have made no difference, I don't think, to anyone, but it might have made a lot of difference to me, because I would have probably taken an earlier interest in architecture.*
> *(Gordon 2nd interview 25/8/15)*

Gordon's story told of a literal distinction between the young people, a physical segregation of which he was aware from a very young age. The difference in architecture between the two buildings speaks of class divides and 'taste'. The old building, with the interesting architectural features, was solely for those young people whose parents could afford to pay, Gordon, as a ward of the state, was in the new building. In Gordon's narrative, he perceived that living in the old building

would have provided him with a resource, an early interest in architecture, which the new building did not provide. He talks of the new building disparagingly, saying “you could see it had been built on”, whereas the old building is described in terms of its features “a billiard room” and “tennis courts”. It seems that Gordon unwittingly reinforced the ‘taste’ distinction, suggesting that only the old building had architectural merit, although there is also a likelihood that this new ‘extension’ was indeed unattractive. Architecture in the 1960’s tends to polarise opinion, termed ‘brutalist architecture’, its use of concrete has been largely out of favour since the 1970’s (Hoggard, 2016).

Debbie considered the difference between herself and others as a source of pride, for her education is what differentiated her from others, and also provided her with a distraction, to help her cope with life. In our first interview Debbie told me about her perseverance in her educational ambition:

> *I kind of get an idea in my head and I want it. And then I’ll go for it, I think that's just more me. And I enjoyed it as well. Even when I missed loads I still go back to it. I just get bored really easy, I’m always doing something. And I think the kind of people I was around weren't really like me. Like because they weren't educated, or they were from very rough areas, so I was always a bit different. So I just kind of stick to my studies and get on with it, because I did get bullied quite a lot when I went into more homes or hospital because of that. So it was more of a distraction to stick to it.*
> *(Debbie 1st interview 13/8/15)*

In interview 2 Debbie had slightly altered her position, she maintained that she was cleverer than those around her, but now she claimed that this held her back. She described the school in a secure unit in which she had been placed:

Most people there were still just doing like access to education access to learning or something, and so I was actually GCSE level, and then I don't think they had the staff to be able to do any one to one with me at a better level, and everyone else would be messing around, kicking off. I wanted to learn and there was like one teacher for us all, and so it ended up just not teaching me.
(Debbie 2nd interview 16/8/15)

Again this story spoke of othering, Debbie differentiated herself from the other young people in the secure unit, because of her educational ability. She did not accept responsibility for her own lack of educational effort, it was framed as an inevitable result of the behaviour of others, both the young people who were 'messing around' and the fact of there only being one teacher. Gordon talked of taking responsibility for his behaviour. Here he discusses his foster parent's attitude towards him, and accepts that he played a part in that, but equally, this was the impetus he needed to change his life:

They were good people really, like I say, but looking at it from my point of view it was duty, and they did their bit and that was it. I guess when I was much smaller things were different, but as I grew up and became more troublesome really, they'd got less and less enthusiasm I guess which was fair enough I guess, looking back you can be fair about it. But no, I was kind of displaced somehow, that's how I felt. But you know... all those elements just drove me to move away and do something completely different.
(Gordon 3rd interview 8/9/15)

Here Gordon was not only accepting that his behaviour may have been part of the cause of his foster parents' distance, but also, indirectly, it was the cause of his subsequent move to another part of the country, and a new life. The physical separation of Gordon from his foster family promoted a feeling of difference. His habitus was based on a sense of being 'othered'. He professed ownership of his past and his future in this passage; he took a reflexive stance as to his own positioning. Anne also took ownership of her behaviour, while at the same time allowing some justification for it:

> *My behaviour went downhill because of all the bullies and I was going through a really hard time because I had just went into care, and yes, they were saying some really horrible stuff, so I told them to go Eff themselves…I was only like 13 at the time, and it's quite hard like at any age, really but, I just had like my tests, I had my tests on that time, and it was just really stressful… I wasn't sleeping properly and I wasn't eating.*
> (Anne 1st interview 13/1/16)

Anne admitted to her poor behaviour, but then gave a list of items which have contributed towards this disposition; entry to care, age, tests, stress, insomnia, poor eating habits. Any of these influences would be viewed as stressful, perhaps contributing to a young person behaving in an unacceptable way. Together they paint a sad picture of a girl who needed help. Her story here pointed out the many 'differences' in her life, and underlined to me how much she felt different. At the time of our interviews Anne was still at school, so had had little chance to reflect upon how these life events would impact in the future, she related the physical effects on herself, but could not yet be reflexive about her position.

The section above has considered how these participants narrated themselves as ‘other’, identifying factors which are ‘different’ in their lives. There were no uniform reactions, either across the participants, or across time. There were narratives of striving to fit in, Helen changed her ethnicity in order to avoid ostracisation, and later became a bully to fit in with a particular group. Later in her life she embraced her ethnicity, and now is proud to embody an Indian culture. Julian on the other hand used avoidance tactics to stay clear of bullies; he did not story himself as an aggressor.

Another key theme was the way that achievement became such a strong part of their narrative about who participants were, and who they had been across time. The following section considers narratives of achievement.

6.3 Achievement

In the earliest coding the theme of achievement was linked to ‘education’, ‘agency’ and ‘determination’, from the first stages of analysis it was apparent that these participants foregrounded achievement in their lives, and saw achievement as important across all areas of life, not merely the narrow ‘school’ encounters. It didn’t seem to matter if achievement was about education or something else, for example swimming or skiing, but perhaps in contrast to what the literature would have us believe, it appeared to be centrally important to these young people and gave them a sense of who they were. They actually seemed to have a strong sense of achievement which helped them in the face of adversity, even if their sense of themselves as pupils/school goers wasn’t strong. This variety supports the Fostering Network’s recent work on Social Pedagogy, Head, Heart, hands (McDermid et al 2016), expanding the nature of learning to include non-academic activities, the ‘broad education’ advocated by Cameron et al.(2015).

Perseverance in the face of obstacles was apparent in the data when Susan explained how she overcame considerable challenges in order to succeed in the swimming pool, she at first played down her ability, saying that she wasn't a 'brilliant swimmer', but went on to say that she took first place in the national surf lifesaving championship, an achievement to be proud of.

> *I wasn't a brilliant swimmer but what I was good at … I joined the surf lifesaving association in [named town], and I was good at kayaking, and I came first in Great Britain surf life championship, I can't remember what it was, there was only 3 of us so I was either going to come first second or third. So I was quite good at that. But that was when I was younger. I couldn't join any of clubs because obviously when the stage of joining clubs was probably when I was with my mum and she was not interested.*
> *(Susan 3rd interview 16/9/15)*

This national championship was all the more impressive considering the lengths Susan had gone to in order to learn to swim:

> *We used to climb over the roofs, and we taught ourselves to swim in the outdoor swimming pool. We used to climb up onto the roof of the building, because obviously we didn't get to do anything as kids, and we used to, me and my brother we used to climb up go on the, it's really dangerous, and go down over the top and go in the swimming pool.*
> *(Susan 2nd interview 2/9/15)*

Susan talked with pride about her swimming achievements, a tangible reward for her efforts. She embodied a successful disposition, striving to succeed, she wrote her own story. For Susan achievement here was key to overcoming her sense of difference. Her natural ability in the swimming pool became institutionalised

cultural capital by means of her effort, and the winning of an award. Susan later told me that her route into her current employment in social services had begun when she volunteered to teach children in care to swim. Her achievement, and thus her investment in cultural capital was able to be converted into economic capital, when she took up this new job role (Bourdieu, 1986a). The habitus forming of Susan, the child, informed the employment future of Susan, the adult.

When I asked Julian, about his future goals, he gave me a list which was particularly focused around behaviour in school:

> *I want next year to be polite not be rude, don't disrupt teachers when they're talking and just get better grades.*
> *(Julian 6th interview 23/2/16)*

I asked him, 'is this what you want?', and he admitted that these were the aspirations of the team around Julian's education:

> *Well it's not just what I would like it's what [carer] would like, my head of year and head of house and also my head teachers. We've got, well we've got a vice head teacher, we've got like vice principals; we've got so many people.*
> *(Julian 6th interview 23/2/16)*

Laudable aims these may be, but they were clearly those of others, not Julian's own ambitions. Julian was telling me what he knew those around him wished to hear. When he talked of these goals there was little emotion involved, unlike the next excerpt where it was evident that Julian has internalised this expectation, he wanted to achieve when he helped his friends. He spoke several times about the role he played in helping other students to create online presences. Julian also

showed me his own YouTube channel, and some of the brief videos he had made and showcased there. Julian's tendency to aim to please others is also evident when he talked of trying to help his friends and being unsuccessful. On page 139 Julian's reflexivity was apparent in his internal monologue regarding his lack of success "Oh I messed up". He spoke of deploying the capital he has, his skill in the virtual environment, to help his friends, but then his despair at failure when he did not live up to his own expectations. Julian, at 11, seemed predisposed to tailor his behaviour towards what he perceived was required of him, but it seems his cultural capital was not yet sufficient to match the requirements of this predisposition.

Susan said many times that she valued her education, knowing that this was her way to secure her adulthood. But school also provided Susan with opportunities to learn more than the curriculum. She had the chance to step outside of her 'comfort zone', and she took that opportunity. Unlike Anne, who at a similar age, said she was unable to take an opportunity because of her perceived difference, Susan recounted an experience, where an outsider helped her to surmount this 'difference'. Susan narrated a simple transfer of economic capital, but she also told how she did not expect this to be possible. A skiing trip is also a signifier of 'class', skiing is not for the hard up, it is an expensive pursuit, she did not have the financial means to pay for it herself. By enabling Susan to take this trip, the donor was also giving her a glimpse of another way of life. This gesture impacted the life of Susan and her future family. She told how, when she was a teenager, a relation of her foster mum gave her a job cleaning, and helping to tend to an elderly diabetic gentleman. This was not a pleasant job, but was certainly described as a learning experience:

I used to have to clean bloody [name] septic ulcers on his legs, because he was diabetic. And I used to think I hate this bloody woman, she's a cow, bloody bitch, hate her. She used to go right Susan you can go and clean the drain, she used to give me all the shitty jobs, but I used to do it because I wanted the money, and I just learned to get on and do stuff.
(Susan 3rd interview 16/9/15)

With this hateful work in the background, what Susan related next was a surprise:

I was cleaning upstairs and she came up she said 'Susan are there any school trips?' I went 'I don't know.' And she went 'well you need to go and find out', and I went 'oh alright', so I came back the next day. Funny, you did what people told you to do. I said 'well there's the skiing trip'. Well she said 'can you get the form', and I went 'well not really no, because I can't afford it' and she went 'no ill pay for it', and I went, 'really'. She went 'yes', and she paid for me to go skiing… and I really enjoyed it.
(Susan 3rd interview 16/9/15)

For a girl in foster care who did not have the correct uniform for school and didn't have lunch money, it would seem that an expensive sport like skiing would have been outside of the natural 'field' for Susan, but in fact this holiday had such an impact on her, that she has introduced her husband and sons to skiing, and saves to ensure they can go every two years:

When I had the boys I said to my husband, 'it's a really expensive holiday, because it's about £5000 for 5 of you', I said 'but it's a really good holiday for young people', I said 'it's very middle class which I don't agree,' but I said unfortunately that's how summer holidays are, but I said I'd really like to take the boys.' … we went skiing every other year, and I'm sure that

was because I went skiing and thought this is a really good activity, because it's a group activity.
(Susan 3rd interview 16/9/15)

Susan recounted how a situation, which may have appeared to be potentially outside her field of comfort has actually allowed her to enjoy an activity with her children, and also to take part in a holiday which she herself brands as 'middle class'. This trip, occasioned by an unexpected act of kindness, resulted in a permanent amendment to how Susan sees herself. She does not quite go as far as to claim 'middle class', but she makes a point of telling me that she knows this is a 'middle class' entertainment. When Susan had the economic capital herself she was able to leverage these educational opportunities in order to give her children 'the good life' too.

Gary on the other hand was less likely to persevere in the face of adversity. He spoke of a job assignment he was given, but which he could not undertake. He told me he had visited the 'Job Centre' looking for employment. He went on to say that the Job Centre, in association with 'Prospects[4]' sent him out on a gardening work project, alongside people who he assessed as 'normal'. His learning disabilities were not taken into account. Gary was vocal in pointing out that he should not have been placed on the job with 'normal' people, and blames the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) employee for misleading him:

They got me to sign a thing to join prospects they told me it was to do with gardening, if it was a verbal contract or a contract with business, it would be null and void because I didn't understand what the hell I was signing,

[4] Prospects is a UK institution which can help to find education or employment opportunities for a wide range of people. They work with local authorities to help vulnerable groups to find employment.

because it was DWP they put me on a work programme and put me on with all normal people and funnily enough, surprise surprise, the woman that signed me into it doesn't work at the job centre anymore.
(Gary 4th interview 9/2/16)

Gary chose not to persevere with a job which he did not believe suited him; his learning disability could be used as a tool in order to legitimise his refusal to undertake some actions. He chose to remain segregated, and unemployed, he did not want to be 'normal'. His 'failure' here is attributed to the job centre employee who assumed he could work with 'normal' people. Gary does not talk of himself as 'normal'; he spoke often of his learning disabilities and his autism. This choice about when to act and when to refuse is highlighted when it is set beside an earlier comment in the same interview:

I was born retarded, it's like that was the word at the time I was born that was used to describe learning disabilities. Yes I know its offensive now. In one way I'm proud that I was born retard, I wore nappies till I was 8 so what. I think I've done far better than someone who was born with a normal brain that's just wasted their life.
(Gary 4th interview 9/2/16)

Here Gary stories himself as an achiever, having beaten the odds, so now he is better than normal. He still recognised his difference, but narrated this story as one where he beat the odds. There is evident selectivity about how and when to act, and a clear measure against which he measures himself: 'normal'.

These stories of achievement were set both in formal schooling, but importantly too in other settings. For these participants, their habitus is informed by their learning and achievement in many areas of life. The stories were also firmly

framed by the histories of the individuals. They remembered and narrated many small details of their pasts, in order to piece together their stories. The next section considers some if these historical moments.

6.4 History

In the first code map (Appendix 4) elements of history formed a large section of the map, almost half of the page, showing its importance to participants. Initially the coding was quite simplistic, associated with people and places, but even at that stage, a notion of 'reconstructing' history was apparent within the discussion around family. This 'history' theme developed from those early codes. Small details, tiny fragments of their 'known' history were drawn upon by participants in their narratives. Even when they said this didn't matter, it clearly gave them a sense of who they were and where they came from. This was fascinating because it said something about how they explained themselves over time and how important these recollections were, as compared to the importance of the experiences themselves. Life history work, which helps a young person to 'place' themselves within their family, even when they are not living with the family (Ryan & Walker, 1999), is a requirement of the adoption process. This section of the chapter explores how participants focused on their histories, in order to make sense of their identities.

When Helen talked about her entry to care, she recalled specific small instances, which for her seemed to be pivotal. She recalled here that she had once had to call an ambulance for her mother; she narrated this as 'a lot of responsibility'. But this responsibility that was placed on her is not what she storied as the cause of

her entering care. Helen claimed responsibility for her entry to care – saying it was due to her running away. I had asked if she believed that her mother's worry was the reason for her being put into care, she was able to recall a series of small events, the full excerpt is recorded in the quotation on page 130 from the first interview but key phrases include "a massive panic attack", "making me hold her hand and look after her", "call an ambulance" "it was like a lot of pressure for me, a lot of responsibility". Helen summed the situation up later in the first interview:

> *I think it was more she couldn't cope; it was more of that really. Obviously she was probably worried about my safety, but it was she couldn't cope with the worrying about my safety anymore.*
> *(Helen 1st interview 10/9/15)*

Helen has narrated a way to excuse her mother, while at the same time there is an element of blame, her mother could not cope, and therefore the young Helen was forced to become the carer. In a later exchange it became apparent that Helen retained these memories, she told me of a humorous exchange which embodied a sense of forgiveness:

> *I said to her, we were talking her getting old, and she said you'll just put me in a home, and I said well I will because I'm going to get revenge [laughs] but we both really laughed. I'll voluntarily put you in a home. [laughs] we were really laughing, but it was the right thing for her to do at the end of the day.*
> *(Helen 3rd interview 1/10/15)*

Helen's manner of approaching this tricky area of her history was one of humour, the anecdote was humorous, and Helen was laughing as she told it. She did not absolve her mother, the history was not forgotten, but equally she did not allow her current life to be tarnished by the past. She could 'reproduce' her social history in a positive manner, this technique allowed her to come to terms with its shortcomings, but to minimise the impact on her preferred future, which included close contact with her mother. In the excerpt detailed above Helen ran through the entire history, with an admirable economy of words. She was put in a children's home, she could have borne a grudge (she refered to the possibility of revenge), but she chose to say that her mother's decision was correct. She wished to retain a connection with her mother, and so she developed a history which would permit this narrative.

For some participants the ability to trace things back to an origin seemed to be key to their sense making, and their understanding of who they are. Helen talked of her amazement at discovering the trade of her Asian family. She had been telling me about her preference for creative, manual subjects at school, and her disappointment that she was not allowed to learn woodwork and metal work as they were for boys, and she didn't like the traditional 'girls' subjects. This study does not focus on gender, however, when Helen went on, she claimed a genetic heritage from her Indian family, which was, for Helen, the reason for her liking of woodworking, she then went on to tell me why she believed that education was important to her:

> *I remember even at primary school not liking sewing. So that's quite interesting. It was woodwork and metal work, but what is interesting since, is when I found my Asian family, apparently the name of us in our little village, was all carpenters.*

(Helen 4th interview 2/12/15)

My grandparents were teachers so it must have been ingrained somewhere that that was important.
(Helen 4th interview 2/12/15)

I like thinking about the world as well, and society and stuff… it probably comes from intelligent grandparents, intelligent mother talking to me all the time, about the world. My mum was like very clever; she got like 90 in her masters [laughs]. … I do the same with my kids, you know, in the car on the way to school; we're always talking about the world.
(Helen 1st interview 10/9/15)

Helen storied herself as having a sort of determinism, she talked of looking back in order to make sense of her decisions. However, it is not the woodworking trade which has captured her, she has embarked on a course of postgraduate study, aiming for a PhD in education; the academic route suggested by her grandparent's professions. Helen has aimed higher than they or her mother achieved. Helen exhibited how she viewed heredity when making choices in her life, but also that she was not bound by it.

Anne was currently at the stage of her life where important academic decisions were needed, and she appeared to be relying on her family history. We talked of what she would do after school, what were her future choices. As discussed earlier, Anne had the option of aiming for university, but at the time of these interviews, at age 14, she was rejecting this possible future; her elected path was the same one that her sister, mother and grandmother took, as detailed on page 151, when she talked of this heritage of caring.

When we had this conversation, Anne did not seem to be as enthused as when we discussed other options, both business and archaeology had captured her interest, but she did not quite make the mental leap to add them to her future, she had positioned herself in her family 'trade'.

Structural impositions featured strongly in these stories, the participants lives were disrupted by the conditions which led to being placed in care, and then they were further constrained by being 'in care'. Notwithstanding this however, participants spoke of occasions where they were able to make a 'virtue of necessity', using the situation to further their own ends. Helen talked of using her mixed race to her advantage. She feigned religious dictates in order to be able to dress as she wanted at school.

> *I was a real tomboy and I didn't want to wear skirts, so my mum, because of me being mixed race, she used it to say that I was religious and that I had to wear trousers, so that I could get away with wearing trousers, so I know that I was different in that way, that I could wear trousers, so that probably got some bullying even more coming on.*
> *(Helen 2nd interview 18/9/15)*

Helen talked of being able to maintain her 'tomboy' persona, even at the cost of broadcasting her racial heritage. At this stage her clothing choices were an outward symbol of the character she wished to portray. This seems more important to her than avoiding the bullies who victimised her. She was able to deploy her 'difference' to her own advantage, what Bourdieu would term a strategic choice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007), where she had weighed up, however unconsciously, the costs and benefits of 'owning' her heritage.

Susan too exhibited this strategic behaviour, both in her dealings with her mother, and after she had entered care for the final time.

Susan did not refer to her mother as ‘Mum’ she called her by her first name throughout our interviews; once during our interviews she almost used the word ‘Mum’, but immediately corrected herself. I understood this as a decision to distance their relationship from that which Susan recognises as a mother/daughter relationship. It is interesting that Susan did not shy away from talking about this shoplifting, instead she used it as an opportunity to ‘tell herself’ as being in control. When she talked of being sent out to steal, and her dislike of this task, she stories herself as winning. When she was fostered, Susan spoke several times of doing what she had to in order to avoid being moved again. Her use of a gaming analogy links further to Bourdieu’s theory. He often used the metaphor of a game in order to describe his theory, and deployed the term ‘feel for the game’ specifically to describe habitus at work in a given ‘field’, where the ‘game’ is the field. When she was fostered, Susan spoke of ‘playing the game’, doing what she had to in order to avoid being moved again. Here she described her time with her final foster carers. She denied any affection for them, and explained this by use of the example of being sent to ‘respite’. Respite care is available to foster carers to allow them to go on holiday without the children and young people who they foster. The young person is sent to temporary carers for a week or a fortnight, until their permanent carers return.

> *Then I went to a foster family in [named area] and I just played the game so I could stay at the school and get my education.*
> *(Susan 1st interview 26/8/15)*

I ended up with a family, I wouldn't say I was particularly close to them, because I think you know they used to go away on holiday and I used to have to go to respite, and you don't tend to build up a bond when people do that, you tend to think well I'll use you... I'll be good, I'll fit in I won't cause any problems and then I will eventually leave, and that's what I did. (Susan 1st interview 26/8/15)

Susan here explained that by 'fitting in' she was able to gain the outcome that she wanted. She seemed to be suggesting that if they had been more welcoming, she could have been closer to them. The example of respite care is the one that she selected to underline their treatment of her, this treatment influenced her habitus, and thus how she viewed and treated them.

The stories above show how the family retained significance for participants, and continued to guide their decisions, even into adulthood. This was not universal however. Gordon's family history did not emerge, from his narratives, as a driving force. For a young person in the care system the concept of 'family' can be difficult to define. There is a birth family, which may or may not be physically present, sometimes with a wider family network of grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. In addition though, there are the other 'families' with whom the young people interact. There are foster carers, adoptive parents and other elements of the 'care' family. For Gordon the nuanced relationships associated with family were difficult to grasp.

I just get a bit lost with it all really because it's too far removed from me really to understand. So it's not something I've grown up with really. I suppose my sort of grandparents or family were the kids in the children's homes probably, and that kind of thing. Or the house masters or the people that looked after you in whatever institution I was in.so they were

the sort of corporate parents, I think is the term isn't it [laughs]. Corporate parents.
(Gordon 3rd interview 8/9/15)

For Gordon the terms 'family' and 'parents' did not fit into his story. He was adopted, and then re-entered care before the concept of 'life story work' had emerged, he had no clear memories of his mother or his adoptive parents. The excerpt above seemed to show him searching for an adequate term to describe the significant adults in his life. He arrived at the quasi legal term 'corporate parents'. Gordon said that he felt no close link to his birth mother, and that he did not believe that it was necessarily useful to attempt to recreate these ties. He referred to his own meeting with his mother, which he talked of in a matter of fact fashion, 'job done'.

Sometimes it's just a can of bloody worms you know it doesn't always bring a happy ending I don't think. And at the end of the day some stones are best left unturned I think because you know things have happened for a reason, and you know maybe you want to find out that reason. but you know for some people it might work, but for me it really didn't hold a great deal of interest for me, because it's not going to make anything any better, it might fill in a few holes or gaps in your story, but no I think some people do it for the wrong reasons a lot of the time, and they'll always probably be dissatisfied with the results, really. Whereas I discovered my mum, I met her, and that was it. that was kind of job done really as far as I was concerned and she didn't really seem to be particularly keen, I guess she would have kept in contact had I done so, but there was no sort of great need from either of us to do it, so we just sort of went our separate ways you know.
(Gordon 2nd interview 25/8/15)

In the interviews there was no suggestion that Gordon has attempted to replace the lost family, he talked of a solitary disposition. In his current marriage he has been placed into a step-parent, step-grandparent relationship, but he said he struggled to understand these family relationships. Unlike the other participants, Gordon had no shared memories of time with his birth family, so he had no opportunity to create memories, good or bad, and this lack stayed with him during his adult life.

These excerpts highlight the importance of history on the structuring of habitus, and also how history defined future choices. As Bourdieu suggests, habitus is structured by the past, and in itself structures the future (Bourdieu, 1977). The participants narratives show how they treasured small elements of their personal histories, and how these histories influenced future dispositions.

6.5 Discussion

This chapter began by focussing upon how participants drew on early life experiences, and personal histories to tell a sense of who they were today? Reay (2004) pointed out that for Bourdieu individual histories were essential to the understanding of habitus. This suggestion is borne out by the stories presented above. The participants told stories of home and school, as being influential upon their dispositions and their ways of dealing with the world. For children in care the home life is a fragmented experience, often involving residence in many different 'homes', each of these experiences transforms their ways of being:

> *The habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the restructuring of school experiences…; the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences… and so on, from restructuring to restructuring.*

(Bourdieu, 1972, translated in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007:134)

This quote helps to explain how the many changes of place for the participants each impacted upon the structuring of their habituses. Each change of carer or change of school offered the chance to change the individuals' expectations of the future, and to expand the range of possible choices (Reay, 2004). However this choice is also limited by the perspective of the individual; what do they think is possible, and what is inconceivable. People can be regarded as part of a class collective, but this does not mean that their lives will be identical. For children in care, history is often an unhappy place, marked by cruel experience; however no two stories are identical. In this small study we have participants who have suffered many types of neglect and abuse, as well as bereavement. They have a collective history of care experience, but also individual family histories; the first may tend to homogenise their dispositions the second to differentiate them one from another.

6.5.1 Othering

For these participants 'difference' was described as an important signifier of habitus, in line with Bourdieu's statement that "*differences function as distinctive signs"* (1989:20 emphasis in original). However Bourdieu suggests that this happens outside of any conscious intention. The narratives presented in this chapter show conscious othering, participants claim their differences. This is more akin to Stahl (2017) when he studied how groups of boys create their identities by Othering different groups in order to differentiate themselves from them. Debbie clearly differentiated herself from the other residents in her secure unit, she was the academic, and they were not. She also used this technique

when she described herself as a ‘trophy kid’, she storied herself as different from the normative ‘child in care’, she laid claim to a superior identity.

Stuart Hall described identity as:

> *Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them.*
> *(Hall, 2013:6)*

Key, for me, in this definition is the concept that identity is constructed across a ‘lack’. The participants in this study lack many of the elements of normal life which most children and young people can take for granted. This definition also addresses the inequalities between children in care and their peers. When Gordon spoke of the inequity of the different accommodation at his ‘school for maladjusted boys’, he perceived the lack inherent in that divisive policy. The physical space he was permitted highlighted the difference he knew existed, although he suggested that he came to the full understanding later. The residential policy helped to divide the boys along class lines, those with economic capital and those without.

The discourse of ‘difference’ which runs through the findings can be seen to be influencing their future opportunities. When Anne spoke of rejecting an opportunity to go to visit her local university, she foregrounded her difference as her main reason. For her university was for ‘popular people’ not for ‘the likes of

her'. Grenfell (2012:57) suggested that it is this habitus which allows individuals to "relegate themselves out of the system". Anne's habitus is currently not predisposed to entering higher education, and the objective conditions of the proposed visit, both the strangely impersonal manner of inviting her, and her potential companions were sufficient to deter her.

Being 'in care' can be stigmatising, when other children 'discover' their care status, they are singled out, and can feel ostracised (Ridge & Millar, 2000). However there were stories of other sources of ostracisation, and narratives of dealing with them. Ethnicity was a strong identifier for both Gary and Helen, with each employing this difference in their habitus. The fact of their ethnic difference was apparent, as each embodied elements of their cultural heritage, Gary in his accent, and use of a regional dialect, and Helen in her appearance. This difference, whilst a cause of bullying and difficulty in youth, has become a valued source of cultural capital for each. Bourdieu talks of acquiring cultural capital through self-improvement (Bourdieu, 1986a), however these participants, rather than utilising education in order to 'improve themselves' instead had to learn how to deploy this capital to their advantage, in effect how to value their difference.

Some participants desired and sought out the 'similarities' with others, for example through a schooled identity, as with Helen's efforts to maximise her similarities in order to fit in. Others felt that they could never close this gap. Susan talked of never fitting in at school. Her early experiences, she said, had a long term effect on her ability to integrate. The two youngest participants report this inability to fit in as a current phenomenon in their lives. They are unable to build

social capital, in the school environment, and are socially limited as a result. Ridge and Millar (2000) also noted this phenomenon amongst children in care. The local authority provided material support, but their experiences of care inhibited their ability to builds and maintain social networks.

This discourse of 'difference' was evident in chapter 4 when the participants reflexively considered their social networks. In chapter 5 there were stories of agentic endeavour to create social networks, however there was a tendency towards difference which their histories had predisposed them towards. I see here another clear example of the cruel optimism of Berlant (2011), where the very goal which the participants seek, individuality, is a factor mitigating against the social network which they reflexively need, and strive for.

6.5.2 Achievement

As well as narratives of difference, participants also reflected upon their achievements, both in formal education and in other areas of their lives. Achievement mattered to them, and was storied as a strong part of their habitus. Literature regarding the achievements of children in care tends to focus on their weak formal educational outcomes (eg Jackson, 1988-2017) while their other achievements are overlooked. For participants in this study other achievements were highlighted in their stories.

Susan storied herself as an achiever both in school and in other pursuits. She taught herself to swim, and then competed at national level and won. This is a story full of justified pride. The experience of achieving in the swimming pool is an example of a habitus generating event, it shaped her future possibilities, and

allowed her to view future sporting endeavours as a possibility, rather than considering as outside her social field (Grenfell, 2012). She later went on to describe her skiing trip, and how that has impacted on her adult life, and her interactions with her own family. These achievements were important to how she described herself; her identity was informed by her abilities. Bourdieu (2000) suggests that our sense of what is possible for us is conditioned by our habitus, Susan's sporting stories clearly showed a habitus which had been mediated by her prior achievements, by achieving in one sport, Susan had learned the rules to carry that achievement forward into another sporting arena.

Gary related a narrative which allowed him to outperform 'normal' people, while at the same time he storied himself as different, and rejected the opportunity for 'normal' employment. He clearly told of himself as being other than normal, and this difference is what defined him. As Stahl (2017) found, this process of defining identity by means of that which it 'is not' was a useful way to resist identities which do not appear as 'normal' for young men seeking to differentiate their group. Gary rejected other people's sense of normal; it is not normative for him. Gary's story provides a counterpoint to findings that suggest that disadvantaged young people are more likely to want to 'fit in' with their peers (Weiss et al., 2008), his story is more resonant of the girls in Bottrell's (2007) study, who exhibited a form of resistance, which could be viewed as resilience. Not the resilience focussed on 'protective factors' such as those outlined by Morrison et al. (2006), but a claim to their own sense of self, as a marginalised group outside of the mainstream. Gary's story suggests an element of rejection of social norms as a form self-protection against expected failure. He resisted continuing in

education, Gary does not want to fit in, for him achievement was associated with being ‘other’.

Bourdieu suggests that we gravitate towards social fields which best match our dispositions, what he calls the field/habitus clash (Grenfell, 2012). For Julian, his ability in the digital arena provided him with capital which he could then use to transform his social position. His achievement was storied as a social endeavour, whereby he helped out his friends, thus confirming his place in the social world. When he narrated a story of failure, he was forced to re-examine his identity. As Bourdieu suggests, his habitus had been shaped by his prior expertise, but the field, i.e. the digital spaces required by his school friends, had changed, and he had not, this dislocation between habitus and a changed field was termed hysteresis (Hardy, 2012). The hysteresis thus produced required Julian to review his skill base, and thus reinvent his habitus.

6.5.3 History

Returning to Bourdieu’s much repeated definition of habitus “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1977) we can see that the participants in this study have told stories of the durability of their dispositions. Many of the stories refer to conditions which persisted from childhood, in the care system, through to adult hood.

Since the 1980’s the use of life story work with young people emerged in the Social Work profession (Watson, Latter, & Bellew, 2015). The production of a life story book became a legal requirement in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 for children who are going through the adoption process. Gordon’s story supports the literature which recommends life story work with adopted children. He

experienced both adoption, and then a second entry to care before this practice emerged, and he had no contact with family during his childhood and adolescence. His lack of understanding of the nature of ‘family’ stems from his lack of knowledge of his own family.

Gordon was the only participant who had been adopted in childhood; each of the others had been fostered, or had lived in children’s homes. In 2017 in the UK there is no legal requirement to carry out life story work with fostered children; however the practice is being promoted within fostering. This study suggests that children who enter care retain clear memories of their families, and these are intrinsic to their identity formation.

The ways of ‘being’ which participants described have been ‘structured’ by past events, and continue to impact on decisions. As Bourdieu (1977) suggested, past events informed Helen’s memory of specific instances where her choices could be explained by her memories of family. These show both her positioning of herself within her birth family, and also her decision making, she chose which instances to narrate, and how to position her memories within her story. Her story of how her current career and study choices match her grandparent’s career resonated strongly with Anne’s present day dilemma, and her decision to avoid the unknown, and continue within her family ‘trade’. Helen’s disposition in this regard had shown itself to be durable; she was 44 years old at the time of the interviews, and about to embark on a PhD programme, having achieved a Master’s degree in Education some 2 years previously.

Anne at 14 has time to consider her future; however delayed decision-making at this time in her schooling would inevitably lead to delayed uptake of higher education opportunities. Each adult participant talked of this postponement of

formal education; this confirms the findings of Jackson and Cameron who found that few young people, with a care background, “followed a conventional pathway through school to college or university” (2012:1107). Their study included children from Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary, suggesting that the delay in education is not one which is country specific; rather it is attributable to the care experience itself. The history of care impacted upon the future identity of the individual.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the participants stories as they relate to the structuring of their habituses. The narratives here show how the participants storied themselves as ‘different’, from an early age they had taken a sense of difference into their identities, and this difference impacted upon their sense of self, and their choices about their future. This difference is in direct conflict with the homogeneity discussed in chapter 4 and 5, seen as necessary for a cohesive social network.

The conditions associated with identification of the learning habitus were described as class, difference, heredity, stigma and delayed gratification. These conditions are added to the developing model in the following chapter, to show the completed conditions for learning triangle (Figure 8).

The role of habitus in the learning stories of these participants emphasises the achievement focus identified in chapter 4, when participants storied themselves as successful. Here achievement has been highlighted as a prominent feature of the habitus of children in care. In addition the history of the individual is shown as an element of the learning habitus, the personal history positioned the young person. In chapter 5, agency was shown to be apparent in how individuals

positioned themselves within their ‘structural’ environment, an important relationship labelled on the model as ‘positioning’.

Participants storied themselves as achievers, they spoke of achievement across their lives, including, but not limited to formal academic attainment. For those individuals who continued with higher education, this was delayed.

The participants described how their histories had informed their choices, developing the habituses which they shared with me, often the smallest element of history were recalled and given significance in these stories.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I present the conclusions of this study. Initially I will briefly outline the study and its findings. I will go on to consider the limitations of the study, before making recommendations for future policy. I will finish by detailing the original contribution to knowledge offered by this study.

This study emerged from the disparity in measured educational attainments for young people who are placed in the care of the local authority. The thesis has told the story of the educational experiences of seven individuals who experienced 'care' during their years of formal education. These participants ranged in age from 59 to 11 at the time of the research; they told me about their educational experiences across a minimum of four research interviews. In this final chapter I shall draw together the arguments which emerged from their stories, which are discussed in the previous three chapters.

This research was designed to explore the educational experience of children in care, aiming to answer the two main research questions.

What is 'education' for a child in care?

How do children in care story their learning?

These questions emerged from the literature, as addressed in Chapter two, which identified a lack of sociological studies which sought to uncover the educational experiences of children in care, and in particular the lack of such work in England. Studies have been carried out in Wales and Scotland, focussing on the life experiences of children in care.

In Wales, the (Extra)Ordinary Lives project (Holland et al., 2008; Renold et al., 2010) worked with children in care, with a focus on creating a research environment which allowed them to actively participate in the project. A more recent study carried out in Wales, used creative methods to allow Looked After Children and Young People (LACYP) to reflect upon their experiences of education, in a school setting (Mannay et al., 2015). While these projects have added to our understanding of the looked after experience, they have not allowed a broader focus on what 'education' means to the child in care. My project sought to explore a wider view of education, in order to answer the research questions.

The Scottish Extraordinary Lives project (Happer et al., 2006) focussed on identifying factors which promoted 'success', where education was an element of success, but not a main focus. This study has not limited the educational discourse to that which is 'successful', participants spoke about the range of educational experiences which they wished to foreground.

It is here that my study offers an original contribution to knowledge. This study has addressed a gap in the literature in regard to the educational experience of children in care in England. Previous sociological studies have been carried out in Wales and Scotland, and in England, as part of the YIPPEE project, a group of care experienced students in Higher Education were interviewed to learn about their experiences (Jackson & Cameron, 2011), but to my knowledge this is the first study in England to use qualitative research methods in order to learn about the educational experiences of children in care, from this wide age range. It has made an original contribution to knowledge by investigating the educational experience of a group of seven individuals, aged between 59 and 11 years, through encouraging them to tell their stories.

Methodologically this is the first study, to my knowledge, to have worked with participants across a wide age range, where life history interviewing has allowed access to adults' memories of the time spent in care, as well as young people's stories. Previous work has spoken to children who are currently 'in care', indeed the recent review of 'sources' for the Children's Commissioner for England's vulnerability review rules out studies which do not directly engage with young people (NCB & RiP, 2017). Studies which work with 'care experienced' individuals focus on outcomes, those events which have happened after a young person leaves care.

The three preceding chapters have introduced and discussed the findings in relation to reflexivity, agency and habitus, the following sections draw these discussions together to summarise the progress this thesis has made in achieving its aims. For each area in turn I will show how I arrived at the findings, and relate them to previous research.

This study has shown that children in care have a broad view of education, including but not limited to, the pursuit of formal qualifications. In addition it has shown that children in care exhibit a high degree of reflexivity, able to consider how they impact upon the world they inhabit. They are agentic, within the space available to them in a highly structured life, these participants showed they can take control of elements of their lives. The habitus of these young people emerges from their experiences of difference, achievement, and the history which they carry with them. The following sections will address each of these areas in turn.

7.2 What is 'education' for a child in care?

Participants storied themselves as achievers, speaking with pride about what they had achieved. This flies in the face of the traditional discourse surrounding poor educational achievements (DfE, 2017). The successes which were shared showed that the participants storied their education in a much wider way than the literature suggests. Previous work with this group of society has focussed on achievement of measured outcomes based on classroom endeavours, and found children in care lagging behind their peers. Although formal schooling was an element of the education they discussed, it was only one element. There were stories of learning which involved mastering sporting skills, stories of self-directed digital mastery, and stories of learning how to structure a life. Within this learning environment the passing of exams in school was given a lower priority than the Department for Education would like (DfE, 2017).

This wider educational landscape was storied as an obstacle by some participants, who found that they had to navigate areas of learning which they struggled with. Participants talked of how they learned to carry out the simple day to day tasks which are necessary to life, Gordon's account of not knowing how to apply for a driving licence is a good example:

> *It's a process, and its only later on in life that you kind of understand that, because you can't do certain things before you do other things first…I had no driving licence I had no insurance I had no MOT I didn't know anything… and my parents didn't seem to sort of say well you can't actually do this, this is what you've got to do.*
> *Gordon 3rd interview 08/09/15*

He had to learn this kind of practical knowledge on his own. This theme of autonomous learning was apparent in each of the stories, the participants did not see formal education as separate; all elements of education were part of a wider learning journey. In some ways, as with Gordon above, this singled them out, adding to the existing stigma of their situations. In addition, the increased burden to address many levels of learning on their own added to their disadvantage. There was no mechanism in England at the time of writing to address this wider perspective on education. As Petrie points out the English language does not even have terms to differentiate this education in its broadest sense, from school based academic learning (2007).

Participants storied themselves as successful achievers, across all of the areas of 'education', they told stories of positivity. This positivity supports Mannay's suggestion that young people in care are aspirational, but their aspirations can be subdued by the professionals around them (2017). Cameron et al. (2015) suggest that teachers should separate behaviour from learning, in order to allow children in care to move beyond the stigma associated with their care status. This suggestion is backed up by Mannay's findings, where young people claim that their educational aspirations are not always challenged, their teachers focussed too much on behaviour and not enough on education (Mannay et al., 2017). When Julian listed the ambitions which his teachers and carers had for him (he listed carer, head of year, head of house, head teachers, vice head teachers, vice principals, so many people) it was impossible to ignore the weight of expectation upon this eleven year-old's shoulders: be polite, not rude; don't be disruptive; get better grades. This description of the passive schooled subject has echoes of Dewey's 'traditional' education system (1948), whereby he perceived that

children were expected to be docile, receptive and obedient. Foucault's work (1995) reiterated the school's role in turning learners into docile bodies, ruled by timetables, punishments and constant supervision. Almost 70 years after Dewey's writings, Julian storied himself as being singled out and encouraged to 'behave' in his formal studies, but he also imposed high standards upon himself in respect of what his classmates wanted from him, this was his personal challenge.

Formal education was part of the overall education described, and the attainment of recognised grades formed part of the overall stories, however this learning was not as prominent as government bodies and 'corporate parents' would prefer. A key finding in relation to formal education is the delay that was experienced by the adult participants who spoke of prioritising their academic learning. Only Debbie and Helen have succeeded in attending university, and both achieved this goal a number of years behind other young people of their age groups. For Susan, the goal was there, but the delay in opportunity has prevented her from pursuing higher education, her notion of achievement became linked to her young family, her focus became her motherhood. The adults in the study were able to speak about how they managed their sense of achievement into adulthood. Anne, one of the young participants, spoke of choices which could also prevent her from taking the opportunities available in higher education alongside her classmates, at the time of this study she was rejecting any engagement with higher education, Anne's reason was that she was different from the other girls who would go to university, her belief in her own difference was an obstacle to her development.

Cameron et al. (2015) point out that education has narrowed to a defined 'national curriculum' which does not allow time to address the wider perspectives promoted by social pedagogy. There is no UK equivalent to the professional role of social pedagogue, which exists in parts of continental Europe (Petrie, 2007). The implementation of Social Pedagogy has been promoted by the Fostering Network in their Head, Heart, Hands initiative (McDermid et al., 2016), but is not a priority in our formal education system. Social Pedagogy is a means of bringing empirical knowledge (Head) into the social environment of care (Heart), allowing carers to use practical tasks (Hands) as opportunities for learning within the social spaces in life, effectively recognising the learning events which occur in social settings outside the formal school environment. The Head, Heart, Hands initiative developed social pedagogic skills in foster carers, however McDermid's report suggested that the training and the responsibility for Head, Heart, Hands should have been shared with the wider social care team. Cameron et al. focus on the integral link between education and care, introducing the concepts of learning placements and caring schools, to help develop disadvantaged children to "take advantage of opportunities and realise ambitions" (2015:11).

7.3 How do children in care story their education?

All of the participants talked of the need to build and maintain social networks, this learning to be a 'social animal' was an oft repeated story across the interviews. This is unsurprising, as the building of social capital is considered to begin in the home and family environment; children in care have been removed from this home, in the majority of cases because of neglect or abuse. The search for social capital concurs with McClung and Gayle's findings that social capital can be key to understanding how young people achieve (2014). This focus on the

‘social’ was evident in both the Welsh (Holland et al., 2008) and Scottish studies (Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006). However, as discussed in chapter 6, participants were predisposed to differentiate themselves from others, thus mitigating against the homogeneity which can be seen as vital in the building and maintenance of social networks (Putnam, 2000).

7.3.1 Conditions for learning

The findings in this study, linked to three key theoretical areas: Reflexivity, Agency, and Habitus, can be viewed as a model, which draws together the key elements from the participants’ stories:

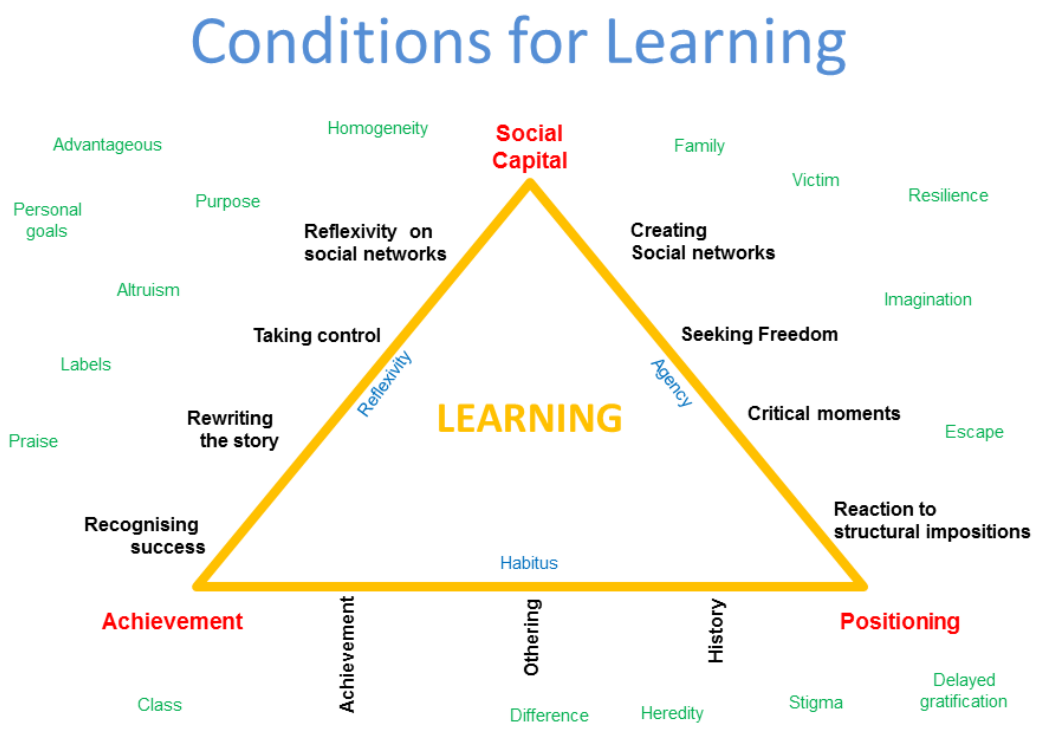


Figure 8 Conditions for learning

In the model each of the three theoretical areas are represented as sides of a triangle, made up of the major themes from the findings. These meet at areas of

convergence: social capital, achievement and positioning. The objective conditions of the educational experience, as emerging from the project, are represented on the outer levels of the diagram.

7.3.2 Reflexivity

France et al. (2013) suggest that reflexivity can be difficult for disadvantaged young people, viewing reflexive capacity as a form of embodied cultural capital. This can be likened to Skeggs (2004) suggestion that through reflexivity it is possible to rework one's story, in a quest to boost self-worth. This study has shown that these young people were able to be reflexive about their own situations and those around them, they told their stories in a way which was advantageous to them at the time.

The participants in this study exhibited a surprising level of reflexivity. They storied themselves as reflexively constructing their social networks, both through inclusion and exclusion of potential 'contacts'. Gordon was clear that his birth mother was a stranger, and he was able to consider how that impacted on the development of his personality. Other participants took a different perspective on this relationship, with both Anne and Helen specifically talking of rebuilding the relationship. Susan sought to replace the 'family' she had lost by strategically 'cherry picking' from the foster carers she was placed with. In this she effectively described a transformation narrative (Skeggs, 2004), eschewing the excesses of the working class, in order to embrace a more sedate middle class 'culture'.

Relationships with peers were described as difficult, Gordon and Susan spoke of problems with building friendship groups while they were at school, and Anne's narratives detailed similar difficulties in her current school environment. Helen in the past, and Julian at the time of the research talked of the steps they took to

actively enhance their social networks, however this element of social capital emerged as less durable, and less urgent than family relationships.

In line with the achievement narrative outlined above, participants storied themselves as successful. In some narratives external validation of success was a vital component of that success, as when Gordon talked of his earliest memory of receiving praise. The praise validated his action, his trust was placed in the governor, Archer referred to this as communicative reflexivity (2007), suggesting a level of social immobility. Julian, the youngest participant, on the other hand self-validated his endeavour, evidencing meta-reflexivity (M. Archer, 2007), his digital prowess was a personal goal, which he worked hard to acquire, and was happy to share with others, investing in his future cultural capital.

As well as learning, there was evidence of a desire to help others by sharing experiences; participation in this study was explained as a way to use their experiences to improve the future of others. Susan summed this up during our third interview:

> *I think if it's going to go towards helping other care leavers, that's really important, isn't it.*
> *(Susan 3rd interview 16/09/15)*

This marks an extra level of reflexive control, whereby it was shown that participants could identify how their experience was impactful for others. Susan's altruism resonates with Giddens' consideration of the construction of self-identity. The decision to use her experience to help others is a "consequential decision",

she is prepared to give time and energy to confront past circumstances, in this case to allow her to put her life story to best use (1991:143).

These findings also resonate strongly with Winkler's suggestion that resilience is founded in the capacity for reflection (2014), where resilience is the capacity to overcome adversity and succeed in life. Success for children in care tends to be measured in terms of 'outcomes', and in the literature they tend to be found 'lacking'. The care experience, or the circumstances which led to care, are reasoned to cause poor adult outcomes. Statistics support this supposition, Bright (2017:2) identifies four groups of 'weak' outcomes areas: educational, economic, social and behavioural. In contrast to this stereotype, the participants in this study exhibited a surprising level of resilience which allowed them to story themselves in ways which helped to eschew the labels associated with their care experience, and tell themselves as successful. They exhibited 'meta-reflexivity' whereby their story of success was unrelated to the normative measures of success in the literature. From the youngest participant setting himself development targets for self-directed learning, and supporting others through his skill development, through to older participants viewing the challenges they had faced and the means of overcoming them as 'success'. The outcome categories highlighted by Bright (2017) do not encompass the possibilities of success for children in care; their reflexive space surpasses the normative view.

7.3.3 Agency

The discourse surrounding children in care does not present them as agentic individuals, and actions taken to improve formal educational outcomes tend to be structural, based around interventions conducted by others. Whether the care experience itself is viewed as the causal factor leading to weak measured

outcomes (Jackson, 1988, 1994; Martin & Jackson, 2002), or the experiences which led to a child being taken into care (Berridge, 2012; O'Higgins et al., 2015), the dominant discourse presents structural problems, and structural solutions. A report in 2003 by the Social Exclusion Unit is typical, suggesting that key changes which would have an impact on 'the education of children in care' were stability of placement; more time in education; more teacher support; more help with homework; and, improved health (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). While it is impossible to argue with these aims, they do not take account of, or promote, the autonomy of the individual, or take account of the educative experiences outside of the formal classroom. The child in care is characterised as a victim in need of support, unable to operate without adult intervention.

This project found that individuals not only told themselves as agentic in school, they also exhibited agency in how they told their stories, and over which stories they told. Berridge (2017) suggested that children in care were prepared to be agentic in the school setting, once they had a stable home environment. This study adds to this finding, showing participants storying themselves in agentic ways in their broader educational lives.

Within the highly structured environment that surrounds children in care, participants both storied themselves agentically and took an agentic stance on the stories they chose to tell. Some stories told of victimhood; however the decision to tell oneself as a victim can also be construed as agentic. Both Susan and Gary related stories of hiding from the difficulties in their lives by escaping into their imaginations. Francois (2013) found that reading can be influential in the development of identity. This study shows that there are other ways in which

the imagination can be harnessed agentically as a means to escape structures. The care system is beset by structural impositions, limiting possibilities for autonomous action, but the imagination of participants allowed escape.

Some stories showed an acceptance of responsibility for issues in their lives, participants were clear about the structural problems they faced, and told stories of creating social networks in their own way and their own time, as when both Susan and Gordon talked of their decisions impacting upon their social network, they identified the structural issues which delayed their ability to create friendship groups. Julian, in contrast, showed a claim to agency when he spoke of the active roles he played in ensuring social cohesion. Thomson et al. (2002) suggested that timing, opportunity and identity were important in exercising agency, however in this study it was apparent that participants restoried events in order to retrospectively claim agency, in circumstances where there appeared to be little real choice.

Timing was also construed as a reason for delayed agency. When Debbie described the delay in her educational pathway, she used her story to prove her control. The timing for her was delayed, but she told the story in such a way as to suggest that the delay proved her agency. She talked of an ability to delay gratification, when she deemed the delay to be worthwhile. Helen too spoke of her decision to defer educational endeavour until later in her life. These stories are contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of disadvantaged young people as suggested by Evans and English (2002) or Kidd et al. (2013), whereby they are unable to wait for improved outcomes, preferring the guarantee offered by gratification, however small, in the short term.

7.3.4 Habitus

There was a strong sense of othering apparent in their stories, with participants knowing of their difference from their peers; they talked about how this difference informed their identities. This process is distinct from the stigmatisation of the child in care which others have identified, most recently Holland (2016) found that young people in residential homes dislike the term LAC (Looked after Child) as it suggests that they lack something. The claims to difference were based upon other aspects of identity; ethnicity was an important feature of difference for Gary and Helen, while Julian, Anne and Susan differentiated themselves from their classmates as not able to fit in with the norm, while Debbie talked of herself as a 'trophy kid', telling a story of separateness from the carer's family. The cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) considered earlier in this chapter is evident too in these tales of difference. This 'othering' was in direct conflict to the other aims of these young people, stated above: by being different, social homogeneity was compromised. Where homogeneity was important to cohere social networks, participants' predisposition to this active distancing of themselves from others limited potential social capital acquisition, by limiting social contacts. Gordon blamed a lack of social capital for the gaps in his knowledge of practical life skills, reasoning that his carers should have taught him more, while segregation at school reinforced his understanding of himself as unworthy. This self-generated sense of difference from all participants coupled with the stigma which is inherent in the care experience (Michell, 2015) presents a narrative of habitus transformed by the care experience, with the potential to limit future development, however, difference can also be utilised as cultural capital. When Helen and Gary deployed their ethnic identities, each learned to use this difference as an asset. As well as

difference, Helen told of striving for similarity, adopting pugilistic behaviours in an effort to conform and succeed socially, but this story too tells of othering from the 'norm' in order to associate with a small group.

Participants retained a strong sense of their personal histories, and narrated themselves as the product of these histories. The Children's Commissioner found that this understanding of history was an important factor for children in care (2015) and the proponents of life story work suggest that children and young people require support to position themselves in their family history (Ryan & Walker, 1999; Watson et al., 2015). The Adoption and Children Act 2002 specifically requires that life story work is carried out as part of the adoption process as a way to help young people, who are adopted, to explore and understand their early lives; currently there is no such legislative emphasis on life story work with children in care, but social work practice does encourage the technique (Ryan & Walker, 1999). Treacher and Katz (2001:22) point out that the understanding of history, for a child in care, is important in helping the child or young person understand "How did I get here?"

The narration of life histories is an important tool in helping to establish identity (Watson et al., 2015). The stories told by older participants as part of this project reflect this practice, the narratives had a rehearsed quality about them, as if told and retold many times, whether to external audiences, or as an internal dialogue. It was apparent that Helen had rehearsed her 'entry to care' story, and had come to see humour in the story, which allowed her to make sense of her mother's actions, and move beyond blame, thus paving the way for a strong relationship with her mother.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus suggests that it is structured by history, and is itself the basis of subsequent experience (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). History then is a vital element of future experience. This study identified occasions where histories were carried forward into adulthood, informing adult decisions. Helen talked about how her antecedents were part of her adult life course; she followed her grandmother into teaching, but retained the artisan tendencies of her Indian family in her leisure activities. The beginning of this process of situating her future choices based on her family history was evident in Anne's narratives, at the time of our meetings she could not see a future outside of the life choices her family had made before her. She intended to enter the caring professions, and did not equate that with university, as university was for 'popular people'. History was not always a course to follow in these stories; Susan talked of her mother, she related small incidents to illustrate the poor treatment she recalled from her mother. She storied herself as surviving her childhood, choosing to succeed. Her mother is relegated to a first name, not worthy of the term 'mum'. Susan did not intend to follow in her mother's footsteps, however her history was an important element in that decision making process.

The lack of knowledge about personal history is seen to be a factor in poor emotional and social development (Ryan & Walker, 1999). One participant in this study, Gordon, was adopted many years before the Adoption and Children Act 2002 legislated for the mandatory use of life story work during the adoption process. Gordon had been adopted in the late 1950's before being returned to care, and ultimately fostered. He had no knowledge of his early life, and when we met had not succeeded in discovering why he was returned to care by his adoptive parents. His story clearly exhibited the difficulties he had with emotional

and social aspects of his life, although his manner of telling the story dwelt on the positive aspects of how he viewed his history. The positivity of Gordon's narrative was also apparent in the stories of the other participants, outlining a limitation inherent in the methodology.

7.4 Limitations of the study

The methodology of this study lent itself to a type of 'positive' recollection. Participants narrated the ways in which they have made the best of the hand they have been dealt. All participants were volunteers, suggesting that they knew they had stories to tell which would illuminate the discussion around the thesis topic. They were ready with stories to influence the future for other young people. As Holland (2016) found, when she spoke to children in care, these young people do not want to be viewed as 'lacking'; this trait carries on into adulthood, shown by this wish to story themselves as survivors.

The aims of this study were purposely broad, in order to allow me to capture the participants own understandings of education. This has produced valuable understandings of 'learning' across the whole life experience, showing how a social pedagogic stance to education would help this particular group of vulnerable young people. A narrower focus would perhaps have produced results which were more immediately applicable to a particular area of learning, however this study has produced a model which could be applied in other projects, with different groups of participants.

In the initial planning for this project I had hoped to utilise participatory creative methods with the young participants. The young people did not want this level of engagement with the project; it became apparent that this was my ideal, not theirs. The recorded interviews which were the young people's chosen methods

to contribute yielded a wealth of useful data, and produced findings which were more readily integrated with the testimonies of the older participants, however I retained a sense of disappointment that creativity in data collection was not possible.

This research was conducted with a small sample of participants, in one county in England. This small scale does not produce results which could be immediately applicable to another context. This does not diminish the findings however, the small sample was not intended to be representative, rather it allowed me to conduct multiple interviews with each participant, in order to explore education in depth. Multiple encounters allowed rapport to be built up over a number of research meetings. The study achieved its aims, in that it allowed seven individuals to share their experiences, in the way which suited them. Their stories illuminate the discussion around the care experience, and open avenues for future research endeavour.

7.5 Recommendations for future research

This small scale project has identified areas which would benefit from further research:

The impact of 'othering' on social networks – there was a distinct contradiction in the narratives of these participants, whereby their stories spoke of differentiation, but they also felt a lack of social networks. A larger study focussing on this key area of development may help to shed light on this apparent contradiction.

Examination of educational priorities – it was apparent in this study that the acquisition of academic qualifications was delayed for these participants; however other educational priorities were apparent. A study which examined this

broader view of education across a wide cohort of care experienced individuals would generate a more complete picture of the balance between the formal and informal educational priorities of children in care.

Other vulnerable groups – The methodology used in this study would be a useful tool to examine the education of other groups of disadvantaged young people. In particular it would be useful to apply the Conditions for Learning model (Figure 6) to a cohort drawn from a different population, with a view to confirming or supplementing the model.

7.6 Recommendations for policy

Given the evident understanding of a broader view of education, this project supports the implementation of a social pedagogic approach to working with children in care, as supported by the Head, Heart Hands study (McDermid et al., 2016). Supporting carers to provide a more holistic learning environment, and providing infrastructure to promote social pedagogic practices would promote the 'learning placement' described by Cameron et al. (2015). Young people in care could be supported in their wider educational journey, thereby potentially allowing them a clearer focus on the school based acquisition of recognised qualifications.

In addition an exploration of measures which support the reflexivity, agency and habitus of children in care would allow an assessment of the effectiveness of interventions which give ownership to children in care. This could form part of an educational intervention which would allow the team around the child to identify and support all of the learning needs of the young person.

7.7 Impact

The conditions for learning model (Figure 8) proved a useful device to bring together and visually describe the findings in this project, however its use can be

extended to operate as a tool to bring the findings in this study to a wider audience, potentially improving the educational experience for children in care. In order to facilitate the model's use in this way, the key concepts used in this study: reflexivity, agency and habitus, are amended to: thinking, doing and being (figure 9), by implementing this small change, the language of the tool becomes accessible to an audience who are unfamiliar with the theoretical concepts.

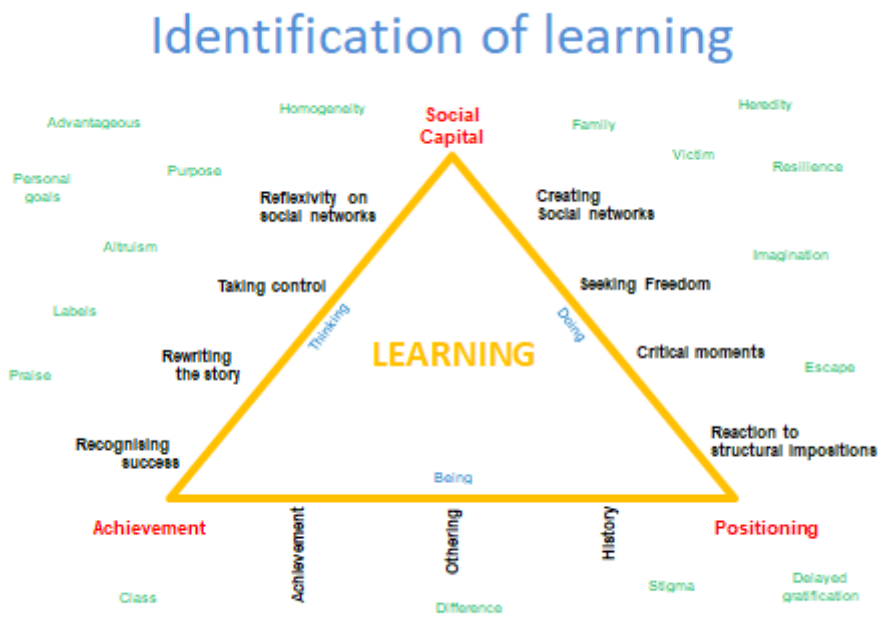


Figure 9 Thinking, Doing and Being

The current focus upon a narrow view of education, recognising only that which happens in formal school establishments, does not recognise the many learning experiences which children in care are encountering during their lives. As noted in the introduction to this thesis many carers cannot support the formal education of the young people in their care, however the wider educational experience identified in this thesis is one which is accessible to all of the individuals involved in the care experience. The amended model, as shown in figure 9 can be an empowering tool, enabling learning to be identified across the life of the young

person. This recognition of learning can then help to promote a positive view of education as a whole, giving opportunities to extend conversations beyond GCSE performance, but also allowing achievements in one area of learning to foster interest in the more formal measured educational arena.

As a result of a request from the foster carer support team, the model will be presented to a group of foster carers in the early part of 2018. In addition enquiries have been made about presenting this work to social workers and Independent Review Officers (IRO), allowing the model to be available to many of the team who support children in care.

7.8 Final thoughts

This study, which emerged from a maths lesson at a kitchen table, has analysed the stories told by individuals aged 59, 49, 44, 37, 21, 14 and 11. As they shared their memories of learning, both from experiences on the previous day, and those recalled over several decades, a picture of a wide view of learning developed. The story of their education was not limited to school qualifications; they narrated tales of learning across their whole lives. Much of what they told me they had learned came from unplanned endeavour. This thesis sets out a prototype for a learning model which could help parents, carers, schools and social workers to identify learning needs, and to support the young people in their charge to develop their reflexivity and their agency, and thus structure their habitus to promote learning, in and out of the schoolroom.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

The Educational Experience of Children in Care

Details of Project

This 3 year project aims to explore the educational experiences of 'looked after children' in Devon. Despite there being a great deal of diversity on achievement, there has often been concern expressed around the educational achievements of this group of young people. Most research considers examination results but does not speak directly to the youngsters concerned to ask how they feel school experiences might be improved.

This project has been designed to allow for a more rounded picture of the full educational experience, not just in terms of achievement, but a view of wider experiences, aiming to give an in-depth insight into the value that a looked after child places on education. The indepth study will generate much needed qualitative data in order to shine a light on the educational experiences of children in care in Devon. To date most research in this area has focused on statistical analysis of measured outcomes, and contributory factors which show a bleak picture of underachievement and poor adult outcomes.

The project will work with young people in school and college, as well as older alumni of care. Their experiences will be gathered by means of interviews, journals and observation. The findings will be analysed in such a way as to produce an account of the lived reality of the educational experience, across generations, for those young people who are in the care of the local authority. The intention is that the findings of this study will provide important insights for carers and teachers. It is also hoped that the youngsters involved will benefit through developing a better understanding of strategies they could use to improve school experiences.

Contact Details

For further information about the research /interview data (amend as appropriate), please contact:

Name: *Karen Kenny*
Postal address: University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education, *Holnicote Annex, St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX1 2LU*
Telephone: 00 44 (0) *7840241764*
Email: *kk316@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:
Dr Martin Levinson, University of Exeter, North Cloisters, St Luke's Campus, Exeter, EX1 2LU, *or*
Dr Alexandra Allan, University of Exeter, North Cloisters, St Luke's Campus, Exeter, EX1 2LU.

Confidentiality

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held securely stored in a locked metal filing cabinet. All participants will be referred to using a pseudonym. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Anonymised raw data may be shared with academic supervisors. If you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date).Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Data Protection Notice - The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.
Digital data will be stored on the university servers, access to which is password protected; physical data will be stored in a locked metal filing cabinet
Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with pseudonyms being used throughout. Lists identifying pseudonyms will be retained by the researcher in a locked metal filing cabinet.

Consent
I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw their participation;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my daughter / son;
- any information which my daughter / son gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations or training events;
- the information, which my daughter / son gives, may be shared with supervising researchers;
- all information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve my daughter's / son's anonymity.

.....	.....
(Signature of parent / guardian)	(Date)
.....	.....
(Printed name of parent / guardian)	(Printed name of participant)
.....	.....
(Printed name of researcher)	(Signature of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants' parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Karen's questions.

What is school like for you?

Are there obstacles which hold you back in school?

What is your ambition, in school and after leaving school?

What do you think school is for?

Karen Kenny

University of Exeter

kk316@exeter.ac.uk

07840 241764

I have been fully informed about this project, and want to take part.

_____ _____

Young person's signature Date

_____

Printed name

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Your questions answered

Do I have to take part?

No you do not have to take part in this project and, if you do choose to take part, you may decide to stop at any time, and may also ask that everything you have helped to produce be destroyed. You may also refuse permission for the publication of any information about you.

What will you do with the information I give to you?

Any information which you give may be used for publications, academic conferences or presentations or training events.

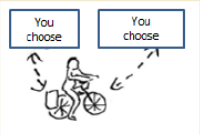
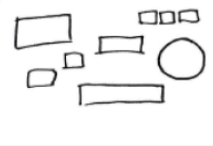
Who will own my work?

All of the work you create will be returned to you at the end of the project. Karen asks that you allow her to use images of the work for the purposes listed above..

Who will know what I say?

Karen will not use your real name on any of the research material. When she speaks to her supervisors about the project she will use pseudonyms. She will keep all of your conversations confidential, unless she thinks that you are in danger—then she will speak to you before she contacts anyone else.

What will you be asked to do?

		
A meeting, and chat, at the beginning of term. I will explain the research project, ask for your help, and also ask you to sign a consent form. You can stop whenever you want.	Keep a record of educational experiences for a half term; this could be a written journal, photos, drawings, poems, or even a blog. During this half term I will send you weekly prompts, with ideas about what to think about that week, and perhaps visit you.	During the term I would like to visit you, we can meet wherever you feel most comfortable. If you do not want this to happen, just say.
		
A chat, after the half term, giving you the opportunity to explain your journal. I will ask you to explain your pictures, photos, drawings, or words.	A group conversation, with other young people who are in care, or older people who have been in care, to share your thoughts and ideas.	When the project is finished, I hope to hold an exhibition, showing your work along with the other people who have helped to answer my questions.

Appendix 2: Stimulus sheets

Week 1 School –The place

This week I would like you to record your thoughts about your school.

Photograph of school.

Think about the places in school, some of these may be

- Entrance and reception
- Classrooms
- Corridors
- Gym
- Playing fields
- Bicycle parking
- Car park
- Places where you meet friends
- Happy places
- Scary places

Which places have you been to this week, and how did you feel about them? Do you like some places more than others? How does this school compare to other schools you have been to?

Week 2 School –The people

This week I would like you to record your thoughts about people and school.

Think about the people linked to your education

- Teachers
- Other staff at school
- People in clubs
- Sports coaches and team mates
- People who help or people who don't
- Friends
- Family
- Foster carers
- Fictional people
- Anyone else

Who have you talked to this week? Who has helped you in some way? Which people are important, and which people are not?

Week 3 Schoolwork

This week I would like you to record your thoughts about schoolwork, both in class and homework.

- What are your favourite subjects?
  - Can you explain why?
- Which subjects do you not like?
  - Why do you not like them?
- Are some subjects easier than others?
- What do you think of homework?
- Do you have a 'homework time'?
- Did you do all of your homework?

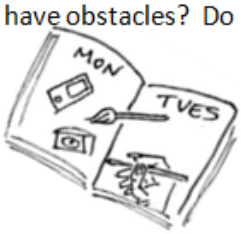
In your journal try to write something about each piece of schoolwork you have this week. Was it easy or difficult? Did you enjoy it or not? Did you see the point of what you were asked to do? Did you finish each piece of work?

Week 4 Obstacles to study

This week I would like you to record your thoughts about the things that stop you studying.

- Do you have days when you don't want to work?
  - Can you explain why?
- Are there some people that can put you off studying?
  - Can you think why they affect you like that?
- Do you have ways of overcoming obstacles?
  - How did you learn to 'beat' the obstacles?
- Are there different things in school and outside school?
- Do you sometimes stop other people from working?
  - Can you think how and why you do that?

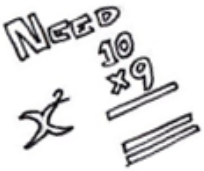
In your journal try to write something about each subject you study, and also about each day. Are some subjects more likely to have obstacles? Do you find it easier to work at a particular time of day?



Week 5 What do you want? What do you need? What do you expect?

This week I would like you to thinks about what you want need and expect.

- What do you really want to learn?
  - How would you prefer to learn?
- Are there some things that you need to know?
  - Why do you need these things?
  - Do you always learn these things?
- What do you expect from school?
- What do you expect to learn outside of school?
- What are the differences between what you want, what you need and what you expect?

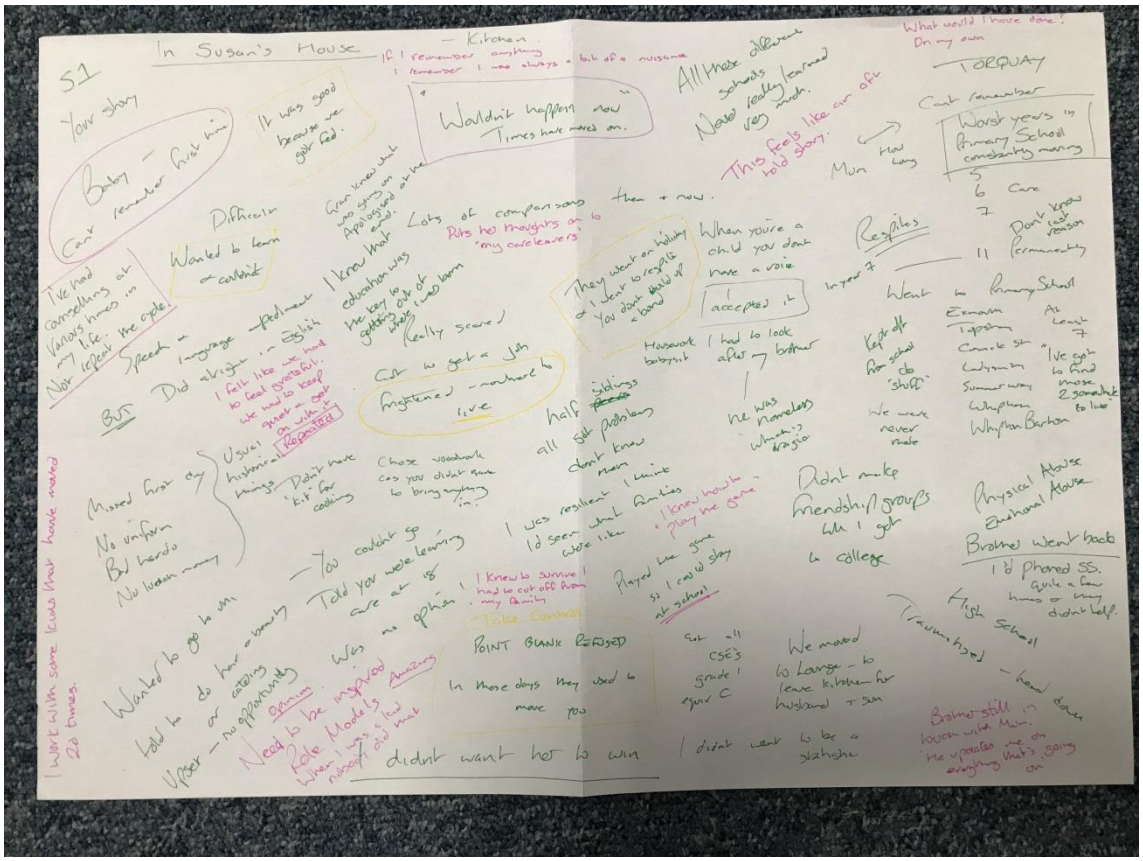


Week 6 What's it for?

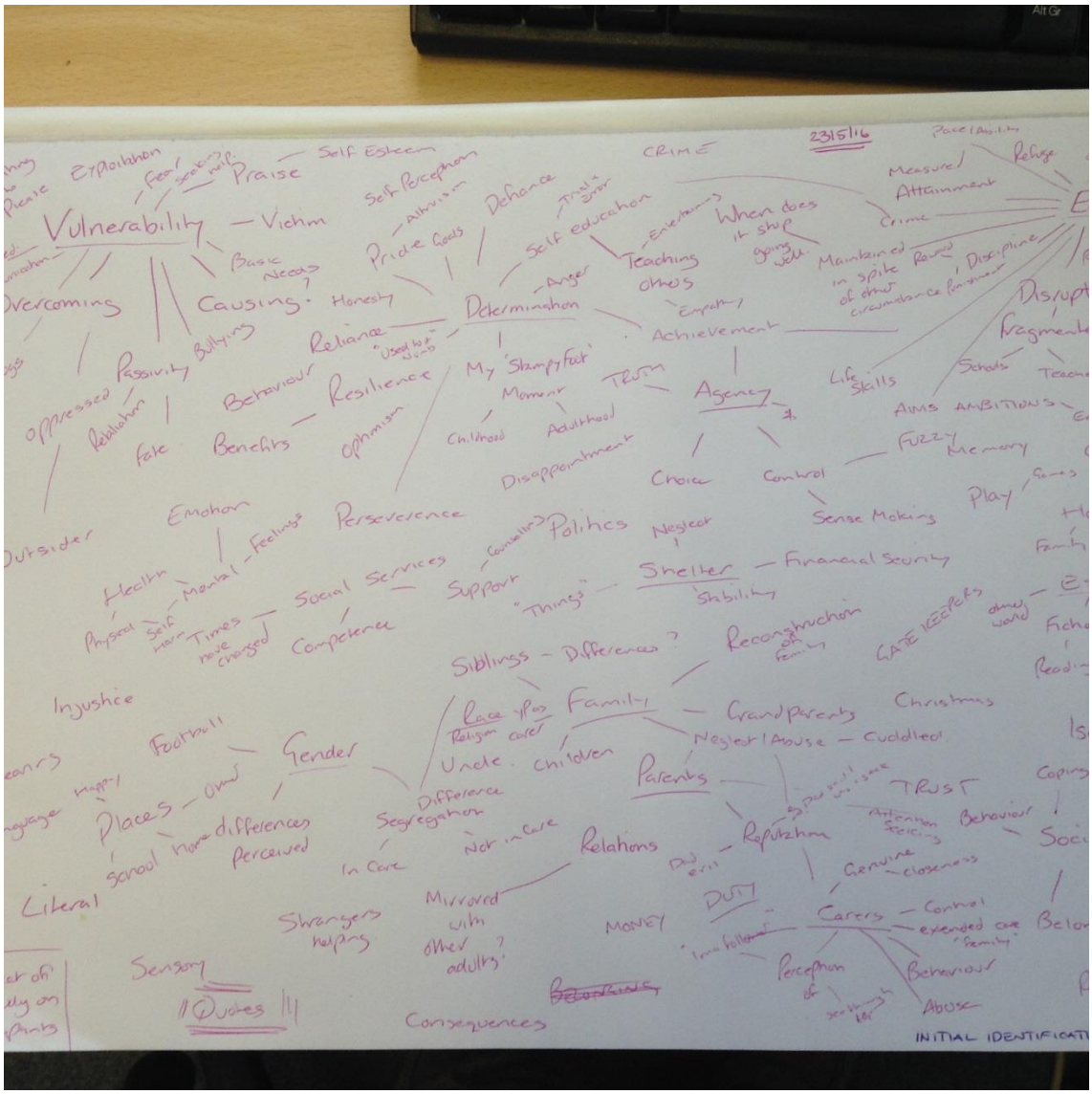
This week I would like you to think about your future.

- What do you want to do?
  - Next year…
  - After school…
  - After college…
  - After university…
- What is your dream?
  - Is school helping you to shape your dreams?
  - Is school helping you to prepare for your dreams?
- Do you learn things at home to help you prepare for the future?
  - Who teaches you? Who helps to prepare you?
- Do you need to prepare for the future?

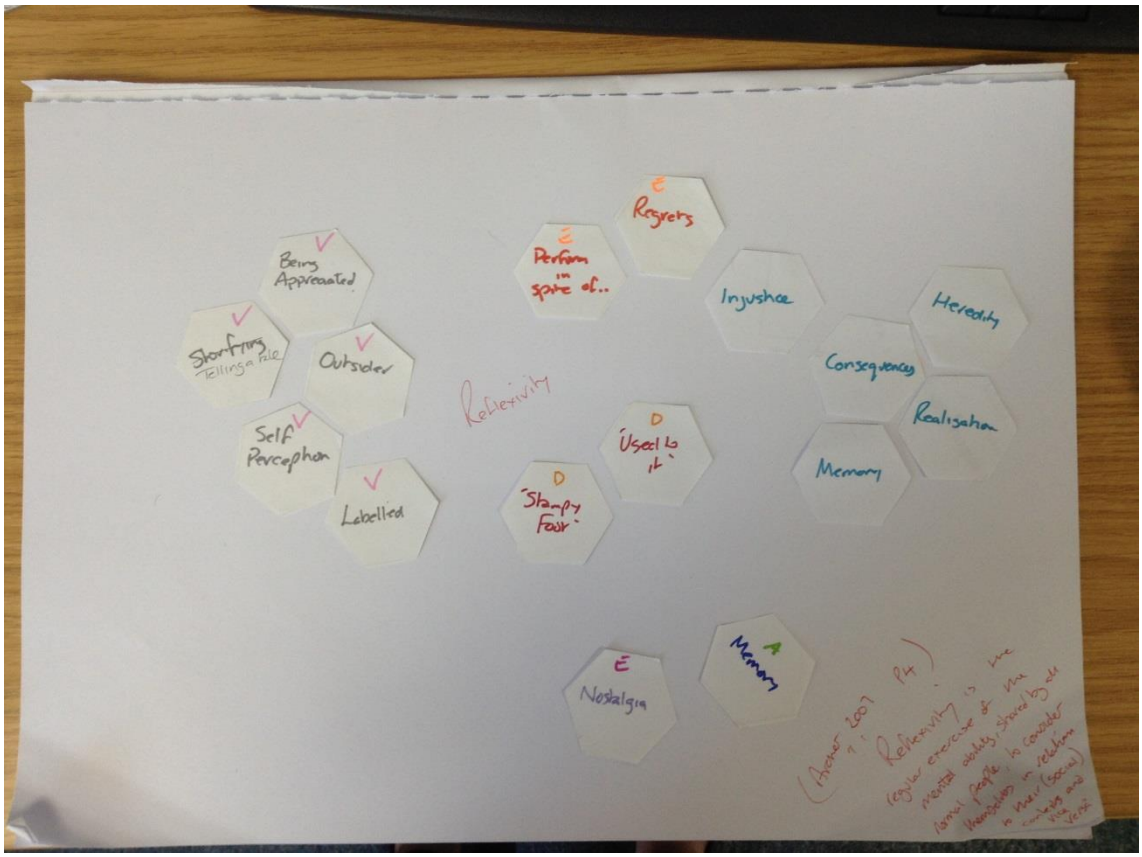
Appendix 3: Initial theme map



Appendix 4: Code map



Appendix 5: Codes as heuristic devices



Appendix 6 Certificate of Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Amory Building
Rennes Drive
Exeter UK EX4 4RJ

www.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Academic Unit: Graduate School of Education

Title of Project: 'The educational experience of children in care'

Research Team Member(s): Karen Kenny

Project Contact Point: kk316@exeter.ac.uk

This project has been approved for the period

From: 17th July 2015
To: 31st December 2017

Ethics Committee approval reference: 201415-084

Signature: Date: 16/07/2015

(Matt Lobley, Chair, SSIS College Ethics Committee)

Appendix 7 Safeguarding protocol

The Educational Experience of Children in Care – an ethnography

Safeguarding protocol

Rationale

This project will work with children who are in the care of the local authority (Devon County Council DCC). Children in care are recognised as being a vulnerable group by DCC. During this project the researcher will be in conversation with young people, the conversation is intended to focus on their education; however the young people themselves may use these conversations as an opportunity to aspects of their care experience. It is therefore possible that the researcher will be the recipient of information which leads them to suspect that abuse is taking place.

There is no plan to work with vulnerable adults; therefore this protocol concentrates on procedures in place for children under the age of 18.

What is child abuse?

"Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention. We know that neglect, whatever form it takes, can be just as damaging to a child as physical abuse.

An abused child will often experience more than one type of abuse, as well as other difficulties in their lives. It often happens over a period of time, rather than being a one-off event. And it can increasingly happen online.

We estimate that over half a million children are abused in the UK each year. "NSPCC (NSPCC, 2015)

The Department for Education expands on this definition

Abuse: a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. They may be abused by an adult or adults or another child or children. Physical abuse: a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional abuse: the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Neglect: the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment); protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Informed consent

During the informed consent conversations at the start of the project, with young people and their parents or guardians, the researcher must draw attention to the confidentiality clauses, and also the disclosure clause:

> "She will keep all of our conversations confidential, unless she believes that I am in danger, then she will speak to me before she contacts anyone else."

If, at any time during the project, the researcher suspects that there are any safeguarding issues in relation to suspected child abuse, of any type, she will follow the steps detailed below.

Procedure if abuse is suspected

Suspicions without real evidence

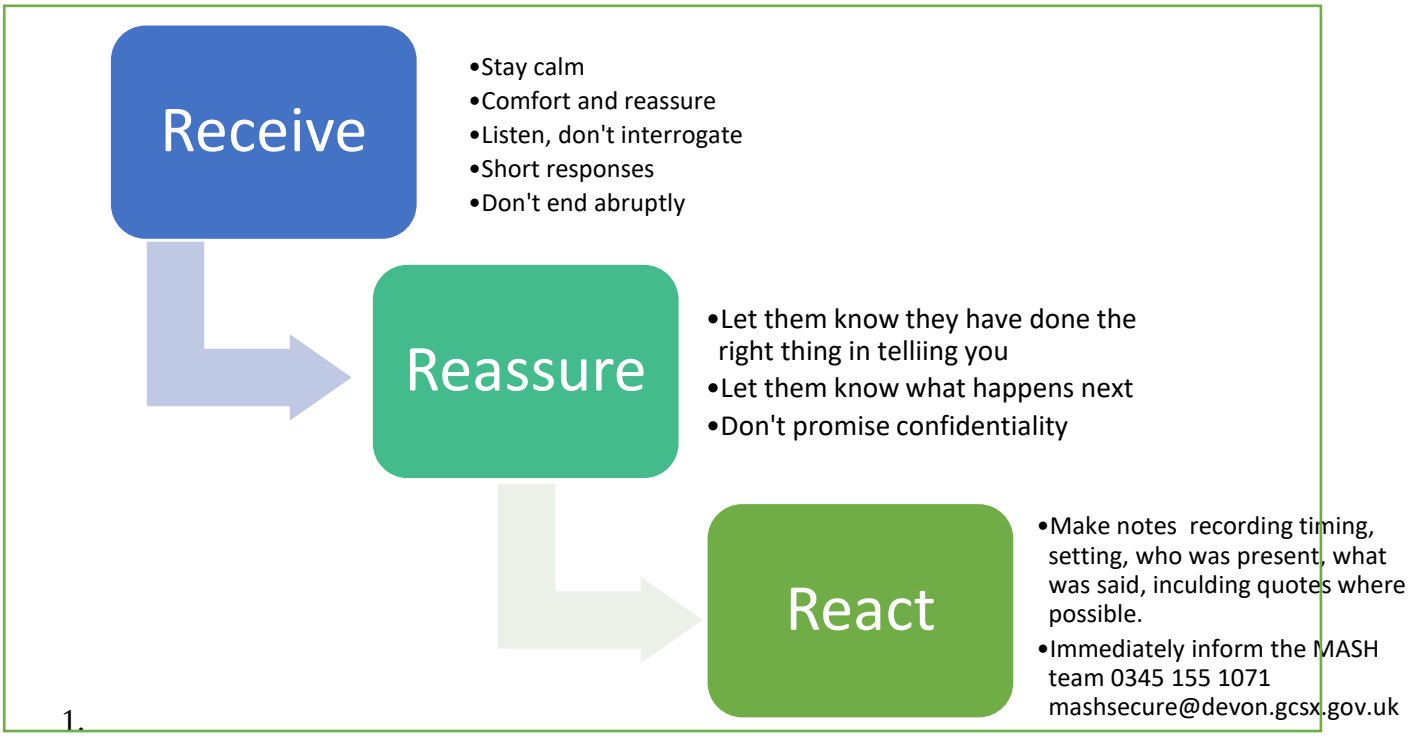
Record the suspicion, date, time and activity. What has given rise to the suspicion?

Report the suspicion to the young person's social worker.

If the social worker is not known, or unavailable, report the concern to the Education Welfare Office for CiC [Currently Colin Mitchell – colinmitchell2@babcockinternational.com]

Disclosures by a young person

If a young person discloses abuse during a meeting:



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Appendix 8 Helen's feedback

Hi Karen, this is fascinating! I made some notes:

I have recently gravitated towards reading about memory as I have so many that are incomplete and/or different to others. I am reading that we all make false memories which are really key to forming our identities, I think this would be so interesting to research further in your essay (obviously not now but in the future). Trauma and frontal lobe development can make memories very different to what really happened.

I thought the bits about what we all defined as success was really interesting. It has become very clear to me lately that this is linked to fitting into society after being so 'different'. I have realised that I am striving to get the highest education because that's what society says I am meant to do, I have been doing it because I thought it was a way of showing everyone that I am good enough. But lately my idea of success has changed, and I now think it is more on the lines of your other participant who has a nomadic life away from the constraints of society. To me, society feels more and more like a prison (and actually more the more I read theory). I also think it is more useful to be thinking about survival in the environment these days too. I just thought it was interesting how my perspective has changed here.

I was fascinated by Susan's family not wanting to hear about her past. My kids are fascinated by my past and always want to hear my stories. I also feel like I have become middle class but I wondered whether Susan may have created her situation by closing herself like the middle classes do sometimes?

When you picked up on me being patient for gratification, I thought that maybe I got it in other ways instead of education? I took a lot of drugs for a few years so maybe I wasn't waiting after all ?

It is a very good read Karen, thanks for sending it.

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