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Exploring Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education: A Pluralistic Approach

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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It was the best decision I ever made

(Liz)

Dedications

Dedicated to the memory of Eileen Smith, none of this would be possible without you.

Dedicated to the memory of Terrance Southwell, Tez you remind me every day that the choices we make define us and we are responsible for our own future.

My PhD would not have happened without the input of all the incredible people who shared their experiences with me. I owe this PhD to them and their amazing support in the development of this thesis.

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And finally, to all those who made the Lemn Sissay Scholarship possible, I am so appreciative of this opportunity and will continue to work and carry out research in order to improve the experiences of children in care.

Abstract

Pathways in education, academic success, and stability can act as protective factors in the future life outcomes of children in care. However, official statistics and previous research within the UK suggest that the prospects of young people who have been in care, particularly within education, are significantly lower than those of their non-care peers. Furthermore, research suggests a concern for times of transition for these young people. Thus, within this developing body of research, a gap in the literature remains; care leavers' experience of the transition to higher education. The doctoral research aimed to investigate care leavers' transition to university, with a focus on how care leavers manage times of transition.

The doctoral research was twofold, consisting of an initial exploratory study which aided the formation and development of the main doctoral research. The exploratory study involved a retrospective approach to experiences of nine care leavers' transition to higher education. All participants participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Several themes emerged; 'care leaver identity', 'lack of positive care leaver role models', and 'corporate versus normal parenting'. Through the findings of the exploratory study, the main study developed. The main study adopted a longitudinal approach to care leavers' transition to university, to explore care leavers' transition to higher education, as it occurred, through a series of three interviews at three stages throughout their initial transition to university and the majority of their first year. Seven care leavers from four local authorities in Northern England participated in this study. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 21, and in total, 20 semi-structured interviews were carried out, with only one participant not participating in the final interview. Each participant was at a different university across the UK.

The main empirical study adopts a pluralistic approach to analysis, through two methods; template analysis and narrative case studies. First, using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, the interview transcripts were analysed through template analysis. Two key themes were identified: exercising agency and regaining control, and modes of transition to university life, and two integrative themes: identity and stability versus instability. Secondly, three narrative case studies were carried out to capture the longitudinal data from the interview transcripts. The case studies highlight the themes and integrative themes of the template and offer an in-depth exploration of some of the participants personal stories of the transition to higher education. The potential lessons from this research for theory, practice, and policy will be discussed.

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1. Introduction

> In setting our priorities for change, we are driven by the knowledge that these
> are our children, and that the childhood we are giving them has not been good
> enough. We have an excellent legacy of achievement on which to build, and a
> dedicated workforce standing ready to deliver. The time has come to accelerate
> the pace of change, and to make care not only a way out of difficult situations at
> home, but a bridge to a better childhood and a better future (Department for
> Education and Skills, 2006, p. 5)

Better outcomes and the improvement of services for children in care has been the focus of policy and practice reform for the past three decades. The aim, to bridge the gap between the outcomes and prospects for looked after children and their non-care peers. The Care Matters proposal published by the Department for Education and Skills (2006) described this gap as *"unacceptable"* and argued, *"we must demand the same for them [children in care] as we would for our own children"* (Department for Education and Skills, 2006, p. 5). Over ten years have passed since the production of this policy, and there is now a large body of research nationally, and internationally, exploring the experiences of young people in care and the potential pathways, post-care, of looked after children. However, there is still a substantial gap in the experiences of transition in education for children in care and care leavers (Department for Education, 2017a, 2017b). The PhD research aims to explore care leavers' experiences of transition in education, with a focus on the transition to higher education. The introductory chapter explores the current statistical context for the education of children in care. This chapter will then set out the current policy, practice, and initiatives aimed at supporting children in care and care leavers. The chapter will conclude with the research aims, questions and objectives, and the thesis structure.

1.1 Children in Care in England: What do We Know?

Children who enter the care of their local authority are arguably one of the most disadvantaged groups in society (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Johansson & Hojer, 2012). In 2017 the Department for Education reported 72,670 children being looked after by their local authority[1] in England (Department for Education, 2017a). The same year recorded 31,250 as 'ceased to be looked after', of which 15%

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[1] The process of going into care refers to a child entering the care of their local authority, which is the council over the area in which they live (The Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970; The Children Act 1989). Young people leaving care, from age 16 onwards are referred to as 'care leavers' (The Children and Young Persons Act 2008). The majority of young people who have been in care are placed in foster placements (74%) (Department for Education, 2017a). Foster care refers to when a child is housed in a family environment with people who are not related to the child (The Children Act 1989). Other placements include homes, which are residential facilities, providing care to groups of young people, who are usually under the age of 18, (The Children Act 1989) or adoption, where a child is within a family which has been granted legal parental rights for them (The Adoption and Children Act 2002). See table two for further guidance of definitions of looked after and former looked after children.

began the move to independent living (Department for Education, 2017a). There are many reasons the Department for Education (2017a) published as to why a child initially enters the care of their local authority. These include; family dysfunction (15%), absent parenting (7%), disability, mental health or other illness (3%), acute stress in the family (8%), and child disability (3%). However, these are slight in comparison to those entering care due to cases of abuse and neglect (61%) (Department for Education, 2017a). Children in care are often navigating difficult and complex pre-care experiences as they transition into care and research on post-care outcomes has persistently reported an increased likelihood of pathways of early parenthood, youth offending, homelessness, unemployment, and addiction (Stein & Carery, 1986; Biehal & Wade, 1996; Stein, 2004; Natalier & Johnson, 2012; Simkiss, 2012; Mannay et al., 2015; Sebba et al., 2015). Once a child has entered the care of their local authority, they are often further disadvantaged by the potential outcomes and prospects associated to their status of 'looked after' (Stein, 2008; Mannay et al., 2015).

Overall, children in care are less likely than their non-care peers to choose a pathway in education post 16 (Harrison, 2017). In context, the educational attainment and achievement of young people who have been in care, pre and post 16, is consistently and historically low (Department of Health, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2003; Department for Education, 2012a; Department for Education, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Statistics produced by the Department for Education (2017b) record only 13.6% of children looked after by their local authority attaining five or more General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) or equivalent at Key Stage Four (KS4) graded at 4/C or above (including English and maths), in comparison to their non-care peers where the figure rises to 53%. The statistics for GCSE attainment or equivalent for children in care has been relatively consistent over the last decade (Department for Education, 2010, 2012a, 2015, 2017b). This pattern of low attainment in education is reflective of the statistics for education post-secondary school. For higher education, the statistics report 7% of care leavers aged 19-21 access university (Department for Education, 2017c), which indicated an improvement since figures published by the SEU in 2003, when only 1% of those who had been in care (care leavers) went on to access university. Overall, 40% of care leavers aged 19 to 21, compared to 14% of all 19 to 21-year-olds, were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Department for Education, 2017a). The current statistics continue to raise the concern for the academic attainment of children in care and care leavers (see table one for further detail of the statistics for former 'looked after' children in 2017).

There are several limitations to the statistics available from the Department for Education. One limitation is that the statistics only represent the information known for care leavers' activity in education, training, and employment. The unknown activity of care leavers' in education and employment accounts for 19% of those aged 17, 7% who are aged 18, and 10% of care leavers aged 19-21 (Department for Education, 2017a). Due to the absence of these figures, the statistics available do not provide a complete representation of care leavers' involvement in education, training, and employment. Furthermore, the Department for Education (2017c) only reports statistics for participation in higher education for 19-21-year-olds; therefore, are representative of this age group

only and provide no information on those aged 18 or above the age of 21. Research by Harrison (2017) reports information on the attainment of care leavers for ages 18-25.

Harrison (2017) offered a comprehensive longitudinal approach to the statistics for care leavers entering higher education. In addition to the statistics available from the Department for Education, Harrison (2017) drew upon the statistics produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In total, these figures accounted for 650,220 young people in England, of which 6,470 were care leavers. All these young people had completed their Key stage 4 (KS4) in 2008 (July). Furthermore, Harrison (2017) categorised participation in higher education as entering higher education during one of the five academic years between 2010/11 and 2014/15, and therefore, obtained information on a broader age group (18-25). Harrison (2017) reported 11.8% of care leavers accessing higher education during this time, which is still significantly lower than the 43.1% of all the whole data set. Harrison (2017) found that care leavers who achieved 5 A*-C were just as likely as their non-care peers to enter higher education. Those care leavers who did not achieve 5 A*-C were significantly less likely to participate in higher education than their non-care peers who also did not achieve these grades. In addition, care leavers were also significantly more likely (38%) to 'drop-out' of higher education and not return to their course. The statistics produced by Harrison (2017) offer a comprehensive overview of the attainment of these young people. However, the dataset for the statistical analysis in Harrison (2017) adopts different methods to the Department for Education for examining the academic attainment of children in care and care leavers. The Department for Education statistics (2017a. 2017b, 2017c) represents children who have been in care continuously for 12 months. Harrison (2017) included a broader sample of care leavers, who were defined as a care leaver for his research if they were in care at any stage of the academic year 2007/08.

Sebba et al. (2015) offer some further context to these statistics and argue that those who enter care early and experience stability in their care placements perform better academically than those who enter care later (post-Key Stage Two (KS2)). Sebba et al. (2015) also found that the children in care (40%) who entered non-mainstream schools had poorer educational outcomes than those who received mainstream schooling. In general, they found that the less fractured the educational experience (stability in placement, schooling, and unauthorised absences), the more likely they were to achieve educational success in KS4. In corroboration, Sanders, Rowley, and Jeff (2000) argue that contributing factors to low achievement in education can sometimes be out of the control of a child's academic capability. They suggest that the education of children in care is affected by the high risk of instability within their living arrangements and schooling, and the low expectations of professionals working with them. Furthermore, Sanders et al. (2000), argue that children in care are sometimes mistakenly labelled as requiring extra support within their education due to the stigma surrounding the educational capability of children in care. Nonetheless, low attainment in education has raised the question of academic ability for those in care, and until recently, the statistics provided limited information about the educational needs of these children and young people (Berridge, 2006). The Department for Education (2017a, 2017b) offers some current insight into the educational needs of looked after children. This report states that on average those who are in care are highly likely to have

a Special Educational Need (SEN) (57.3 per cent), compared with the general population of children who have not been in care (14.4 per cent). However, in the context of attainment for children in care, it is important to note, that the educational need these young people often face is categorised as *"social, emotional and mental health",* with this need being twice as likely as any other special requirements in a child's learning, for example, "*learning difficulties or language and communication needs"* (Department for Education, 2017a). Without further context, the statistics on SEN do not sufficiently explain low academic attainment for children in care.

Overall, this issue is crucial: though the statistics indicate that care leavers are less likely to achieve academically, the education of care leavers, in terms of both participation and achievement, is still an under-researched area. The statistics provide an indication of poor academic achievement amongst these individuals, although they fail to explain why this is, why do care leavers 'underachieve'? The underachievement in education for care leavers highlights the importance of researching the personal experiences of children in care and care leavers to explore what is really behind the statistics, looking at the experience over the numerical figure. Goddard (2000) stressed the need to investigate the educational experiences of care leavers and children in care, as this area was unrepresented in previous research. There have been significant improvements to remedy this specific gap in the literature (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2003; Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2005; Cameron, 2007; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Jackson & Cameron, 2012a; Bluff, King, & McMahon, 2012; Cotton et al., 2014, Mannay et al., 2015, Berridge, 2017).
Martin and Jackson's (2002) research has contributed to the development of research investigating the educational outcomes of children in care and care leavers. The last three decades have seen changes in policy and a significant rise in research exploring the personal experiences of children in care and care leavers in education. However, the prospects for children in care remain a concern.

Table 1: Statistics for Former 'Looked After' Children in 2017

Age	In touch with their local authority	In education	Training or employment	Not In education, training or employment (NEET)
17	79%	33%	16%	31%
18	93%	46%	16%	31%
19-21	88%	7% higher education 21% in other forms of education	27%	40% compared to 13% of all 19-21-year olds

Table 1: Illustrates the current statistics for formerly 'looked after' young people, aged 17-21 in 2017 (Department for Education, 2017a, 2017c).

1.2 Policy

Government policy and publications by The Department for Education have sought to bridge the gap between the experiences and prospects of children in care and their non-care peers. These include The Children Act 1989, The Children (Leaving Care) Act (CLCA) 2000, The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, The Care Leavers Regulations (England) 2011, The Children and Families Act 2014 and The Children and Social Work Act 2017. These Acts, produced by the Government, aim to play an integral part in improving the experiences of young people within and who have left the care system. Furthermore, these acts are in force to protect the needs of children and young people, particularly those who enter the care of their local authority.

Each Act builds upon the next and provides regulations and advice for practice for those supporting young people in care, those transitioning from care, and those who have left care. The following table (table 2) details the legal terms associated with children in care and care leavers, highlighting the criteria which characterise each term and the subsequent support their local authority has a duty to provide. The support they provide is in accordance with the guidelines and regulations set out by The Children Act 1989 and The Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Table 2: Definitions of Terms Associated with Children in Care and Care Leavers, and the Duties of the Local Authority in Accordance with the Legal Term Associated with Their Care Status

Legal Term	Definition	Duties of Local Authority
Looked After	Child or young person who is in the care of their local authority, either through a care order/interim care order or the child receives accommodation from their local authority for a time amounting to 24 hours or more.	To safeguard and aid welfare, which includes prospects in education. Appoint a worker employed by the local authority who will have the duty of care for that child (corporate parent). Consider the views of the child, parent, individual with parental responsibility, relevant adults, where reasonably possible. Provide accommodation.
Eligible Child	Aged 16 or 17. Currently looked after and have been for at least 13 weeks since turning 14.	Provide an assessment of support, advice, and assistance required for when the young person ceases to be looked after. Pathway plan: This details support for future prospects and general well-being of the young person (must be frequently reviewed).
Relevant Child	Previously looked after by a local authority in England or Wales. A child placed under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order, or an adoption order. A child placed outside of local authorities in England and Wales as the placement would not have been suitable (*'adequate'*) for that child, and they longer meet the definition of 'looked after'. Is aged 16 or 17 and was an eligible child when looked after.	Contact from the responsible local authority Assign a personal advisor Where a pathway plan is not prepared – local authority must assess the needs of this child to ensure they determine advice, assistance, and support that is needed to provide for this child. Unless local authority is sure that the child does not need their support, they should support, safeguard, and promote the child's welfare. Provide funding for maintenance, and this could include cash. Provide suitable accommodation. Must keep in contact with the child and where contact has been lost, they must take reasonable steps to re-gain contact and continue to do so until they succeed.
Former Relevant Child (Care Leaver)	In concurrence with the above definitions, however, the young person has now turned 18. Under 21 or still in education (up till the age of 25). Must have been an eligible child	Must keep in contact with the young person, whether they are in the area or not. If contact is lost, the same above applies. Provide a personal advisor and a pathway plan Same support as a relevant child for well-being and education. Other assistance where welfare requires. Cash – in exceptional circumstances

Table 2: Provides definitions of children and young people in local authority care: England, according to The Children Act 1989 and The Children and Social Work Act 2017.

To summarise table two, a care leaver is;

- An individual that has previously been under the care of their local authority.
- For at least 13 weeks,
- After turning 14, and for some time after reaching the age of 16.

Each Act developed in order to provide guidance for local authorities and professionals who work with and support children and young people, in care or who have left care. Each Act builds upon the previous Act to improve the experience of these young people. Within each Act, provisions are set out for the educational welfare of children in care and care leavers. Initially dating back to The Children Act 1989, the support local authorities may offer to young people who have been 'looked after', was to assist care leavers with the expenses of living in a particular area close to the institute of education he/she is enrolled within, to assist him/her with the costs of studying on that course, and to ensure that when the individual requires accommodation, appropriate accommodation was provided for this period of time. All these provisions are to aid better educational performance for care leavers. Following The Children Act 1989, The Department of Health (1998) argued that children and young people, who are in the care of their local authority, were still at risk of low achievement within education.

> Too many reports and inquiries have highlighted cases where social services have
> failed vulnerable children. Children in the care of local authorities have been
> abused and neglected by the care system that was supposed to look after them
> […] the majority of looked after children leave care with no educational
> qualifications at all, many of them at great risk of falling into unemployment,
> homelessness, crime and prostitution (Department of Health 1998, p. 41)

Issues surrounding education, unemployment, housing, and the general well-being of care leavers are prevalent amongst these individuals in society. Due to recommendations produced by The Department of Health (1998) for looked after children and care leavers, The Children Act 1989 was amended and The CLCA 2000 built upon the current legal requirements and guidelines for local authorities supporting these children and young people. However, in reference to the educational needs of care leavers, there was no change from The Children Act 1989. Although, after The CLCA 2000, The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 was developed, outlining more initiatives involved in support of young people in and who have left care. Under this Act, a 'virtual head/virtual school' became a requirement for each local authority, and a 'designated teacher' was required at each school to assist children from a care background, with their educational needs. Post high school each care leaver that pursues a mode of education must be supplied with an advisor from a leaving care team and an assessment of needs in order to form a pathway plan setting out a plan of action for the young person during this time of education. Furthermore, local authorities are now required to support care leavers enrolled in education before the age of 25 and until the end of their course. In addition to financial support suggested in The Children Act 1989 and The CLCA 2000, any young person

formerly looked after, pursuing higher education, will be provided with some form of funding from the local authority, in the form of a fixed grant.

Broad (2005) examined the use and impact of The CLCA 2000 within local authorities. Through questionnaire booklets distributed amongst three hundred local authorities, a total of 6953 young people replied. Broad (2005) compared the findings from this study to previous research he had conducted in 1994 and 1998, before the release of The CLCA 2000. This research appears to suggest significant improvements in the number of care leavers who remain in education after secondary school and care leavers who are in employment since the release of The CLCA 2000. Broad (2005) found that those care leavers within post-16 education had increased to 31% compared to 17.5% in 1998 and 19% in 1994. Incentives were now being offered in 68% of cases of young people pursuing education, employment, or training. Furthermore, 29% of care leavers within these local authorities were unemployed compared to 51.5% in Broad (1998) and 49% in Broad (1994). However, the total amount of young people in this research was 4304 compared to 2905 in Broad (1998) and 859 in Broad (1994). It is unknown whether the change is because of an increase in care leavers within these local authorities or if Broad (2005) received data from different local authorities to his previous research. If so, this could account for some of the changes in post-16 education and those unemployed, as this does not appear to be controlled for. Langdridge (2004) argues that when comparing figures to previous research, the participants should be like for like where possible. The research by Broad (2005) does suggest an improvement within some local authorities since the introduction of The CLCA 2000 but not in all. Also, this research focuses upon the local authorities' point of view; therefore, in doing this, the experience of the young person using this service is not acknowledged. The current study aims to explore the experience of care leavers using a qualitative approach in order to obtain this experience from the perspective of the care leaver to address this gap in Broad (2005).

Dixon, Wade, Byford, Weatherly, and Lee (2004) also explored the outcomes of individuals leaving care post The CLCA 2000. Like Broad (2005), their research coincided with the release of The CLCA 2000, in order to examine the effect this policy had on leaving care services. Dixon et al. (2004) looked at the importance of the transition of leaving care for a young person's future. Factors of importance included the level and quality of the preparation. They argued that better quality of preparation in leaving care led to better outcomes in a care leaver's adult life. One hundred six people took part from seven different local authorities in the main study, then in the follow-up, 101 care leavers took part in an interview with their personal advisors. In the study by Dixon et al. (2004), 54% left school without GCSEs, and 35% were in education post-secondary school. However, there were high drop-out rates in further education. Dixon et al. (2004) found that care leavers who left care early appeared to have poorer outcomes, regarding education and employment. They argued that the

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transitional period from leaving care was too condensed. This research briefly explored the education of care leavers but did not focus on transitional periods during this process. However, this could be due to the low numbers of care leavers in education within their sample.

Since the development of The Children Act 1989, this area of research has attracted a significant amount of academic interest (Stein, 2006). In particular, the focus has been on the importance of the transitional period young people experience when leaving care and the effects this can have on them in later life (Biehal & Wade, 1996; Dixon et al., 2004). Recent developments in the law provide some guidelines for local authorities, regarding care leavers who access further and higher education. These include The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, although care leavers are still underachieving post the production of these policies (Department of Education, 2012b, 2017a, 2017c).

In practice, disparities have been reported from one local authority to the next, with some local authorities offering the bare minimum of support required compared to personalised support offered to care leavers within different local authorities (Jackson & Cameron, 2012b). In 2017 the first 'national implementation advisor' Mark Riddell MBE, was appointed to support local authorities through 'best practice' to bridge the gap between the support offered from different local authorities (Department for Education, 2018). Several initiatives and strategies have also been implemented since The CLCA 2000; 'The Care Leavers Charter' (sets out several promises care leavers want the Government to deliver) (Department for education, 2012b), 'Staying Put' (Funding to stay with foster carers post-16) (Department for education, 2013), 'The Care Leaver Strategy 2013', 'Keep on Caring' (outlines improvements for the support of young people leaving care) (Department for Education, 2016a) and 'The Care Leaver Apprenticeship Bursary' (provides a bursary of £1000 for care leaver starting employment) (Department for Education, 2016b).

The Care Leaver Strategy 2013 highlighted the low prospect for those leaving care and attempts to address the disparities between them and their non-care peers, specifically in;

- Suitable accommodation
- Health
- Education, training and employment
- Provisions of support

Initiatives that developed from The Care Leaver Strategy 2013 include Staying Put. Staying Put guidelines came into force in 2014. The Department of Education (2013) developed the Staying Put guidelines. The aim was to guide a new initiative to support young people to stay with their current foster carers, if appropriate for the young person and their foster carers, post-18. The guidance was

later fed into policy in The Children and Families Act 2014. By 2017, 25% of 19-21-year-olds who were previously looked after, were now 'staying put' and living with their foster carers after the age of 18 (Department for Education, 2017a). Furthermore, 2019 saw a promise for the Government to expand this initiative to provide more financial support to ensure this initiative could reach more young people.

The statistics still indicate poor educational outcomes for care leavers post the latest policy and initiative development. The policy changes demonstrate the potential for 'best practice' and support for care leavers in the transition to higher education, however, how does this translate to care leavers experiences in education and in particular their transitions in education? Therefore, the Doctoral research aims to explore care leavers' transition to higher education. The following section will set out the aims, research questions and objectives for the main study and exploratory research.

1.3 The Main Study: Research Aim and Objectives

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university and how other life transitions affect them during this time.

Research question: What are care leavers' experiences of transition to higher education?

Research objectives:

- Gain a longitudinal account of the experience of transition to higher education for care leavers.
- Explore the effect the care system can have upon experiences of education.
- Explore the impact 'care leaver identity' has upon one's transition to higher education.
- Contribute to a theory of transition, in particular, the educational transitions of care leavers

1.4 Exploratory Research: Aims, Questions and Objectives

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university, in order, to inform the research design of the main study.

Research questions:

- What are care leavers' experiences of transition to higher education?
- How do other transitions during this time affect care leavers accessing university?

Research objectives:

- Gain an account of the experience of transition to higher education for care leavers.
- Examine care leavers' experiences of the application process for entering higher education.
- Contribute to the theory of transition in education for care leavers.

1.5 My Interest in Care Leaver Research

We do not live in a perfect society. We are not all provided or equipped with the skills to succeed. Sometimes we are, sometimes we must develop them, and sometimes we must fight for them. Entering care as a teenager, I was met with different expectations from the ones I held for myself. I faced challenges like any child in care, and when I left care, just before I turned 17, I faced an entirely new set of circumstances I needed to adapt to, as I transitioned out of care during my A-levels. I had very little in the way of material belongings, and soon I began to fall away from education, taking paths in life that were not always positive. One decision I made was to stay in college, and through my time in education and involvement in care leaver groups, I decided I wanted to be involved in improving the prospects for care leavers. I became involved in study support groups supporting children in care in secondary education. I met many young people with the potential to succeed in education, who often dropped-out due to the challenges they faced in their home life or through inefficient support to remain in education. After becoming aware of these issues and once completing my degree in psychology I decided to enrol as a PhD student through the Lemn Sissay scholarship and investigate care leavers' experience of the transition to higher education, from the perspective of the care leaver.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The current chapter has discussed and provided a rationale for investigating care leavers' experiences of the transition to education, through exploring the statistics available, the current policy and initiative developments. The following section will set out the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two reviews the previous literature. Here, the literature surrounding care leavers in general, their experiences of education, and their experiences of transition are discussed. Chapter two will also critically examine the current literature exploring the transitions in education for other marginalised groups, and the general population.

Chapter three details the research, design and analysis of the exploratory study, carried out one year before the main study and will include a discussion of the findings through interpretative phenomenological analysis. Chapter three will begin with the research aims, questions, and

objectives, followed by the research design, ethics and findings. The exploratory work led to the development of the research design and the methods of the main study. Three main themes emerged from the exploratory study; 'care leaver identity', 'lack of positive care leaver role models', and 'corporate versus normal parenting'.

Chapter four examines the theoretical framework of the doctoral research. The chapter will begin with theories of capital; social and cultural, followed by the theory of communities of practice and applications for education.

Chapter five is a detailed discussion of the pluralistic methodology employed for this study. This chapter will begin with the ontological and epistemological positions of the main study. The chapter will then discuss the philosophical traditions of the main study, detailing both methodological approaches that form the overall pluralistic design of the main study; hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative, followed by the justification for pluralism. The chapter will then discuss the first methodological approach adopted; phenomenology, and its research application, followed by the second analytical approach of narrative analysis.

Chapter six sets out the method choices and procedures adopted and utilised for the main study. The chapter will begin with the development of the main study, sampling and recruitment and the procedure for the main study. It will then discuss the first method of analysis: Template analysis adopting Van Manen's (1990) Hermeneutic phenomenology and discuss the development of the initial and final template. Following this section, the narrative case study method adopted for the main study will be outlined: Plummer's (2013) elements to narrative understanding. This chapter will conclude with the ethical considerations.

Chapter seven is the first section of analysis for this research and begins with a thorough template analysis of the data collected from study two. The empirical findings of the main study will be reviewed and discussed throughout these two chapters (Ch.7 and Ch. 8). As discussed in the methodology (Ch. 5), the analysis adopts a pluralistic approach. The analysis will begin with the template analysis (Ch. 7) and is followed by three narrative case studies (Ch.8). The template was produced using King's (2004) approach to template analysis. The development of the initial template and the subsequent progression of the final template can be found in the methods chapter (Ch.6). The template analysis (Ch. 7) highlighted two main themes; *'exercising agency and regaining control' and 'modes of transition to university life'* and two integrative themes; *'identity' and 'stability versus instability'*. These themes will be examined in chapter seven.

Chapter eight is split into three sections to cover the narrative case studies of the three participants chosen from the overall sample of study two. It discusses the use of Plummer's (2013) narrative framework in the conduction of the narrative case studies. This chapter will discuss the second

analytical technique of the pluralistic approach of the main study; narrative analysis. Three narrative case studies: Bethany, Liz and Sam, will be explored, highlighting diverse experiences of the transition to higher education for the participants of the main study. Each narrative case study will begin with a brief overview of each story and a discussion of the main narratives that feature in each experience of the transition to higher education. The case studies will highlight and discuss the themes that emerged from the template analysis concerning each case study.

Chapter nine is the discussion of the main study concerning theory and previous research. The essential themes will be discussed within the methodological framework, theoretical orientation, and the previous literature.

Chapter ten details the conclusions of the PhD research, detailing my original contribution to knowledge, limitations of the main study, and Implications for practice, education, and policy.

2. Literature Review

> The only people who can really tell us if the educational experiences of looked-
> after children have changed for the better are those at the receiving end. We
> should listen to them (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 129).

For the last three decades, government policy and research have aimed to improve the prospects of children in care. There is now a large body of research, nationally and internationally, exploring the experiences of young people in care and the potential pathways, post-care. However, there is still a substantial gap in the experiences of education and transitions in education for care leavers (Department for Education, 2017). Significant improvements have been made to remedy this specific gap in the literature. However, through the exploration of the current statistics (Ch. 1), the matter of attainment for these young people remains a concern. Chapter two will begin with a critical discussion and examination of the current literature and empirical research, exploring the education and prospects of care leavers. The next section will discuss contemporary thinking of transition in education, along with, and including, the current knowledge of transition in education for marginalised groups. The chapter will then conclude with an exploration of the historical context of care leaver transition.

2.1 Care Leavers Personal Experiences of Further and Higher Education

Recent years have seen the increase of research in the UK investigating the educational experiences of children in care and care leavers, including personal accounts of their experiences in education (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2003; Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2005; Cameron, 2007; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Jackson & Cameron, 2012a; Bluff, King, & McMahon, 2012; Cotton et al., 2014, Mannay et al., 2015; Sebba et al., 2015; Berridge, 2017; Harrison, 2017). This section focuses specifically on these studies in order to provide a critical discussion of the previous research on care leavers in further and higher education. The findings have often been separated into 'protective' and 'risk' indicators for education, through the examination of the development of resilience (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Cotton et al., 2014). Amongst this research, key findings have consistently illustrated factors of support, stability, and encouragement as beneficial indicators of educational success for care leavers (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jackson et al., 2005; Cameron, 2007; Cotton et al., 2014, Berridge, 2017). Factors that pose a risk to the education of care leavers include: the low priority and low expectations of education from professionals working with children in care and care leavers, the instability in living arrangements and schooling, and insufficient support and guidance in academic pursuits.

Researchers have attempted to understand and theorise the phenomena of children leaving care and what factors lead to positive future life prospects (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Mallon, 2007; Stein, 2008; Driscoll, 2011; Cotton et al., 2014; Harrison, 2017). Much of the previous literature, focuses on the role of resilience in the experiences of former looked after children. Resilience is the ability to prevail over adverse life events (Rutter, 1999). For children in care, Stein (2008) conceptualises resilience as the ability to achieve good life outcomes regardless of previous experiences of adversity. Moreover, Stein (2008) highlights the importance of care leavers forming a 'positive identity', having access to appropriate and suitable quality support, and stability in care, in the promotion of resilience. The development of resilience has been frequently linked to children in care and care leavers who succeed academically and achieve positive outcomes through their chosen educational pursuits and career pathways (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Stein, 2008; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Cotton et al., 2014).

In the first study focusing on the experiences of education for this group, Jackson and Martin (1998), explored the personal accounts of 38 care leavers who had completed a degree at university. Demographically, care leavers were chosen for this study on the basis that they had been in care for a year or more, achieved 5 GCSEs at the requirement of C and above, passed their A-levels and had all at least attained one degree. Through the 'resilience framework', Jackson and Martin (1998) identified several 'protective' and 'risk' factors for aiding resilience in the educational experiences of these individuals. These protective factors include the development of strong supportive friendships with their non-care peers who achieve academically, the consistent and stable influence of a significant supportive adult, and good school attendance. In contrast, the risk factors highlighted experiences of instability in care and a lack of motivation towards succeeding in education. In concurrence with the resilience framework used in Jackson and Martin (1998), Mallon (2007) also investigated the role being in care had had upon care leavers' experiences of education, from a retrospective view. Mallon's findings corroborated Jackson's themes. Furthermore, Mallon (2007) argued that resilience was not always a stable entity for these individuals and may be present in a specific situation or event and not another. There is no clear indicator of when resilience may be present or not.

As the first study exploring the educational experiences of care leavers who had studied for a degree, Jackson and Martin (1998) provided a crucial perspective on the prospects of young people post-care, in a previously empirically limited area of research. However, Jackson and Martin (1998) specifically recruited care leavers that had been in care for more than one year. The Children Act 1989 states, that the definition of being in care refers to a child under the age of 16 that has been in care for at least 13 weeks. To exclude care leavers that have been in care for less than a year but are still eligible to care leaver support could limit the experiences obtained from care leavers.

Further to the research conducted by Jackson and Martin (1998), Jackson et al. (2003, 2005) carried out the first comprehensive longitudinal study exploring the personal experiences of 150 care leavers enrolled at university. Their research aimed to improve the experiences of care leavers, who chose to pursue a degree at higher education, including raising awareness and attempting to address the issues care leavers face in pursuit of a degree. The study by Jackson et al. (2003, 2005) was a five-year longitudinal study. During the period of their study, 21 care leavers chose to withdraw from the research. Care leavers that chose to withdraw from the research, either left before their course finished or because they opted out of the research. Everyone's demographics were examined and compared to the wider population of children who have been in care. Sixteen per cent of the sample were unaccompanied asylum seekers. Demographically the academic attainment of 'birth parents' of the asylum-seeking care leavers, compared to that of the participants born with the UK, was often to a higher standard. Jackson et al. (2003, 2005) highlighted the academic attainment of birth parents as a predictor of success in education amongst care leavers.

Success in academic attainment for the participants of Jackson et al. (2003, 2005), involved the motivation to do well in education, good support from professionals that worked with them, forming social connections at university, suitable living arrangements, and substantial financial support. Jackson et al.'s study produced 12 main recommendations for local authorities and the Government to help improve the educational success of care leavers. These included an emphasis on the support given by foster carers during education and a need for individually designed support packages for those that choose to go to university, in order to support these young people most appropriately. Jackson et al. (2005) informed policy and practice, and this research led to the development of the Buttle UK (2011) 'Quality Mark for Care Leavers' at university[2]. Furthermore, when applying for higher education through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), care leavers now have the option to identify as a care leaver by ticking a box on the UCAS application. At the time this research was published, only 1% of children who had been in care went on to higher education (SEU, 2003). Since the production of Jackson et al.'s research and the inclusion of the tick box on the UCAS application form, the number of known care leavers pursuing higher education has increased by approximately 6% in the statistics reported by Department for Education (2017c).

Further to the research by Jackson et al. (2003, 2005), Cameron (2007) explored the phenomenon of 'self-reliance' amongst young adult care leavers with a specific focus upon education. Within this paper self-reliance was defined on two levels: feeling able to make decisions independent of others

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[2] The Frank Buttle Quality Mark is awarded to universities who provide care leavers with ongoing support and are committed to improving their prospects (Buttle Uk, 2015).

and the choice to resist support. This study explored the experiences of 80 young people, ranging from age 18 to 20. Cameron (2007) explored the differences between the care leavers who were currently in education and those who were not. Those currently studying expressed a great deal of self-reliance and the self-acknowledgement that they were doing this for themselves. In support of the research by Jackson and Martin (1998), all participants in Cameron's study who were in education and a large proportion of those not in any form of education reported times of insufficient support and difficulties in accessing assistance. Those no longer continuing in education associated this to a lack of support with their circumstances.

Much of the previous research has discussed concern for children in care and care leavers in the lack of support available to them. Driscoll (2011) focused specifically on the role of supportive relationships with adults and resilience, in attainment in education. Driscoll's research investigated the experiences of seven young people, aged 16 to 20. None of which were currently enrolled in higher education, although several were studying at college and the majority valued academic qualifications within their prospects. This research reported that where relationships are supportive, young people with experience of being in care channelled this into a protective factor of 'motivation to succeed' (Driscoll, 2011). Driscoll (2011) reported several key themes which corroborated the findings from Jackson et al. (2003, 2005) and Cameron (2007). These are birth families, mistrust and self-reliance, supportive relationships, and education and turning points. In relation to the theme of 'mistrust and self-reliance', in previous research, Cameron (2007) argued that that the development of self-reliance could lead to a young person resisting support and serve as a risk factor towards forming supportive relationships because these young people were more likely to be reliant on themselves due to limited resources of support being available to them. Driscoll (2011) corroborates these findings.

In a more recent study on resilience, Cotton, Nash, and Kneale (2014) explored the potential protective and risk factors for care leavers studying at higher education. Their research took place with eight women, who were studying for a degree at a university in the South West of England. The university had the Frank Buttle Quality Mark and a dedicated care leaver support team. Participants were recruited via this service, and ages ranged from 20-40. Cotton et al. (2014) explored the care leavers' experience of university from preparation to induction, to their experience at university, and their post-graduation plans. Their research raised several 'risk' and 'protective' factors in supporting a care leaver's successful completion of a higher education degree. Protective factors included: having a 'safety net', good support financially, and preparations made for university. Cotton et al. (2014) also found that the motivation to help others due to their own experiences was a protective factor to the resilience of these young people. Risk factors included an insufficient emphasis on the adjustment to life at higher education and insufficient or inadequate support.

Interestingly, the care leavers of the study of Cotton et al. (2014) highlighted their care leaver status as a protective factor for university and all discussed the positive implications this status had on their time at higher education, as they desired to be successful, despite their background. For several participants, their status of 'care leaver' played a substantial role in their course choices, and others valued the level of independence it afforded them. In contrast, Mannay et al. (2015) discussed the negative aspect of the care leaver status. The researchers highlighted how young people in care often felt they were treated differently due to the 'looked after' status and how education, in terms of positive experiences, helped alleviate the feeling of 'different'. Harrison (2017) also reported that some of their participants experienced receiving stigma at university due to their status of care leaver and others faced practical issues due to being in care. The practical issues included the transition from benefits and acquiring accommodation without a guarantor. Although research by Cotton et al. (2014) highlights potential protective and risk factors for care leavers studying at higher education, it is methodologically limited, by the method use of one university and the absence of the male care leaver experience.

Harrison (2017) adopted mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative. The statistics reported in chapter one for Harrison (2017) were part of the quantitative examination of care leavers' educational attainment at KS4 and above. They were reflective of care leavers who had attended higher education between the academic years of 2010/11 to 2014/15. Further to the quantitative part of this study, the self-respondent questionnaire contained five open-ended questions to explore the experience of the transition to higher education qualitatively. These questions explored care leavers' experience of this transition, what they believed could have improved this transition, and any challenges they faced. In corroboration of Jackson et al., (2005) and Cotton et al., (2014), Harrison (2017) found that care leavers with a negative experience of the transition to higher education were more likely to report financial issues and discuss inadequate financial support available from their local authorities. For those who experienced financial difficulties, they were more likely to consider withdrawing from higher education. Furthermore, for those facing difficulties during this time of transition, around two-thirds attributed this to their relationship with their local authority. These care leavers reported feeling a lack of support in their plan to participate in higher education from their local authority, and in some cases, they felt they were actively discouraged from participating in higher education. They also discussed encountering difficulties in getting the relevant paperwork from their local authorities to receive financial support.

Harrison (2017) found that some care leavers felt they did not have the option of a 'safety net' if required, particularly if they had moved for higher education. Moreover, this left several participants feeling they had to manage this time of transition alone, and in many cases, this was without the family resources their non-care peers could draw upon (financial or emotional support). Contributing

factors to the successful transition to higher education included the management in preparation for higher education and the transition from care to university. Care leavers who did not experience adequate support in their preparation for university reported wanting their local authority and institute of higher education to liaise with one another, in order to plan and manage this time of transition more effectively. They also expressed a desire to meet similar students in the same position, due to the additional challenges faced as a care leaver in the transition to higher education. Other factors included good quality disability support and their involvement in university life (societies and groups). Harrison's (2017) research provides a comprehensive examination of care leavers who participate in higher education. However, the limitation of self-respondent questionnaires provides a lack of opportunity for asking further questions regarding care leavers' experiences of higher education. Notably, Harrison (2017) argues that most participants discussed having positive experiences of the transition to higher education, although they were unlikely to provide qualitative data, compared to those with negative experiences.

Research by Berridge (2017) explores the connection of agency in resilience and the implications, thereof, for education. In the social sciences, having agency is the ability to act (Etelapelto et al. 2013). Etelapelto et al. (2013) argue that the ability to act freely without the influence of others is something fundamental, at the core of human existence. This ability to exercise agency is an essential and crucial part of human rights. Martin, Sugarman and Thompson (2003, p. 1) argue that *"agency is the freedom of individual human beings to make choices and to act on these choices in ways that make a difference in their lives".* Previous research suggests that when an individual can exercise their agency and feel in control of their own decisions, it increases the likelihood of them experiencing positive life outcomes and general life satisfaction (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Berridge, 2017). "*They are able who think they are able"* (Roman poet Virgil). Berridge's (2017) research on agency and education for children in care, builds upon and develops the current knowledge of resilience in these young people. Berridge (2017) explored the experience of secondary education, through interviews, with 26 young people, aged 16-18. All the young people were still under the care of their local authority. From the findings, the young people were organised into four groups '*Stressed/unresolved'; 'Committee/ trusted support'; 'Private/self-reliant'; and 'Disengaged'*. He found that the young people across all these groups were utilising their agency to make their own choices within education. The more stable their home life was, the more likely they were to engage with education. Berridge's work offers some insight into the additional role of agency in education, providing a rationale for further exploration of the education of these young people to better understand the role of agency in education.

Research within the United Kingdom (UK) has increased over the last two decades, and this area is now receiving significant attention internationally. The research outside of the UK is reflective of UK

findings (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies; Franz & Branica, 2012; Hojer & Sjoblom, 2014; Harvey, Mcnamara, Andrewartha, & Luckman; 2015; Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Rak & Fuller, 2017; Wilson, Mendes, & Golding 2018; McNamera, Andrewartha, & Harvey, 2019; Wilson, Mendes, & Golding, 2019). For example, Croatian research carried out by Franz and Brianca (2012) investigated the opportunities in the education of 31 young people who have been in the care of their local authority. The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 21. Franz and Brianca (2012) reported that some of the key determinants for educational success, from the care leavers' perspective, are the relationship between themselves and the professionals with whom they work, and access to financial support. In corroboration of Franz and Bianca (2012), US researchers reported that the lack of financial support was argued by former looked after children to be the most significant barrier to their pursuit of education post-secondary school (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies). Australian research reported that young people transitioning out of care face numerous challenges delaying their path to higher education and call for policy reform to enable better practice within the care and education sector (Wilson et al., 2019). Furthermore, Andrewartha and Harvey (2017) argue, for better understanding of care leavers within establishments of higher education, "*we argue that better understanding of the challenges, experiences, and strengths of care leavers could benefit all students on campus*" (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017, p. 52).

In 2012 the final report of the YiPPEE (Young People from a Public Care Background; Pathways to Education in Europe) project was released, and subsequent publications evolved from the data of this research (Cameron et al., 2012; Jackson & Cameron, 2012a, 2012b; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Montserrat et al., 2012, Racz & Korintus, 2012). The YiPPEE project was carried out across Europe, in England, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary and Spain and explored the participation in post-compulsory education of 170 young people who had an experience of the care system (Jackson & Cameron, 2012a). The YiPPEE project suggests there are two key factors in continuing onto post-compulsory education across the participants of this research. These factors are, the quality of their accommodation and the support that was available financially to them (Jackson & Cameron, 2012a, 2012b; Johansson & Hojer, 2012). Other indicators are a desire to break the background pattern of their birth parents, the importance placed upon education by the young person's birth families and access to role models. In what previously was an under-researched area, the YiPPEE project offers insight into the post-compulsory education of young people who have entered the care system, across five different European countries (Jackson & Cameron, 2012a).

The previous research available on the transition to higher education has explored this transition for the general population and other marginalised groups. The next section will examine the contemporary thinking on transition in education.

2.2 Contemporary Thinking on Transitions in Education

Gale and Parker (2014) refer to transition as the *"capability to navigate change"* (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737)*.* They examined transition literature in education, identifying three classifications that encompass the experience of transition to higher education; '*induction'*, '*development'* and '*becoming'*. The latter, thereof, being unrepresented in the breadth of transition literature. A large amount of contemporary research exploring the theory of transition in education has focused on inclusion "*asking not only who attends and why but also more difficult questions about who should attend and doesn't*" (Tienda, 2013, p. 467). Tienda (2013) argues that establishments of higher education, with a diverse student demographic, is not conducive of inclusion in higher education. Instead, Tienda argues that the cultural history of establishments of higher education could reflect inclusion at university. Tobbell et al. (2020) explored the student perspective of inclusion and matters of the meaning of inclusion for them. They argue that inclusion is reflective of interaction and participation in education, within these institutional structures of higher education. Also, Turner and Tobell (2017) found that participation in education is linked to success in transitions to higher education. The new emergent debate focuses around historical pedagogic practices in institutes of education, focusing on established issues of 'inclusion' and the implications on approaches to practice in pedagogy. Tienda (2013) discussed the pedagogic benefits of diverse student backgrounds, highlighting that diversity in students promotes the inherent challenge of pre-held stereotypes and misconceptions. For those who already lack self-belief, these feelings may be exemplified during the transition to higher education. In concurrence, Gale argues *"That is, to be equitable, an expansion agenda in HE also needs to expand current conceptions of the capabilities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds"* (Gale, 2015, p. 265). Pajares and Schunk (2002) argue for the focus on the development of self-belief through childhood. Pajares and Schunk argue that how individuals view their ability in a specific area is crucial to their overall motivation and any future achievements in that specific subject, highlighting the importance of the role of self-belief in an individual's future prospects. However, as many self-belief theorists would argue, the development of self-belief is connected to an individual's environment, external influences (families and teachers), and previous experiences of similar transitions.

Transition to higher education for any student can bring with it uncertainty and difficulty. Several factors can support or hinder success in higher education. Previous researchers have explored this time of transition for other 'disadvantaged' groups (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005; Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2008; Reay, 2008; Wray, 2012; O'Shea, 2013). Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) argue that an individual's background can play an integral part in their future educational success. In concurrence, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) argue that students accessing higher education, who are not typically mainstream students, have a higher likelihood of facing difficulties during their transition to higher

education. One explanation for this was offered by Reay (2002), who argues that mature students may be affected by imposter theory. Imposter theory explains that students who do not fit the mainstream mould of a 'student' pursuing higher education may feel like they do not belong and should not be attending University. Therefore, they feel like an imposter. Imposter theory is linked to students from working-class backgrounds. Research conducted by Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) and O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) provides an argument for research on educational transitions of individuals from non-traditional backgrounds.

The first year of higher education has been argued to make or break a students' academic career (Yorke, 1999, 2000; Laing, Robinson & Johnston, 2005; Kift, 2009 & Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010). Preparation for University is essential regardless of an individual's background (Yorke, 2000; Laing et al., 2005). Yorke (2000) argues that limited or poor preparation can often account for non-completion of higher education. The institute can also be seen to play an integral part in a student's non-completion, as Yorke (2000) argues higher education institutes can fail to induct students appropriately and spend insufficient attention on the induction process of first-year students and their overall experience of the first year. Misconceptions can lead to students dropping out of University (Yorke, 2000). Some students hold unrealistic or ill-informed expectations of University and when faced with the reality of the situation and unmet expectations, they drop-out of higher education (Yorke, 2000). Yorke (1999) argues that there are common factors that can lead to an individual deciding to leave University, these factors include course satisfaction, insufficient finances, and overall dissatisfaction with their choice of University (environmentally and with the support available). Overall, course dissatisfaction was a significant contributing factor to individuals leaving University and the incompletion of their course (Yorke, 2000). Some students are unable to meet the requirements of their course and fall short of what is expected of them (Yorke, 1999; Yorke 2000). Yorke (2000) sets out several recommendations for student retention, highlighting potential avenues to improve student transition to university. The recommendations of this study included appropriate and efficient university inductions and appropriate and accessible learning tools.

Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) argued that this transitional period of an individual's education could be difficult for most students to adapt to regardless of their background. Also, Yorke and Longden (2008) found that several student participants, were more likely to opt-out if they struggled with the financial implications of going, doubted their academic capability, and they had little or no sense of belonging at University. Jackson et al. (2005) suggested that care leavers are more at risk of these concerns within their sample and were care leavers opted out of university. These factors were associated with this decision. In addition, Jackson et al. (2005) argued that care leavers also had the added pressure of being affected by previous experiences relating to being in care and a lack of support from the family unit and professionals working with them. In support of this, Tobbell et al. (2008) suggest that

educational transitions can lead to low academic achievement and can affect the overall educational experience for the individual.

There is a growing body of research on student transition to higher education (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012). Briggs et al. (2012) stress the importance of developing a learner identity in higher education, as this can be a key facilitator of academic achievement. The hope is that the individual will develop this identity of 'university student'. Furthermore, Briggs et al. (2012) argue that cultural capital is important when transitioning to University. Cultural capital is the ingrained dispositions developed within the family environment (Bourdieu, 1986). Briggs et al. (2012) highlighted several factors for the general population that can prevent or hinder their future academic success (Briggs et al., 2012). These factors include visits to a university and 'study buddies' who are already enrolled at University, for children still in school who have been identified as having the potential to access higher education (Clerehan, 2003). When marginalised or disadvantaged, these factors can significantly increase and prevent involvement in education altogether. Wray (2012) investigated transition to higher education for people who were registered as disabled, comparing their experiences with non-disabled students. Like care leavers, individuals with disabilities are statistically less likely to attain success in educational pursuits, facing multiple barriers that hinder and prevent progression in education (Wray, 2012). Wray (2012), through the use of focus groups, reported that those students without a disability faced fewer challenges compared to their peers who self-defined as having a disability but both groups of people had supportive factors that aided them while transitioning to higher education. Furthermore, Wray (2012) noted that some of these supportive factors included the ability to use negative remarks from others as a way of encouraging themselves to continue pursuing their desired goals in education and having a deep-rooted focus to enter higher education.

Cook and Leckey (1999) argue that students will have developed learning techniques throughout their education that are best suited to those particular establishments of education, although, this may not always be complemented by the learning approach implemented by higher education institutes. Lowe and Cook (2003) further argue that students are often ill-equipped for the learning style adopted by universities. Cook and Leckley (1999) argue that the gap between students' expectations of University and the reality of attending University needs to be bridged in order to prevent course dissatisfaction and non-completion. Previous research provides a comprehensive understanding of the transition to higher education for the general population and marginalised groups, a gap in the literature remains: care leavers transition to higher education.

2.3 Care Leavers in Transition: Transition to Independence

A substantial amount of the research on the prospects of children leaving care in the UK has developed from research exploring the transition to independent living (Biehal & Wade, 1996; Broad,

1999; Dixon, Wade, Byford, Weatherly, & Lee, 2004; Chase, Maxell, Knight, & Aggleton, 2006; Wade & Dixon, 2006; Wade; 2008; Coyle & Pinkerton 2012). Since the development of The Children Act 1989, this area has attracted a significant amount of academic interest (Stein, 2006). In particular, the focus has been placed on the importance of the transitional period young people experience when leaving care and the effects this can have on them in later life (Biehal & Wade, 1996; Dixon et al., 2004). Within this literature, little emphasis is placed on the effect transitions can have on a care leaver's education, although there is evidence to show underperformance academically for care leavers (Berridge, 2006; Jackson & Ajayi, 2007; Department for Education, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Van Manen (1990) argues that past experiences of phenomena can reflect our present and future experiences of similar situations. The understanding of care leavers' experiences of previous transitions could offer some insight into how they manage the transition to higher education.

Biehal and Wade (1996) explored the transitional period to independence for care leavers, investigating the support care leavers receive during this time. Their research took place over four years with local authorities within England (the authors did not state how many local authorities were involved). Adopting a mixed-method approach, the first stage of the research involved the completion of postal questionnaires which explored the transition to independent living within the first few months of leaving care. From the postal questionnaires, a two-year follow-up study developed, in which, 74 care leavers, aged between 16 and 19, took part in two semi-structured interviews. Also, Biehal and Wade (1996) conducted interviews with the social and leaving care workers of the young people involved. The authors reported that 75% of participants had left care before their 18th birthday and were now living independently. This proportion is higher than in the general population of 21-year-olds in Britain, with around 50% of 21-year-olds still living at home with their families (Jones, 1995). Therefore, Biehal and Wade (1996) argue that starting to live independently earlier than the general population may lead to care leavers experiencing other transitions a lot earlier than their peers, with many being in relationships, living with partners and having children within two years of leaving care. Therefore, the authors recommended that leaving care should be a more gradual process, with more support being provided from professionals working with these young people during this transition, to offer care leavers the same opportunities as their non-care leaver peers who may still be living at home. Biehal and Wade (1996) also argued that the age of leaving care affects other transitional periods in a young person's life, especially within his/her education. However, other transitions relating to education during this specific period, for example, proceeding on to other educational institutes, are not mentioned. (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005). Therefore, not investigating this suggests that none of the young people in the research were attending college or university or that education was not considered important. The low importance of education for children in care is consistent with research conducted by Stein (1994), arguing that education is often not the main priority of

professionals working with children in care, highlighting a need to investigate educational experiences of care leavers and promote the importance of education for children in care.

Following research conducted by Biehal and Wade (1996), Dixon et al. (2004) explored the effects of independent living for 106 care leavers; within Dixon et al.'s research, more emphasis was placed on education. A total of seven local authorities across England took part. During the follow-up period, 101 of the care leavers took part in another interview along with their personal advisors. The findings showed that 54% of the participants left school without any GCSEs, while only 35% were in education after school. However, they reported a high drop-out rate for further education in their sample. Dixon et al. (2004) suggest that the key factors for future educational success included the age of leaving care. They maintain that academic achievement could be related to moving on from care later than 16 and 17. Therefore, Dixon et al. (2004) argue that leaving care too early could account for why some care leavers have less success within education, which is consistent with the research findings of Biehal and Wade (1996). Another factor identified was the quality of the young person's placement, arguing that an emphasis on educational success from carers can prove to be beneficial in the educational future of children in care. In support of this, Martin and Jackson (2002) also highlight the importance of motivation from carers and professionals working with young people in and who have left care.

Though previous research on care leavers has tended to focus upon the transitional journey of leaving care to live independently, rather than transitions in education, the historical impact of poor support and ill-prepared transitions, while in care, stresses the importance of investigating personal experiences of transition (Stein & Carey, 1986; Biehal & Wade, 1996; Dixon et al., 2004; Wade & Dixon, 2006; Dixon, 2008; (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies). Dixon et al. (2004) argue that this transitional period of independence can also contribute to low academic achievement for care leavers in further and higher education. Transitions for other groups in society (for example, mature students) were often seen to affect an individual's academic success, often depending on how they manage this time in one's life and the quality of the support and resources they have available to them (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005). In addition, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) argue that one's educational transitions can affect their overall educational success, from going from one educational institution to another or the transition in the level of work expected at higher education compared to standards of work expected at A-level. They particularly argue that those from marginal backgrounds are more likely to incur difficulties during this time, providing an argument for the importance of investigating these transitions in a care leaver's life, to examine the impact educational transitions and other transitions, not exclusively related to education, can have on their experiences. However, they argue that they also have the added pressure of past experiences relating to being in care, lack of support from the family unit and professionals working

with them. So, with care leavers on average, not going to university, exploring the educational transitions of those that do go may raise awareness into the barriers care leavers face within this journey.

2.4 Literature Conclusion: Rationale for the Current Study

Research nationally and internationally has significantly increased. However, there are still limited studies exploring care leavers' experiences of higher education in the UK. More specifically, there are limited longitudinal studies of this kind. None of which have explicitly explored the transition into higher education and the possible impact this time of transition may have on a care leaver's success in higher education. The main study aims to explore care leavers' transition to higher education, to address the gap in the existing literature: to explore the care leaver experience of the transition to higher education. This study is one of the first to explore this transition from the care leaver's perspective and will further contribute to the developing research on transitions and disadvantaged young people.

Nearly twenty years on from the first study exploring care leavers' experiences of higher education and there has been substantial progress and reform in Government acts and policy, however, the current statistics provide a bleak picture for the potential academic attainment of children in care. There has been minimal improvement in the academic attainment of these young people. In the developing body of research, a gap in the literature remains; the experience of transition into higher education for children in care and care leavers. The previous research suggests that difficulty within transitions in education can affect academic attainment and highlights the importance of understanding the role an individual's background has on successful transitions in education. Previous experiences of transition for those who have been in care demonstrates an evident concern for the support available to them and the inevitability of resisting further support and becoming self-reliant, due to the failing of support networks. Through the exploration of the current literature, exploratory research (Ch.3) was then conducted exploring the transition to higher education. The main design and aims of the PhD study developed from the exploratory work. The PhD research will aim to make theoretical contributions to the theory of transition in education for children in care and care leavers, through investigating the educational experiences of the transition to higher education for care leavers, whose experiences of these transitions have yet to be explored.

3. Exploratory Research

Previous research conducted in the UK (Ch.2), highlighted issues with the educational experiences of care leavers in general and has suggested that life transitions affect care leavers' later experiences. The participation and achievement of care leavers in education, particularly care leavers' experiences of transitions in education, remains under-researched. To begin to address this gap, the first part of the doctoral research was an exploratory study investigating care leavers' transition to university. The exploratory work led to the development of the research design and methods of the main study. The exploratory study explored the educational experiences of nine care leavers studying in their first or second year at universities across the Greater Manchester and Yorkshire area of Northern England. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview relating to their transition to university. Through adopting a phenomenological approach, interview transcripts were analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Three main themes emerged; 'care leaver identity', 'lack of positive care leaver role models', and 'corporate versus normal parenting'. The first theme 'care leaver identity', investigates what impact being a care leaver has on the participants' personally and within their education. The second theme 'lack of positive care leaver role models' explores, what effect role models have on care leavers within their educational pursuits. The final theme 'corporate versus normal parenting', investigates care leavers' perceptions of what parenting means and the nature of the parenting they receive. The current chapter explores the findings of the exploratory research, carried out one year before the main study. This chapter will begin with the research aims, questions and objectives, followed by the research design, ethics and findings of the exploratory study. The chapter will conclude with the development of the main study from the findings of the exploratory work.

3.1 Aims, Questions and Objectives

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university, in order, to inform the research design of the main study.

Research questions:

What are care leavers' experiences of transition to higher education?

How do other transitions during this time affect care leavers accessing university?

Research objectives:

- Gain an account of the experience of the transition to higher education for care leavers.
- Examine care leavers' experiences of the application process for entering higher education.

- Contribute to the theory of transition in education for care leavers

3.2 Sampling and Recruitment

The exploratory study explored the experiences of nine care leavers aged between 18 and 33. All participants were enrolled at universities within greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, participants were asked a series of questions relating to their transition to university, including questions exploring their previous knowledge of higher education; before they applied and their application process for university. Within this sample, two of the participants chose to change their course, two changed universities and two repeated their first year. More information on the participants' demographics can be found below (table 3). In order to gain access to these participants, contact was made with the designated member of staff for care leavers at several universities in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. Details of these contacts can be found on the university website under student support. The member of staff at each university then agreed to send an email to care leaver students who were in their first and second year of university. Contact was then made via email with the researcher by the participant or the gatekeeper at that higher education institute. The email disclosed information about my interest in this area as a care leaver researcher. This decision was made to help alleviate any barriers between the participant and the researcher. Each participant participated on the basis that they were identified, and also self-identified, as a care leaver.

Participants were interviewed on their own. In previous research conducted by Dixon et al. (2004), care leavers were interviewed alongside their leaving care worker. The leaving care worker being present in the interviews, could have potentially affected the responses given due to the dynamics of the relationship between the care leaver and the leaving care worker, in turn, affecting what he/she chose to share in their response to the questions asked (Manderson et al., 2006). Therefore, in the exploratory research, the participants were interviewed independent of their leaving care workers to eliminate the effect this may have on the participants within this research.

Table 3: Characteristics of Participants who Took Part in the Exploratory Research

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Degree	Year of study	Type of care	Length of care
Gavin	19	Male	Journalism	First	Foster care and supported accommodation	2 years
Rhiannon	20	Female	Exercise, Physical Activity and Health	Second	Foster care	11 years
Layla	23	Female	Counselling Studies	Second	Foster care	9 years
Catherine	20	Female	Adult Nursing	Second	Foster care then adoption	10 years
Bridgette	23	Female	Social Work	Second	Foster care	Since being a baby
Rochelle	20	Female	Education with Cultural Studies	First	Foster care	----------
Stephen	33	Male	Social work	First	Supported Lodgings	----------
Sam	25	Male	Environmental Health	First	Residential and foster care	6 years
Mary	18	Female	Psychology	First	Foster care and supported lodgings	2 ½ years

Table 3. Illustrates the demographics of all participants that took part in the exploratory study. Blank spaces indicate when the participant did not give the information.

3.3 Procedure

Each interview was arranged at a pre-booked room at the university the young person attended. The interview was arranged at a time and date convenient for both the participant and the researcher. The

room was booked through the designated member of staff for care leavers at the university, and at least one week's notice was given in order to ensure a room could be booked. I arrived first to set up the recording equipment, before meeting with the participant at either the room itself or at the reception of the university building the room was booked. The recorder was only switched on if he/she agreed to this. In the pilot interview, this technique appeared to give the participant time to settle and feel comfortable with the interview setting. As an interview is an 'artificial setting' having the recording equipment switched on before the interview starts may alleviate issues concerning artificial settings and could also make the interview feel less formal (Langdridge, 2007). Participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix B). They were then asked to read and sign the consent form to confirm that he/she had fully understood what the research entailed and was aware of their right to withdraw from the study. Time was then given for any questions the participant had. Once the consent form was signed, and the participant was happy to start, the interview began.

Each semi-structured interview lasted roughly an hour. All participants were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding their experiences of educational transitions they may have faced during their educational journey to date. At the end of the interview, there was an informal chat to check that he/she was happy and any concerns he/she had, had been addressed. The type of interview structure used was influenced by the chosen method of analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Semi-structured interviews are commonly adopted in research utilising this form of analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher and analysed through IPA. The method use of semi-structured interviews provided rich data embedded in the description and self-interpretation of particular phenomena.

3.4 Method of Analysis

This research aims to investigate personal experience through interpretative phenomenology as the methodological approach facilitates this form of investigation, as it enables the researcher to explore phenomena from another's perspective (Sadala & Adorna, 2002; Spinelli, 2005; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). The history of this methodology is set out in chapter 5, where the development of transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology and subsequently, the development of hermeneutics (interpretative) are discussed further. The specific form of phenomenology adopted for the doctoral research is embedded in interpretative phenomenology. Interpretative phenomenology is concerned with investigating phenomena, as it is lived, from the perspective of the participant (Langdridge, 2007; Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008; King & Horrocks, 2010). Heidegger (1927) developed interpretative phenomenology, and his work was built upon by Merleau-Ponty (1962). Their work led to the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Smith (1996), which is the method of analysis utilised for the exploratory study. Through the use of IPA, the

researcher attempts to interpret the participant's account of their experience, which in itself is an interpretation of that particular phenomenon, known as a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2009; King & Horrocks, 2010). IPA is concerned with how the individual found his/her experience and what it meant to him/ her, in order to obtain different perspectives on a phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007).

IPA argues that one is not able to view and describe another's experience from an objective point of view, due to one's connection with the world around them. Therefore, it is important when using IPA, that I am reflective of my position within this research and how this may affect how I analyse the data, as a researcher but as a care leaver too (Langdridge, 2007). Interpretative phenomenology was chosen, instead of descriptive phenomenology, due to my position within this research. In addition, IPA is a qualitative methodological approach, and qualitative methods, overall, allow one to explore individual experience from the perspective of the beholder (Smith, 2008). In contrast to quantitative methods, which are primarily concerned with quantifying phenomena rather than attempting to explore them from a variety of perspectives (Langdridge, 2007). Therefore, due to the nature of this research, qualitative methods are more appropriate.

The phenomena investigated for this research are care leavers' experiences of the transition to university. IPA allowed me to explore the individual experience of this phenomenon and then examine the data to look for themes across participant's shared experience of this transition. In order to achieve this, I first engaged in the process of re-familiarisation with the interview data and making any initial notes on the data (King & Horrocks, 2010). Then as themes in the interview transcript became present, I recorded them. Once this stage was completed, I made connections with themes from the other transcripts, which are discussed in section 3.6 (Smith, 1996; Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

3.5 Ethics

Ethical approval for the exploratory research was requested and initially accepted on the 10th March 2011. Documents submitted for the School Research Ethics Panel (SREP) were an information sheet for the participant; a consent form; the interview guide (Appendix C); and a template email that was sent in the initial recruitment of participants. This research was carried out in compliance with the British Psychological Society's (2010) ethical guidelines. The main ethical considerations are confidentiality, anonymity, protection from harm, and right to withdraw. The participants who took part in this research may wish to keep their involvement confidential therefore, everyone who took part was interviewed separately in a booked room that was convenient for the conduction of an interview. Each interview was recorded. However, this recording was only listened to by my supervisors and me. The recordings will be deleted five years after the completion of the PhD.

The findings were reported at conferences and in one journal publication: Bluff et al. (2012). All participants were made aware of the potential for publications before agreeing to take part, and participants were provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity and any identifying information they disclosed. Precautions were in place to prevent participants from incurring any form of harm as a result of this research. For example, if any of the participants had expressed any form of discomfort with the venue that had been chosen, then a new venue would have been located. Once the interview had commenced, if any of the participants expressed any form of emotional discomfort, they would have been asked if they wished to continue, or if they would like a short break. In addition to this, if any participants felt they required any additional support following the interview, telephone numbers were provided in the information sheet for the university counsellor and the student support liaison officer. If a participant wished to withdraw from the research at any point before the write-up, they were informed to contact the researcher and his/her data would be erased from the study.

After ethical approval was granted on the 10th March 2011, the ethics form was amended twice to allow for a larger sample of participants to come forward. These amendments were accepted on the 31st of May 2011 and 16th June 2011. The amendments were made due to a lack of participants responding to the request to take part in the universities stated in the ethics form. One of the universities explained that the lack of participants coming forward was due to there being low numbers of care leaver students at that university. Once the research was extended to include all universities in the UK and students in their first or second years, there was more interest from care leavers to participate in the study.

3.6 Findings

Through the use of IPA, three prominent themes have emerged from the nine interview transcripts for the exploratory research. Each theme relates to the care leaver's transition to university. The first theme discussed is 'care leaver identity', the second; 'positive university role models', and the final theme; 'corporate versus normal parenting'.

3.6.1 Care Leaver Identity

> I'm so embarrassed, is that bad? I'm so embarrassed
> of saying I'm in foster care. (Rhiannon)

Identity relates to whom an individual is and their self-perception of who they are (Côté & Levine, 2002; Woodward, 2004). Some identities can be formed through an individual's actions or from membership to a particular group (Woodward, 2004). The theme 'care leaver identity' illustrates the impact of being in care and the effect this has upon the participants of this study, both personally and

within their educational pursuits. From the extracts, it is apparent that the identity of a 'care leaver' is salient to the participants. In the quote above, Rhiannon shows that she views the label of being in care negatively, to the extent that she is ashamed of this experience. Later in the interview, she says,

> I did know that the news and stuff you hear rubbish things [...] I just didn't want to associate myself with other people that had been through the same thing as me.
> (Rhiannon)

Due to Rhiannon's negative perception of being in care, developed as a result of media influence, she actively rejects her connection with other care leavers as a way of disassociating herself from the stigma of being in care. The disassociation from the stigma of being in care is reflective of Catherine's experience too,

> I never wanted to be seen as a foster child, so what I saw is that foster children weren't usually going to university, so I was going to go to university. (Catherine)

It is evident from Catherine's experience that a contributing factor to her pursuit of higher education is that care leavers do not generally choose this route, demonstrating that Catherine feels that if she associates herself to this identity, this will affect people's views of her potential in education. Bridgette also discussed viewing the label of 'care leaver' as affecting her educational success,

> I think that they must have thought, 'you know she's not going to go,' and I do remember one situation where I was told, 'you know care leavers don't go to university.'" (Bridgette)

Bridgette later explains that the stigma surrounding care leavers and attendance at university had affected her original career path before she applied to higher education,

> I just thought, 'they know what they're talking about,' and so you think [...] 'you're not going to do it,' but it really impacted me because it took me so many years to get past it, you know to kind of think, 'I can do it, I can do it,' but before I was thinking, 'I'll do something that doesn't include getting qualifications. 'So I went to work as a chef because going to college, to do catering, you didn't need qualifications to get in the course to start off with and then you could kind of go on from there but even that I didn't finish because I still had it in the back of mind, "you don't you know, you don't achieve at things like that because it's not something care leavers do". (Bridgette)

Bridgette's opinions on education were shaped around the perceptions of professionals who worked with her during this time. Her experience shows that this stigma of 'care leaver' can affect career choices and educational pursuits, reinforcing the negativity of this identity. The care leaver identity can be argued to inhibit cultural capital, as they only have access to the historical negative stigma

surrounding care leavers accessing university. The participants all referred to negative stigma related to being in care, the impact this had on how they viewed the identity of being a 'care leaver', and how they felt about this being a part of who they are. This issue has not previously been discussed in the background literature.

Furthermore, some care leavers within this research appear to set themselves apart from the perceived expectations of care leavers in general. Through doing this, they could be trying to negotiate with themselves why they have achieved academically, and other care leavers do not, in a productive way to fight against the stigma of low achievement in education, which so often surrounds care leavers and children in care. This time of transition in the participants' lives highlights how the individuals negotiate their past experiences in order to make sense of their educational achievements. Each participant drew upon his/her identity as a 'care leaver' in explaining their journey in education, suggesting this to be an influence within their educational pursuits.

3.6.2 Positive University Role Models

If he can do it, I can do it. It's not impossible. (Gavin)

Role models can be highly influential in an individual's life (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Honeycut & Milliken, 2012). They are people who can be looked up to, admired, and who act as a source of encouragement to succeed (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). The following theme explores the effect positive role models, who have studied at higher education, have on the transition to university of people who have been in care. Many participants in this study discussed knowing someone who had been a significant influence on them in their transition to university. Mary shared an experience of her granddad being her role model in education and discussed the impact this had on her decision to go to university.

> My granddad was my biggest role model, because he went to university at 18, […] did Electronics or something [...] and he loved Open University. If he saw an advert, he'd get dead excited about it, and he'd go to visit Unis, just for like the fun of it. (Mary)

Mary's quote demonstrates the effect that having a role model has had upon her education. Having a positive role model has affected her decision to go to university, illustrating that role models can be important within education. Recent findings produced by Jackson and Cameron (2012b) from the YiPPEE project support these findings. Jackson and Cameron (2012a) argue that exposure to people who have attended higher education and access to role models can be key contributing factors to pursing education. Therefore, a lack of positive role models, in regard to education could potentially be detrimental to those who do not have access to them, limiting their social and cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1977; Vryonides, 2007). Sam's experience is also evidence of a positive university role model, in the form of his stepbrother,

> I looked up to him quite a lot [...], it kind of gave me a bit of umph to go and do it because he was at university, got his degree, he's a dentist now, he's does all sorts of stuff, and it's just something I thought I could go and just do myself, it was my stepbrother that I looked up to and that's why I wanted to go to university. (Sam)

Sam's role model has provided him with the motivation to succeed and attend university. From both Sam's and Mary's experience, it is evident that role models have been important for them in their educational aspirations and pursuits. In Gavin's case, he shared the experience of having a positive care leaver role model, who served to be a source of encouragement for him to go to university,

> Robert explained to me that there were other care leavers here, and my experience [...] was that all care leavers are either pregnant or in prison and there is no other option for you […], and because, coming here, and meeting John, and 'oh my God it's a guy […] that isn't in prison, and that is in Uni,' [...] that filled me with confidence […], and I was like, 'if he can do it, I can do it, it's not impossible. (Gavin)

This quote explains Gavin's encounter with another care leaver through Robert. Robert is the support and liaison officer for care leavers at the university Gavin attends. His opportunity in meeting a care leaver at university gave him a new positive perspective of care leavers.

Before he met John, Gavin had a negative perception of the life outcomes for those who have been in care. In Gavin's case, having a positive care leaver with whom to identify with provides Gavin with a less inhibiting perception about care leavers. Meeting a care leaver at university made him feel that it was a possible path for him to choose. Research conducted by Sowards, O'Boyle and Weissman (2006) supports this finding, and they argue that role models with some form of shared experience can play an important part in providing an individual with 'hope'. Furthermore, Murrell et al. (2009) stress the importance of role models for individuals whose backgrounds may act as a disadvantage to them in their educational pursuits. This theme demonstrates that having positive role models with an experience of going to higher education can offer some explanation as to why some participants accessed university.

3.6.3 Corporate Versus 'Normal' Parenting

> I think in my head I've built it up,
> […], if you've got a mum and a dad, your life's perfect. (Layla)

Parenting is often associated with unconditional love and care for a child (Clarke & Dawson, 1998; Bornstein, 2001). However, when the local authority becomes the 'parent', experiences of parenting appear to differ from this. The final theme from the exploratory study explores care leavers' perceptions of 'normal parenting' and how this differs from their experiences of 'corporate parenting'. Corporate parenting refers to elected members and professionals within a local authority who work with a child or a young person who enters care (Bullock, Courtney, Parker, Sinclair, & Thoborn, 2006). They are responsible for the support they offer to this individual and for their wellbeing (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001; Jackson et al., 2005). The term corporate parent has already been noted as problematic by Jackson and Sachdev (2001). These two words placed together appear to contradict one another, with 'corporate' a term often associated with business, and 'parenting' referring to words such as nurturing and unconditional love (Jackson et al., 2003, 2005). 'Normal parenting' refers to the care leavers' perceptions of parenting. The sample of care leavers' experiences illustrated that there was an imbalance between a care leaver's perception of parenting and the parenting that they received from their 'corporate parents'. An example of this can be seen from Gavin's transcript, in which he explains his experience of going to an interview at university,

> A normal person their mum and dad would be like, "oh your first interview, let's drive you down, oh aren't we excited", sort of thing, sort of making it more fun, than it is an intimidating sort of experience. (Gavin)

Gavin's quote explains his perception of parenting and the parenting he feels an individual who has not been in care, would receive in this situation. Gavin appears to feel disadvantaged because his parenting situation is not 'normal'. 'Normal' is the term he uses to refer to other people who have not been in care. Rhiannon also draws upon differences in parenting from her experience of watching her partner fill out the application form for university with his mother,

> They would sit you down and make you do it in front of your face because [...], I've seen my boyfriend and his Mum, and he'd be like "I'll do it later" and she'll be like "no you'll do it now", sit there and make him fill out an application form. (Rhiannon)

Rhiannon argues her partner receives encouragement in filling out the application forms, and this has not been her experience of parenting. The differences in the parenting that Gavin and Rhiannon encounter are associated by them with their experience of being in care. As illustrated in the first theme of 'care leaver identity', care leavers are already battling with the outside perception that care leavers do not achieve, so this process might serve to discourage them, as they are left feeling different from their peers that have not been in care. It is worth noting, however, that individuals going through this process with no experience of being in care may also not experience this kind of parental

support. The care leavers appear to be constructing their ideal image of parenting, which is not necessarily reflective of the parenting those who have not been in care may experience. Therefore, their perception of parenting appears to be affected by their process of entering care.

Layla's quote below explains how she feels about the parenting she has received,

> You become a number, a case file, and that makes me angry because we're not, we're people, and like social services are meant to be corporate parents, and I look at the way I've been treated, and people that I know have been treated, and I think, if you were actually parents, we should be taken into care by now. (Layla)

From this quote, it is evident that Layla feels 'let down' by her corporate parents and from her perception, she argues that the level of parenting she received would result in being removed from the family home. Throughout the participants' experiences of parenting, it appears that care leavers feel they are disadvantaged through the process of applying for university because of being through the care system and being parented by 'corporate parents'. Bullock et al. (2006) argue that corporate parenting from the state has raised many concerns into whether the state can effectively parent, and they argue that children in care have different parenting requirements to their non-care peers. The parenting children in care require is often complex and reflective of their individual experiences. For example, factors could include: the age in which they enter care, the circumstances surrounding their entry, and involvement with their biological relatives (Bullock et al. 2006). Bullock et al. (2006) argue that placements of good quality can aid the relationship these young people have with their corporate parents, including appropriate matching with foster carers, based on relationships and not just based on the demographic characteristics of the young person and carers.

Furthermore, previous research argues (Ch.2) that the more supportive relationships are for care leavers within their educational pursuits, the more likely they are to attain academic success (Jackson et al., 2005, Cameron, 2007; Driscoll, 2011). Croatian research also reports that educational success can be related to supportive relationships with professionals (Franz & Branica, 2012). In the exploratory study, the participants report a lack of support from their corporate parents, who are one of their primary sources of support. Although the corporate parent relationship may be unsupportive for the care leavers of this study, they do report supportive relationships with other people in their lives, irrespective of their corporate parents.

3.7 Conclusion

The exploratory research demonstrates how the individual background of 'care leaver' has an impact on one's transition to university. From this study, care leavers' experience of the transition to

university appears to be influenced by the identity of 'care leaver', the presence of university role models in their lives, and the nature and level of parenting they receive. Also, care leaver identity appears to permeate all the themes, with participants illustrating that the identity of 'care leaver' has an impact on how they identify with other care leavers and understand 'parenting'. Specifically, within the positive university role models theme, it is evident that role models with experience of attending university can encourage care leavers to pursue education. Furthermore, care leavers' experience of 'corporate' parenting suggests that care leavers feel they are disadvantaged in the parenting they receive, because of the fundamental differences between 'corporate' parenting and what they understand as 'normal' parenting. The findings from the exploratory study informed the conceptual framework of the main study (Ch. 4) and the overall methods (Ch. 6). The main study aims to explore care leavers' transitions to university, through a series of interviews, during the time of this transition.

4. Conceptual Framework

Previous research argues that entry into care alters the life trajectory of a child (Ch. 2). In terms of attainment in education, the future outcomes and implications of being 'looked after' are historically low (Department for Education, 2017b, 2017c). The research on transitions for children in care describes early experiences of transition for children in care as dependent on others: social workers, carers and leaving care workers (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Pinkerton & Doyan, 2007; Berridge, 2017). Furthermore, during times of transition (entry into care, changes in schools and the leaving care), decisions are often decided for them (Jackson & Cameron, 2012a). The PhD explores the concept of transition to higher education for care leavers within the framework of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) and the navigation of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2000) within institutes of higher education. The next section will outline and discuss theories of social and cultural capital and the implications for education, followed by communities of practice theory. Then the current chapter will discuss the use of capital theories combined with communities of practice, followed by the conclusion.

4.1 Social Capital

One of the earliest definitions of social capital is from Bourdieu (1986),

> The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a
> durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance
> or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

For Bourdieu social capital acts as a valuable resource through the relationships and networks an individual forms, relying upon a mutual trust that the individuals in these relationships will provide the support that is required when needed (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes; 1998; Field, 2005; Li Pickles, & Savage, 2005). Furthermore, Coleman (1988) argued, "*like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible*" (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). Being rich in social capital can traditionally provide one with resources to draw upon in a time of need (Coleman, 1988; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2001). The strength of these relationships is crucial in the production of social capital, as access to support can rely upon an obligation to act. The individual approached for help defines his/her obligation to act (Coleman,1988; Field, 2005). For those individuals outside of the group where a specific form of social capital is available, this can lead to exclusion from this capital (Portes, 1998). Putman (1995) argues that the family is an integral and crucial part in the formation of social capital. Furthermore, Li at al. (2005) argue that the capacity to form trust connects variables of social class, age, and gender.

Many theorists have proposed the argument that social and cultural capital is more accessible to individuals from the more privileged social class backgrounds; middle-class and higher-class (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998). Historically, there are multiple factors in the development and influence of social capital (Field, 2005). For education and transition, an influence of social capital could be, having a social connection who has personal experience of this time, and can act as a resource in the preparation stages of transitioning to university. It could also relate to having someone with the resources to help attendance to open days and interviews if the individual does not have the psychical resources themselves (money or a car). Social capital can come in many forms and can be as beneficial as economic capital in the above circumstances (Coleman, 1988).

4.2 Cultural Capital

In contrast to social capital, cultural capital refers to the knowledge, values, resources, and habits accessed through the traditions of the family environment (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; Sullivan, 2001). Cultural capital becomes part of the habitus for Bourdieu (1977),

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material
> conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus […]
> (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72)

The habitus is the built-in dispositions that form due to our lived experiences and social connection with the world (Bourdieu, 1977). The notion of cultural capital developed from research by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and was further developed by Bourdieu (1979, 1986) through his exploration of the inequalities of achievements in education. In Bourdieu's (1986) research on the influence of social class on attainment in education, he argued that cultural capital played an integral part in a child's opportunities in education and the success they achieve in academia. Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital as consisting of three states; *'the embodied'* (self-development), *'the objectified'* (material resources), and *'the institutionalised'* (pre-existing cultural resources through the family and social ties). The embodied capital has '*external wealth*'. This form of wealth is part of the '*habitus',* and unlike capital that has monetary value, it is not provided instantly to another. Emotional capital is a characteristic of the embodied state described by Bourdieu (1986). Leavitt (1996) argues*, "socialised human bodies, bodies that normally exist as groups and in interaction rather than as isolated entities, have their being in recurrent situations that call forth the meaning/feeling responses we recognise as emotions"* (Leavitt, 1996, pp. 524-525). Thus, Emotional capital is culturally acquired. Zembylas (2007) argues that emotional capital originates from 'affect'. He defines affect as

> Something first experienced in the body and then named and re-experienced through
> social relations and culture. According to this view, for example, the basic affects of

anger, fear, disgust and so on are universal and embodied but cultural experiences
and social interpretations of the embodiment of emotions allow much variation
(Zembylas, 2007, p. 445).

Emotions can *'move'* or be *'moved'*. Ahmed (2004) frames this example with the difference between 'anxiety' and 'fear'. For Vorhies, Davis, Frounkeller, and Kaiser (2012) the embodied cultural capital, for young people in care can relate *"to the ability to exhibit appropriate behaviour and to adhere to norms"* (Vorhies et al., 2012, p. 267). Those in continuous and consistent employment exhibited awareness of expected behaviour within the workplace. Vorhies et al. (2012) argue that sources of cultural capital can develop within employment, with the participants of their study, demonstrating knowledge of the expected behaviours they should exhibit within the workforce. However, only those who had continuous stable employment were able to exhibit and act in these culturally expected ways. The research by Vorhies et al. (2012) can have applications for transitions in education. Knowing how to act and behave educational settings could support transitions in education. In contrast, *'the objectified state'* of cultural capital refers to material resources that hold cultural significance and have value within them. These material resources can include books, pictures and art (Bourdieu 1986).

'The institutional state' (institutional habitus) is the ingrained dispositions of the family and social connections. In research exploring the transition to higher education and the role of *'institutional habitus'*, McDonough (1997) argued that where a student had no family tradition of entering higher education, guidance teachers were instrumental in providing support and advice of this process. However, Smyth and Bank (2012) explored decision-making in the transition to university. Focusing again on the *'institutional habitus'*, they argued that not all young people had access to the same levels of university information. Concerning children in care, research by Martin and Jackson (2002) explored the educational achievement of care leavers, exploring the impact of the professionals around them, concluding that many of the professionals working in children's residential homes had not proceeded past further education. Through their primary interactions, these young people had limited access to institutional habitus for higher education.

Vryonides (2007) argues that an individual's primary source of cultural capital is the home environment. Limited access to people who hold high educational qualifications could potentially reduce a young person's access to strong values towards education, inhibiting their access to this form of cultural capital. The exploratory study highlighted the importance of positive care leaver role models for several of the participants. Hence the exploratory work highlighted the importance of available resources in social and cultural ties for these young people. Johansson and Hojer, (2012), as part of the YiPPEE project, were the first to explore social and cultural capital theory directly in the understanding of the educational choices and academic attainment of children in care. Johansson

and Hojer (2012) argue that some of the young people who participated in this research, did not have the opportunity to attain social and cultural capital, which reflected the ease of their educational pursuits. The identity of care leaver can then affect the amount of social capital available to an individual, which could be due to their ability to trust. The care leaver identity may reflect their opportunity to develop social capital in comparison to their non-care peers. Johansson and Hojer (2012) argue that educational identity is a characteristic of cultural capital and connects cultural and social capital. The learner identity characterises the academic attainment of familial connections, possessions of cultural value (book), and the family's interest and habits. These theoretical perspectives could provide a way of conceptualising the potential difficulties experienced by care-leavers in their transition to university (Johansson & Hojer, 2012).

4.3 Social Capital and Cultural Capital

Capital in the social sciences refers to resources that are available to an individual. For more than four decades, social capital and cultural capital have been influential in the field of social sciences. Social capital exists within social networks and relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Immandoust, 2011). It develops between people who share familiar ground and connect through common social ties (Field, 2005). In contrast, cultural capital refers to the resources accessed through a person's family background, knowledge, and material possessions that hold cultural value (books, art, and pictures) (Bourdieu, 1986; Barone, 2006). Both social and cultural capital have applications for a variety of social phenomena: education (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2001; Barone, 2006; Vryonides, 2007; Johansson & Hojer, 2012), civic engagement (Putman, 1995), health (Bassani, 2008), and Technology (Bian & Leung 2014). Several of the crucial thinkers of social and cultural capital originate from the works of Bourdieu, Coleman, Putman, and Portes. These theorists have written extensively on the applications and implications for a broader evolving societal context.

Prior to the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1986), capital resources were seen in terms of monetary value (economic), referring to physical possessions, cash, and investments. For Bourdieu (1986), capital can come in many forms: economic, social, and symbolic (cultural) and can affect how people act (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Bourdieu's (1977) theory developed from anthropological work using a structuralist approach. Structuralism is the study of structure in society that leads to the way people act and is based on the assumption that there is a pattern to behaviour within social structures (examples include: tribes and religious organisations) (Runciman, 1969). The results he found did not coincide with the predicted way of acting for people in general, in line with motivations and rules of the social structure of which they were a part (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's (1977) work led to the development of the 'theory of practice'. His 'theory of practice' was the start of a new conceptual framework, which outlined social and cultural capital. Based on his empirical work, Bourdieu (1977,

1986) theorised that social and cultural capital could be just as influential as economic capital, and additionally, could be interlinked between one form of capital to the other. Bourdieu (1986) argued that all three forms of capital could influence an individual's motivation to act and his/her overall experiences, including ease and opportunities in education. Social capital, cultural capital and emotional capital can provide explanations to care leavers' transitions in education.

4.4 Communities of Practice

The development of communities of practice theory began with Situated Learning Theory (SLT) devised by Lave and Wenger (1990). SLT argues that learning is unintentional ('legitimate peripheral participation') and is involvement, culture, and context specific. SLT arose from Vygotsky's (1967) concept of social development, where he argued the importance of social interaction in learning. Wenger (1998, 2000) identifies a community of practice as a collection of people with shared goals and shared interests on a particular topic. Also, Wenger-Trayner (2015) argues that communities of practice must possess three essential elements; 'The Domain', 'The Community', and 'The Practice'. The domain refers to the collective of individuals sharing common goals and interests and is central to its identity and purpose. The production of the practice develops from the sharing of knowledge and information (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Members develop a shared pool of resources to draw upon in shared practice (Snyder & Wenger, 2010). A community of practice goes further than a group of people with shared ideals, goals, and interests (Wenger, 1998). Its members not only share common interests but unite in sharing knowledge and resources, supporting one another in a shared enterprise (Snyder & Wenger, 2010). Membership in a community of practice entails regular engagement with one another (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). For example, academics will form together to develop forums to discuss specific topics of study and research, that will often lead to co-authored research papers and the developments of conferences (Wenger, 2000).

Communities of practice theory argue that people develop in communities, sharing, developing, and utilising knowledge between them through interaction with people in a similar role; work, institutes of education, and hobbies (Wenger, 2000). Communities of practice can define an entire sphere of learning and can be present in many environments (Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, Van de Putte, & Van Hove, 2010). Communities of practice are a useful tool in sharing information across practitioners, students and people with similar interests and goals alike (Wenger, 2000). These interactions support the development of new, emerging, and existing identities (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice offer useful resources to its members, although they can change. Members can become less active for many reasons. A community of practice has its own identity that is synonymous with membership and practice (Wenger, 1998). It connects 'belonging' to 'becoming' through learning in a community (Wenger, 2000). Also, the theory of communities of practice has had multiple implications for health research and practice. Kilbride (2011) explored the benefits of a community of practice for survivors of

a stroke and their recovery process. Furthermore, Kislov, Harvey, and Walshe (2011) critically examined the effectiveness of communities of practice between establishments of higher education and the National Health Service (NHS).

4.5 Education, Transition, and Communities of Practice

As a student enters university, they enter a culture of traditions and practices. Higher education institutes are rich in communities of practice: from communities formed to address topics of shared interest, to discussions with colleagues or fellow students during lunch (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Research has sought to theorise the complexities in understanding student transition to higher education; exploration of class (Wakeling, 2005), international status (hall & Wai-Ching Sung, 2009). Some research has explored the effectiveness of parents and teachers working together as a community of practice to support students with intellectual disabilities (Mortier et al., 2010). Research by Mortier et al. (2010) discusses the use of a community of practice that originated from the shared interest of inclusion for three school children with 'intellectual disabilities' (the domain). They met regularly to share experiences and practice they had encountered (the community) and then implemented the ideas for practice in the classroom setting (the practice). Several studies have applied communities of practice theory in order to explore transition in education (Clarke, 2008; Euerby & Burn,2012; Mortier et al., 2010). For Wenger (2010), learning informs the development of identity and knowledge. As a student, this could involve joining research groups on topics that interest him/her, with 'like-minded' individuals. Several theorists have developed and adapted the traditional communities of practice theory developed by Wenger (1998) to education. Clarke (2008) adopted the theory of communities of practice to professionals to produce a 'Professional Online District' (POD) to share knowledge, information, and devise teaching tools (the practice'). They then distributed these tools amongst the virtual learning environment they are developing as a collective of teachers (the community). In a similar study, Euerby and Burn (2012) devised a 'domain-community model' to support virtual social engagement. In a world of growing technical resources, the process of sharing information and knowledge has progressed significantly and is continuing to develop and evolve.

4.6 Capital and Communities of Practice

> I propose the process of 'plug-and-play' among theories as a way to think of progress in social theory. The idea is that in the social sciences, the best theories are well-shaped pieces of a puzzle, rather than a grand unifying theory (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, 2016, p. 6).

Social capital, in its very essence, shares many similarities to the fundamentals of communities of practice theory and co-exists within communities of practice. These two theories complement one another. Social capital is the shared repertoire gained from the connection with the community of practice they associate, which can further aid the development of cultural capital through shared habits and practices. A community of practice can foster the development of social and cultural capital outside of the family. In turn, communities of practice can be a resource of social capital through the communities formed with like-minded people, and if the practice is continuous and participation is active, inevitably cultural capital forms.

4.7 Conclusion

The exploratory study (Ch. 3) highlights the role the care leaver identity plays in the transition to higher education, particularly the available resources to a care leaver during this time. The uncovering of identity as a theme in the preliminary research has led to the need for theoretical exploration of identity management, development, and formation in a care leaver's transition to higher education. Both theories have implications for identity, transition, and education. The conceptual framework draws upon theories of social and cultural capital and communities of practice theory, exploring identity and the transition to higher education (Ch. 9). Much of the research on identity and transition explores the newly achieved identity of an undergraduate or postgraduate student. The research does not explore the complexities of managing this newly emerging transition alongside complex pre-existing identities, like the identity of 'care leaver', which highlights a need to move from the understanding of transition, in general, to the concept of theorising transition in education for individuals from specific backgrounds.

Social and cultural capital explains the resources and inherent dispositions the participants have and how these interplay and effect the transition to higher education. For example, research has argued that trust can impact the development of social capital. For care leavers, their previous experiences of trust may affect their ability to rely on others and place any trust within them. They could form a resistance to developing social trust and consequently developing their social capital. Social capital is what an individual can bring to a social situation. It connects human interaction and the purpose this serves to those involved in a particular exchange. Care leavers' social capital may affect their social standing through the application of the label 'care leaver'. The social capital a care leaver may have may differ from someone who has no experience of being in care. Furthermore, communities of practice can also act as a resource in the transition to higher education if people choose to participate in these communities. These theories are adopted to explore the participants' transition to university (Ch. 9).

5. Methodology

The methodological approach is central to critically examining the research questions and informing the overall analytical method(s) adopted for a study. The methodology chapter will discuss the philosophical traditions of the main study, detailing both methodological approaches that form the overall pluralistic design of the main study; hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative. This chapter will begin with the ontological and epistemological positions of the main study. The chapter will then discuss the first methodological approach adopted; phenomenology, and its research application, followed by a critique and justification for pluralism, referring to the main longitudinal study. The chapter will then conclude with the second analytical approach; narrative analysis.

5.1 Contextual Constructionism

Nietzsche (1895) argues that the existence of truth itself is undiscoverable. Truth is not universal; multiple interpretations can be elicited and depicted from a particular experience, which can be impacted by a variety of external influences (Deurzen-Smith, 1997). A contextual constructionist assumes that any given phenomenon elicits more than one interpretation. The interpretation is reliant on external factors, which are specific to the researcher's position and the overall context in which experience is 'granted' (Madill et al., 2000; Van Manen, 2007; King, 2011). The approach of a constructionist is that the mind is not the discoverer of knowledge and truth, rather that these entities are created through influences outside of the mind in cultural contexts (Burnigham & Cooper,1999). Contextual constructionism is a focus on the external influences of the research environment and the researcher's position (Sullivan, 2009). It forms the assumption that individual factors and external sources can impact one's construction or recollection of a specific event or situation (Burnigham & Cooper,1999). Individual factors include age, gender, social position, and external influences which can range from the weather, the mood of the interviewee and the researcher, cultural background or practices (Madill et al., 2000). In line with the theoretical orientation of the main study, contextual constructionism highlights that the recollection of events always reflects the cultural and external context.

The main study rejects an objectivist approach to understanding phenomena and focuses upon how an experience can hold meaning for the individual, and therefore, how they make sense of this experience (Sullivan, 2009). The person chooses how they recall that specific experience and how they present it too. Furthermore, contextual constructionism also focuses on the researcher's position and the effect this could have upon the research process. Ontologically, contextual constructivism rejects the notion that there is a single "reality" separate from the researcher's perspective on it. Both methodological approaches used in this thesis (interpretative phenomenology and narrative) adopt

interpretative approaches to understanding the meaning of individual experiences and narratives, and therefore represent contextual constructionism.

Within, and specific to narrative research, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the telling of a particular story. Salmon and Riessman (2008) argue that narratives are co-constructed by the person telling the story and through the context in which experience took place, for example, who was present and where it happened. Frost (2009) argues that the telling of a story is as important as the story's content, and therefore the telling of these stories is context specific. The influence of context highlights the importance of remaining reflective within the research process. Also, the researcher must remain reflective to ensure he/she is aware of his/her overall influence on the recollection of the participant's story. Like narrative, hermeneutic phenomenology assumes that all data is subjective, and requires the researcher to remain reflective of their position and the effect it could have on the research. Issues and discussions on reflexivity will be discussed in chapter nine. Both approaches, narrative and hermeneutic phenomenology, reflect contextual constructionism, as the researcher seeks to understand the effect context has upon the recollection of an individual's story or experience.

5.2 Phenomenology

5.2.1 Introducing Phenomenology: Descriptive Phenomenology and Husserl

Phenomenology can be dated back to the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), where the first form of phenomenology developed. Husserl's (1900/1970) method focused on eliciting the 'objective truth' from experience through describing phenomena as they appear to an individual's consciousness, without the influence of the researcher's prior knowledge. Husserl's approach, also known as transcendental or descriptive phenomenology, argues that phenomena need to be stripped back to their essential forms, taking away any form of judgement, prejudice or pre-formed stereotypes, in order to discover and describe its true essence, objectively and in its purest, 'pre-reflective' form (Husserl, 1970). Husserl sought to study the phenomenon in question from an objective point of view, returning to what he described as the 'natural lifeworld', the world as it is in its natural form. Husserl's (1980) method of phenomenology focuses on eliciting the 'noesis' (subjective experience), from the 'noema' (objective experience), aiming to return to the essence of the phenomenon itself, before any pre-supposed explanations, sought from cultural, social or religious explanations one may hold of a particular experience or phenomenon. Hence, Husserl's construction of phenomenology is concerned with both what is experienced (the noema) and how it is experienced (the noesis), it is the inevitable relationship between these two that constitutes intentionality. One of the fundamental principles in the development of Husserl's approach to phenomenology is the concept of intentionality. Brentano (1874) initially coined the term intentionality, and Brentano's work focused on developing a method in

psychology that was scientific. Husserl adopted Brentano's work and adapted this into his theory of phenomenology. Intentionality, for Brentano, relates to the notion that the mind and world are interconnected, one cannot exist without the other (Deurzen-Smith, 1997). Husserl goes further in his depiction of intentionality, explaining that intentionality is not only an inability to separate our consciousness from the world but is also responsible for how we behave and act in the world. For Husserl, experience is understood by investigating things 'as they appear', 'the true essence' (Husserl, 1970).

The process in which Husserl argued phenomena could be explored at its essence was the method of phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1913). The Husserlian method of phenomenological reduction involves the process of bracketing (Epoche). Bracketing is the technique of stripping experience of pre-formed understandings and perceptions, to avoid approaching experience through common everyday ways of perceiving (Dowling, 2007). Bracketing is what initially made phenomenology a research endeavour as opposed to a philosophical one (Moran, 2000). The next Husserlian method is imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the description of the essential structures of the phenomenon, that without which it cannot exist. The process involves the understanding of the phenomenon from varying perspectives to find the structures of the phenomenon which are vital to its essence (Dowling, 2007). Whilst in the process of imaginative variation, the question is asked, is this phenomenon the same if elements are added or deleted? The researcher remains in this process, examining varying scenarios of the phenomenon to find its true elements. Phenomenological reduction aims to uncover the true essence of the phenomenon in question, how it appears to an individual consciously, before pre-impositions and pre-formed judgements, which may develop through the influence of common everyday views, cultural influences, and scientific ways of understanding the world and experience(s).

Husserl's work was introspective and involved his own descriptions of phenomena, which led to a considerable amount of debate and the development of alternative approaches in descriptive phenomenology, in particular the method devised by Giorgi (1997). The core difference separating Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological method to that of Husserl's is the addition of descriptions of experiences from other people, not just the researcher. The main aim is to attempt to alleviate the analysis being subject to 'an undetected bias', and therefore, more descriptions of a phenomenon from differing perspectives are explored, not just one person, to find the commonality amongst these descriptions (Les Todres, 2005). The eventual aim is to find generalisations among the set of data and formulate patterns and themes that transcend the data set. The analytical process following data collection requires the researcher to bracket their preconceptions, to the best of their ability, of the phenomenon in question, by immersing themselves through the process of reading and re-reading the descriptions of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). The description is grounded in the

context it presents itself within (Les Todres, 2005). Furthermore, Polkinghorne (1983) argues for a dual-stage process to 'phenomenological reduction'; 'free imaginative variation' and 'intentional analysis'. Intentional analysis is the turn to the essence of the experience by describing the construction of the experience.

Husserl's work also led to a considerable amount of debate amongst the scholars that succeeded him, not just those who argued the 'noesis' could be subtracted from the 'noema', through a method grounded within descriptive phenomenology (Les Todres & Galvin, 2005). Furthermore, many of Husserl's successors in the tradition of phenomenology questioned the researcher's ability to detach themselves from their pre-derived conceptions of a phenomenon fully. The criticisms of the descriptive method, aimed at finding the true essence in its pre-reflective form, led to the move towards hermeneutic phenomenology (Spinelli, 2005; Langdridge, 2007; King & Horrocks, 2010).

5.2.2 The Turn to Hermeneutic phenomenology

> How does one put out of play everything one knows about an experience that one has
> selected for study? If we simply try to forget what we already "know", we may find that
> the presuppositions persistently creep into our reflections (Van Manen, 1990, p.47)

In the Greek language, hermeneutics refers to interpretation and translation. Hermeneutics in phenomenology originated from the work of Heidegger (1927) and marked the beginning of existentialism in phenomenology. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, was amongst the first to debate Husserl's approach to understanding phenomena, arguing that we are unable to view and describe phenomena from an objective point of view, due to our inability to fully detach from our connection with the world around us, therefore breaking away from the Husserlian method of phenomenology. Other methods like grounded theory seek to uncover 'truths' whilst hermeneutic phenomenology desires to uncover essential meanings of phenomena. For Heidegger (1927) phenomena require interpretation, not just description, and he focuses on the 'daesin' (being there'). The focus on the 'daesin' saw the development of interpretative methods in phenomenology, notably the turn towards hermeneutic phenomenology. Following Heidegger's (1927) move to interpretative methods in phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty (1962) developed upon the ideas of Heidegger and argued that one could never be entirely 'free of the world'. Therefore, the world helps shapes who we are. Interpretative phenomenologists reject the notion that a person's experience can be only categorised and described, presenting the argument that all attempts to elicit meaning are interpretations (Dowling, 2007; Langdridge, 2007; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; King & Horrocks, 2010). Hermeneutic phenomenology builds upon the practice of description to develop the art of interpretation.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1983) approach to hermeneutics is rooted in his early scholarly research into the work of Aristotle and Plato and from being a scholar under the teachings of Heidegger. Gadamer's (1983) approach to phenomenology developed from the work of Heidegger concurring the rejection of exploring experience through the Husserlian method of descriptive phenomenology, arguing that our prejudices and preconceptions are a crucial part of interpretation that form the process of making meaning of an experience. Gadamer (1998) argues that practice rather than theory can provide meaning in life, and Gadamer sought to discover 'being' through language. Gadamer (1983) viewed the concept of prejudice as crucial to the understanding of experiences and phenomena, and through our own pre-judgments is where we elicit meaning. Unlike Husserl, and in corroboration of Heidegger, Gadamer's method to phenomenology highlighted the importance of interpretation. Therefore, Gadamer's (1975) approach pays attention to how the phenomenon appears, whilst also being interpretative due to the underlying principle that all phenomena are open to interpretation. Gadamer's (1975) approach to the hermeneutic circle goes one step further, and researchers using this particular method are to engage more vigorously with their research participants in gaining feedback throughout the research process. The horizon of the interpreter and the phenomenon being studied are combined (Rapport, 2005).

5.2.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology Applied to Research

Phenomenology of practice is an ethical corrective of the technological and calculative modalities of contemporary life. It finds its source and impetus in practical phenomenologies of reading and writing that open up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, self and other, interiorities and exteriorities, between who we are and how we act (Van Manen, 2007, p. 12).

At the core of phenomenological research are the nature and the meaning of phenomena. There are several approaches that the researcher can adopt when utilising an interpretative phenomenological framework. In the exploratory study, which led to the development of the main study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted and applied to the process of acquiring and analysing the experiences of care leavers in their transition to higher education. This method, developed by Smith, Flowers and Osbourne (1997), aims to explore phenomena from the perspective of the individual experiencing it, in how it felt, and, in turn, what it meant. The researcher undergoes the process of a 'double hermeneutic'. The method of IPA entails that the researcher gains accounts of experience and then begins the process of making sense of the individual's experience from their perspective, whilst also taking into account the researcher's position and preconceptions, and the impact this has upon the research and analytical process. For Ricouer (1970), the combination of

description and hermeneutics was essential to his position in phenomenology, alongside the open process of remaining reflective and adopting the position that all accounts are open to interpretation. One must consider the position of the author in their interpretations of other people's experiences critically (Ricouer, 1970). Ricouer (1970) referred to this as the 'hermeneutic critique'. Ricoeur's approach adopts two forms of hermeneutics, the 'hermeneutics of meaning' and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. The hermeneutics of meaning refers to obtaining an account of experience as it presents itself and the hermeneutics of suspicion adopts theory to understanding this particular experience.

Data in phenomenological research relates to the Greek singular word 'datum' meaning a thing 'given' or 'granted' (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen argues that for phenomenological research, the term data refers to 'lived experience'. 'Lived experience' is something provided by the one experiencing it. Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology developed through his research on pedagogy. Van Manen (1990) argues that phenomenology is crucial to understanding the experience(s) of working and living with children, which saw the development of his approach to hermeneutic phenomenology. At the centre of Van Manen's approach to phenomenology are four life existentials (Dowling, 2007). Van Manen (1990) argues that these life existentials together form the structural elements to the lifeworld that each individual experience. These four life existentials are 'lived space' (spaciality), 'lived body' (corporeality), 'lived time' (temporality), and 'lived other' (relationality or communality). Van Manen (1990) defines 'lived space' or 'felt space' as the space that one is aware of, and that has an impact upon them, although we do not typically reflect upon this. For example, using a lift may create the feeling of being trapped or closed in. The person experiencing this is aware of how a particular environment automatically feels to them. 'Lived body' is our presence physically in the world, referring to the impact of our bodily presence in interactions with others. 'Lived time' is not objective, rather is the reference to time in a subjective manner and how time feels to an individual, as going fast or slow depending on their experience of the 'what' they are partaking. Hence, 'lived time' is the impact of past experiences on the present, the present on the future, and the past and present on the future. Van Manen (1990) argues that previous experiences can alter the present and future transitions. The fourth and final existential, 'lived other' is the interpersonal space in which we maintain our interactions with others. These existentials were initially introduced by Merleau-Ponty and employed by Van Manen (1990), and together they form the 'hermeneutic circle'. All four existentials interplay with one another and impact how we experience things in the present and, or, reflections on past and future experiences.

Van Manen combines descriptive with hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the process of surrendering to understanding the influences related to a particular interpretation or interpretations of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen takes into consideration external influences on how experience is interpreted and understood. These life

essentials inform research and together form a fusion of horizons of the hermeneutic circle. These four existentials are adopted for the main study alongside Van Manen's (1990) six research practices to studying 'lived experience';

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;

3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon; and

6. Balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole.

5.3 Narrative Analysis

5.3.1 Introducing Narrative Analysis

Storytelling is universal; it is a common everyday practice in society (Nelson, 1989). Over the last two decades, narrative analysis has become an increasingly popular choice of analytical approach in human health and social sciences research (Riessman, 2000, 2000; 2005; Beal, 2013; Rejno, Berg & Danielson, 2013). In concurrence with Van Manen (1990) and his approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, narrative analysis also adopts an idiographic approach, focusing upon the individual and what their experience means to them (Somers & Gibson, 1993).

A narrative is a primary way in which we make sense of our experience and the world around us. Narratives are defined by the structure and organisation of events told by individuals and groups (Riessman, 2000). The telling of the events can often be audience and situation specific (Riessman, 2003). Narratives are often drawn upon by an individual for guidance or knowledge on how to act and behave in a particular situation (Somers & Gibson, 1993). There are both social and cultural influences in story formation (Schiffrin, 1996). Cultural influences in recollecting stories are argued to be a way of globally positioning that specific experience (Bamberg & Marchman, 1991). In addition to globally situating an experience, Schiffrin (1984) argues that stories are positioned locally too, and therefore, the retelling of an experience is often dependent on the listener, the current environment, and the purpose or aim of the story. Riessman (1993) argues that our access to an individual's experience comes in numerous forms that do not always depict truth or accuracy. Instead, they provide us with the storyteller's representation; what they want to tell us and in the way they want to tell it (Schiffrin, 1984). Riessman (1993) argues that it is a common conception that to share a story

with another is not always an easy or pleasant experience and due to the nature of a story the storyteller may encounter great difficulty when sharing their story. Therefore, the telling of the story, and how one chooses to share their story, is ultimately within their frame of reference, informed by the nature of the social, cultural, emotional, or situational influences, in which they choose to draw.

5.3.2 The Development of Narrative Analysis

There are several forms of narrative analysis, each achieving different objectives. Three conventional approaches of narrative analysis include content and thematic; structural, and analysis; and identity (King & Horrocks, 2010). White (1973) argues for four archetypal plots in the formation of stories: tragedy, satire, romance, and comedy. More recent research has suggested seven archetypal plots to storytelling: 'Overcoming the Monster', 'Rags to Riches', 'The Quest', 'Voyage and Return', 'Comedy', 'Tragedy', and 'Rebirth' (Booker, 2004). Booker (2004) argues that not all stories conform to one plot and often represent a combination of several, if not all, of the basic archetypal plots. Plummer (2013) refers to these plots as 'narrative forms' (p210), which include White's (1973) four archetypal plots and several others, for example, melodrama, farce, gossip, anecdotes and jokes. Literary models of narrative analysis argue that there are three essential components of this analytical approach: first is temporality, second is causation, and third is human interest. These three things, when placed together, are argued by theorists of literary models to form the bare essentials of any plot.

One of the earliest researchers in narrative analysis is William Labov (Labov & Waletsky, 1967). Labov's (1972) approach to narrative analysis follows an event-focused framework where the story forms through a series of events. However, a key flaw to the Labovian approach is that it does not recognise the influence of context on the construction of individual personal narratives (Andrews et al., 2008). The main study adopts a contextual constructionist framework, this renders the Labovian approach insufficient for the data set and unable to meet the epistemological questions of the main study. Andrews et al. (2008) argue that contrary to a focus upon events that form the Labovian approach to narrative structures, a component to narrative that is neglected by Labov is the individual constructing their identity or themselves to the listener.

Furthermore, Squire (2008) expresses a preference for and a shift to researching narratives as stories represented by experiences, instead of stories formed by events. Riessman (2000) argues that there is no one exact way to carry out a narrative analysis. The researcher has freedom in how they adopt narrative analysis for their research. The researcher can combine one or more methods of narrative analysis, if required, for the research process. Previous researchers and philosophers grounded in the narrative academic discipline have historically adopted the position of narrative as 'representational', as opposed to narrative being 'ontological'; many narrative theorists later disputed this. Hence, narrative was once argued as the telling of past stories that were defined as a representation of

knowledge. In contrast, theorists within the human and health sciences propose that stories develop from everyday social life, demonstrating narrative as a way of studying life and existence, which is highly prevalent to ontology (Somers and Gibson, 1993).

5.3.3 Identity and Narrative

> The form of our stories (their textual structure), the content of our stories (what we tell about), and our story-telling behavior (how we tell our stories) are all sensitive indices not just of our personal selves, but also of our social and cultural identities. (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 170).

To engage in the act of storytelling is argued to develop the story teller's sense of who they are (Polkinghorne, 1989). The storyteller chooses how they wish to present who they are to the listener (Schiffrin, 1996). Schiffrin (1996) argues that through this process, the individual draws upon expectations of how they should act or behave in the situation he/she is foretelling, both culturally and socially. As the individual locates themselves in relation to these expectations, their *"identities as social beings emerge"* (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 170). Bamberg (2010) argues that an individual's identity is often in transit, and within their story, their identity is continuously subject to develop or change. To truly study action in social life, key conceptual notions of identity and ontology must not be overlooked (Somers & Gibson, 1993). Somers and Gibson (1993) argued the importance of bridging the gap between narrative and identity. Many narrative researchers argue that an individual construct their identity through the stories they tell and the way they frame and present themselves (Somers and Gibson, 1993; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Bamberg, 2010, 2011). Identity is salient in most narrative research, and narrative can take an in-depth individual approach to explore identity (Somers & Gibson, 1993). Narrative analysis provides the perfect way of exploring the highly prevalent theme of 'care leaver identity' and 'identity' in general.

5.3.4 Narrative Approach Adopted for the Main Study

In relation to the current research, there are several key studies adopting narrative analysis on transitional data (Nosek, Kennedy, & Gudmondsdottir, 2012; Rhodes & Bivol, 2012; Hernandez-Martinez & Williams, 2013; Hennings, Froggatt, & Payne, 2013; Ballem & Macintosh, 2013). Instead of following a specific narrative structure, the current study will utilise several key elements defined by Plummer (2013) as assisting in narrative understanding. Plummer (2013) argues that gaining a narrative understanding will inevitably lead to gaining 'narrative wisdom'. Plummer (2013) outlines these specific elements that may be present in a person's story; narrative understanding, narrative meanings, narrative others and dialogue, narrative flow, narrative embodiment and sensualisation,

narrative inequalities, narrative space and global narratives, and narrative power. The above categories split into two key sections which are 'inner life' and 'outer life'. Plummer (2013) states that *"narrative understanding involves inspecting both the inner and outer life of stories"* (p. 213). Concentrating on the inner life of stories demonstrates the emergence and presence of a story within a text. Following Plummer (2013), the inner life story contains the plot(s), archetypes, storyline, themes, characters, and mythologies. On the other hand, the outer life story explores the impact and position this story has in the wider society (narrative reality), including where the story is heard, who read it, the effect it has, and its overall connection with wider structures.

The main study adopts the use of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative analysis to attempt to focus on and recognise the individual experience in the transition to university. The large amount of data produced from the main study enabled the exploration of patterns and themes across the data through hermeneutic phenomenology and detailed case studies, analysed through narrative analysis. Furthermore, narrative analysis allows me to explore each participant's key story content across the three interviews, investigating what is specifically salient to their transition that may not necessarily be present across the other participants, but played a crucial part in their experience(s). Together, these analytical approaches fortify one another. Interpretative phenomenology provides an understanding of the nature of lived experience during the transition to higher education for all the participants of the study. Narrative analysis adds the perspective of a more in-depth exploration of selected cases, which enables the way stories of transition and care leaver identity are constructed. Hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative analysis are both methodologies rooted within interpretative frameworks.

5.4 Pluralism

Pluralism in psychology has most commonly been applied to mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative, and more recently, mixed methodologies. Mixed methodologies examine individual data and experiences from different analytical perspectives (Frost 2006, Frost, Nolas, Brooks-Gordon, Esin, Holt, Mehdizadeh & Shinebourne, 2010; Frost & Nolas, 2011). Mixed methods are becoming increasingly practised within research in the human and health sciences, with examples including research in the community (May, Hunter, &y Jason, 2017), practices in psychotherapy (Slife & Gantt, 1999), and healthcare. May et al. (2017) argue that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods pays attention to context and multiple interpretations of context, and Frost (2006) argues that the same applies to the practice of mixed methodologies (Frost, 2006). For Frost (2006), pluralistic approaches to data provide a more in-depth analysis, with multiple perspectives arising on the data analysed.

Research before Frost (2006) focused upon addressing the gap between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Wiggins, 2009), although more recently the approach of adopting mixed traditions, philosophical underpinnings, and analytical methodologies, has received more attention (Frost, 2006; Frost et al., 2010). Frost et al. (2010) explored the strengths and limitations to using mixed methodological approaches, with differing philosophical and theoretical traditions within qualitative research. Together they founded 'The Pluralism in Qualitative Research Project (PQR)'. Frost et al. (2010) adopted multiple analytical approaches (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Narrative Analysis, and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis) to their data. The findings demonstrated that multiple methodologies provided similar themes across each analytical technique, whilst also providing unique interpretations due to being situated in a variety of epistemological and ontological beliefs. Each interpretation provides a different way of looking at phenomena, and a deeper understanding of experience. The use of mixed methodologies is innovative in providing insights to data that one alone may not achieve.

5.5 Conclusion

The main study adopts the approach that narrative and hermeneutic phenomenology are located by the assumption that people construct their own experiences in the way that they choose. The construction of their story could be true to them, or they could be telling a story as a co-construction of the presence of the researcher or listener. Furthermore, experiences and narrative will be impacted by the context of the story formation and societal and cultural views that feed into it (Hogan, Huff, Moore, Watson, & Bunkers, 1990). Moreover, our interpretation must be carefully considered for our own position in society, leading the researcher to consider the effect their position may have on the construction of their interpretation.

Narrative analysis draws upon stories and carries the belief that through the art of storytelling, individuals are making sense of their own experiences (Plummer, 2013). From this perspective, narrative analysis has a foundation in which its core principle of eliciting meaning is comparable to interpretative phenomenology (King & Horrocks, 2010). The individual is in control of the experience or story they share, and through doing this, are making sense of their experiences, allowing the researcher to understand the experience from their perspective. Through the influences of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative traditions, the position of the main study is interpretative, and the individuals sharing of their experiences and narratives are at the core of the interpretative process.

6. Methods of the Main Study

The following chapter will begin by setting out the progression from the exploratory study (Ch. 4) to the main study of the PhD. The chapter will then outline the methods utilised in the main study, including all ethical considerations, the analytical procedures adopted, and the use of a pluralist approach. The chapter concludes with the development of the final template and the narrative case studies.

6.1 Development of the Methods for the Main Study

The exploratory research was carried out one year before the main study and aimed to inform the overall design and methodological approach of the main PhD study. The care leaver participants were at varying stages of their university degrees and progression (first to final year) and reflected on their experiences of their transitions to university. For some of the participants, it meant reflecting almost three years. In some cases, reflecting three years led to a need for more interview probes than others, particularly for those in their third year compared to those in their first year of university. For the main study, I recruited participants before they started their first term of higher education, in order to reduce the length of time the participants had to reflect on their experience of the transition to university. The results of the exploratory study also indicated that an in-depth longitudinal study exploring the transition to higher education as it occurs could provide rich, in-depth data on this transition. Goodman et al. (2005) argue that to explore transition fully a participant's experiences should be investigated at more than one point during a time of transition. Given the nature of transition and the hope to capture this experience as it occurs, the decision was made to carry out a longitudinal study over the space of a year, at three points during the participants' transition: before they start university, during their first term, and finally during their second term.

The main study continued with the method use of semi-structured interviews. The method use of interviews, along with a hermeneutic framework, allowed for rich data embedded in description and self-interpretation of particular phenomena to be discovered. Qualitative methods allow one to explore participants' perspectives on their experiences, in contrast to quantitative methods, which are concerned with quantifying phenomena, rather than attempting to explore them.

6.2 Development of the Analysis of the Main Study

The move to an in-depth longitudinal study raised three questions;

1. How to handle the analysis of large amounts of data?

2. How could the findings of the previous study be built upon in the current research?

3. How to capture the individual experience in large amounts of data?

In response to the first question, the exploratory research adopted the method use of IPA. IPA is a method more commonly utilised in studies with ten or fewer transcripts (Smith et al., 2009; King, 2010). The main study contains 20 transcripts, making IPA an appropriate choice for the exploratory research but less suitable to handle the larger data set produced by the main study. Therefore, the requirement for a method of analysis that could accommodate a larger data set, whilst also remaining within an interpretative framework, led to the use of template analysis. King (2012) argues that template analysis can accommodate between 15 - 30 transcripts. Like IPA, this method of analysis follows a data-led approach, where theory is informed by the data, suggesting this to be an appropriate progression in analysis from the exploratory research to the main study (King, 2012). Template analysis also allows for flexibility in how the researcher chooses to structure the coding in order to fit best their research design and questions. To remain within an interpretative framework, the choice was to adopt Van Manen's (1990) approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, as this methodology can be adapted to other forms of thematic analysis whilst also being grounded in the philosophical tradition of interpretative phenomenology.

The main difference in the method of template analysis compared to IPA is the use of a priori themes (King, 2012). A priori themes are pre-determined before the analytical process (King & Horrocks, 2010). These themes are developed through exploratory work and, or, the examination of the previous literature. Reflectively, and in line with an interpretative approach, the decision was made to include findings from the exploratory study. To address the second question, above, the use of a priori themes allowed me to form one theme from the exploratory work: identity. The participants in the exploratory study discussed issues of identity through their identity of care leaver. The finding of identity led to the development of care leaver identity as a theme. Notably, other identities, such as student, also emerged throughout the data. The a priori theme remained broad in order to encompass identity as a whole and to reflect how participants reported more than one form of identity. Finally, template analysis provides the flexibility of adapting or even deleting any a priori themes, in light of the developing analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Finally, how to capture the experience through large sets of data? Template analysis is useful when embarking on the time-consuming task of comparing multiple perspectives of a phenomenon. However, one limitation of template analysis is the organising of data thematically, which is useful in collating large amounts of data, although it does not capture the depth of the experience for each individual. Furthermore, one criticism with the move to template analysis from IPA is the loss of in-depth exploration of each data set as a whole; this is due to the process of developing an initial template through a subset of data which is then used to analyse the remaining data set. The

development of a pluralistic approach then followed due to the limitations of template analysis in exploring each data set as a whole. Therefore, the choice was made to adopt a case study method to explore the experiences of several participants. In addition to the case study method, I utilised analytical techniques from Plummer's (2013) approach to obtaining narrative understanding from individual stories to explore these personal accounts of transition. Through adopting Plummer's (2013) analytical method for gaining narrative understanding, personal narratives developed for each of the participants chosen for the narrative case studies.

6.3 Research Aims and Objectives

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university and how other life transitions affect them during this time.

Research question: What are care leavers' experiences of transition to higher education?

Research objectives:

- Gain a longitudinal account of the experience of transition to higher education for care leavers.
- Explore the effect the care system can have upon experiences of education.
- Explore the impact 'care leaver identity' has upon one's transition to higher education.
- Contribute to a theory of transition, in particular, the educational transitions of care leavers

6.4 Sampling and Recruitment

The main study recruited seven care leavers, who had applied for university and were planning to start higher education that academic year (September 2012). I made initial contact with four local authorities in Northern England before I applied for ethical approval. After the School Research Ethics Panel (SREP) granted ethical approval, permission for the study was sought by email from leaving care teams[3] across local authorities in England. I approached ten different local authorities and sent a research protocol (Appendix D) to each local authority who had expressed an interest in this research. I selected participants upon referral from their local authority and in total, four local authorities, all in the North West of England, helped with the recruitment process. Seven care leavers aged between 18 and 21 agreed to participate in the research (see table four for further detail regarding participants' demographics). All participants were British residents: four of them were women, and three were men.

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[3] A leaving care team is a service within a local authority, which works with young people in their transition to leaving care (Stein and Dixon, 2006).

All participants had been in care for more than one year, and all had more than one placement during their time in care. Five of the participants were interviewed before they started university, and the last two were interviewed in their induction week. At the time of the first interview, three of the care leavers were living in their own accommodation (all female), one was lodging, one was in supported lodgings, and two were still in foster care (both male). Six out of the seven participants chose to move for higher education, and the remaining participant moved from supported accommodation to their flat in their first term of university.

The participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate and only if they were planning on attending a university that September. Initially, recruitment was to be finalised when the participants' first term of higher education had begun. However, two local authorities came forward near the end of the recruitment process with suggestions of two further participants willing to take part. They were not excluded from the study as it seemed appropriate to interview them if they took part in the first interview in their induction week. Interviewing participants at the earliest point of their transition to higher education was important as this research aimed to investigate care leavers' transition to university as it occurred.

Table 4: Demographics of the Participants of the Main Study

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Degree	Type of care	Length of care	Age at entry into care	Number of placements
Sam	18	Male	White Caucasian	Law but switched to Psychology with Criminology	Foster care	8 years	10	--
Susanne	19	Female	White British	Business Management	Foster care	2 years 2 months	15	8
Liz	20	Female	White British	Tourism and marketing combined	Family foster care, foster, and residential	15 years	3	--
Thomas	18	Male	White British and a quarter Greek	Physical Education (P.E.)	Foster care then guardian ship order for one – two years	10 years	From birth	8
Liam	21	Male	White British	Illustrating	Foster care, Residential and private care	5 years	11	6
Lisa	18	Female	White British	Criminology	Foster care and supported lodgings	4 and a half years	14	3
Bethany	21	Female	White British	Integrated practice in learning disabilities nursing and social work	Foster care and supported lodgings	8 years	14	8

Table 4: Illustrates the demographics of all the participants in the main study. Blank spaces within the table indicate when the participant did not give the information.

6.5 Data Collection Procedure

The method adopted to collect data care leavers' experiences of the transition to higher education was semi-structured interviews. The questions were constructed through the critical examination of previous research and from the findings of the exploratory study. In reference to educational

transitions, these included the journey from school to college, from further education to higher education, and the process of going from one term to another. The semi-structured interviews were a combination of descriptive and evaluative questions relating to encouragement participants had received, open days they attended and their experience of the application process, including applying for finance for university (see Appendix E for the interview guide for the first stage of the main study). Participants were re-interviewed in their first term at university during November and December 2012 and then again in their second term in April 2013. The content of the interview guides in interviews two and three developed in line with the previous interviews for each participant. Each interview guide following the first interview became centred on the individual and their experiences. General topics relating to their first and second term were used to form questions for all participants. For example, some participants moved for university, and others did not; therefore, moving was the general topic and the questions asked were explicitly related to the experiences they had mentioned in the first interview.

Each interview was arranged with the participant through the participant's local authority for interview one and then directly by the researcher in the following interviews. A venue that the participant was comfortable with was decided before each interview. Chosen venues included the participant's accommodation and the university that they were planning to attend. One of the challenges I experienced during the interview process was the unpredictability of interview locations. For example, when attending one interview it was agreed that the interview would take place at a café, which the participant had chosen, however upon arriving at the pre-planned location, the cafe was too busy, and it was much quieter outside, so this is where the interview took place. The participant suggested and agreed upon this setting and appeared more comfortable.

I gave each participant an information sheet and a consent form to read and sign at the beginning of each interview. The information sheet and consent form were provided to ensure that participants fully understood what the research entailed and that all the participants were informed of their right to withdraw. As well as being given this information in a written format, I verbally discussed this information with each participant. Participants then received the £10 love-to-shop voucher. Time was also given for any questions that the participant may have. Once the consent form was signed, and the participant was happy to start, the interview began, and I switched on the recorder. Once the interview had ended, there was an informal chat to check that that he/she was happy and to address any concerns he/she had. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through template analysis, adopting Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological framework. All participants were provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity, and any information they disclosed that could potentially identify them was anonymised.

6.6 Ethical Considerations

The main study was carried out in compliance with the British Psychological Society's (2012) ethical guidelines. Ethical approval was requested and accepted by SREP on the 31st July 2012. The documents submitted to SREP included the research protocol (Appendix D); an interview guide for the research (Appendix E); an information sheet (Appendix F); and a consent form for the participants (Appendix G). The main ethical considerations are confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, protection from harm and the right to withdraw.

All participants were interviewed separately in a booked room convenient for interviewing to ensure participation in the main study remained confidential. The recording of all interviews was done so with the consent of each participant. The recording was only listened to by the researcher and the researcher's supervisors. I informed all participants that the recordings would be deleted five years after the completion of the PhD. As previously discussed (6.5), each participant was provided with a pseudonym, and any information that could potentially identify them was anonymised in order to protect his/her identity. All participants were made aware of the potential for publications before agreeing to take part. Precautions were in place to prevent participants from incurring any form of harm as a result of this research. Once the interview commenced if any of the participants expressed any form of emotional discomfort, I asked them if they wished to continue or if they would like a short break. In addition to this, if any participants felt they required any additional support, they were all provided with contact numbers for a counsellor, the student support and liaison officer at their university, and the contact number of their leaving care team. The contact information for additional support was provided in the information sheet.

Participants were given a £10 love-to-shop voucher for each interview they participated. The voucher was offered as an incentive for their time, and all participants were made aware that this would not affect their rights to withdraw and if they wished to withdraw at any time their data would be removed, and they would not be asked to return the voucher(s). One participant dropped out of university and consented to one final interview, this participant was given the same information as every other interviewee and offered the same incentive of a £10 love-to-shop voucher. If the participants wished to withdraw from the research at any point before the write up had begun, they were made aware they could do so by contacting the researcher, and their data would be erased from this study.

6.7 Template Analysis: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Framework

The first analytical approach adopted for study two is template analysis, within the framework of Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Ch.5.2.3). Van Manen (1990) proposes six

research elements that work together as a part of hermeneutic phenomenology, and these were employed in the research development and analytical process of this study:

1) Researching a phenomenon that we have an interest in
2) A focus upon lived experience
3) Development of themes through reflection that tells us something about the phenomenon that we are researching
4) Description of the phenomenon
5) Reflection on our position concerning the phenomenon
6) Considering all parts of phenomena

Template analysis was the thematic method adopted to organise the themes that arose from the analysis. This type of analysis has no pre-defined epistemological and philosophical traditions, allowing me to utilise the analytical method within my chosen research parameters (King, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2012). Template Analysis begins with the production of an initial template. The initial template is produced from a selection of transcripts (King, 2010). Once a selection of transcripts is chosen for the initial template the researcher then begins to familiarise themselves with the data, highlighting data that coincides with the research aims and furthers the researcher's understanding of the phenomena in question (preliminary coding) (King & Horrocks, 2012). The initial template consists of hierarchal (higher-order) and integrative themes, consisting of first and second-order codes that are prominent across the data set (King & Horrocks, 2012). The initial template is applied to further data and revised where necessary. The processes of using and modifying the template continued until a final version of it was produced, against which all the data are coded (King; 1998; Langdridge, 2007; King, 2010).

6.8 The Initial Template

The initial template (Appendix H) was developed from the data of two participants with diverse experiences of the transition to higher education: Thomas and Bethany. Then the initial template was used as a guide in conducting the complete analysis of the data set as a whole. The process I underwent was a combination of reading and re-reading, in order to see the data with 'fresh eyes' each time I revisited the transcripts, following Van Manen's (1990) 'wholistic' approach. Van Manen's 'wholistic' approach involved analysing the interview transcripts for both participants as a whole in an attempt to find the 'meaning' in the data. I then began to code the data and record themes as they emerged ('selective reading approach'). The following section provides a brief comparison between Thomas and Bethany, providing an insight into why these two participants were chosen for the development of the initial template and how their experiences of transition differ from one another.

6.8.1 Thomas and Bethany

When conducting the interviews and through the process of transcribing, the diversity of Thomas and Bethany's experiences stood out significantly. One of the main reasons for this, which I will discuss here was the support they experienced whilst in care and transitioning out of care. Both shared two key similarities, particularly in their placement background, as they had each been placed in eight placements and had each been under the care of their local authority for at least eight years. Though their background appears similar, one key distinguishing factor between the two participants was their experience of foster care and the effect their experiences had on their education. Thomas disclosed having at least one stable foster placement, but Bethany did not report the same stability. Thomas often shared experiences of support and ease in his transition to university, while Bethany discussed the difficulties she often encountered during this time,

> It's just like they've [foster parents] always been there, it's like when I've had something to do they've always been there and asked if I wanted any help or when I've had any problems they sit and listen to what the problem is and work towards you know solving it, and I've always like feel like they've been really supportive and they've been like my real parents, and that's the feeling I've got (Thomas)

This quote from Thomas illustrates his relationship with his foster parents. He appears to view this relationship as positive and supportive. In contrast, Bethany's experience with her foster parents appears to have been very different,

> I've had one foster mother tell me that I'd never go to university and that I'd end up in psychiatric hospital or in prison, she never thought I would get my GCSEs. I got them. I did well in my GCSEs as well (Bethany)

While Bethany's relationship with her foster parents appears to be unsupportive to her academic progress, she does claim to have a supportive relationship with her birth family.

> I know my family will always believe in me, and that's great, but I think foster carers need to be a lot more encouraging I think they could have been a lot more encouraging for me when I was 14, 15 years old and they weren't (Bethany)

Bethany and Thomas both report having similar placement history, although the diversity of support from their foster parents is apparent. The main distinguishing factor is the existence of a supportive foster placement, but Bethany illustrates having a strong and supportive relationship with her birth family instead, providing her with the encouragement she did not receive from a foster family. Supportive relationships and stability are important in Bethany and Thomas's experiences in their

educational pursuits. The current section highlights briefly the diversity between these two participants and why they were chosen for the initial template. After the initial template developed, the template was then used as a guide to analyse the remaining data.

6.9 Developing the Final Template

Once the initial template was developed, the process of finalising the template began, which allowed for constant revisions of the template including adapting, inserting or deleting themes where necessary. This process of remaining open to the data, throughout the analytical stage, is especially important due to the methodological approach of hermeneutic phenomenology (Turley, 2011). Below is the final template (see Appendix I for the development of the final template).

Figure 1: The Final Template

Integrative Themes	Main Themes

1. **Integrative theme: Identity**
  a. **Care/care leaver identity**
    i. Care experience
    ii. 'Normal'
      1. Feeling different
      2. Fitting in/unity
      3. Belonging
      4. Stigma
 	
  b. **Student identity meets care leaver identity**
    i. Education (prior to university)
    ii. Academic Accomplishment
    iii. Identity in transition
    iv. Effect on applications forms
    v. Managing care leaver identity
      1. Identity to embrace
      2. Identity to resist/reject
 	
2. **Integrative theme: stability versus instability**
  a. **Control of care experience**
    i. Placements
    ii. Control of own care
	3. **Exercising agency and regaining control**
	  a. **Precarious agency**
	    i. Stigma
	    ii. People's expectations
	    iii. Powerlessness in decision making
	  b. **Pursuing agency**
	    i. Pursuing education
	    ii. Proving people wrong
	    iii. Autonomy in decision making
	    iv. Resisting or rejecting support
	  c. **Aspiring and searching for accomplishment**
	    i. Through education; with university as the focus
	    ii. Aspiring from a young age
	    iii. Seeing the benefits of getting a degree
	    iv. Strong work ethic
	    v. A sense of accomplishment
	  d. **Self-belief**
	    i. Questioning academic ability
	    ii. Receiving encouragement

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b. Accommodation
    i. Prior experiences of moving
    ii. Quality of accommodation
    iii. Managing disruption to home life
    iv. Consistency post entry to higher education

c. Importance of stable support
    i. Wellbeing
    ii. Financial
    iii. One positive influence
    iv. The absent worker
    v. Family and friends
    vi. Education as a source of stability

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4. Modes of transition to university life

a. To prepare 'getting there'
    i. Gathering information about university
    ii. Applications forms
    iii. Planning the move
    iv. Feelings about university prior to entry (mental readiness)
        1. Anticipations
        2. Expectations
        3. Concerns
    v. Support
    vi. Social networking prior to entry to university

b. To Fit in
    i. University course
    ii. University accommodation (adapting to new accommodation)
    iii. New area
    iv. Meeting new people
    v. Working as a group
    vi. Social life
    vii. Ease of 'fitting in'
    viii. Isolation

c. To connect or to disconnect
    i. Involvement in social life (social life involvement)
    ii. New accommodation
    iii. Course satisfaction
        1. Learning experience
        2. Thoughts after the first lecture
        3. University work/workload
        4. Managing disappointment
        5. Motivation
        6. Disengaging from course
    iv. Met and unmet expectations
    v. Doubts about university
    vi. Impressions of university

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6.10 Description of Integrative and Higher-Order Themes

6.10.1 Integrative Themes

The integrative theme cuts across all the other themes of the study. The main feature of an integrative theme is that it is presented heavily across the data and the higher-order themes of the study. The template analysis consists of two integrative themes. The first integrative theme to emerge was identity. For this study, identity relates to who a person is and his/her perception of who they are (Côté & Levine, 2002; Woodward, 2004). Within this research, multiple identities arose from the care leavers' experiences, including care identity, care leaver identity, student identity, learner identity and several more. There were times when people formed new identities as they transitioned into university and rejected or resisted identities that may have already formed. This theme became an integrative theme because it was evident that one's identity could affect the level of agency and control an individual feels they have, the support one receives and their perception of what support they find supportive, their exposure to university: pre-entry to higher education, and how they prepare for and engage in university life.

The second integrative theme to develop was stability versus instability. This theme explores the impact of stability and instability on experiences of education and other life transitions faced during this time. Stability and instability affected the participants' experiences of education. Instability describes a time in which the young people discuss experiences of an unsettlement that has affected them at specific times of uncertainty. Examples of instability include a change in care placements, disruption to education, inconsistencies in support versus effective support, and preparations for university. When the participants in this study encountered instability, it was often out of their control. As they grew up through the care system, these experiences often reflected how they exercised their agency, and still does, and also how they maintained and continue to maintain personal control in their own lives. Participants often demonstrate a lack of control in their care, and in contrast, how stable experiences can benefit them not only educationally but personally too. It quickly became apparent from the interviews that support, in multiple forms, is potentially crucial and at times, highly beneficial to people within this study. The data also revealed that the offer of support could have the opposite effect, and support is sometimes unwanted, resisted or rejected. With that in mind, this theme explores the participants' perceptions of what is supportive or unsupportive to them in their transition to higher education and in their experiences before this transition. It explores how support networks sometimes fail and how support can differ from one local authority to the next. There is also an emphasis on the role of key individuals and agencies in providing support and whether this support is tailored to the professional or the young person. Other sub-themes include financial support and the benefits of being in care. The benefits of being in care, relate to the support that was available for

accessing education specifically for children in care and care leavers. Furthermore, this sub-theme refers to skills developed through an individual's experience of the care system that can have a beneficial effect on their transition to university.

6.10.2 Higher-Order Themes

Higher-order themes reflect the grouping of similar lower-order codes and patterns amongst the data (King & Horrocks, 2012). The first of the two higher-order themes are exercising agency and regaining control. Throughout the transcripts, it was evident that people often faced situations where decisions were made for them, or they had limited choice and control during these times. The theme of exercising agency and regaining control explores how people in this study responded to a loss of agency (ability to act) or when their agency was precarious. It also demonstrates how they exercise agency in their lives. In this study, it was found that an individual's agency could be jeopardised by a variety of factors, including people's expectations and stigma. The rest of this theme relates to how people regained control in their lives and exercised agency through aspirations, taking back control and searching for accomplishment. Furthermore, self-belief was seen to affect agency in the transition to university. Those who felt they could not make it to university demonstrated encouragement to be incredibly important during this time.

The second higher-order theme is modes of transition to university life. This theme reflects how the participants of this study planned for and reacted to university and what affected them during these times. It starts at the beginning, with preparing for university, which includes filling out application forms and the expectations the individuals hold of higher education and their new accommodation, if they are planning on moving. Next, this theme explores what factors lead to engaging and disengaging from university life, how people embrace university life and the process of fitting in. This theme also explores the impact exposure to university can have upon an individual's decision to attend higher education. It was evident that everyone in the study experienced some exposure to higher education. This exposure for some people included role models who had attended university, the foster home environment and university trips. The template analysis (Ch. 7) explores more examples of exposure to higher education.

6.11 Narrative Case Studies

Narrative case studies provided an in-depth analysis of individual accounts of participants' transition to university. As part of a pluralistic approach, alongside template analysis, the case studies provided a different perspective to the data set. Template analysis was valuable in exploring the data set as a whole, drawing upon higher-order themes and patterns across participant's experiences of the

transition to higher education, pluralistically, each analytical method fortifies the other. In addition to the case study method, analytical techniques from Plummer's (2013) approach to obtaining narrative understanding from individual stories was adopted to explore these personal accounts of transition. Plummer (2013) argues that gaining a narrative understanding will inevitably lead to gaining 'narrative wisdom'. Plummer (2013) outlines these specific elements that may be present in a person's story; narrative understanding, narrative meanings, narrative others and dialogue, narrative flow, narrative embodiment and sensualisation, narrative inequalities, narrative space and global narratives, and narrative power. The above categories are split into two key sections which are 'inner life' and 'outer life'. Plummer (2013) states that *'narrative understanding involves inspecting both the inner and outer life of stories'* (pg. 213). Concentrating on the inner life of stories demonstrates the emergence and presence of a story within a text. In accordance with Plummer (2013), the inner life story contains the plot(s), archetypes, storyline, themes, characters and mythologies. On the other hand, the outer life story explores the impact and position this story has in the wider society (narrative reality), including where the story is heard, who hears or reads it, the effect it has and its overall connection with wider structures.

Out of the seven young people who participated in this study, three were chosen for this section of the analysis: Bethany, Liz and Sam. Due to the large data set produced from the interviews, I only chose to carry out three narrative case studies to capture the longitudinal nature of the data. This was decided after a narrative timeline (Appendix J) was developed for each participant of the main study (an example of which can be found, below, in figure three). Narrative timelines were a useful technique in detailing the participant's transition in story format and identifying three participants with diverse experiences. For the participants chosen for the case studies, each care leaver was from a different local authority and university in England, and each shared a very diverse experience of the transition to university. One example included individual routes to university following completion of secondary education; Bethany left college and re-attended later through an access course, Liz studied for a national diploma, and Sam studied A-levels. When deciding how to present the data of the case studies, I explored several narrative techniques that would best capture the longitudinal aspects of the data. I decided to focus on two key narratives for each participant. For example, Bethany's story produced several key narratives. The two most prominent narratives were; 'unsettlement, change and disarray' and 'unsupportive: failing and failed relationships'. For each of these narratives, one sub-theme was drawn upon and further explored to demonstrate how each young person positions this sub-theme during their transition to higher education and how it contributes to and forms each overarching narrative. For example, for Bethany, the sub-narrative that developed within the narrative of 'unsettlement, change and disarray' was 'moving'. The sub-narrative of 'moving' was then explored in the context of the over-arching narrative of 'unsettlement, change and disarray' and in how she positioned this narrative as significant in her transition to higher

education. The same process was adopted for each narrative case study. Furthermore, each narrative chosen highlights a theme or themes derived from the findings from the template analysis. In relation to Bethany's narrative discussed here, this theme coincides with each theme of the template, specifically the integrative theme of stability versus instability.

This method of presenting data allowed an in-depth exploration of individual accounts of this specific transition. As part of a pluralistic approach, alongside template analysis, the case studies provided a different perspective to the data set. Template analysis was valuable in exploring the data set as a whole, drawing upon keys themes and patterns across the participants' experiences of the transition to higher education, pluralistically, each analytical method fortifies the other, as previously discussed (5.4) In adopting the narrative approach, this research will explore the stories that form the transition experience for these three participants. The aim is to provide a different analytical perspective that focuses upon individual stories rather than specific themes across the entire sample. Choosing to adopt a pluralistic approach is a methodological strength of this study. The main argument to be presented here is how narrative analysis can be adopted on data developed from an interpretative phenomenological framework. To tackle this criticism appropriately and constructively would be first to demonstrate the key similarities between both approaches. It is crucial to note that both analytical approaches focus on the meaning the experiences hold for the individual participating in the research. A key limitation to drawing upon narrative analysis secondary to the data collection process is the absence of narrative interviewing. In the original development of this research, an interpretative phenomenological framework was adopted, and semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection. The use of a less structured approach to interviewing could potentially have led to difficulties in information being shared, particularly in the first interviews, where frequent probing was required to gain rich, in-depth data; therefore, having a set of questions and probes to draw upon was a great aid during this time. The following two chapters will detail the analyses from the template analysis and narrative analysis case studies.

Figure 2: Narrative Timeline

Participant: Five
Pseudonym: Liam

Timeline: Five
Strong key themes:
Exercising agency and regaining control, modes of transition to university life, perceptions of support

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority: Absent Parent: LA support surrounded in mystery - is unproductive and Sam struggles to get in touch with his worker due to absence when he requires her support – No accommodation with two weeks roughly till he moves. Sam appears to be fighting for support from his LA, who should be actively supporting him during this time.

Accommodation – Concerned about the people he will be living with. Mainly that he will not get along with them.

Finances: Student finance – Liam was fighting a SF decision that he would not be awarded the grant from SF. Awarded a university care leaver scholarship

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority is semi productive. Sam finally finds accommodation a week after his university course started. Thus, Sam missed his induction week and had to catch a train down to enroll because by that point Sam still had no accommodation. He also faced a battle getting travel funding for this, as his LA only wanted to fund one trip down and he needed two, one to enroll and one to move. LA eventually provided this funding after Sam fought for it.

Accommodation – Lives alone, would like to live with people though. Faces moving as his landlord is selling the house he lives in. Discussed missing his friend from where he was from.

Key individual – discussion about a social worker whose influence has been crucial to his progression – had an influence on him going to college, Ghana and university.

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority – worried they will not fund him to repeat his second year after he failed two modules. No visits from LCW, some phone contact?

Accommodation – Lives alone, is happy living alone now. Has not had to move as the landlord has not sold the house.

Interview one	Interview Two	Interview Three

Past experiences of placements and the effect this has on his education and him personally – Negative experience of residential placement. Loss of agency in his own choices. Fought back against residential home manager

Exposure to university – Met a master's student on his trip to Ghana.

Motivation to learn something new – Liam was very enthusiastic to learn something new. He feels his college course didn't provide this and was too easy for him.

Course dissatisfaction: Beginning to lack motivation: Good presentation – Apart from a few positive situations, Liam expresses a lack of motivation in general for his course. He appeared unenthusiastic and down in general about his course

Illness during first term that affected attendance at university: Felt overwhelming pressure to catch up – Liam became ill at the beginning of his first term which along with moving later than the average student, severly affected his attendance during his first term.

Course dissatisfaction: Lacking motivation: Failed two modules due to lack of attendance – Began to fail to attend lectures but continued to complete the work, although, attendance was part of his overall grade.

Relationship with course mates: Library and Italy trip - Liam went on a trip with his course mates and found this enjoyable, he confronted someone on his course to resolve tension between them both. Library incident: Overheard gossiping that angered him.

Friend back home – Talks about his friends back home, that he will be going to visit some of them soon. Previously talked about missing his friends.

7. Template Analysis

The empirical findings of the main study will be reviewed and discussed throughout the next two chapters. As discussed in the methodology (Ch. 5), the analysis adopts a pluralistic approach. The analysis will begin with the template analysis (Ch. 7) and will be followed by three narrative analysis case studies (Ch.8). The template was produced using King's (2004) approach to template analysis. The development of the initial template and the subsequent progression of the final template can be found in the methods chapter (Ch.6). Chapter 6 includes the main patterns and themes that emerged and the process by which the themes developed. This chapter will discuss the finalised integrative and hierarchal themes that characterise the template. All identifying information and data has been anonymised.

Overall, the presentation of the template findings will be separated into four sections, see figure three for a recap of the formation of the template. The first two sections will outline and discuss the integrative themes; identity (7.1) and stability versus instability (7.2), to demonstrate how these move through the higher-order themes and permeate care leavers' experiences of higher education. The remaining two sections will examine and explore each higher-order theme of the template; exercising agency and regaining control (7.3) and modes of transition to university life (7.4).

Figure 3: Recap of the Final Template for the Main study

Integrative Themes	Main Themes
1. Integrative theme: Identity **a. Care/care leaver identity** i. Care experience ii. 'Normal' 1. Feeling different 2. Fitting in/unity 3. Belonging 4. Stigma **b. Student identity meets care leaver identity** i. Education (prior to university) ii. Academic Accomplishment iii. Identity in transition iv. Effect on applications forms v. Managing care leaver identity	**3. Exercising agency and regaining control** **e. Precarious agency** iv. Stigma v. People's expectations vi. Powerlessness in decision making **f. Pursuing agency** v. Pursuing education vi. Proving people wrong vii. Autonomy in decision making viii. Resisting or rejecting support **g. Aspiring and searching for accomplishment** vi. Through education; with university as the focus vii. Aspiring from a young age

1. Identity to embrace
2. Identity to Resist/Reject

2. **Integrative theme: Stability versus instability**
   d. **Control of care experience**
      i. Placements
      ii. Control of own care
   e. **Accommodation**
      i. Prior experiences of Moving
      ii. Quality of Accommodation
      iii. Managing disruption to home life
      iv. Consistency post entry to higher education
   f. **Importance of stable support**
      i. Wellbeing
      ii. Financial
      iii. One positive influence
      iv. The absent worker
      v. Family and friends
      vi. Education as a source of stability

viii. Seeing the benefits of getting a degree
ix. Strong work ethic
x. A sense of accomplishment
   h. **Self-belief**
      iii. Questioning academic ability
      iv. Receiving encouragement

4. **Modes of transition to university life**
   d. **To prepare 'getting there'**
      vii. Gathering information about university
      viii. Applications forms
      ix. Planning the Move
      x. Feelings about university prior to entry (Mental Readiness)
         1. Anticipations
         2. Expectations
         3. Concerns
      xi. Support
      xii. Social networking prior to entry to university
   e. **To fit in**
      i. University course
      ii. University accommodation (adapting to new accommodation)
      iii. New area
      iv. Meeting new people
      v. Working as a group
      vi. Social life
      vii. Ease of 'fitting in'
      viii. Isolation

   f. **To connect or to disconnect**
      vii. Involvement in social life (Social Life Involvement)
      viii. New accommodation
      ix. Course satisfaction
         1. Learning experience
         2. Thoughts after the first lecture
         3. University work/workload
         4. Managing disappointment

		5. Motivation
		6. Disengaging from course
		x. Met and unmet expectations
		xi. Doubts about university
		xii. Impressions of university

7.1 Identity

Identity, previously defined in section 3.6.1, was the only 'a priori' theme developed before the analysis of the main study. Thematically, identity was constructed as a broad theme, to explore the role identity plays for care leavers in their transition to higher education. Consistent with the exploratory research (Ch. 3), identity featured predominantly throughout the accounts of the care leavers of the main study. This theme is integrated throughout the template, and how identity features throughout the participants' experiences will be further discussed throughout the following themes. The identities that feature consistently across these young people's accounts of the transition to university are; care identity, care leaver identity and student identity. The next two sections focus on the roles of care and care leaver identity, and how the participants negotiate these identities through the development of the new identity of a university student. These sections will explore how these identities develop for the participants, the role they play on their lives and subsequently, their experiences of education and transition.

7.1.1 Care and Care Leaver Identity

The focus on the term 'care leaver' as an identity, originally arose from the exploratory research (Ch.3) and featured predominantly as part of the main study's integrative theme identity. Those experiencing the transition to care are instantly connected to the care and care leaver identity through their experiences of early life. Both identities possess many connotations that can impact these individuals in a variety of ways. These identities are not perceived as identities of choice for the participants and are often viewed as unwanted and undesirable. The process of entering care is a time characterised by loss, frustration and confusion. Furthermore, amongst the participants, knowledge of what care is prior to entry was rare. Many did not understand what care was and why they had entered care, *'I didn't have a clue what was happening, never heard of anything at all'* (Bethany). It was often a situation of uncertainty, leading to feelings of concern and fear,

It was just a bit strange because, at the time, I didn't know anyone that was, I didn't even know what care was, I hadn't heard of it, it was quite literally my dad told me this was happening, I come home from school, and this was happening, I didn't have a clue what was happening, never heard of anything at all, never met another person in my life even at the age of 14, I didn't know a person that had ever been through the care system before, so I didn't know what it was. (Bethany)

When you first go into care it's a bit like all crazy, and like, I don't know, but like I think it's quite unsettling because you don't know where you're going to stop or anything. (Susanne)

These accounts epitomised for these participants their fears upon entry into care. Susanne and Bethany's accounts highlight previous experiences of transition within the care system. They reported feeling unsettled by this process, and once these young people had entered care, they were left navigating this particular change in their lives and the impact this transition could potentially have on their future in general. Many of the participants explained feeling and being treated differently in their early experience of education because of their care experience and subsequently their care identity,

I think they should treat you the same no matter your background, they should allow certain allowances but […] I must have got about five more written warnings, late quite a few times, had a few days off, and they don't bother, do you know what I mean and they still say all these rules and they don't put them into practice I suppose. (Susanne)

I missed a year of high school, like my first year of school as well, because I needed to prove myself that I could be integrated into society, why do I need to prove that, just because I'm in care. (Liam)

The participants felt their behaviour was often excused because they entered into care, and for them, this reinforced the sense of feeling different from those with no care experience. For Liam, he viewed the process of where he was schooled to be related to his care identity and felt no agency in this decision, further reinforcing for him a sense of difference to his peers.

7.1.2 Student Identity Meets Care Leaver Identity

'Normal' was a term used frequently by participants to depict the lives and experiences of individuals who did not have experience of care. Normality and care are two terms for the participants that are mutually exclusive from each other. The participants are often searching for their 'normal' by separating themselves from the care identity and pursuing paths they perceive to be conventional for their non-care peers.

> It was good, it was weird, really strange to know that you are actually at university, well you're being enrolled tomorrow and, and you're going to be a uni student, and you're just like "I'm going to be like everyone else, yes" (Lisa)

Lisa's pursuit of normality was within education, and the process of entering higher education is what she feels makes her '*like everyone else*'. Her prior experiences of education, specifically support in education are what she explains as leading to this feeling of being different:

> I don't wanna be summat weird, like being in care makes you different, and I don't want that, I just want to be like everyone else, I don't want extra support simply because I've been in care cause I don't need it, I'm not a retard

> I was asked it [care leaver support at higher education], but I turned it down because I didn't want, I wanted to be normal, I didn't want people butting in because through school I had a learning mentor and oh my days the amount of times he'd knock on the door just to ask me, the amount of times I actually had to leave a lesson just to be sat in a room talking about nothing, and it would annoy me because people would be like where were you in lesson, "why do you get special treatment?"

When asked about support as a student, during higher education, Lisa's refusal of support was due to her desire to lead an everyday life, and she felt this support separated her from non-care experienced students. Entering higher education provided Liz with a sense of unification with her peers and a sense of belonging within higher education. This desire to be 'normal' led other participants to resist and reject support. It also appeared to instil a negative perception of care leavers' support services available at university. It is evident in Liam's and Liz's experience too,

> I've had emails saying we're having a gathering of care leavers, yes so, why, I don't understand it, I don't know why they're singling us out, it's like we're stray animals, we should all stick together because it's like somebody saying "oh I'm from this town" "so am I" well we obviously have something in common, no. (Liam)

> It's just got me thinking about how, how not to let it discriminate ya and make you different to everyone else, I've requested to be treated with, same as any other student, I've said I don't want to be taught, treated any different. (Liz)

Like Lisa, this sense of being different is something Liam and Liz actively avoid too. Liz was adamant that she wanted the same treatment as any other student, care or non-care experienced, and Liam rejected the notion of commonality with other care leavers because of the shared experience of 'care'. This sense of not being normal or not having the same life chances as others, in general, was also

obtained from the views of others, for example, professionals and carers who have a duty of care to them and media influences. The stigma surrounding the care leaver identity impacted participants' personal agency (7.3.1). Stigma often led to care leavers resisting or rejecting the care leaver identity, although, for Thomas, he connects with this sense of being different as something to embrace.

> Because it's something they weren't expecting, because people were just expecting to put down what their normal lives are like because they've all lived normal lives, for someone to come out with something different about their past experiences that have been quite hard, it surprises them because I remember the head of sixth form saying that when he read it, it actually brought a tear to his eye, which was quite good and he said it was one of the best he ever read, so I was pleased with that, so it was nice writing it yeah. (Thomas)

Thomas believes this identity made him unique and accepts the difference he feels because of his care experience. Thomas combines his care leaver identity with his identity of student, *'I like being a bit a bit different you know, I like having something that's you know is kind of unique compared to everyone else, I enjoy that'* (Thomas). Thomas transforms an unconventional experience of childhood into one of intrigue, finding the potential in embracing this experience. His experience connects his care identity to his identity of student in a positive way. The transition to higher education for participants led to the negotiation of what their care leaver identity means to them and how this fits in their emerging identity of a university student. The role of identity in a care leaver's transition to higher education is a theme that has yet to be explored in its complexity in the previous literature. The main study explores care leaver identity as interconnected to other developing identities these young people have chosen for themselves, particularly the identity of 'student' and how they subsequently manage the two identities during this time of transition to higher education. Furthermore, the integrative theme of identity features throughout the other themes and will be discussed further in the following sections.

7.2 Stability versus Instability

The data indicate an overall pattern of instability during the participants' transition to higher education, as well as a positive relationship between more stable experiences and participants' perceptions about their future prospects. All participants discussed times of disorder and insecurity in many aspects of their lives. Their accounts demonstrate how they managed this, where possible, and the influences that at times aided them in these challenging times of instability.

7.2.1 Control of Care Experience

Entry into the care system is often characterised by extreme upheaval and significant change, and this was a pattern present throughout all interviews *'I suppose like when you first go into care it's a bit like all crazy'.* For many, a transition is not often thought of as a time of stability; however, those who are care experienced have periodically and more frequently faced times of disruption compared to their non-care peers. Instability was often the backdrop to much of the participants' life experiences, with many accelerated and repeated times of transition, and instability integrates across all the other themes. Previous experiences of times of transition could influence how one manages future transitions. Thus, in exploring the instability present in these participants' lives, it is paramount to understand the relationship they have previously had with times of disruption and in contrast, periods of security, and to investigate the role these influences may have featured on their future life choices. Many of the participants of this study characterised their time in care by frequent placement changes, loss and confusion,

> Everything went wrong when I went into care, in my own opinion. When I lived at home, everything was not perfect, but it was better than being in care, but everything in my life changed when I was 14, and some people think that when you're in care, you've had a bad upbringing, and blah blah blah, but actually no, I've had a pretty good upbringing, I think that's set me off really well was the fact that my parents brought me up well. Everything went wrong when my parents weren't there, and somebody else was in charge, who just didn't care. They got struck off the register my foster parents (Bethany)

This account highlights the unpredictability of entry into the care system. For Bethany, the dynamics of life before care are highly valued, and this experience is characterised by frustration. This pattern permeated most interviews, and the disruption to their home life illustrates a time of a lack of control in their own lives.

7.2.2 Accommodation: Stability of Housing

Since the entry into care, all the participants of this study underwent multiple moves, often in a short amount of time. All participants felt changing placements regularly led to much disruption to their home life. Most of the young people explained this as the reason why they did not try to settle anywhere as they felt it was only a matter of time before they moved again.

> I think it's quite unsettling because you don't know where you're going to stop or anything, obviously, they're not going to let you stop on the streets, but erm, I don't know, erm, but after like a few placements, then I thought there's no point getting settled in a

placement, so there was like, I don't know, no point getting settled in a placement, because I'll move in a few weeks, it wasn't, I don't think it was great, especially when I was in like year ten as well so it was a bit like all crazy, well end of year 10, so it was like during my GCSE's as well. (Susanne)

I know I fell really behind on my assignments, which is the reason my grades were so low because I ended up being capped on my overall grades because they were overdue and that, I think that if I'd stayed there and been stable and been able to do my work in my bedroom, in my own time, that I'd set myself to do it, I'd have been all right, but it was moving from here to there, I think I lived in 3 different places whilst I was at college. (Bethany)

Both accounts demonstrate how frequent times of moving led to an unstable experience of care. Susanne and Bethany explained how times of instability coincided with crucial milestones in their education, and words like 'hectic' and 'crazy' featured predominantly throughout theirs and the rest of participants' accounts of being in care. Bethany, at 21, was the only care leaver student of the study not taking the traditional route to university, straight from college or the sixth form. She felt the disruptions to her placements in care affected her ability to succeed initially in further education and expressed a need for stable placements during this time. This pattern of instability in her living arrangements continued throughout her first term in higher education, which further affected her concentration at university. She attributed her choice to opt-out of higher education in part to her instability in living arrangements. Bethany at the time of her transition to university was facing the move to independence, her accommodation was unready, and she struggled with the practicalities of living alone.

I started university and was not eligible for housing benefit, I couldn't afford to stay where I was, and my flat wasn't ready, I've got a flat, they're just doing the repairs, so they've told me to do kind of, do what I want really. (Bethany)

I think if I hadn't moved house because when you're sat worrying about house stuff, and you're at Uni it's different, I think, I don't really cope well to change, I've coped a lot better than I thought I would actually because on the Sunday I moved out of supported accommodation, my whole life changed that Monday morning because I'd moved house and started university, the two biggest things you can do in your life, move house and going to university, is a massive thing for most people, both them things happened to me on one day. (Bethany)

Like Bethany, this pattern of moving, for some, permeated their transition to higher education, with some fighting for support to find accommodation and others struggling with the move to independence at the same time that they were in transit to university (further discussed in section 7.4). Although instability is a predominant pattern throughout all the interviews, some of the participants expressed how consistency in their placements provided stability in their home life.

> Well, primary school was, well it was weird because I was moving around a lot then, it was like the time when I didn't have a set home, so I was just moving around from place to place, getting to know new people, but it was secondary school when I got more settled. (Thomas)

Thomas attributes his success in education to this sense of stability, and he discussed how his final placement, which later became a special guardianship order[4], provided him with the stability he had not previously experienced.

7.2.3. Importance of Stable Support

As previously discussed (7.1.2), participants' feelings about support networks in establishments of education, before university, were often connected by participants to their resistance to and rejection of further support at higher education, even when support was required. Furthermore, when discussing other networks of support available to them, the participants explained frequently the notion of the absent and unavailable worker, when the young people attempted to access support or advice,

> Yeah, my leaving care worker but he's a bit, nice guy but always on the phone and he's always on sick leave as well, he's always on sick. (Sam)

> There should be more contact at the application process. I haven't had any really. My social worker decided to take all their annual leave before it ran out, and that kind of fucked me up (Liam).

> I needed help with something that's not university-related, I'd like my leaving care team to ring up, "do you need some help with this?" or being able to ring up and the person I need to speak to not being on holiday (Bethany)

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[4] Special guardianship order was introduced by the Children Act 1989 as a private law ensuring a care placement is legal and giving the carers the right of 'special guardian'.

It was all right, [...] it was boring, but it was hard to get someone to move me, because like, my leaving care worker, she only works Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, but my [sibling's] leaving care worker, she works Wednesday afternoons, Thursday, Friday, so she had to help me on Friday, but they were going to put on a removal place for me, but then people were like what's happening? What's happening? So, it's like just get someone, do you know what I mean? They should have got someone to move me, which they did in the end, but it was a bit of a nightmare (Susanne)

Susanne expressed frustration in accessing support to move to university from her leaving care team, further forming the theme of instability in these young people's transition to university and experiences of education. The participants' ability to access support when needed directly reflects their willingness to access other forms of support networks, especially care leaver support at higher education, as they have not found aid in the current sources of support available to them prior to higher education. However, for most, there was the presence of at least one stable influence the participants expressed as having a direct impact on their journey to university.

It's just like they've [foster parents] always been there. It's like when I've had something to do, they've always been there and asked if I wanted any help or when I've had any problems they sit and listen to what the problem is and work towards you know solving it, and I've always like, feel like, they've been really supportive, and they've been like my real parents, and that's the feeling I've got, and that's why I went for the guardianship [special guardianship order]. (Thomas)

Very, very, very big impact she like inspired me to like apply to charities[5] and get a place in this trip [...] and she like helped me all the way through it, she like, I was living on my own back then in a grotty apartment, didn't really have much of a future, didn't want to go to Uni then, didn't know what I want to do, I was just smoking dope every day, just pointlessly living and breathing and then she went to the extent of getting the, […] which is like basically the head of, the organiser, who was running the trips all around this world, this Government funding, she got him to come round to my house and basically get me off my arse and he was just like "if you really want to go, you're going to have to stop doing this" just those sorts of things you know, it doesn't take fucking much to change someone's life like that, you've just got to stop beating someone over the face with a book and just take, take a look a little bit like, it's not going to get you arrested is it, doing something like that, just having a bit of initiative, it's what all carers need really. (Liam)

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[5] Charities have been anonymised to further conceal Liam's identity

For both Thomas and Liam, the presence of a supportive influence helped and aided them in creating stability in their lives, which for both contributed towards their desire to access higher education. Interestingly, another participant has found education itself to be a source of stability within a chaotic home life, with education becoming a form of security, throughout their earlier and present life experiences.

> Well, I was stopping at my friends during my main GCSE's, at the end of, well during year 10 and 11, some of it and like I hated being there it was horrendous, well it wasn't like horrendous, but it was like not great but like so I'd stop in my room and revise and me doing that got me full marks on tests and a few marks off full marks on like Science and stuff, so it helped me a lot well it didn't help me a lot, but I supposed it helped me in some ways because I'd like revise more than I would have done if I'd stopped at home because I'd just be playing on the X box or something I suppose. (Susanne)

Susanne's account illustrates, that although her home life was unstable, she found comfort in education during this time. These accounts highlight how care leavers managed times of instability that was often out of their control by continuing their pursuit of education.

7.3 Exercising Agency and Regaining Control

Agency can be impacted upon by extraneous factors, specifically through other people's perceptions, which are imposed on the participants and limit the choices that are available to them, due to some people already holding pre-existing views based on hearsay and unverified facts. The findings suggest that, throughout the participants' accounts of their transition to higher education and their experience of the care system, they encounter many situations where their agency is under threat. They attempt to challenge and negotiate, in order to regain and retain their agency. These young people's circumstances are often frequently changing, leading to the precarious agency. This section will firstly explore times where the agency is precarious. The following section will then explore how the participants negotiate re-gaining agency that was once precarious and sometimes still is, due to the instability of their experiences through being in and leaving care.

7.3.1 Precarious Agency

The process of entering care is fundamental to the amount of agency these young people feel they have to exercise, particularly concerning their transition to university, when they reflect retrospectively on experiences of transition and school. Once they enter the care system, the duty of responsibility

becomes that of the carers and professionals responsible for the child or young person's welfare. There are many accounts within the participants' experiences of the transition to higher education, where these young people have faced times of precarious agency because of choices made for them, especially in their earlier life. Several factors of influence include stigma, the perceived expectations of others, powerlessness, and conflict in regaining control in decision-making. Furthermore, the participants often encountered situations where they felt their decisions were influenced, made on their behalf, or that they were limited in the decisions they made. An individual's background, therefore, could potentially limit someone's source of agency. The following analytical discussion focuses on the care leavers' experiences of how their agency and control was limited, and how they responded to a potential or actual loss of agency in their transition to university.

Amongst the participants, issues of stigma were a predominant feature. They discussed receiving derogatory opinions from the media, from school and particularly from people's preconceived views of the behaviours attributed to children and young people in care. When discussing statistics, Liz states, *'The statistics aren't forgiving to care leavers, not at all, in fact, the statistics slate care leavers, quite a lot'.* Perceived negative perceptions from others were often internalised by those within this study, and in numerous cases led to a stigmatised perception of what it meant for them to be a child in care or a care leaver, and what this means to them and their agency in their personal progression. An example of this is evident from Bethany's account. Bethany discusses the supporting information she provided about her background when writing her personal statement for university,

> I didn't want to write some of it that I wrote about being in care and things like that because I don't want them to read that and think "oh she'd been in care she must have done something bad, must have been a bad person" you know things like that, Just the stigma that comes with being in care, I don't like that because I know it's not true, just how other people perceive a person who's been in care, I have a lot of issues about how people perceive me, and I don't like people thinking that I'm a bad person because I've come through the care system. (Bethany)

Bethany depicts the perception of children in care as a generalised belief that to be in care relates to 'bad actions' and 'blame' on the part of the young person themselves. The association to the identity of care, for Bethany, raised questions of how she believed she will be viewed and demonstrates that she wants to have control of the truth of this perception. The stigma surrounding the identity of 'care leaver', left Bethany questioning the information she disclosed about her personal background on her UCAS application form, therefore, potentially affecting her agency to choose to disclose this information if she wishes to do so. The decision to disclose information about her background is met by 'fear' due to the connection with her identity. Furthermore, Bethany is angry at how she might be perceived because of her association with being in care, and this appears to cause incoherence in

how she perceives herself and how she believes others will judge her. The statistics, as previously discussed (Ch.2), further contribute to the negative picture of a care leaver's future potential. This interplay of identity is evident from Susanne's account too. However, she focuses on her statistical knowledge of children in care as a deterrent to fit within these statistics '*I think it's only 5% of like kids in care or care experienced to go to university and a lot won't, and a lot will get pregnant and stuff, and I didn't want to be in that statistic, I can do all that when I'm older*'. The statistics could have affected Susanne's agency, although in her case, it became a motivation to achieve. Each account of stigma presented here has been managed very differently by each care leaver. Stigma does have the potential to influence personal agency, and, in some cases, the stigma left individuals doubting decisions they had made. It is important to note, however, that all these care leavers went onto access higher education. For many of the participants, the negative representation of the future outcomes of care leavers, acted as encouragement for them to pursue higher education and change perceptions held of them because they have been in care. Also, some participants utilised these negative perceptions of care, and the influence of them, as a protection mechanism for others. They attempt to normalise the care leaver identity, particularly for those they know who share this identity, in order to reduce the impact on the situations they partake in.

> I invited him on a weekend away, and he opened up a lot more like he came out with me and a couple of my friends and it was just a completely different person, like because he was with normal, like normal people, not like care leavers, he was like, he said he felt normal because he was like with me and my friends and no one was like taking the mickey, no one was saying "ha you're a care leaver, you're in care" he just felt like he fitted in. (Lisa)

> I've incorporated my friends that aren't, into my friends that are, like I've made sure that if I go somewhere, I've made sure that I've either took the girl who I live with me or someone else because the people that I've met through social services are not as sociable as I am like I'm quite, my social worker said I'm quite a sociable person for my age and for the situation that I'm in but like everyone else doesn't seem to bother really, so I kind of like try and make it connect, does that make sense. (Lisa)

Lisa supports other children in care with their confidence in their agency to socialise and not feel different or segregated due to their care identity. Based on her experience Lisa is aware of the potential impact perceptions people hold of children in care can have. Instead of Lisa potentially allowing this to affect how she views herself or how she acts, she attempts to minimise the effect of this on her friends too. Her friend now has the agency to socialise without receiving negative ramifications for being in care, which could have potentially led to this person dissociating themselves from the care leaver identity, and, in turn, addressing the pre-conceptions held of this identity.

Furthermore, this demonstrates that some care leavers see negative perceptions and stigma as something they wish to protect other care leavers from experiencing.

Negative perceptions are also depicted in the expectations people hold of the participants, and again these expectations have the potential to jeopardise their agency. For many, these expectations are characterised by negative attitudes and disbelief in their ability to achieve. Sam states '*some people were like, Sam, you can't do Law'*, and Liz shares a similar experience *'everybody's telling me that I'm making the wrong decision by going'*. It is evident from the transcripts that these individuals faced discouraging and derogatory expectations from others, usually from their carers, family and the professionals who work with them. The young people's awareness of these views had the potential to influence their agency, although many of the young people, like with stigma, turned the negative expectations of others into a driving force for them to succeed. An example of this was evident from Liz's experience,

> I just didn't want to discuss it with them [...], the way I saw it, they saw me, they [leaving care team] didn't expect me to choose Uni, they expected me to just go, "I'll go for an apprenticeship", but I sat there, I left them hanging really, so I told them "I'm going to go for an apprenticeship" but then they clocked my UCAS form and went "oh, university", I went, "yeah, it's my back up plan" but then when I started getting my offers through, they expected me to defer my entry, but I sat there and went "no I'm going to go this year", and when they [universities] accepted my offers they were like, "oh God, she's accepted them", and they were all like, "will she get in, will she not" and a lot of my college tutors said, "you won't get in that Uni".

Liz demonstrates that the expectations others held of her were substantially different from the ones she held of herself. For Liz, this led to a resistance of the support networks around her, engaging in trickery in order to deflect them, by making them think that she had no intention of attending higher education. On the other hand, Bethany discusses how the expectations of others impacted her perception in her own academic ability,

> Once I came out of care and supported accommodation it was great because people treated me like an adult and told me that I can do anything that I want, that if I put my mind to it, I can do it but when you're foster parents are telling you actually no you can't, you can barely get your GCSE's, that's was really, I didn't like that, but then I always thought because my [sibling] is really clever that I must be too stupid to go to university, and then they told us last week that it doesn't matter about your ability, that anyone can study at university, it's just how you learn, the university will adapt to that, but yeah, I

never thought I'd ever end up at university, I'd be the last person on this planet to go to university.

For Bethany, leaving care reflects the change in the expectations she holds of herself and in her ability to achieve, demonstrating a shift in her self-belief, and the agency she now feels free to exercise. Like Bethany, all participants discussed times where those who had a duty of care for them doubted their ability to achieve. The participants refused to abide by these expectations and to the stigma associated with children in care pursing education.

In addition to stigma and the perceptions of others, participants expressed a lack of power in their decision making. A lack of power in the participants' decision making was an aspect of their lack of agency. They all discussed times where instability and a loss of autonomy hindered their power to make decisions regarding their own care and progress in education. The participants encountered many situations where they felt their decisions were made for them. Due to these particular constraints they were facing, they discuss feelings of powerlessness, subsequently leaving them feeling that their decisions were dependent on the professionals who were in a position of care for them.

> I actually came down here to enrol and to find somewhere to live before I actually moved down here, social services paid for. They were a bit of a dick about it at the start like I said I've not found anywhere to live, but I need to go down there to enrol and get my student finance signed, so I can have money when I do get there" "but well you're going to have to pay for your next coach down there then" "and like obviously if you supported me in finding somewhere to live then I wouldn't have to make two journeys I'd probably be there by then". (Liam)

> I think that kind of put me off at the beginning of the year, like moving down here really late and not having much help with moving down here and finding somewhere to live, that put me off big time, and by the time I was here like I said like everybody had like their groups and everybody had divided into little soap opera style groups, the dynamics were pretty much fixed for the coming year. (Liam)

Liam faced a possible challenge in his agency due to financial constraints and the willingness of his local authority to support him in this situation. His decision was based upon the decisions of others and their capabilities in offering the support he needed. The support care leavers receive in their pursuit of higher education is often decided upon by the local authority they live within and the university they attend. Many local authorities provide support for the care leavers' who choose to pursue education, and the amount of support can differ significantly from a local authority to the next. Liam faced an added challenge in the practicalities of travelling to and moving for university, in which

he found times of confrontation and negotiation with his leaving care team in order to overcome these challenges. An essential aspect of this transition for care leavers is that they feel control over their own decisions, and additionally, many are often going through the added transition of leaving the care system. To have a choice or a decision taken away from them could potentially render an individual powerless, which they may choose to succumb to or fight in order to regain control in their lives.

7.3.2 Exercising Agency

The previous section (7.3.1), demonstrates how these young people experienced situations where they had limited capacity in their agency. This disadvantage, for many, was redirected into a desire to regain their personal autonomy and take back control of their own lives. The following section will focus on care leavers' accounts of how they regained agency in their lives, either through education, proving people wrong, autonomy in their decision making or resisting support.

Thomas states, '*I suppose what you can say with this is that, with the past, I've always kind of been driven to do since I've had the worse start'.* Furthermore, Bethany explains, *'I've got my own mind. I'm not a child. Nobody can tell me what to do'.* These young people focused on education to improve their lives and take back control from their past, regaining their personal agency that has been impacted by their identity and stability associated to their experiences of care. For many, it was important to show that they had agency in their achievements.

> I would love to just show her [foster carer] my university badge and say, "look here, do you remember what you said to me when I was 14 years old that I couldn't go to university, well look at this, it says my name, it says the university [...], and I'm so proud of myself it's untrue". (Bethany)

For Bethany, her experience of foster care fuels her desire to succeed in education. She is keen to demonstrate that these expectations are no longer what holds her back, and she has surpassed the hold they once had on her agency in her future prospects. For many of the participants, there were frequent accounts throughout the interviews illustrating the participants' desire to prove they could achieve in education despite what they had been told. In other accounts, it was not the expectations that these young people felt they needed to take back control from, rather the very reality of the practicalities and instability of the care environment,

> Well, I was stopping at my friends during my main GCSE's, at the end of, well during year 10 and 11, some of it and like I hated being there, it was horrendous, well it wasn't like horrendous, but it was like not great, but like, so I'd stop in my room and revise and me doing that got me full marks on tests and a few marks off full marks on like Science

and stuff, so it helped me a lot well it didn't help me a lot, but I supposed it helped me in some ways because I'd like revise more than I would have done if I'd stopped at home because I'd just be playing on the X box or something I suppose. (Susanne)

It is evident from Susanne's experience that she found the care experience disadvantageous emotionally. She used what she portrays as a negative and unstable environment that reduced her agency in many ways, to exercise her agency to immerse herself into studying for her GCSE's, with much success. Susanne redirects the loss of agency in her environment into exercising her agency within her pursuit of education. Another way in which the participants sought to regain agency in their life was in the decisions they made once they had left care. All the participants expressed frustration in decisions being made for them, with little or no consultation with them, limiting their ability to exercise their agency freely, and have the option to do so.

They annoy me, […] I need to make my own decisions, they try and like sway my decisions, and I'm like that "no leave me alone, let me make my own decisions. (Liz)

Liz's account highlights her expressed wishes to be in control of her own decisions. Many of the participants' expressed a loss of agency due to the involvement of care and care leaver support, which led to resisting and rejecting support available to them now. Rejection of support could be seen as an extreme reaction to the loss of autonomy in participants' ability to make decisions during their time as a child in care. They appear to have a deep awareness that they now can take control of their own decisions.

She pays for my accommodation, but even that pisses me off, cause, I'm just like, well, "why, why can I not pay for it myself like every other normal person?" Why can't you just not pay for it, but she just went "no we have to cause you're in care" "I'm not, I'm 18 years old now, I can look after myself." (Lisa)

Lisa's experience of the support that is provided to her by her leaving care team is constructed as being unwanted. She appears to construct the financial support they provide her as abnormal and deviating from the norm. She shows resistance to understanding why she has to access this particular type of support because she was in care. She connects her experience to her age, presenting age as being vital to her ability to make decisions. She portrays that her age now means she can take care of herself and make her own decisions. The support she receives that is connected to her care experience is seen as negative rather than the potential to be supportive. Another example of this can be seen within Thomas's experience,

I think it's annoying that I have to have a social worker, I think it's pointless, I don't think I need one either, and I think it's a waste of time that they actually bother to travel here or whatever to come and talk to me about things that they should already know, and she knows that as well and the second and the third time as well she's rang up, so I've just spoke to her on the phone which has been like easy but then she said that, she's like obliged to actually come up and see me every now and then, so the next time she does actually have to come up to here again, like check how I'm doing or whatever, which I think is annoying because it's a waste of my day. (Thomas)

I think they complicate things too much and I think they don't get things done, whereas if I go to my foster carers I already know that they like you know try their best to sort things out and they'll do it immediately because I'll phone them up and tell them that I've got a concern and the same day that I ring them they'll try and sort it, as my leaving care team will probably delay it, take too long to do. (Thomas)

It is evident from Thomas's experience that he has deciphered which types of support connected to his care experience are useful and efficient for him in his transition to higher education. He resists and rejects support he feels is a *'waste of time'.* He presents his foster carers as being instrumental in supporting him during the transition to university and his social worker as being *'pointless'.* Lisa, Liz and Thomas all demonstrate that a lack of adequate support from their social worker or leaving care team can lead to an outright rejection of support. Efficient and effective support is valued highly, and their prior experience of support has constructed their future ideas and expectations of further support. All three participants portray that this support is often forced upon them, and with Thomas, he says he approaches his foster parents when he needs support, they do not come to him. They are all seeking to make their decisions independently. An essential aspect of this transition for care leavers is that they feel in control of the decisions they make as they transition out of the care system and into higher education.

7.3.3 Aspiring and Searching for Accomplishment

As seen in the previous section, agency is sought and regained through several avenues. Every participant of this study explained a time where they experienced limited capacity in their own personal agency, however, this same disadvantage for many of the participants has been redirected into a desire to fight back and take charge of their own lives (7.3.2). It was evident from the experiences these young people shared that part of their desire to exercise their own personal agency derived from a need for accomplishment, and a search for individual success and achievement. Aspiring and searching for accomplishment can be seen as a form of pursing agency. For the

participants, exercising agency is not only embedded in a desire to regain control from a loss of agency but is also a way of bettering themselves and improving their future life prospects.

> I suppose what you can say with this is that, with the past, I've always kind of been driven to do since I've had the worse start, well a bad start anyway, and I've always wanted to make myself do better. University was always something you could look towards doing and push yourself towards. (Thomas)

Thomas' aspirations are embedded in a desire to attend university. It is evident from this excerpt that, for Thomas, University is a goal he wished to accomplish and a route by which he wished to improve his future life prospects. Interestingly, he portrays his bad start as developing his ambition and agency to access higher education. The previous literature (Ch.2) argues that the process of entering care would reduce the chance of a young person attending university, however, for Thomas, he has turned the entry into care, and his start in life, into a reason why he should be driven and have goals to work towards and achieve. For Thomas, education is a way to break patterns of dysfunction and provide himself with the opportunity to aspire and improve on the start he has had.

> But I didn't know when I was going to go, I thought I'll go to university one day, but it might not be till I'm 40, it might not be this early, if I could I would have gone, when I was 18 if I'd have got the results that I wanted, but when I was at college, a lot of change happened, and I think that that affected my education, all the moving about I did because they decided they wanted to move me halfway through college, from here to there, as they do. (Bethany)

Like all the participants, Bethany possessed a strong desire to attend university. For Bethany, the timing is not particularly important, but the action of attending higher education is. The integrative themes of care leaver identity and instability are both at play within this excerpt from Bethany's first interview. Bethany explains that she always intended to access higher education and felt the instability of her care experience had hindered her path to university. She believes the frequency with which she moved placements directly affected her attainment in education. The lack of stability in her placements demonstrates a connection between her care identity and her experience of education. Her use of the phrase 'as they do' is particularly striking as it acts as a way or normalising her experience, showing that she believes the process of being moved around is a normal action connected to her care experience. These excerpts present a group of young people who have developed a focus on entering higher education and appear very driven in this goal.

Throughout the experiences shared by the participants of this study, it was consistent to see accounts of strong aspirations, particularly concerning education and future career prospects. In some cases, their aspirations began when they were in primary school, and their early years of high school.

Because I wanted to do like Law since I was in year 7, there's no way you can do Law without going to university [...] I just like working with criminals, not like I've worked with, I'd like to work with criminals and argue with people in the courtrooms and stuff like that. (Sam)

All these young people expressed the value of education and the potential it has for their future life prospects, and they believe a degree will provide them with the chance to improve their life circumstances and future career prospects, for example,

I didn't want, I didn't want to just rely on training because apprenticeship, it's only a limited amount of time and Uni it is three, maybe four years and you can do whatever you want when you've got a degree, you can go in for most jobs, I didn't want to limit my career, I didn't want to limit my career prospects, so I said no to an apprenticeship. (Liz)

I knew that you had to go there if you wanted a good job, If you wanted to get a degree, It's like a stepping stone for a good career, and I've been encouraged to try and work towards going to university (Thomas)

From exercising their personal agency in applying to higher education and being successful in getting there, the participants expressed a strong sense of accomplishment and an awareness and recognition of their achievements,

I screamed when I found out, actually genuinely screamed, it was like quarter to five in the morning, I checked my thing, and I could hear the woman I lived with getting ready for work and like she knocked on my door and like, she was like "are you awake" "yeah" "check ya grade because it's gone on today" "oh yeah" checked, I heard her walk down the stairs, and I screamed, she ran back up the stairs, and she was like "what" "I've got into Uni" like running around my house like a madwoman, like screaming, holding my laptop in the air woooo (laughs), it was funny. (Lisa)

A substantial amount of the participants' accounts focusses upon their personal desires to aspire and achieve and demonstrate an individual focus on accomplishment. Attending university represents a focal academic goal for these participants and is explained by these young people as part of their progression in education. For several of the participants in this study the aspiration to attend university and have a successful career developed at a young age, during their time in care, or in some cases, before they entered the care system. Not all participants' initial aspirations were connected solely to university, and for many, these aspirations were linked to a successful career. The desire to attend university came later or developed from this primary aspiration. The experience for these participants, of aspiring and then achieving, is described in their accounts as rewarding. Through all their

challenges, they all demonstrate being proud of themselves, and their experiences depict excitement and accomplishment.

7.3.4 Self-Belief

When I first met the participants, they had all yet to enrol at university, and through their accounts, they had questioned their academic ability in accessing and succeeding in higher education. While many young people may have doubts about their ability at the start of university, lack of self-belief was particularly strong for many of these participants. The participants' self-belief was often the result of internalised stigma and the expectations of others (7.3.1).

> I always thought that university was for very, very, very brainy people that knew everything about everything and I thought that I knew very little and that I was stupid and I thought because I saw my [sibling] and my [sibling's] really brainy, I thought that university is for really clever people, people who don't get jobs in ASDA and do nothing you know what I mean and then as I got older I realised that maybe I'm not as intelligent as top-class scientists, but there's more to university than having a great academic knowledge and then thought maybe actually "I could do this, I could go." (Bethany)

Bethany held expectations of the kind of people who go onto access university, and this is something she had to tackle in order to break through her own personal barrier. Interestingly she had a sibling who attended university, and instead of this encouraging her to go, she viewed her own ability in education relative to her sibling's and believed herself to be less capable of going than her sibling. Bethany frames her realisation that she could go to university through the lens of maturity. Her awareness of what it takes to attend university changed and she felt empowered to achieve this goal. Once there Bethany became frustrated with her ability to pass assignments successfully,

> It makes me feel like I don't know enough, that I'm not clever enough but, but it's more frustrating that you've put all the effort in that you can possibly put in and you still haven't passed it, and I don't know why. (Bethany)

As previously discussed, Bethany already doubted her ability to attend university, and once there, she discussed struggling with knowing what was expected of her academically and how to achieve the grades she wanted. Bethany's difficulties with passing her assignments further fed into her insecurities that she could not achieve a degree, and she discusses frustration in trying and not succeeding. Other students with positive self-belief and external sources of encouragement may not have seen this as a defeat but more an opportunity to learn and would seek out the support from their course tutors. For

Bethany having low self-belief prior to attending university, she focuses on what she believes to be the only reason she could have failed this assignment and that is that is she is *'not clever enough'*.

> I'm not sure, I don't really want to quit, but I'm not really sure whether I'm good enough,
> I'm not sure, I think it's pretty normal, and they're like, yeah when I started my degree, I
> was like "why the fuck am I here, do I really want to do this?" And they were like "yeah
> but you start getting involved, even the boring stuff" they were saying that's like
> contextual stuff "you'll end up getting involved one way or another, the more you do it,
> the better you get at it", it's the way the human brain works really. (Liam)

Like Bethany, Liam also reaches a point in the early stages of his transition to university where he doubts his ability to complete his university course. Unlike Bethany, Liam draws upon and has access to positive external influences. These external influences help him to re-define and redirect his doubts into the doubts that could be reflective of any 'normal' student. His friends act as a source of encouragement and provide a sense of hope that it is normal to feel this way. Lisa experiences a similar situation to Liam and discusses a key moment in her journey to higher education, where, like Liam, her peers act as a source of encouragement for her when she seriously doubted her ability to become a university student.

> I kind of talk myself out of things, I do it quite a lot, talk myself out of being motivated as
> well, it's a bad thing, I don't know, I just don't have, I seem like a confident person, but
> I'm really not, and I think that was one of my biggest fears, not being able to cope with
> the work because I'm not a very academic person, I'm a practical person, so everything I
> learn, I have to be able to put into context and do it for me, to be able to understand it
> and I don't think, well at the time I didn't think I'd be able to pick it up as quick as
> everybody else but then the people I live with, were like you're going to have so much
> support around you, you just need to ask for, and they're there for me, I think that's why
> I'm commuting as well. (Lisa)

Lisa's account of the belief she held of her own academic ability also shows a substantial shift due to an external source of encouragement. After receiving encouragement from people who were in a similar position to her, Lisa expressed feeling hope and the added belief that she could successfully complete university. Lisa clearly states, *'I don't think, well at the time I didn't think I'd be able to pick it up as quick as everybody else'.* From this quote, we see that Lisa revises her initial thought that she did not think she could keep up with everybody else, to demonstrating she now feels, after encouragement, that she can succeed in education. For many of the participants, questioning their academic ability and receiving encouragement are both elements that affected the participants' self-

belief, and their transition to university. Self-belief can have a substantial effect on how an individual perceives their time in education and how they perceive their position as a university student.

7.4 Modes of Transition to University Life

Each participant adapted to the transition to higher education in a variety of ways, with some methods appearing to directly relate to their ease of the transition into higher education. All who participated in this study drew upon several key processes they had experienced that affected the ease of their transition.

7.4.1 To Prepare; 'Getting There'

Preparing for any transition can significantly aid the process of adapting to a particular change. For the participants, appropriate preparations appeared to be vital to how they experienced this time of transit, specifically when applying for university and preparing to move. Some participant's preparations were more in-depth than others, demonstrating different levels of resourcefulness. These preparations ranged from gathering information about the university they were attending, to involvement in social networking before entry to higher education. Most participants had gathered some form of information about their chosen university, including attending talks and independent research. This process is not unlike that of a typical student, although several of the participants focused on or were encouraged to gather information related to being a care leaver at university,

> I just looked at what charities the Uni had, when I applied and just told them that I'm applying, I want to go, and they just sent me the application form for it. I got a scholarship for Uni [...] 3 grand [...] for first year, for being a care leaver I think (Liam)

> They were interesting, but a lot of them were just like sitting in a room with some guy at the university talking about what they do, like, how they support people in care. (Bethany)

> My personal advisor just told me to go on it. She was just like you're going on this, on this date, it was pretty boring, to be honest, we just, we just had people speak to us. (Lisa)

Bethany and Lisa were the only two participants who attended a talk aimed at care leavers attending university. Interestingly, neither Bethany nor Lisa discussed gaining anything from these talks. However, the participants raised the complexities of preparing for higher education as a care leaver, particularly the effect being a care leaver had on the application process for university and student finance. The application process for any student can often be very daunting, regardless of personal

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background. Participants expressed receiving limited information on the effect of their status as a care leaver, the potential impact this could have on their finances, and what support could be available to them. In particular, the participants of this study voiced persistent frustration with finance applications for university, with many being unaware of what role their care leaver status featured in this process. For student finance, care leavers are not assessed against their parental income, and many will be entitled to the full financial support available to a student. Care leavers are asked to provide evidence from their local authority that they have been in care, usually in the form of a letter, however, as can been seen from the quotes below, these young people shared experiences of difficulty in discovering this and complying with it.

> Well, they asked me to send them all this stuff proving I'm a care leaver, like as letter stating when I went into care and how old I am and my local authority and I sent them all this shit that took me like a week to compile, and they finally got it and they sent me the breakdown back, and they said you gonna get £3,700 loan, and I was like, "well why would I send you all this shit, why would you ask for it if you were going to give me the loan, not the grant?" So basically what they've done is ask for all this shit, all this information that is completely irrelevant anyway, because they've just sent me a letter anyway saying that I've got a full loan, that's why I sent them all this fucking information, I sent them a bible, like a fucking bible thick. (Liam)

> It's been as slow and as painful and as longwinded as for everyone else, I think, if not worse, because they just keep sending me things back, saying, "this is not right, you need to get more evidence for this, we can't prove that you're in care, blah, blah, blah, blah" and it's just "please just leave me alone, just do it." (Lisa)

Both Liam and Lisa's accounts are characterised by confusion and frustration. The process of applying to university places them in a position where they need to convince student finance that they have been in care. However, UCAS (2017) argues that many care leavers do not feel comfortable declaring they are a care leaver on their UCAS application and now they must demonstrate they are a care leaver, in order to obtain the proper financial support for their situation. In addition, they all have to rely on their leaving care worker to support them in this process. All care leavers face this decision when applying for student finance, and none of the participants knew this before they began the application process.

During this time of preparation for university, many students, care experienced, and non-care experienced, will choose whether to move or stay at home whilst they study at university. Moving, in general, is considered to be a highly significant and challenging time for most people. For many care leavers, at the time of this transition, they are also transitioning out of care or in some cases, to living

independently. Out of the seven participants, two chose to stay at home and within commuting distance to university, whilst the rest opted to move for higher education. Out of these five, Susanne was already living independently and faced the challenge of downsizing all her belongings to be able to move into halls, a year after she had moved into her own home. At the time of the first interview, one week before the beginning of his first term, Liam was the only participant who had not found a place to live and was seeking the support of his local authority to support him with this situation.

> To be honest, all I've been doing is looking for places to live on something called 'XXXX', and I've applied through the university for approved accommodation, but they haven't got back to me either, I don't know it feels like everything's against me at the moment, no social worker contacting me, [...] she knows I've only got a week to go and she knows I'm still here so why the fuck she hasn't called me, I don't know.

Frustration characterises Liam's experience of preparing to move, and when he was sharing his experience with me he appeared incredibly upset and angry with the lack of support provided by his leaving care team and believed this was due to his placement being out of the area of his local authority, he was *'out of sight, out of mind'*. Liam felt he was taking the right steps to support his move on his side. However, regarding his leaving care team, he demonstrated feeling unsupported and angry at how they were handling the situation. It was the first time that I met Liam, and he appeared agitated by this situation, repeatedly checking his phone, hoping for some form of communication from his leaving care worker. Most, but not all the participants faced complexities in the practicalities of getting to university, although for Sam, he received support during this time of preparation to move, and his foster carers supported him in this specific transition, including moving him to his new accommodation,

> They [foster parents] offered to take me, and they always said that they wanted to make sure that I'm safe, take me there, ease their mind that I had hot water, that I'm not, make sure that I was safe and that and that I'd enjoy it so.

Sam's experience was a rarity amongst the participants of this study with only one other participant receiving support to move easily, from someone in a position of support to them. What was more typical amongst the participants was a fight to access support during this time. It was evident that many participants required and wished for support during this crucial preparation stage for university. Thomas was the only participant who said they received an information booklet from his local authority about being a care leaver at university *'I received quite a few booklets. […] There was a book from one Uni about what care leavers will expect in terms of financial support'*. Unfortunately, although Thomas received this form of information, he was still unsure of the support he would receive and

experienced several inconsistencies between what he was initially told he would receive and what he received.

> Well the finance has been probably the most awkward thing about the lot because my Uni like they've been saying like all along that they would pay for the money, they would pay for the tuition fees and stuff like that and I think personally they didn't expect me to pass my A-levels to go to university, so I think they kind of said it in a way to make them look better, so cause when, what we found out, that when it actually came to me passing, they didn't realise that I was going to university so because when people well, well you know like they go on for job seekers allowance and things like that and they like leave care altogether, so they just assumed that I was one of those people, so they kind of like hadn't sorted out the money or anything so we've had like a lot of complications with trying to figure out who's paying for what and after they said like they're going to pay for some of the tuition fees, they're not paying for them now so I've had to like to take out a loan'.

> And they could have sorted it out quickly rather than me trying to find out information when they knew what they wanted, and it would have been easier if they talked to the university rather than asking me to.

Although everyone faced some difficulties in gaining support, all participants were happy to be receiving some form of financial support and felt it better enabled them to decide to attend university.

7.4.2 Fitting In

Feeling a sense of belonging in any given setting can be integral to the success in that particular situation and enable people to feel comfortable and at ease. Social connections and physical settings can play a substantial part in this. Children in care and care leavers have often experienced significant changes in their lives that could have affected their opportunities to settle and form meaningful relationships. This section explores the process of fitting in for these care leavers and what aided the participants to fit in, in several situations during their transition to university. As previously discussed, many of the participants of this study developed successful social connections during this time. As seen in section 7.1, the participants described many instances where they felt different because of their upbringing, and therefore did not feel a strong sense of belonging. For all the participants of this study, 'student' is an identity these young people chose. For most of the care leavers of this study, the very nature of attending university creates a sense of normality.

It was good, it was weird, really strange to know that you are actually at university, well you're being enrolled tomorrow and, and you're going to be a Uni student, and you're just like "I'm going to be like everyone else, yes!" (Lisa)

This account captures how the participants felt about higher education and how enrolling at university gave them a sense of finally fitting in. A pattern throughout the interviews was the importance of accommodation in the individual's ability to fit in at university. The participants who initially moved for university discussed developing friendships and strong social ties from their accommodation,

Don't really remember much of it. We just have a hectic social life in this house. We're always out if we're not out we're always drinking in, in drinking or cooking together, it's only Monday night that we don't cook together because my friend works. (Liz)

It's better cause like you're on, just in a flat on your own but here there's always someone, well when it's normal there is, but normally like me and my friends are always together on nights and stuff, so it's better I think. (Susanne)

The formation of social connections helped to aid the ease of transition for these participants. For others adapting to their new accommodation left them feeling 'homesick' and facing the reality that they could no longer go back to their previous placement.

I have to go shopping now, I have to spend money on food, and I have to cook for myself, I don't like it, no, it's not too bad, I wish I could go home though sometimes, like at the weekend, I wish I could just go home (Lisa)

As a result of a breakdown in her supported lodgings placement Lisa chose to move into a hall of residence in her first term at university and in addition to the sense of loss she felt from not being able to go back to her placement, Lisa felt hindered in forming friendships in her new flat. She explained that everyone has already developed strong social ties with one another, *'they'd already formed like a little friendship like they'd go out all the time or whatever'*. Liam also felt disadvantaged in developing strong social ties due to his late start at university and felt his peers on his course had now formed social groups of which he was not apart. Liam lives alone and, although at the beginning of the transition he discussed this with fondness, by the final interview (the end of his first year), Liam discussed feeling isolated by this experience and felt he would benefit from living with like-minded individuals rather than living alone,

I think that kind of put me off at the beginning of the year, like moving down here really late and not having much help with moving down here and finding somewhere to live, that put me off big time, and by the time I was here like I said everybody had like their

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groups, and everybody had divided into little soap opera style groups, the dynamics were pretty much fixed for the coming year. (Liam)

I think that if I lived with someone that did a simple subject like music or performing arts or something like that, someone with a similar mind to mine, that I could bounce ideas off, then that would maybe help me on my course a bit more, get involved in things. (Liam)

Liam believes his current social activity was hindered by the lack of support he received in moving and in his ability to start his course at the same time as his peers. This pattern of isolation by the final interview was also present for Bethany. Bethany did not decide to move for her university, as she had a strong family connection in her hometown. As a result, she felt she had not developed many social ties or been involved in social activities with people she met university,

I don't know. I didn't really have any friends as such. We're all we were all kind of, it was weird we were all like in a big group because there was 21 of us at the start and we all got on with each other we all went to have lunch with each other, all 21 of us and then we'd all sit together in lecture theatres, so I didn't really have any, I didn't see anybody outside of university while I was there, apparently, because no one lived up this end. (Bethany)

As evident from these accounts, the participants expressed that developing a sense of belonging, through social connections at university can be integral to fitting in. For those who developed social ties, they found this to be a comfort, which aided them in their transition to university. For others, the absence of these connections was attributed to where they lived and the timing of their move to university, leaving several of the participants feeling isolated during their first year at higher education. Fitting in at university could be argued to be essential for any student regardless of background. However, for care leavers, not fitting in could further isolate them due to a lack of belonging in their home life before and during the transition to higher education.

7.4.3 To Connect or To Disconnect

From the previous section, 'to fit in', it was evident that many of the participants felt social ties carried a substantial influence in their connection to university life. Some participants expressed situations, specific to their care leaver background, that contributed to their development of new social relationships and their overall connection to university. For all, 'fitting in', although important to the participants, was not the only influencing factor to connecting with or disconnecting from university. University is often more to people than just the course they enrol on. For instance, the area and the

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campus itself can all lead to differing levels of engagement for students. Each participant of this study engaged with university life in a variety of ways and discussed experiences that led to a sense of connection or disconnection with university. Some of these were specific to being a care leaver while others could be likened to the experiences of a non-care experienced student. An example of this for participants was accommodation and moving due to the instability of this time.

Furthermore, many of the participants discussed their connection to university as embedded in the satisfaction they felt in the course they had chosen to enrol on. Course satisfaction appeared to hold significant influence in the ease of transition for the participants of this study. All except one of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their course. How they managed this dissatisfaction appeared to affect how they felt about their place at university.

> It wasn't what I expected it to be. It's a lot more like teaching based, whereas like in the prospectus it said that it was gonna be like quite a lot of coaching things like that, getting out into the community, where it hasn't really been much of that yet, so yeah I am a little disappointed with that. (Thomas)

> Now, I mean if I'd started, [...] If I knew what I know now, I wouldn't, I'd go to university but not on this course (Bethany)

For other participants, they discussed the fear that the course they had chosen would not develop into a career or the career they wanted,

> The thing I'm worried about is that I'm doing this and I don't think I'm going to get a job out of it, like the job I want out of it because it's just a criminology degree, so I don't think I can be, I think I've got to specialise afterwards (whispers), and I really don't want to be here for that long (Lisa)

For some participants, the lack of course satisfaction and unmet expectations led to them disconnecting from university,

> I don't get out of bed in the morning, I look at my alarm, and I'm like urgh, no, not today (Lisa)

> It felt like I was doing two degrees, to only get one at the end of it because I was working so hard because I was doing everything the social workers were doing, everything nursing was doing, at the same time, three assignments at once we had (Bethany)

Lack of course satisfaction for Bethany was an influencing factor in her decision to leave university, although it was not the only one. Bethany also encountered financial difficulties, *'I was struggling financially as well, some days I couldn't afford to get to university, I didn't have enough bus fare or tram fair'*. It was evident that the complexity of Bethany's transition to higher education hindered her success in completing her degree and how she connected with university life in general. Bethany still wished to go back to university at a later date and study a different degree. For Sam, when met with course dissatisfaction, he demonstrated resourcefulness and resilience in changing his university course within his first week, strengthening his connection to university. He chose a course he felt would be better suited to him. Sam was the only participant that decided to change his course once at university.

> The only thing that was wrong was my course […] all I had to do was go in there tell the faculty office that I didn't want to like, I wanted to change. They did all the paperwork. All I had to do was get permission from the head of department. He emailed him. He emailed me back in about half an hour "yeah that's no problem, of course" and that was it, done. I didn't have to do any forms filling in they did it all, all I had to was email him.

It is important to note that, for any student, course satisfaction can have an impact on their transition to university, and the participants of this study faced this challenge too. Connecting or disconnecting to university, for all participants, encompassed many key elements, and they demonstrated great resilience during this time. Participants accounts of navigating the modes of transition to university life demonstrated the challenges they experienced as a care leaver during this time and as a general student too. On reflection, most of the participants were proud and happy with the decision they had made to attend higher education and the following account from Liz embodies this, *'you can spread your wings, you can choose what course you do, you can choose what path you go down in life'*.

7.5 Conclusions

The template analysis explores how the integrative themes of identity (7.1) and stability versus instability (7.2) permeate and interact with the participants perception of their own personal agency (7.3), and their modes of transition to university life (7.4). Their transition to university raises issues of how they identify with the identity of 'care leaver' and how the time of entering care and leaving care can contribute towards times of instability that impact their education. Issues of identity, specifically the role of care leaver identity in post-secondary education, first became apparent in the findings from study one. The role of identity in a care leaver's transition to higher education is a theme that has yet to be explored in its complexity in the previous literature. The main study explores how the care leaver identity is interconnected with the developing identity; 'university student', that these young people

have chosen for themselves and how they subsequently manage the two identities during this time of transition to higher education, often resulting in a shift in identity. Their transition to higher education depicted acceptance, negotiation and rejection, as they transitioned to the identity of a university student.

In Chapter 2, several supportive factors to the educational progress of marginalised groups were discussed, including the ability of those groups to utilise negative remarks as a way of encouragement. In concurrence, the participants of this study often had university as a focal point in their lives from a young age. They utilised negative expectations from others as fuel to continue their educational progress and regain agency through their pursuit of education. It was often found within this study that negative expectations could lead to 'precarious agency' and by fighting against these expectations and the stigma they received the participants of the study were exercising and reclaiming their agency in their life outcomes. Through the absence and limits on their own personal agency, it was evident that the participants of this study attempted and succeeded to take back control through other avenues, including education. Previous research (Ch. 2) suggests that when an individual is in control of their own decisions, it increases the likelihood of them experiencing positive life outcomes and general life satisfaction, demonstrating the importance of personal agency in an individual's life (Cordova and Lepper, 1996). The participants of the main study face many obstacles in exercising their personal agency and have many constraints placed upon them, although, they fight on regardless of these complexities. However, these obstacles and how they are managed can often reflect their success in this transition, with many of the participants gaining agency in transitioning to university.

Previous literature by Sanders, Rowley and Jeff (2000) raised the practical concern of the impact of factors that are 'out of the control' of children in care. These factors are due to their life circumstances that can have a disruptive effect on their experiences of education and their overall success in educational pursuits. This study concurs with the previous research that the instability of outside factors, such as accommodation and schooling, can impact upon care leavers trajectories in education, impacting their own personal agency in their academic paths. Furthermore, illustrating the integrative nature of the theme stability versus instability in the agency of care leavers. Perceptions of stability and instability contribute to the ease of this time of transition.

Stigma has often featured in the previous research, although much of the previous literature has not focused upon the effect stigma has specifically on a care leaver's personal agency. Previous research on care leavers' prospects in education has shown that care leavers have often faced low expectations from others within their future life prospects. Historically, children in care and care leavers have encountered a large amount of derogatory stigma aimed at their 'care' or 'care leaver' status. The stigma these young people face has the potential to jeopardise their agency, as previously

discussed, although they also face challenges in the expectations people hold of them, which like 'stigma' can often be seen to be internalised by care leavers. Taking back control for care leavers is not always related explicitly to pursing education, although, this may be a characteristic of the experience they share. Nearly all participants discussed times in which their choices were reflected in proving people wrong.

Much of the previous research (Ch. 2) focused on issues of supportive influences and resilience. The main study concurred with these findings; however, it also found other confounding factors interplayed alongside these themes. Together they provide a more comprehensive understanding of this time of transit for care leavers. The chapter preceding the analysis chapters; the discussion (Ch.9), will critically examine in more detail the essential themes of the template analysis in reference to the previous literature and the theoretical orientation of the research; social, cultural and emotional capital, and communities of practice.

8. Narrative Analysis Case Studies

The following chapter will discuss the second analytical technique of the pluralistic approach of the main study, narrative analysis. Three narrative case studies, Bethany, Liz, and Sam, will be explored, highlighting diverse experiences of the transition to higher education for the participants of the main study. Each narrative case study will begin with a brief overview of each individual story and a discussion of the main narratives and the sub-narratives that feature in each participant's experience. The template analysis (Ch. 7) highlighted two main themes; *'exercising agency and regaining control' and 'modes of transition to university life'* and two integrative themes; *'identity' and 'stability versus instability'*. The case studies will highlight and discuss these themes in relation to each individual. The justification for pluralism and the chosen participants for the narrative case studies has been previously discussed (Ch.5 and Ch.6).

The purpose of this chapter is to capture the transition to higher education through in-depth narrative case studies. Adopting narrative analysis case studies for presenting the data allowed for in-depth exploration of individual accounts of this specific transition. As part of a pluralistic approach, alongside template analysis, the case studies provided a different perspective to the data set. Template analysis was valuable in exploring the data set as a whole, drawing upon key themes and patterns across the participants' experiences of the transition to higher education, although, pluralistically, each analytical method fortifies the other. The narrative analysis case studies adopted analytical techniques from Plummer's (2013) approach to obtaining narrative understanding from the individual stories, to explore the participant's accounts of the transition to university. Through the use of Plummer's (2013) analytical method, personal narratives for each of the participants developed and each narrative highlights a theme or themes derived from the findings from the template analysis. Again, participants for this analysis were provided with a pseudonym to ensure anonymity; any identifying information was omitted or anonymised.

8.1 Bethany's Story

It proves the story, that just because you are a child in care, doesn't mean that your life can stay as it has been, it's up to you, you can change your life, and that if you want to achieve university, then you can, and nobody can stop you.

Bethany entered the care of her local authority at the age of 14 and left when she was 18. She had a total of eight placements, including her leaving care placements. After leaving foster care, Bethany

was assisted by her leaving care team[6] in finding accommodation. Bethany portrays her time in care as turbulent and emotionally straining, arguing that her life before entering care was '*perfect*', '*everything was perfect in my life till I turned 14.*' She encountered low expectations from foster carers she lived with, and her experiences of care demonstrate a loss of agency, with the focus being on her desire to maintain, regain, and exercise her agency in her decision making. Bethany's desire to exercise her agency in making her own decisions coincides with the first theme of the template analysis; '*exercising agency and regaining control*' (7.1). Bethany was 21 when she entered higher education, and therefore, she did not take the traditional route to university. She chose to pursue an apprenticeship because her grades at college were low, and she felt that her job directly fed into her interest to study her chosen degree. At the time of the first interview, Bethany was living with relatives and was waiting to move into her own accommodation. By the time of the second interview, she was now living independently, but unfortunately, Bethany was encountering several difficulties in her first term of university and chose to suspend her studies at the end of her first term.

After Bethany left university, she agreed to one final interview, in which she discussed her reasons for her decision to leave higher education. She mainly attributed the suspension of her studies to moving into her own flat early on in her first term, lack of course satisfaction, and financial difficulties. She felt the support she received from her local authority was not tailored to her needs and found the financial support to be insufficient. Bethany's local authority supported her with accommodation costs, although they were unable to provide any further financial support until the confirmation of figures from her student finance application. When she left higher education, she still had not received these figures and had been awaiting them for three months. She shared many difficulties in completing these forms, and although she reached out for support from her university, she still struggled to reach the successful completion of this application. She could no longer afford to travel to university. All the support systems appeared to fail Bethany, although, unlike most of the participants interviewed for this study, Bethany had strong familial links that supported her financially until she could no longer afford to continue without student finance or some kind of extra financial support. Bethany's experience of a lack of preparation for university, and instability in accommodation and finances, had a significant impact on her time there. As seen within the template analysis, preparations for university (7.4.1) and issues of stability and instability (7.4) arose as factors affecting the ease of this transition for all the participants. These themes are highlighted once again within Bethany's story.

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[6] A leaving care team is legally responsible to provide assistance to a care leaver in their transition to adulthood, therefore, in preparation for leaving care, a young person will be assigned a personal advisor/leaving care worker, most commonly known as a personal advisor (National care Advisory Service (NCAS), 2014).

Bethany's story produced several key narratives. The two most prominent narratives are discussed within the following section. They are entitled '*Unsettlement, change and disarray*' and '*Unsupportive: failing and failed relationships*'. Through each narrative, a sub-narrative will be further explored in order to demonstrate the positioning of these sub-narratives and how it further contributes to and forms each overarching narrative.

8.1.1 Narrative One: Unsettlement, Change and Disarray

> My whole life changed that Monday morning, because, I'd moved house and started
> university, the two biggest things you can do in your life.

The first narrative to be explored for Bethany is '*unsettlement, change and disarray*'. Bethany characterises the transition to higher education with frequent references to change and instability. Time of instability links specifically to sections 7.1; '*stability versus instability*,' and 7.4; '*exercising agency and regaining control*' of the template analysis, which, in part, is related to several sub-narratives including '*moving*', '*course dissatisfaction*' and '*financial difficulties*'. The most dominant sub-narrative conversed by Bethany, throughout her narrative of '*unsettlement, change and disarray*' was '*moving*'. This section will explore how Bethany discusses moving in her life and the impact this had upon her transition to university.

8.1.2 Sub Narrative of Unsettlement, Change and Disarray: Moving

Moving is a dominant factor in Bethany's transition to higher education. The timing of the transition to independent living for Bethany is a contributing factor towards the suspension of her studies. The timing of when this transition occurs further feeds into the overarching narrative; '*unsettlement, change and disarray*' and the integrative theme; '*stability versus instability (7.2)*', which dominates her transition to higher education. Almost immediately as the first interview began, Bethany started to discuss her current living situation. Bethany had moved a week prior to the first interview and was living with family while she waited for her council flat to be ready for her. This period of transition coincided with her first week at university.

> I started university and was not eligible for housing benefit. I couldn't afford to stay where
> I was, and my flat wasn't ready. I've got a flat, they're just doing the repairs, so they've
> [leaving care team] told me to do kind of, do what I want really [...]. I wanted to go
> straight from supported accommodation, where I was living straight to my new flat [...]
> and my leaving care team said they wouldn't pay my rent for the week at supported
> accommodation [...], and so no one would pay it, and I couldn't afford it, so I had to go, I

could have stayed and get in loads of debt, but I don't want to do that' […], but it would have been convenient for me.

Bethany's account constructs a time of '*disruption'* and '*change'*. For Bethany, she explains this time of transition as disruptive and a direct result of her choice to leave higher education. She describes her leaving care team as being responsible for the moving out of her accommodation before her flat was ready to move into, as she states, *'they wouldn't pay my rent'*. Her leaving care team had agreed to pay for her accommodation whilst at university but not the amount her supported accommodation was. Her story illustrates a '*loss of agency'*. Bethany lacked the economic capital to secure her accommodation until her flat was ready and had limited options from which to choose. The position of power is given to her leaving care team, and she implies that if she was exercising her own agency, she would have chosen to postpone moving until her flat was ready. This loss of agency and instability reflects her previous experiences of the transition of moving whilst at college,

> When I was at college a lot of change happened, and I think that that affected my education, all the moving about I did because they [leaving care team] decided they wanted to move me halfway through college from here to there, as they do [...] I know I fell really behind on my assignments, which is the reason my grades were so low because I ended up being caped on my overall grades because they were overdue.

In concurrence with the first quote, it is evident that Bethany highlights moving as a time that was '*out of her contro*l'. Bethany goes further to attribute this time of disruption to her education and positions 'others' (her leaving care team) as partly responsible for her academic performance at college. Here she distances herself from her own low academic achievement and further portrays her leaving care team as having an attitude of 'low priority' towards her education, *'my leaving care team were more concerned about the flat than they are about the university'.* Bethany entwines her overall academic performance with the instability of moving.

In interview one, Bethany describes the beginning of financial difficulties that she suspected would be a problem for her in her new accommodation. Plummer (2013) argues that stories can be embodied with emotion and in particular Bethany's personal narrative of moving is characterised by anxiety and fear that she will not be able to cope in her new accommodation financially.

> With the bursary at the moment, I don't know what I'm getting, when and how much, so I'm pretty lucky that I'm actually here because I've got my own flat too, so I wouldn't be eating anything, so I couldn't afford it, I can barely scrape my bus fare.

Bethany describes being 'unprepared'. Being prepared relates to the template theme; 'modes of transition to university life' (7.4.1), where it was argued that preparedness for university led to a smoother transition to higher education. The insecurity she experienced because of the instability of her financial income describes a circumstance of incomplete preparations for university. She reflects on being fortunate for currently living with family, as she was already experiencing financial difficulty. In the first interview, Bethany explains moving as a time of disruption. The time of moving for Bethany embodies frustration, where she lacked agency and preparation.

Once again, Bethany frequently drew upon her experiences of moving throughout interview two, highlighting the prevalence of this sub-narrative. Her narration of moving, and her attitude towards moving, differs from each interview to the next. From interview one to interview two, moving to independent living had evolved from preparation to reality. By the time we met for the second interview, Bethany had since moved into her council flat and had recently finished her first term of university. Throughout the second interview, she frequently relayed back to the complexities of the transition to independent living at the same time as being in transit to higher education.

> I had to take an afternoon off during the learn to learn week because I needed to go and pick up my keys for here, because they could only, they could do it on Friday afternoon or I'd be waiting for about another week or so.

> Everything was being delivered carpets and furniture. I'm glad I had my dad because I don't know what I'd been able to have done without my dad waiting for it all while was at uni.

It is particularly evident from these accounts that moving whilst transitioning to university for Bethany was challenging. She narrates the combination of these transitions as leading to several interruptions in her first few weeks at higher education, which she again illustrates as being 'out of her control'. The one thing she highlights here as being within her control and stable, is the support she received from her father. Bethany portrays her father as a supportive influence, sharing emotions of relief and gratefulness that she had her father as a source of aid to her in this time of transition. In the context of care, many young people who have been in care have little or no connection with their immediate family. Bethany's case may be a rarity, but it is evident from this account and throughout Bethany story, that without these strong familial ties, she would have had minimal access to networks of support. Although, Bethany's portrayal of the support received from her leaving care team, in the transition to independent living, is narrated as supportive,

> She's been very good in the sense, because being here on my own in my flat panics me slightly because I've never lived on my own, I had a whole list of questions and things

that were worrying me, and she's helped me sort all them out, but in relation to
university, no she's been more house sort of thing, not university.

Bethany frequently shared her anxieties concerning living alone and moving, although, the stability of the support she receives creates a sense of calm and capability when moving to her first independent home. However, within this account, Bethany raises the lack of support she received for the transition to university, which was co-occurring. Bethany is highlighting that, in the transition to independent living, she has received more support than in the transition to higher education, and the transition of moving has been much more successful. By the third interview, she was still living independently but was no longer studying at higher education.

Between interviews two and three, contact was lost with Bethany. After a few months, Bethany made contact and agreed to take part in the final interview, and the main discussion of the interview was Bethany's choice to suspend her studies and the events leading up to her making this decision. Again, almost immediately, the sub-narrative of moving arose.

> This was the first time I was living on my own, on my own, so I was sat in a lecture
> theatre thinking have I turned my cooker off, have I locked the door, are the windows
> closed, is somebody going to burgle me, what do I do if there's a fire, what I do if there's
> an electric, you know all these mad things going round in my head, I actually wrote a list
> of everything I worried about in my flat, about two pages and it, it, that, that started
> panicking me because I was so far away from home and I thought, I know it's only XXXX,
> but it was still a long way away in case my flat was on fire, or someone was burgling me,
> or the roof had caved in, really odd random things like that worrying me.

She now highlighted how the anxieties she experienced in having her own accommodation impacted her time at higher education. Moving into independent living during her transition to university left her concerned about her flat, leading her to become 'panicked' over any possibility that something could go wrong at her accommodation. She narrated that she felt everything happened too fast *'everything just happened too quickly in relation to moving house',* and that change was already difficult for her *'I don't really cope well to change, I've coped a lot better than I thought I would actually'*. Across the time of the interview process, we see that Bethany's anxieties towards her accommodation increase throughout her transition. Both transitions; the transition to university and the transition to living independently, occurring alongside each other, are portrayed as having a detrimental impact on her time at university, further demonstrating the overarching narrative 'change unsettlement and disarray'. Bethany narrates the involvement of her leaving care team as being centred on her accommodation, and this relationship will be further discussed in the next narrative 'failing and failed relationships. Overall, it is evident that the issues that arose at the beginning of this move escalated until it was

significant enough to cause her to suspend her studies. Bethany found it difficult to adapt to living independently and starting university at the same time. Numerous other sub-narratives are carrying a lesser impact that fed into the narrative of unsettlement, change and disarray. These include course layout and course satisfaction at university and created much anxiety for her when changes occurred that were out of her control. Course satisfaction has been examined further within the theme, 'modes of transition to university life', located in the template analysis (7.4).

8.1.3 Narrative Two: Unsupportive; Failing and Failed Relationships

>They don't seem to be very interested or very involved. I want them to be involved
>because they said they were going to help me with this.

Relationships possess a wide range of properties, from being useful sources of care, support and encouragement, to having the ability to cause disappointment and hinder an individual's progress (Noller, Feeney, & Peterson, 2001). Bethany frequently narrates occasions where she has been let down by another, particularly by others who have a professional duty of care to her. Characterised by disappointment and a battle for personal agency, the narrative of failing and failed relationships permeates not only her transition to university but also her pre-university experiences of education and her care experience. Across the three interviews, two relationships dominate this narrative account: her leaving care team and her first foster carer. Interestingly, both relationships developed as a result of Bethany being in care and limited the level of emotional capital she has available to her. The next section will demonstrate how Bethany discusses the most prevalent of these across the data, her leaving care team, and what this meant to her and her transition to university. Furthermore, this narrative will draw upon several of the themes located in the template analysis, specifically the integrative theme 'identity' (7.1) and the hierarchal theme, 'exercising agency and regaining control' (7.3).

8.1.4 Sub Narrative of Unsupportive; Failing and Failed Relationships: Leaving Care Team

Bethany's relationship with her personal advisor/leaving care worker is the predominant relationship across the data, and she narrates the relationship as 'turbulent'. She describes this relationship as 'unsupportive' and 'a hindrance', *'I've never really rated them. They seem to be more of a hindrance than anything at times in my life.'* As previously discussed, Bethany felt that, during this time of transition, her leaving care team were more focused on her transition to independent living and took very little interest, if any, in her transition to higher education. Hence, Bethany provides numerous examples of how this relationship has 'failed' her during her transition to university. In interview one Bethany often narrates her personal advisor as 'absent' and 'unsupportive',

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I found all this out when I was 16, they're there, but when you need something nobody's there, sorting out my house, for example, I rang up last week, and my worker wasn't there, she was on holiday, and she usually is when something's happening and then she'll come and see me when I'm busy and got to do something, and I have to work around her.

Within this narrative account, Bethany highlights the relationship with her personal advisor as a source of disappointment. She feels that the power to determine her own life was not hers. The result for Bethany is a 'jeopardy of agency'. She places her personal advisor as being in a position of control, in which she makes the decisions about where and when they will meet, *'I don't want to meet her there, it would have been easier to meet her coming out of university, but no, whatever'*. This jeopardy of agency mirrors how Bethany narrates her leaving care team and personal advisor during the previous sub-narrative, 'moving'; therefore, Bethany inevitably narrates herself as 'powerless' in this relationship. She frames the support she receives through this relationship as tailored to her personal advisor and not to her individual needs, which is a common theme across interview one as Bethany battles to get the support and information she needs.

I would have liked as much information they could have given me about finance, about UCAS, about the choice of university, about different types of accommodation, everything, I've pretty much done this, so I'm not a care leaver, I still want some information from my leaving care team, but they don't seem to know anything at the moment.

Bethany's pursuit of information from her leaving care team has left her frustrated and lacking the knowledge she desires to obtain about higher education. She discusses her personal advisor as between her and the information she would like about university, narrating them again as being in control of the information she receives and when she receives it. Furthermore, within this extract, what is particularly striking is when Bethany states, *'I've pretty much done this, so I'm not a care leaver',* therefore, connecting being supported by her leaving care team to the identity 'care leaver'. Bethany holds the perception that to be a 'care leaver' is to be supported by a leaving care team. Bethany has siblings who also went to university and witnessed the support provided to them. She recalls an experience her sibling encountered,

I've seen my [sibling], last year, have to struggle all the way through with my [sibling's] student finance, luckily our leaving care team supported my [sibling] when my [sibling] hadn't had had any money and things because my [sibling's] money wasn't coming through.

Bethany's experience is characterised somewhat differently from her sibling's, as, when required, her sibling received support. Hence, through the same support network, they have varying levels of social capital available to them, further segregating and isolating Bethany, creating feelings of frustration and confusion. Bethany states *'I've had nothing at all, I don't know whether it's all going to be the same or it's all going to be a lot different, I don't know'*. Therefore, at the time of the first interview, Bethany was telling a story of 'unfairness' in the inconsistencies between the support she was receiving and the support her siblings' received. Bethany also required information about university that she did not receive, and found the support she had received so far, only focused on her transition to independent living.

During interview two Bethany continued to narrate the breakdown and continuous failing of the relationship she had with her leaving care team and personal advisor. This relationship was again consistently prevalent during this time, further highlighting inconsistencies in the support she received compared with her siblings. As discussed in the previous narrative, financial difficulties permeate many of Bethany's experiences of the transition to higher education and the transition to living independently. There is an overlap between both narratives, although finances are central to both narratives and each stood out individually as a key story element to her transition to higher education. The financial difficulties Bethany experienced as a result of the lack of support she described receiving from her leaving care team, meant Bethany relied heavily upon the familial support networks she had, and it soon transpired which relationships she felt she could rely upon and most valued. Bethany mainly encountered difficulties after struggling to complete her finance application forms, for her student bursary and loan,

> Bethany: They (student finance) need proof that I've been financially independent for three years and apparently, my P45 ain't enough, so I'm going to have to go to the town hall and see if they can have a record of my wage slips and things because they used to, to prove that I've been independent for three years financially, which I have because I worked for two and then I was on JSA last year.
>
> Me: How are you funding yourself?
>
> Bethany: My dad [...] and my [sibling], cause my leaving care team won't support me until they have the final figures and my nan gives my money to get a bus pass […] They need the final figures to work out how much, if, if they can support me financially, they haven't got any figures, I, I don't know

Bethany's account of financial difficulty narrates her family as providing effective support. The financial support her family provides for her enables her to continue to afford to travel to university. Care leavers facing financial difficulties during this specific transition is a recurrent finding across previous

research (Ch. 2). Young people who have been in care are more likely to be in more debt than their non-care peers in their transition to university. Bethany explained her situation to her leaving care team, but without her final figures from student finance, they were unable to provide her with financial support, except for with her bills. In the first interview, however, Bethany discussed how her sibling was supported by their leaving care team when her sibling encountered a similar problem with the finance application. In this case, their leaving care team supported her sibling financially *'luckily our leaving care team supported my [sibling] when my [sibling] hadn't had any money'*. Bethany felt confused, different. and isolated from other care leavers, which further affected the relationship she had with her leaving care team.

> In comparison to the support that my [siblings'] get, I just don't seem to get anything, I've, I've felt like that for many years with my leaving care team though and that it's one rule for one and different for somebody else, but you can be both be in the same situation, and two different things will apply.

> There's been times in my life when I've needed support, and it's not been there, and I think in regards to my leaving care team, I wish they'd give me a breakdown of what they'll actually will do to support me and then If things are different compared to my [siblings], then why are they different and to explain this to me.

Bethany expressed being '*let down*' and that she has often been treated differently from other care leavers within the same local authority, including from her siblings who accessed university the year before her. Indeed, this came at great frustration to Bethany and has further fed into the overarching narrative of a '*failing relationship*', as she narrates the relationship as failing her. Furthermore, from Bethany's discussion of her first term, she further brought into light the inconsistencies in the support her leaving care team can offer, from one person to the next, especially within her care. In the third and final interview, Bethany tells us of the outcome of her application for finances, her lack of financial support, and the involvement she had with her leaving care team.

> I was waiting to hear back from the bursary, who then sent me a letter saying that I'm not actually eligible because I don't have any bills because my leaving care team was paying my rent. Apparently, I didn't have any bills, so because they didn't ask for gas, your electric, your water and your T.V. licence, everything else, you have to, it just asked me what rent was, yeah or what I pay on the rent and I said zero, so they said you're not eligible for the bursary, and then I sent things back to student finance, and they weren't getting back to me because I needed proof that I was eligible for student finance, for the bursary, so that all messed up. My leaving care team couldn't support me financially because they didn't have my final figures, what I was actually fully entitled to, so I was

struggling financially as well, some days I couldn't afford to get to university, I didn't have enough bus fare or tram fair to actually get there.

Bethany's financial difficulties persisted, and eventually, she could no longer afford to continue attending university. Bethany decided to suspend her studies. Unsurprisingly, her reasons for suspending were characterised by several distinguishing factors, including unsupportive relationships. Bethany has repeatedly situated her leaving care worker in her first and second interview as '*unhelpful'* and '*absent'*. Her leaving care team was still paying her rent but would not provide any further financial support until they had the final figures from student finance. Bethany narrates feelings of '*unjust'* as she knows other people have been supported financially in her situation,

I always found with my leaving care team though, that everybody got different, you could have three people from the same situation, and they'd all receive different levels of

Throughout the interview process, Bethany positions her leaving care team as resisting helping her and not providing a reason as to why. She further stressed wishing to know from her personal advisor why she gets different levels of support to her siblings, *'If things are different compared to my [siblings], then why are they different and to explain this to me'.* This lack of information leaves her feeling '*treated differently'* and further demonstrates inconsistencies in support from one person to the next, even within the same local authority, reinforcing the sub-narrative of an '*unsupportive, failing and failed relationship'*.

8.1.5 Concluding Comments

Bethany's narratives of '*unsettlement, change and disarray*' and '*unsupportive; failing and failed relationships*' are expressed as being determining factors to her decision to leave higher education. Financial difficulties permeate both narratives, including how these difficulties are managed by those who support Bethany. The management of financial difficulties is a central feature of what constitutes as '*supportive'* for her. She expresses a loss of agency and a lack of control in her transition to university, due to insufficient support. Furthermore, the ability to exercise agency in one's decision making permeates most of the experiences of the participants of the main study, relating specifically to the template theme; '*exercising agency and regaining control'.*

8.2 Liz's Story

It was the best decision I ever made, […] you can spread your wings, you can choose what course you do, you can choose what path you go down in life.

Liz was the third participant to take part in this study and was living on her own before she applied for higher education. Liz initially entered kinship care[7] and then later entered the care of her local authority. From that point onwards, her care experience was a mixture of residential and foster placements. She refers to this as the time she *'officially went into care'.* In total, she spent six years in local authority care. Liz's final and longest placement was in residential care. She left care at the age of 18 and spent several months in a leaving care placement before moving into her own accommodation to live independently. Liz completed her GCSEs and went on to achieve a national diploma at college. The main challenge she often faced during college was with the confrontation with tutors. She narrates this as a time of 'turbulence',

> It's been a very turbulent four years, I've gone through, I've gone through all the kicking off, the swearing at the tutors, telling the tutors that "I'm going to burn their car out" I've gone through the anger, the stress, the crying, I've gone through mental health problems at the college, it's been a very turbulent four years.

This time of disruption not only illustrates the relationships she experienced at college but also the changes she presents in herself. Higher education demonstrates a shift in the relationships she experiences with her tutors. She still encounters confrontation, but Liz discusses these relationships as a mixture of supportive and unsupportive, and not just detrimental. Liz applied to study for a degree at university and moved into university accommodation. Before this, she had lived in the same town since she was four but confessed to being happy to move and start afresh. This desire to have a fresh start permeates her decision to move away for university, even though she had the option to live nearby. Liz narrates her choice to move away through the relationship she has with her family. She persistently narrates a strong desire for her family not to visit her whilst at higher education and relates this to a complicated relationship she holds with her mother. Furthermore, Liz narrates her family as unsupportive and disbelieving of her academic ability. She explains wanting to 'better herself' and move away from the lifestyle her family leads.

Throughout Liz's transition to higher education, she narrates an account of resilience. Liz faced many challenges throughout her first year. For Liz, the disruption she experienced contributes to the reason she had to apply for extensions for her assignments. She also portrays several disputes and anger management concerns that she was receiving help for at the university, relating directly to Liz's first narrative; rebellion and deviancy. Following rebellion and deviancy, the next narrative explored will be identity, which links specifically to the integrative theme of the same name (7.1), presented and examined in the template analysis. Liz faced many complex challenges before entry to and during her

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[7] Kinship care refers to being placed in care with a family member, usually a biological family member or a family member through marriage (need reference).

first few months at higher education. Her identity was in flux, with her statement in the second interview that she would prefer to be separate from her leaving care team, but by the final interview she had developed strong links and improved relationships with her leaving care team. Several identities emerged for Liz in her first few terms at higher education, including care leaver, student, and offender, discussed further in section 8.2.3.

8.2.1 Liz's Narrative: Rebellion and Deviancy

> You ain't about to tell me that I can't do something.

Liz's story of the transition to higher education is persistently framed through a mixture of 'deviant' and 'rebellious' acts. Located in the broader social context, the terms 'deviance' and 'rebellion', when used here, reflect the societal view of what constitutes a deviant or rebellious act. To be deviant is often viewed as non-conformity to societal norms and rebellious behaviour is commonly characterised by resistance or outward rejection of a figure of authority. At times Liz tells a story of herself as purposefully being deviant, demonstrating little regret in the choices she makes, positioning many of these acts in her pursuit of self-control, agency and independence, linking to the template hierarchal theme of '*exercising agency and regaining control*' (7.3). Out of the three sub narratives, '*criminal behaviour', 'confrontation' and 'resistance',* confrontation dominated Liz's overall story of this period of transition and her experience of education pre-university. Her acts of rebellion and deviance are most often what leads to times of confrontation for Liz. Furthermore, her desire to resist the judgements and opinions of others appears to be the driving force to her pursuit of higher education and more generally, her desire to succeed. This next section will investigate the influence and narration of confrontation by Liz personally, and more specifically, within her pursuit of education.

8.2.2 Liz's Sub Narrative of Rebellion and Deviancy: Confrontation

Confrontation dominates Liz's story of the transition to university. It is not only reflective of her experiences of entering higher education but also reflective of her journey throughout college. Embedded within this sub-narrative of confrontation are recurrent patterns of resistance, rebellion and fighting for her own personal agency. The confrontation focused upon in this section is in the context of arguments and conflict Liz encounters with course tutors, her leaving care team, and her family. Liz provides a diverse sample of the variety of confrontation she narrates throughout this time of transition. In the first interview, conflict at college featured heavily and was positioned by Liz as the cause of much turbulence and disruption. She had not yet started at university, and therefore the focus was on the events leading up to her decision to apply for university and the type of confrontation she experienced at further education.

It's been a very turbulent four years, [...] I've gone through all the kicking off, the swearing at the tutors, […]. I've gone through the anger, the stress, the crying. I've gone through mental health problems at the college. It's been a very turbulent four years, [...] There's been a lot of resources put into me staying at college. I started moving my placements in the first year of college, […] in my first year of college I lost my nana, [...] everything changed, I turned into this monster that people didn't like, I turned into this angry person that no one expected, and I just turned. I just pushed everyone away I even started to push this place away [leaving care team], they'd say, "come on do your course work", but I'd say, "no", but surprisingly, in my first year, I passed my course with a distinction.

The type of confrontation she initially highlights is between her and her course tutors at college. She discusses a range of challenges she has overcome and positions this alongside the confrontation she encounters. She feels those supporting her acknowledged this 'turbulent' time and made a conscious effort to try to ensure she completed her college education. The use of '*I*' and '*I've*' constructs the sense that she went through this alone. Liz further creates a sense of isolation. Framed within a different context of experience, this pattern of isolation and segregation is also a characteristic of Bethany's narrative of 'unsupportive; failing and failed relationships. For both Liz and Bethany, the experiences they share of isolation and feeling segregated permeate the integrative theme of *'stability versus instability'* (7.2).

Liz discusses two main events here in her reflection of the confrontational situations that aided the construction of this disruptive time: the loss of her Nana and moving placements. The loss of her Nana is narrated as a turning point which led to a substantial change in her behaviour and a time of grieving and loss for Liz. She became angry and argumentative. She goes further to say that she 'turned into a monster' describing this change as undesirable and feels nobody expected it. She appears shocked as well by the transformation in herself, and this is what Liz defines as leading to a confrontation. She further narrates refusing guidance from her leaving care team and felt she pushed them away and was shocked by this. This is later mirrored in her shock at what grades she achieved in her first year, highlighting education as the only pleasant occurrence within this narrative account and presenting education as something she can do despite her circumstances. Through this, she narrates the importance of education in her life. Furthermore, what is important to note is that Liz narrates this person she became in the past tense, narrating this as someone she no longer is, suggesting that she wishes to disassociate with this person she once was. This pattern of confrontation at college is not only isolated to her first year in further education, she continually discusses this throughout her time at college, with reference to her tutors.

I had nagging tutors, very nagging tutors, […], some were a pain in the backside, some were good and some were bad, at one point something come out in my second year/third year at college, something come out, a big thing that was from my past, and college started delving into it, and I got there and they were pushing me to go into it and I was like "please stop it I don't want to go into it" and they were like "but you need to" and then I sat there like "no" and they used to push me every morning, every morning they'd pull me in and go come on discuss it discuss it and I'd go "no, because I'm not about to gossip about my life", and they'd go "come on, you need to tell us we need to support you" and I'd go "no it's my past and that's where it will stay, where it will be left" so I said "so don't push me to discuss it" and they started ringing my social worker calling meeting and I thought "what are you trying to prove" and then at one point I got so annoyed I overdosed on the college premises and college then blamed themselves and I said "yeah it's your fault, I did tell ya that if you pushed me too far then something would go" and they went really far and they started bringing a lot of things up and I just said to them "that I suggest you leave now while I'm still giving you the chance to leave, and they didn't, they carried on delving into it.

Liz discusses an incredibly difficult confrontation between her and her college tutors, in which she blames the confrontation on her subsequent overdose. She frequently and persistently highlights her tutors as intrusive. The tutors delved into Liz's past experiences without her consent, and she discusses feeling pressured and harassed by her tutors to share information that she did not want to share. Liz strongly resisted providing her tutors with this information and reported pleading with them to stop asking her about this past event. Her tutors are positioned as attempting to exert power by frequently asking her to share this information when she does not want to, but Liz fights to maintain this control and privacy over her personal life. This narrative account is embodied with frustration as pleas for privacy are ignored when her tutors arranged a meeting with her social worker. This time of conflict is expressed as detrimental to her wellbeing as she narrates being backed into a corner. The unearthing of her past caused her great distress. Her resistance to discussing this led to frequent confrontation with her college tutors. Liz positions her overdose as a play for revenge against the college. She narrates warning them that she would do something if they would not leave the situation alone. For Liz, she frames the college as responsible for her actions, and she does not take responsibility for this. The overdose, for Liz, was a way of making them stop bothering her. Her narrative account demonstrates a strong battle for control. She feels they are overly involved in her decision making and further resists any advice they give about choices she makes, *'They found out that I was reading my files, "oh I don't think you should read your files", "don't you dare tell me what I should and shouldn't do."'* Characterised by a battle for agency, these accounts demonstrate Liz's

anger and frustration with her college for persistently attempting to make decisions for her. She discusses any behaviour resulting from these confrontations as the fault of the college.

For Liz, the other characters in her narrative accounts instigate these times of confrontation, and therefore, are narrated as responsible for the resulting consequences of these forms of interaction. Throughout Liz's narrative accounts she presents many situations where she was faced with a loss of agency,

> They (leaving care team) annoy me, I'm 20 years old now, I need to make my own decisions, they try and like sway my decisions, and I'm like that "no leave me alone, let me do my own decisions."

Liz is once again narrating her attempts to regain power and control back in her life. She resists support from others that in any way threatens her sense of agency. She demonstrates a significant amount of determination in her own decision making and pushes those away who threaten her sense of agency. Furthermore, Liz describes experiences of conflict within her family, especially with her mother, when discussing going to university,

> Yeah I, like I said to my mum, she said to me "I'd have to pay for your Uni", and [...] I said "no you don't", I told my mum, I said, "you're not getting involved in my Uni". Never wanted her involved in my education, so I'm not about to start now that I'm 20 years, she's like. "I'm coming to visit you", "no you're not", I don't want her turning up to my Uni, and I've said that to, I've said that to the care leaver co-ordinator, well she said, "if she turns up Liz, I will tell you, but it will be your choice what you do."

Like the personal exchanges between Liz and her college tutors, every narrative account Liz has with her mum is reflected within this sub-narrative of confrontation. A discussion about financing university led to the unearthing of Liz's strong resistance to having her mother involved in any part of higher education. She presents fear that her mother will arrive at her university unannounced, and often, her accounts of her mother are characterised by interference and embarrassment. Liz has asserted her power in this situation and rejected her mother's invitation to visit her at higher education. Overall, the first interview was characterised with numerous accounts of confrontation and the consequences of these confrontations, particularly at college for Liz.

Confrontation is a consistent issue throughout Liz's story. These types of altercation repeatedly feature throughout each interview, and she narrates them as important in her transition to higher education. For Liz, confrontation adds to patterns of instability and disruption during this time of transit, once again highlighting the integrative theme of *'stability versus instability'* (7.2) within the template analysis. From interview one to interview two, the pattern of confrontation between Liz and

her course tutors remains, although, these times of conflict are now with her university lecturers as opposed to her college tutors. Furthermore, the confrontation in interview one characterises a time of resistance, whilst in interview two, the confrontation is more commonly connected to rebellion. Her relationships with her leaving care team and course tutors are again at the centre of these times of confrontation in interview two, therefore, will be the focus of this section.

> One of them, I really don't like, […] she's my seminar tutor, I really don't like her, […] she's a complete cow. She went to me one day, we were all sat there, and she said "oh I expected you all to fail this module" so I turned around and went "oh yea of fucking little faith" she went "excuse me" so I repeated myself, she told me to get out.'

> She did her PhD here. She thinks she's better than everyone, she walked in last Monday and went, "right, I want this test doing now", "well you've not even given us a test yet, so how can we do it now", she handed, she threw the test on the desk, so I moved out of the way on purpose and mine went on the floor, I turned round, she went, "pick it up", I went, "no", I went, "you threw it", she went, "you moved", I went, "and, you threw it, you're supposed to place the test, not throw it", she went, "I didn't throw it, I put it down", I said, "no you went like that, I said "you may have touched the desk with your hand" I said, "but the way you did, it flew at me, so you threw it, so there you go" I said, "you're an idiot."

The difference between the confrontation in interview one and interview two is that in interview one, Liz discusses this conflict as a result of harassing behaviour experienced from professionals at the college she attended. In contrast, in interview two, confrontation is more frequently positioned as a game, and Liz openly confronts and challenges her seminar tutor. In the second narrative account, she is openly challenging her seminar tutor in front of her class, where she engages in a power struggle with her tutor. Liz tells the story of having more control and power within this conflict and her resulting behaviour to be at the fault of the tutor. Trickery is a recurrent theme amongst the confrontation she has with her seminar tutor at university. In interview one, she narrates having less control over the confrontation than she does in interview two, where she appears to engage with it. She expresses the confrontation with her tutor as a battle she has 'won' or is 'winning'. Liz has expressed her account to portray herself in control when faced with a situation that could result in a loss of control,

> I absolutely hate her, do you know, she was just a plain arsehole when we were meeting, at the end we went, when we went for our drinks, she went, "I'm not drinking with the students", and I turned around and I said, and I was a bit drunk at this point, so I stood up with my pitcher/glass in my hand, [...] hand and I went, "do you know what […] you're so uptight", I said, "have a drink", and she ended up having a drink, and we ended up

getting her drunk, and we learnt a lot about her, we learnt that she's very uptight, very stuck up, and we also learnt that she doesn't like students. [...] We all left her, I left her, I walked out "sorry I'm not going to stay here with that snotty cow", and all the other tutors, we all found them in another pub, and she walked off home.

She discusses the consequences of this altercation. It appears vital for Liz that she portrays herself to the outside world as the leader (ringleader), who is in a position of control, other characters in this account are narrated as followers. She appears to belittle her tutor to gain a power status within this group and wishes to construct an undesirable image of her tutor to validate her actions, which she later describes within this narrative account. She tells the story of the group as a collective, as on her side. She says, *'we all left her'* and then *'I left her'*, to demonstrate that this was her choice and everyone else followed her. She wants the listener to dislike this character of the 'student hating tutor'. She further discusses the repercussions of her actions.

The next morning I got pulled in to her office, she was going on at me "now then I'm sorry, but you were the knob last night you were the one that sat there being all I'm, I'm not drinking" I said "and you wonder why we think again about you sitting with us" I said "you're not very friendly, you're a bit arsey" I said "and we don't like that" so [...], she threw me out of her office, and I've never stepped foot into her office since she'll ask me to go into her office for a chat and I'll go "no" I won't step foot in there if I've been thrown out of somewhere I'm not going to set foot in it.'

It's just because if they've kicked me out, why should I then make the effort then to go back in the room, I'm not going to stand there and let somebody kick me out and then think [...] "oh yeah I'll just go back in" I'm quite stubborn [...], it's like when my mum kicked me out of the house, [...], I never went back, my mum kicked me out when I was seven, and so I moved in with my nana, and I refused to ever go back, I said, "no, I'm not coming back", social services were like "oh go back, go back", "no, I will not go back" I'm stubborn I won't just go "yeah I'll go back after you've just kicked me out" so that's part of the reason that's, that's where it stems from, me being kicked out of me mums, my own house, so if I'm kicked out of a room I won't go back in.

The conflict between Liz and her course tutor continues onto the next day and is a portrayal of the course experiences she discusses throughout the time of interview two. Liz often uses the term 'we' through her narrative accounts, suggesting that her opinion is shared and not just her own. She shows that she does not have respect for her tutor and challenges her. She describes her opinion as especially important in how others will treat this tutor. Interestingly, this is how she presents this to this specific tutor, ensuring that she knows that it is not just Liz, who feels this way. She positions herself

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as ganging up on this tutor. What is particularly interesting about this narrative account is the effect Liz narrates her tutor asking Liz to leave her office had on her. Her response was connected to her past that is related to her being a child in care. After being 'kicked out' of her tutor's office, she now refuses to go back in and connects this with the experience she had when she entered care after being 'chucked out' of her home by her mother. She narrates a story of pressure to go back but portrays a firm determination not to return, suggesting that she does not return to protect herself, possibly from the feeling of rejection that being *'chucked out'* of her family home could have evoked. The above account demonstrates how confrontation is connected to her time in care and the effect her time in care can have on her experiences of education. Following this interaction, her tutor files a complaint against Liz,

> She made a complaint about me […] I got spoken to by the head of the department, I explained to the head of the department why I said it and why I was angry, she went "Do you know what, I can fully understand", so I got away with that one, and she doesn't like it.

This narrative account epitomises trickery. It echoes the first account in this section where Liz demonstrates that she is a leader and can affect other people's opinions on this tutor. Liz establishes that she has total control over this situation and in interview one, she presents a battle of control with her tutors at college which may reflect her behaviour at university. There is a strong sense of trickery because Liz feels she has been able to convince her head of the department that she is justified in her actions. She discusses 'getting away with it', therefore acknowledging that she knows she has done something wrong. Liz narrates the confrontation in interview two as in her control, rather than battling for the control.

When discussing the relationship Liz has with her leaving care team, in interview two, she presents a slight change from when she spoke of them in interview one, pre-transition to university. Within this interview, their relationship appears to break down. Liz's frequent discussion of the leaving care team as a 'nuisance' and an 'irritation' illustrates this. Furthermore, consistent with interview one, Liz further highlights narratives of 'resistance' and 'independence' within this sub-narrative,

> My leaving care team keep saying "how much have you got left", "nothing to do with you what I've got left out of my loan," I don't tell them, [...], they're like "come on you can tell us" I'm like "no", and they're like "how much?" and I'm like, they went "is it near two grand" and I went never you mind, I've only spent 500, and I got 2400 and something [...] It just mounts up in my bank, it just sits there, because I don't use it, I tell my leaving care team I use it every week, but I actually don't, I've not used a single bit of my incentive money since coming here.

Liz describes the involvement her leaving care team attempts to have with her finances as 'unwanted' and narrates a substantial amount of 'pressure' from them to share this detailed information. The persistent narratives of 'independence' and 'pressure' reflects her decision in the information she shares, as she further demonstrates resistance to their involvement. She describes her leaving care team as 'nosey', and she narrates this involvement as intrusive. In order to defuse the confrontation about her financial position, Liz engages in 'trickery'. She discloses to her leaving care team that she has been using her weekly incentive money when she professes in interview two to not doing so. Liz's use of her weekly incentive money is the first time she draws upon the use of 'trickery' within this relationship, further demonstrating a shift in this relationship from interview one and the overall resistance to their involvement in her transition to higher education. Liz's use of trickery is often as a defence to a situation where she encounters a threat to her agency and control, relating to the theme of *'exercising agency and regaining control'* of the template analysis.

Contextually, the duration of time between interviews two and three is mainly constructed in Liz's telling of her experience of being tried for harassment, being found guilty, and receiving a sentence of probation. Liz encountered unwanted involvement from the press and discussed how this time in her life had an impact on her personally and her progress in education. Her experience of conflict, although already heavily discussed in the previous interviews, increased in volume and spread across other relationships she held. These times of confrontation often epitomise control, as seen in the previous interviews, although her use of 'trickery' and 'game-playing', alone or together, now permeate nearly all her accounts of confrontation. In her narrative about her university tutors, she positions them as defining her as the kind of student that possesses these characteristics,

> The Uni says I'm a different type of student, cause I kind of push and test the boundaries purposely, I know I do it, and personally, I don't care, I'll do it, because the thing is, if I get a rise out of this Uni, I know I'm winning, and I'm just one of them people.

This narrative account characterises terminology associated with 'game-playing'; '*I'm winning*', *'get a rise'* and '*push and test the boundaries purposefully*'. Liz openly boasts about testing others and portrays no remorse for her actions. Furthermore, by referring to the term 'boundaries', she is acknowledging that she is aware that what she is doing could be referred to as deviant or unacceptable behaviour. Liz excuses her actions and justifies the situation by saying she is *'just one of them people'*, therefore, through the use of the plural noun 'people' she is implying that her actions are not perceived as unusual, and others also behave this way, attempting to normalise her behaviour. Her accounts of confrontation frequently illustrate a power battle, in which she attempts to exert her free will and authority and receives opposition in this battle.

She [course tutor] tends to challenge me, and I think, "you're an arse, I don't like you", I don't like anyone that challenges me […]it's just that when I'm being challenged, I feel like I've lost control [...], out of what I do, so that I can't control what they think.

This quote sums up Liz's framing of confrontational situations and embodies 'fear'. Liz's narrative extract narrates a loss of control at times of confrontation and, explicitly, the need to control what others think. She presents herself as being afraid of losing control. Through this fear, Liz constructed a battle for power in reference to this sub-narrative and demonstrated this need for control throughout her story of the transition to university. As discussed, Liz often demonstrated feelings of 'powerlessness' throughout her time in care which could have potentially heightened her desire to be in control of her life now and also be a possible cause for her frequent engagement of a battle for agency in her actions with 'others'.

In addition, throughout interview three, Liz still narrates numerous accounts of trickery and game playing with her leaving care team. Liz told me of how she broke her laptop *'I threw it out of this window actually because one of the cleaners was arguing with me.'* She positions the only reason her leaving care team borrowed a new one for her is because she omitted the truth from them about how she broke her laptop *'I told my leaving care manager it had a malfunction and I was sending it off.'* However, by the end of the third interview, Liz began to narrate a change in this relationship due to her recent court case. The court case was the main difference between interviews two and three. Liz attended a court case for harassment charges where she was the alleged perpetrator. She was found guilty and ordered to pay a fine and attend probation. This case received the attention of the press, and she reported being harassed by them daily. Liz told me of how she was now attending probation and no longer harassed by the press. Throughout this time, she began to position and frame the managers of her leaving care team, as 'supportive', 'respectable' and 'consistent'. Liz now narrate the managers as offering support and providing Liz with someone to turn to,

It's quite good because we have a laugh with him (leaving care manager) and we get to know him, and between him and my leaving care worker, they're the best people we've ever met, I've known him (leaving care manager) since I came into care, and he's always been there for me, he was there for me through the court case, he was there, he's been there for me, now, since, and he's always been a sounding post.

Characterised by consistency, Liz now portrays the relationship with her leaving care managers as 'enjoyable'. She refers to them as the '*best people we've ever met*'. The use of the phrase *'we've'* appears to refer to other care leavers and young people who are in care. By using this term, she is expressing her opinion as shared, further validating her statement. The repositioning of these characters is substantially different from interviews one and two, where her leaving care manager and

leaving care worker are highlighted as nuisances. What is particularly noticeable within this extract is the repetition of similar phrases; *'he's always been there'* and *'he was there for me'*. The leaving care manager is situated as a consistent and supportive influence. Liz narrates the support from her leaving care manager as useful, and that she required this support, although, in previous narrative accounts, she appeared irritated by him being there when she did not need him. However, she appreciates him being there when she does. Liz discusses her leaving care manager as a person who has earned her trust, when she says, *'he's always been there for me'*, constructing this as the cause for this relationship change. Liz's narrative of 'rebellion and deviancy' is characterised by a fight to exercise her own agency and be in control of the decisions she makes. When Liz is in control and freely exercising her own will, she appears to build supportive relationships as can be seen in the latter part of this section where she details the relationship, she now has with her leaving care team. Liz narrates and utilises trickery as a defence mechanism.

8.2.3 Liz's Narrative: Identity

Identity is a vital part of or our self. It can form the basis for how we identify with others and how we identify ourselves. Therefore, further contributing to how we and others form perceptions of whom we are, and the behaviours expected from us. Liz frequently narrates being protective and defensive of her self-image and how others perceive her. She narrates several identities, including daughter, care leaver, offender, and obedient and disobedient student. Liz's narration of the transition to higher education illustrates how she manages these identities during this time of transit. The identity she predominantly discussed throughout her interviews was that of care leaver, indicating a complexity in her identity. Liz narrates a battle not just in the identity of care leaver but also how she manages this identity. As previously argued within the template analysis, the identity of 'care leaver' can affect an individual's experience of education, and their perspective of life prospects and outcomes, whether they choose to identify with this identity or not. Liz's story highlights how she manages the identity of care leaver within her transition to higher education, further developing upon the hierarchal theme of *'identity'* (7.1) within the template.

8.2.4 Liz's Sub Narrative of Managing the Care Leaver Identity

Liz's perception and management of the identity of *'care leaver'* fluctuated throughout her story of the transition to higher education. At times Liz narrates the care leaver identity as being advantageous, particularly in her application process for university. However, in the second interview, Liz described attempting to position herself away from this identity. This section will focus on Liz's narration and management of her care leaver identity within this time of transit. In Interview one, Liz immediately began to discuss the impact of the identity of care leaver, often referring back to the statistics in

education and the stigma associated with this identity. This narration was fraught with frequent stories embodied by frustration and anger,

> It's like someone said something to me the other week […] "you're one of our statistics", and I sat there and said "excuse me I'm not a statistic" […] people say "that you're one out of a statistic that goes to Uni" and I say, "I'm just a statistic, okay", well I say, "okay, let me re-phrase this, so I suppose all care leavers are statistics?"

Liz frequently narrates her perception of the expectations of care leavers as being located within the statistics for care leavers' achievement in education. She is frustrated by the reduction of her achievements to a statistic, due to her care background and actively objects to the notion of care leavers as statistics, '*they do say that care leavers are statistics, but some can speak*'. The use of the term '*statistic*' leaves Liz, feeling categorised and depersonalised. She further went onto tell me of her anger in the use of these statistics in questioning her past achievements in education,

> The statistics aren't forgiving to care leavers, not at all, in fact, the statistics slate care leavers quite a lot because it's like this [...] virtual head in this place, he says, "only 40% of care leavers get GCSE results [C and above upon completion of high school], and I go, "well hang on, not really", and I said to him, I said "hang on I got GCSEs results, and he went "yes but they weren't Cs" "actually they were, and in ICT I got a pass, and that's equivalent to 4 Cs", and I said "so that's a pass and oh yeah I got my English at college and that's a C, so that's 5 Cs and plus I've got my English and Math equivalency, which are equivalent to a C so" I said, "so that's 7 Cs, and you say that I ain't in that 40%?"

Liz found herself defending her academic achievements and narrated that because her grades were not presented in the traditional way her achievements were not recognised. She further positions the virtual head as not understanding these achievements because they do not conform to the conventional GSCE scoring method of 'A', 'B', 'C', and so forth. As seen in the previous narrative account, Liz resents the use of statistics to define care leavers, however, to be excluded from these statistics could further marginalise Liz from care leavers defined as succeeding at GCSE level, leaving her to question her own narrative of 'success in education'. In the first interview, Liz narrated more than just the challenges she faced from her connection to the care leaver identity. Interview one also saw Liz explain the care leaver identity as beneficial, particularly in her preparations for university and the support that would be available to her,

> Everyone at college knew I was in care, she kind of put me in touch with the right people, a few of the tutors put me in touch with right people they organised for me to go to the Uni and make myself feel comfortable around it […] now I know my way around my Uni before I've even started.

I knew that it was my next step that I wanted to do in my education, and I knew there would be support for care leavers, and I knew that it would just be a new, a new fresh start.

Liz received support in her preparations for higher education, and she relates this support as resulting from her identity of care leaver. She narrates that this identity provided her with the opportunity to visit her prospective university, therefore aiding her in developing the feeling of comfort and surety in her choice of university before she officially entered higher education. Liz was beginning to discuss her identity as beneficial in accessing support. Furthermore, within the second account, Liz demonstrates prior knowledge that she would receive support at university due to her care leaver status, including financial support, '*They're [leaving care team] giving me £60 a week to live off as well but that's only usually what I would get off job centres, so it's just like someone helping me to live.'* Liz attempts to normalise the financial support she is receiving by comparing it to the support she would typically receive from the jobcentre if she was not attending higher education. For Liz she presents the financial support as beneficial, however, for those providing this support, her leaving care team, she narrates their involvement as unwanted,

They tried muscling in, but I said: "no, I can do it myself thank you". I only need them now because they're paying my accommodation fee, and that's the only time I'm needing them when they're paying my accommodation money, that's it.

This narrative account demonstrates Liz's desire to be viewed as independent and in control. She attempts to maintain her independence, reluctantly accepting the involvement her leaving care team has in her transition to higher education. Liz illustrated this when she states, '*I can do it myself*' and argues twice that she '*only*' needs them for financial support. For Liz, her sense of independence could be at jeopardy by the involvement her leaving care team has in financing her degree. She further argues that her leaving care team attempted to be more involved in her transition to higher education, although she resisted any further involvement during this time, framing maintaining her independence as highly essential for her.

At the time of the second interview, Liz had moved into her student accommodation and was near the end of her first term at university. She narrated several incidences where she resisted the connection to her care leaver identity,

They don't know anything about me being in care, and I don't want to tell them. The Uni know because they have to know but none of my housemates and none of my classmates, none of my friends at Uni, know.

She describes being powerless in the disclosure of the sharing of her care leaver identity at college. However, her non-disclosure of this identity with her flatmates at university demonstrates control in the information she wishes to disclose. Liz chooses not to tell them, demonstrating a desire to disassociate from this identity. When asked about whether she had shared her care identity with her new flatmates she expressed many times how she did not want to disclose this with them, *'I just don't want to discuss it with them'*, *' I just don't tell them'.* The non-disclosure of her care leaver identity became problematic for Liz when her leaving care worker visited her at her university accommodation,

> My leaving care worker came last week, she came up to see me, and make sure I was all right, and make sure I wasn't dying of alcohol poisoning [...], she started being nosey, asking me about my budget, told her that it was nothing to do with her.

> It was awkward really because I'm used to seeing them [leaving care workers] when I'm living on my own but coming in, having to bring her through the house, I'm like hmm

Initially, Liz discusses the visit from her leaving care worker as concern and care for her welfare. However, this account quickly becomes infused with irritation, as her leaving care worker questions Liz about her finances again. Also, the leaving care worker's visit to Liz is positioned as an inconvenience, as she has not disclosed to anyone that she has been in care and does not intend to. In support of this, the template analysis (7.2.1) highlights the effect the identity of care leaver can have on an individual, with several participants of that study attempting to disassociate with the identity of care leaver. Liz's decision to distance herself from her leaving care team reflects this, *'I try and avoid them as much as I can [...], they all do my head in, they mither and mither and mither, I kind of try and drift away from 'my leaving care team.'* This desire to *'drift away'* from her leaving care team was also reflective of her narration of their involvement in interview one and was discussed further in the previous narrative of rebellion and deviancy.

In interview three, Liz's narration of her care leaver identity in the latter part of her first year at university remained similar to how she discussed this identity within interview two. She continued to narrate resistance in disclosing her care leaver identity to the people she lived with, *'I just don't want to tell them, I want it to be a fresh start for me really.'* Evidently, for Liz, distancing herself from the care leaver identity allows her to start afresh, further telling the story of this identity as 'undesirable'. Liz's overall management of the care leaver identity reflects her decision not to disclose this identity to anyone else. She narrated wanting the same treatment as any other student,

> It's just got me thinking really. It's just got me thinking about how, how not to let it discriminate you and make you different to everyone else, I've requested to be treated with, same as any other student, I've said, "I don't want to be taught, treated any different."

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For Liz, her story is characterised by the desire to be treated like *'everyone else'*, she does not want her identity to be a reflection upon how she is treated and taught at higher education. Within the previous narrative; rebellion and deviancy, Liz positions her treatment at college as being shaped by her care identity, which could reflect her desire not to disclose this identity, although, as previously discussed, Liz explained in the first interview that she felt her university had to know she was a care leaver. She narrated the impact she felt her identity had on the treatment she received at higher education,

> It's given me a lot of chances. I'm like a cat with nine lives. They're less inclined to kick a care leaver out of Uni. They'd have a lot of explaining to do if they did, […] they kind of say to me "look you need to do this", and at the minute I'm being dealt under the mental health policy, so I'm just awaiting a report for that.

> Because they know how hard it can be and they know what obstacles care leavers have to overcome to get to Uni, and they know what stigmas they face, so if they were to kick em out, they would have to be a valid reason, they couldn't just go "oh she's kicked off, we'll kick her out".

Throughout the previous narrative of rebellion and deviancy, Liz frequently illustrates stories of confrontation she encountered with her course tutors. The above narrative accounts describe the outcome of these situations. Liz repeatedly narrates the knowledge her university had of her being a 'care leaver' as reflecting the management of these situations. Liz narrates that she feels her identity has given her more chances and has aided her in getting away with behaviour she may not ordinarily have got away with if she was not a care leaver. Liz tells the story that exceptions are made for care leavers because of their past. She feels that there is a certain level of stigma that would be attached to an institute of education if they were to exclude a care leaver. Therefore, Liz believes they are given more 'leeway' in the behaviour they exhibit, which also appears to be in direct conflict of her previous narrative account of not wishing to be treated differently because of her identity. Liz's management of her care leaver identity at university appears to be adapted to the circumstances she faces at higher education.

8.2.5 Concluding Comments

Liz's narratives of 'rebellion' and 'identity' highlights the template theme of *'exercising agency and regaining control'* (6.3) and the integrative theme of *'identity'* (6.1). Both Liz and Bethany narrate experiencing a loss of agency when in receipt of support, although, Liz received the information she required about the support available and Bethany did not. They both express times where support

was tailored to the needs of the local authority team and not to them personally. The next section, Sam's story, highlights a very different experience of the transition to higher education.

8.3 Sam's Story

> University has just been everything I imagined, even better, [...] and I really enjoy
> my course, you know, I enjoy making friends, I enjoy going out, you know, a laugh,
> the nightlife, everything's good, there's nothing I'd be disappointed at, at university.

Sam was the first participant of this study, and at age 18, he still lived with his foster parents. He was ten years old when he entered the care of his local authority, and his care experience spanned across multiple different foster care placements over the space of eight years. Sam constructs his time in care through the lens of his final placement, portraying a time of stability, care and encouragement. Interestingly, his current foster home is the only placement he discussed throughout the interview process. Sam uses terminology associated with biological families to describe this environment; 'family', 'mum', 'dad',' home' and 'sisters'. The use of these terms by Sam prompted me to ask if he would like me to refer to them in this manner throughout this process, to which he replied, *'yeah, I'm just used to it'*. Furthermore, through discussions Sam had with his leaving care team and foster parents, Sam's foster parents agreed to keep his room open so that he could return home during non-term time. The decision to keep his placement open during non-term time brought much comfort to Sam in his transition to higher education, he was pleased about this, and he often spoke of missing home and its comforts, *'I underestimated how much I would miss home.'* Sam's story highlights the contrasts amongst the care leavers' experiences of the transition to higher education and portrays an experience probably more typical of the student experience.

In order to keep his placement open, Sam paid a retainer to his foster parents through the financial support he was receiving from his leaving care team. It is important to note that at the time this interview took place, this type of support was at the discretion of the leaving care team and would not be the case for every care leaver in Sam's situation. However, legislation (Staying Put) now states that care leavers can stay in care post 18 if they are pursuing education, namely higher education. Staying Put was passed in 2014 and not yet enforced across all local authorities at the time that these young people were accessing higher education. However, it was a key source of support in Sam's story of the transition to university, and further positions care, support, and encouragement as consistent influences throughout Sam's story. Sam narrates the relationships he holds as desirable and helpful. Sam does not discuss his time in care negatively and appears to have a good relationship with his leaving care worker too and can go to his leaving care worker when in need of financial support. Sam discussed that he did not want his application for higher education judged on him being a care leaver and wanted to his application to be reflective of his other achievements. He

only discussed his care leaver identity with those close to them and stated, *'If people ask me I wouldn't lie to them like but like I don't see the need to just broadcast it, I just, do you know if people ask me, people ask me'.*

Sam took the traditional route to university, and at the time of the first interview, he was awaiting his A-level results. He was hoping to achieve the required grades he needed to access his first choice of university and study his desired degree. By the second interview, Sam had achieved the grades he required and enrolled at his chosen university. After his induction week at university, he became dissatisfied with his first choice of degree and switched to another. Sam's decision to change his course illustrates his resourcefulness in his management of course dissatisfaction. Unlike the narrative case studies of Liz and Bethany, Sam does not tell a story of turbulence. One of the reasons that Sam's story was chosen for the narrative case studies was because his experience reflects a non-turbulent story of the transition to higher education and represents an alternative argument to the dominative narrative of turbulence often portrayed in transition literature about children in care and care leavers. The narratives that are particularly predominant for Sam are not necessarily narrated as being connected to his experience of being in care, which separates his experiences from that of Bethany and Liz. There are several dominant narratives throughout Sam's story that this chapter will discuss, including 'stable and consistent influences' and 'ease of settling into university'. These narratives connect specifically to the integrative theme of *'stability versus instability'* (7.2) and the hierarchal theme of *'modes of transition to university life'* (7.4), discussed within the template analysis chapter.

8.3.1 Sam's Narrative: Stable and Consistent Influences

You can do it, Sam!

Stability and consistency are argued to be key components in supporting future life prospects for children in care, in particular stable and consistent relationships. Stability featured predominately as an integrative theme within the template analysis (7.2). Sam's story frequently demonstrates strong supportive relationships in the absence of a birth family. Whilst the most significant part of this support and encouragement is provided by the 'foster family', which he refers to as 'my family', 'my parents', 'mum and dad' and 'my sisters'. Sam also explained receiving support from his girlfriend and peers (new and old). The supportive relationship he has with his girlfriend and peers will be discussed within the following narrative, 'ease of settling in at university'. Interestingly, Sam constructs most of the relationships, new, present or old, as supportive and whilst there are several influences of support that Sam describes, the foster family is the most prominent and consistent throughout his story. The foster family is the focus of this narrative, and the next section will plot and illustrate Sam's narration

of 'the family' throughout his story of the transition to higher education, with reference to other supportive influences where applicable.

8.3.2 Sam's Sub Narrative of Family: The Foster Relationship

Sam's foster family provides care and encouragement for him in his transition to higher education and many other aspects of his life. Often presented as consistent and unchangeable, the relationship Sam has with his foster family is ever-present within his story of the transition to university. The very way Sam constructs and discusses his foster family disrupts the normative societal perception of the family. The use of the terms such as 'mum', 'dad', brother', 'sister' or 'family' from a societal perspective, hold a great deal of significance and are often used to refer to the birth family. However, for Sam, they signify individuals of importance, who represent a birth family member: in Sam's story, his foster family. There are subtle differences in how Sam presents his family throughout the interviews, with the use of terminology most associated with the family becoming more frequent from each interview to the next. The sub-narrative of the *'foster family'* explores Sam's use of this terminology and the positioning of the foster family within his story of the transition to higher education. In the first interview, Sam began by illustrating the encouragement he received from his foster parents in his pursuit of higher education.

> From my foster carers, like "oh you can do it Sam" […], because no one else in our
> family [foster family] went to university, and like, I would say it's impossible, I wouldn't
> say many of my family would go to university, Uni, at this stage. I'm like, the first one in
> the family, like leading the torch you know.

Sam's discussion of his foster parents' response to his decision to apply for higher education is characterised by belief and encouragement. Within this account, Sam only once refers to his foster parents as foster carers. He then continuously refers to them as 'family'; *'our family', 'my family'*. The use of the possessive pronouns 'my' and 'our' illustrates his perception of belonging to this family unit. Furthermore, his repeated use of the term 'family' frames this as the dominant terminology he uses about his foster family and illustrates that he is very comfortable in referring to his foster parents as 'family'.

Interestingly Sam discloses how attending higher education was not the norm for his' family'. He even positions it as 'impossible'. Although, his foster parents demonstrated belief in his ability to study at higher education successfully. Sam is proud to be at the forefront of his family, *'leading the torch for university'*. His foster parents were very active in his pursuit of higher education,

They [foster parents] took me down to the university too, they drove down, you know, to like an open day, I got to ask some questions and that, so it was good, they're taking me down on the day to unpack and stuff.

They [foster parents] keep to looking around university, checking it was a nice place, do you know what I mean, for me and my girlfriend.

Sam's narrative accounts of his foster family's involvement describe times of care and consideration. Sam's narrates his foster parents' willingness and desire to take him and his girlfriend to visit their first-choice university as supportive. In the second of the two narrative accounts, he states '*they keep to looking around the university, checking it was a nice*'. Concerning the phrase *'keep to looking around',* Sam is referring to his foster parents inspecting the university to ensure it is right for him, demonstrating genuine interest to Sam in his transition to higher education. Sam frequently provided narrative accounts of his family expending time in his passion for attending university, providing him with advice when concerned about his attitude to studying, and showing him care and affection in his decision.

During interview two, Sam's story of his initial transition of starting university and moving to his new accommodation unfolded. As a result of the presence and the support offered by his foster family, Sam appears to transition with ease, and although he changes course, he still appears to settle in with little difficulty. Furthermore, he narrates his foster parents as 'proud parents' when he tells the story of achieving the required grades for the university of his choice.

They [foster parents] were well chuffed. They were so proud of me. They were like, "aww", yeah, they got me a present like, they got me and my girlfriend a pencil, little book and that, and little bottle of vodka, like a little University kit. There were all books and stuff, colouring-in pencils, pens and that, all you would need, with a bottle of vodka, "because I knew you'd both study, work hard, and play hard", so it was really good.

We went out for Italian restaurant and had the family around, and drinks and that was it really, it really made me happy, people on 'Facebook' were saying well done and that, but I had a job, so I was just working and that.

Sam characterises his accomplishment through the pride displayed by his foster parents. In society, it is the expectation that in healthy parent-child relationships, the parents will be proud of their children for their life achievements. Sam's narration of his foster parents being proud further reiterates the parent and family dynamic which for Sam and reinforces a sense of belonging to this family unit. Through these accounts, Sam represents his foster parents like family, they reward Sam's

achievements in education and act as a source of approval and encouragement to the continuation of education.

> They [foster parents] offered to take me, and they always said that they wanted to make sure that I'm safe, take me there, ease their mind, that I had hot water, that I'm not, make sure that I was safe and that and that I'd enjoy it.

Sam discusses his foster family as demonstrating genuine concern for his wellbeing, through characterising this account in love and protection. Sam illustrates receiving the kind of treatment associated with a supportive family.

> Yeah they aren't the best as such because you know if I fail or something or I went out boozing the night before my exam, like it wouldn't work, like my standards, if they started moaning at me, I'm not bratish or anything I'd probably just say, say I wouldn't, I wouldn't be that aggressive, nah, it don't matter you know, I wouldn't listen to them, not because I think I know best, but like they have an attitude now, where there's no point arguing, if I want to do something and I'm set on doing something, I'll do it anyway, but like they advise me, but they don't get involved, they say "you know, remember, you have to work hard at university", but they all just tell me to enjoy it, but […] they don't like say "aww you better not go out this night or you better do this", they leave me to my own devices, which is the best thing for me, I don't like, do you know, "do this, do that", they're very relaxed with me, that's what works best for me, do you know what I mean.

The foster relationship he discusses demonstrates respect and an understanding of one another. He discusses how well his foster parents know him, providing for the listener a sense of the strength of their relationship. Sam's foster parents are also discussed as understanding who he is and what works best in supporting him. Unlike many care leavers at the time of this research, Sam had the option to go back home to his foster placement during holidays and frequently discussed his foster home, referring to it as his 'home'. He is happy that he can go back home. He has a sense of control in that he can choose whether he goes home or not. The opportunity to go back home appears to have smoothed the transition into higher education for Sam.

> I like ring them and that, but I got offered to come down-home, but I'm not, they always say that I can come home anytime, they've never got a problem with me coming home, do you know, let them know.

> I enjoy it living at Uni, like good laughter, good social life, I enjoy my course, but it's nice to come home, like, do you know, I didn't realise how much I would miss the T.V. or a leather settee, do you know, so it's like I miss home more than I thought I would, like I

wasn't, I wasn't like that homesick, I wasn't crying that I wanted to go home or anything, I was quite happy to be leaving, I wasn't that upset, but like I didn't think I would be that excited as I was to come home, I was like "woah", I couldn't wait, do you know it, as much as I liked Uni, I couldn't wait to get like a month home, do you know what I mean, like I underestimated how much I would miss home.

Sam's narrative account demonstrates his ease in the transition to higher education. He has been provided with the security that when he wants, he can go back home. His foster parents are forthcoming with inviting him to stay at the house. A recurrent pattern amongst Sam's story is the security the foster home provided to him. The option to go home is supportive for Sam and further creates the safety of stability, as he knows that he will be going home and spending the holidays with his family, whom he cares about and who care about him. His narration of going home in the holidays continued throughout interview three, *'It was good, it was nice, it's been quite nice, we had some Easter eggs, had some nice dinner and that, and I ended up working, so it was good'.* Sam further portrays his foster family as being stable and consistent.

Throughout Sam's transition to higher education, Sam has told the story of his foster family as being actively involved in his life at home and university. In interview three Sam began to narrate more frequently his attitude towards his first-year assessments and the resulting response from his foster dad,

I think it doesn't really matter because I only have to pass, that's my attitude, it's everybody's attitude really, but my dad [foster dad] always tells me off for that, "you should always aim for the first" I say to him "it doesn't matter", "it always matters, its good habits [dad]". I think you get a bit lazy when you know it doesn't count when you know it doesn't count for anything.

Sam's narrative account illustrates his foster father's desire for him to do well. This relationship frames Sam's foster father as authoritative and holding high expectations of Sam, narrating the 'involved father'. Sam feels he must defend his attitude, although, he places the responsibility on the year not counting and feels this had made him 'lazy'. The very telling of this story by Sam highlights that it matters what his family think, particularly his foster father. Importantly Sam now begins to narrate his foster father as' dad', and although he had previously referred to him as a 'parent' this was the first time he narrated him as 'dad', '*Ah my dad gave me a lift, he just gave us a lift, he gave us a lift down [back to university],' I said this to my mum and dad like, if you don't get to university you're limited to what, how much you can earn.'* Using these standard terms associated with a biological family by Sam could be an attempt to separate himself from the identity of care leaver or normalise his experience. Although for Sam, the use of this terminology appears to be reflective of the strength of

the relationship Sam has with the foster family and the stability and consistency they have provided him with since he entered their care. Sam portrays what is a healthy family relationship with his foster parents.

8.3.3 Sam's Narrative: Ease of Settling in at University, from Application to Entry

> I'm now ready like, I want to get started now do you know what I mean?

A substantial part of Sam's narration of the transition to higher education is focused on his desire and ease of settling in at university. This narrative is representative of what creates a smooth transition to university for Sam and is illustrated by several sub narratives: *'accommodation'*, *'being prepared'*, *'course satisfaction'* and *'existing and new relationships'*. These sub narratives for Sam represent essential components to becoming a student and developing a student identity, regardless of background, and therefore, his story can be argued to present a normative experience of the transition to higher education. Out of each of these sub-narratives, Sam framed *'existing and new relationships'* as the most dominant influence on his ease of settling in at university. This section will position and explore how relationships, new and old, aid Sam in preparing for and settling in at university, and again illustrates the hierarchal theme, *'modes of transition to university life'* (7.4).

8.3.4 Sam's Sub Narrative of Existing and New Relationships

Sam's narration of the importance of relationships dominated his story of settling in at university. He expressed a desire to form strong friendships and develop a sense of belonging during this transition. For Sam, meeting new people and making friends is essential to settling in at university. He describes his existing relationship with his girlfriend and the new friendships he develops as supporting the overall ease of settling into university life. Throughout the first interview, Sam narrated several relationships, new and old. He often discussed the significance they had on his time in education and throughout his preparations for university,

> My best mate and my girlfriend, well, we all read each other's [UCAS personal statement] to see what it's like, [...] it's all right when you start learning it, and you can help others when you are getting used to it, do you know what I mean.

Sam's narrative account illustrates the relationship he has with his girlfriend and his best friend as forming a strong support network when applying for university. He received encouragement from his girlfriend when he was struggling with his UCAS application *'my girlfriend is pretty smart, she's like, if I struggled, she'd be like "come on Sam, it's this one.'* The three supported one another through this process, and Sam frequently narrated exposure to others who had the same goal as him, to attend

higher education. The strong relationships he had developed during college appear to reflect his desire to form relationships of this kind at university too*, 'I'd just like to make a good group of friends.'* Interestingly, he does not just state that he wants to 'make friends'; he narrates that he wishes '*to make a good group of friends'.* Sam further demonstrates that the quality of these relationships is essential. When talking with me further about forming new friendships at university, Sam stated,

> It's weird like because when you go to secondary school, you know people from primary, and when you go to college you know a couple of people from primary when you go to university, you don't know anyone, except my girlfriend, I won't know anyone, do you know what I mean, it's like everybody's the same, you don't know anyone.

Sam's concerns about university were mainly in his fear of not forming new friendships. During similar types of transition in education, Sam described having friends who were experiencing this transition with him, and he narrates this time of transition as 'unknown'. His use of repetition in the phrases *'you don't know anyone'* and *'I won't know anyone'* highlights his concerns. However, he displays comfort in knowing that '*everybody's the same',* creating a sense of a 'level playing field' for Sam, allowing Sam to identify with the people he could potentially be meeting, alleviating some of his fears of not knowing anyone. The first interview was framed within Sam's experience of healthy relationships at college and his anticipation of making new friends when attending higher education. His friendships before entry at university were illustrated as supportive, influential, and encouraging, and appeared to reflect his desire to make 'good' friends at university. Developing strong relationships was highlighted as a potential influencing factor on his ease of transition to university.

Sam reiterated his concerns about meeting new people at the beginning of interview two *'The only bit that I was a bit worried about was making friends'*. His concerns were slightly alleviated when he became aware of a Facebook group for all his potential flatmates, and he narrated the impact this had upon the first time they met,

> I was quite buzzed about it, and it was good to have my girlfriend because I like knew somebody, but I don't know all these people because we've like met each other [...], we all Facebooked each other before we moved in, like, we all Facebooked messaged each other and had a little chat and that like and do you know we sort of got to know each other a bit, and like guess what kind of characters you were getting and that, so It wasn't too much of a shock.

> I think it was better like because you weren't like a total, for ins [instance] like, I knew that one flatmate played hockey, I knew that one flatmate liked his tattoos and stuff and like so I know him like, so even like its small topics of conversation, it's not like that awkward, "Hey, so, how are you" it's like "all right, do you know the hockey game" so we can make

a little small talk and so you've got something to go and where if you didn't know
anything you'd be a bit awkward, do you know what I mean.

Characterised by familiarity, Sam's narrative account demonstrates the supportive influence of social media, and his girlfriend for him when meeting his new flatmates. Having already developed common ground before moving creates a sense of ease and control during this time for Sam. Meeting new people is no longer illustrated as the 'unknown' and 'daunting', and he appeared more comfortable due to these influences. Sam highlights his girlfriend as a source of aiding interaction with others and increases his confidence in socialising with new people, *'it's nice knowing someone because you get a bit more confidence, you two can talk, and when you talk to people, and they talk to you, you can explain your thing'*. The presence of his girlfriend is particularly crucial for Sam as it acts as a source of comfort and strength to him when meeting new people, further supporting his overall transition to university life.

Sam frequently narrated meeting new people and forming friendships throughout his first term at university. He embraced the identity of *'student'*, and his story presents a time of ease, excitement, and fun,

> I think university has just been everything I imagined, even better, so and I really enjoy
> my course you know, I enjoy making friends, I enjoy going out, you know a laugh, the
> nightlife, everything's good.

> We have five people now who always sit together, and we have a good laugh and that.

It was evident through Sam's narrative accounts that he felt he was adapting to university life well. He demonstrated many new friendships at his accommodation and on his course. However, Sam felt that he had not made as many male friends as he wished due to his unsuccessful attempts to join a sports team at university. The narration of not making many male friends and successfully playing for a sports team was the only time Sam discussed feelings of disappointment during his first term.

> I think if I, I think it did have a bit of an effect, because a lot of my friends from college are
> from a sports team, because like I was a very sporty person, not all of them, but I'd say a
> good 70% of my friends are related to, or I met them from playing sports with them, or I
> met them at a sports game, do you know what I mean, stuff like that, so, I think I would
> have made maybe a few more friends, a few more lad friends because on my course is
> mainly a lot of girls, cause like I have a lot of friends that are girls but I don't have a lot of
> lad friends, so like I think I would have made a lot more friends with lads, do you know
> like, I could have gone to the pubs with lads, watched the football with the lads, like I

think I would have done that more if I had made a team like, I think not making a team, just like, difficult do you know like.

Sam's involvement in a sports team was the main source of his friendships at college and not making a sports team at university has created a sense of 'loss' for Sam. His friends have gone from being predominantly male to mainly female, which for him as affected the types of social activities he attends. He describes this experience as *'difficult'*, highlighting the importance of male companionship for Sam. Sam positions the loss of a sports team as determining the types of friendships he forms.

By the third interview Sam narrated being very settled at university, his new relationships with his flatmates and course mates had begun to develop into strong friendships, and although he was contemplating changing his course, he appeared happy with university life, *'I'm just coasting through it, nice and steadily'*. His new friendships at university and his relationship with his girlfriend became a great source of guidance to him during assessments, *'we all like help each other, we send each other like our essays, our essays to have a look at and give each other opinions'*. Sam has constructed these friends as mutually supporting one another in their weaknesses. Having a support network of this kind for Sam further supports the ease of his transition to university life. Although Sam discussed his course mates being a strong source of support throughout his assessments, in the previous interview, Sam narrated missing out on male friendships due to his course being highly female-gendered and his lack of involvement in a sports team. By the final interview Sam had been proactive in organising his own football team and began to form male friendships, *'It's like everybody goes and plays football and we have a laugh, and then some of us go out drinking afterwards'.* Sam's involvement with the football team demonstrates how important it was for him to develop these types of friendships.

Sam had formed a good group of friends, and by the final interview, he had already decided who he would be living with during his second year and found a new flat. Sam and his girlfriend had decided to live with a new group of friends, which they had formed outside of their current shared flat and although most of his relationships are narrated as being healthy and supportive, he did discuss difficulties with living with current flatmates,

> So we're, we're not living together next year like we get on, we're all civil with each other, we all have a laugh and a joke, we all have parties and that, but we didn't really like, I don't know, we all argue with each other most of the time, but it's now better that we've all gone our own ways, so we've got our own friends that we're living with next year so everyone's, got their own things, everyone's happy sorting their future out so everyone's getting on with each other, yeah so it's better.

Characterised by 'moving on', Sam's account illustrates acceptance with his current living situation. When Sam encountered a relationship that was unhealthy for him, he moved away from this friendship, and this is evident within the above narrative account.

8.3.5 Concluding Comments

For Sam, throughout the entire interview process, it was evident that he placed great value on the quality of his relationships and positioned them as integral to the ease of his transition to university. Sam's narratives of stable and consistent influences and the ease of settling in at university is the most representative of that of a general student, and this is reflective of Sam's overall transition to higher education. Interestingly throughout Sam's accounts of university life, he rarely mentioned being a care leaver, unless when referring to his foster family or his leaving care team. Instead, Sam framed his story through pre-existing and new relationships and his overall anticipation of getting a university degree.

8.4 Narrative Analysis Conclusion

Presenting the data into narrative case studies has provided a useful method of exploring in-depth individual stories and highlights in more detail the themes and integrative themes of the template. Each narrative case study demonstrates different aspects of the participants' experiences of the transition to higher education, Themes of identity, agency, and stability, concerning support are drawn upon by each participant. Sam's narratives stand out from Liz's and Bethany's due to the stability he discusses, not just from his home environment but also from his leaving care team. For these participants, stability is a determining factor in the ease of the transition to university.

9. Discussion

The previous chapters detailed the findings from the pluralistic approach adopted for the main PhD study. In preparation for the main study, the exploratory work (Ch. 4), utilising Smith et al.'s (1997) interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), uncovered three themes. These three themes are care leaver identity, positive role models, and corporate parenting. The findings of the exploratory research (Ch.4) led to the construction of the research design and methodological approach for the main study. The development of the longitudinal study, through the insights of the exploratory work, can be found in chapter six. This chapter will focus on a discussion of the findings from the longitudinal study. The purpose of the longitudinal study was to examine care leavers' experiences of the transition to higher education, from their point of view, to explore if their experience has implications for policy, practice, and theory for supporting the educational prospects of care leavers. In order to explore the experience of this transition, I first utilised the method of template analysis adopting the Van Manen (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Ch. 7). Then, to capture the longitudinal data, I employed a pluralistic framework, to include three separate case studies adopting Plummer's framework to narrative understanding (2010) (Ch. 8).

The current chapter will first discuss the essential themes developed from the template analysis, utilising the Van Manen (1990) interpretative phenomenological approach, followed by the discussion of the narratives derived from three separate narrative case studies adopting Plummer's framework to narrative understanding (2010). In addition, the current chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical perspectives of social, cultural and emotional capital, and communities of practices. The final section of this chapter will discuss the implications for future work and research investigating the educational experiences of care leavers and children in care.

9.1 Discussion of Essential Themes

The following section explores the first essential theme, identity management and the participants' experience of this phenomenon in their transition to university.

9.1.1 Identity Management

Identity relates to an individual's self-perception of who they are (Côté & Levine, 2002; Woodward, 2004). In both the exploratory research and the main study, identity was a prominent theme in the transition to higher education. The exploratory research found that the identity of care leaver was often resisted and rejected in the pursuit of higher education, due to the stigma held of a care leaver's success in education and overall life prospects. The longitudinal study explored identity further as the

participants discussed their management of the student and care leaver identity during the transition to higher education. Much of the previous literature has not focused upon the notion of care leaver identity, although there are several studies which explored the effect of the care leaver as a status on higher education (Cotton et al. 2014; Mannay et al. 2015; Harrison, 2017), or the label of care leaver (Berridge, 2006; Turner & Percy-Smith, 2019). Criteria for this research were that participants identified as care leavers when recruited. Being a care leaver affected how they viewed themselves, the support they received, their sense of belonging, and how they exercised their agency. Thus, the term care leaver identity emerged. All participants acknowledge that being in care carries certain expectations of how they will proceed in education. To access support that will aid their transition to university, the participants needed to engage with leaving care services and student services at university. This process meant identifying themselves as a care leaver. The identity of care leaver for the participants, therefore, holds significance in the available support and the process of applying for higher education. The PhD research discusses care leaver identity as interconnected to other developing identities these young people have chosen for themselves, particularly the identity of 'student' and how they subsequently manage the two during this time of transition to higher education.

Cotton et al. (2014) found several 'risk' and 'protective' factors for supporting a care leaver during their degree. The protective factors included: having a place to go during the non-term time, good financial support, and guidance in preparations for university. Findings from the participants of this study support this. Those who had consistent information for higher education, including the support they would receive financially and where they would stay during non-term times, demonstrated feeling more stable and secure during the transition to university. Furthermore, Cotton et al. (2014) found the motivation to help others due to their own experiences as a protective factor to the resilience of these young people. Several of the participants in my study discussed supporting other care leavers socially, to elevate feeling different. Some participants, however, felt the connection to other care leavers was forced and felt they shared nothing in common with other care leavers. Jackson and Martin (1998) argues that one protective factor was the development of healthy, supportive friendships with other children and young people who achieve academically and are not in care.

The participants of the PhD study found that moving for university helped them to develop bonds with new people. If the move to new accommodation for participants did not happen at the same time as all other students, participants stressed feeling isolated, as they felt friendship groups had already formed. The results are in concurrence of those of Harrison (2017) who argued that care leavers who had not formed meaningful relationships at university reported feelings of isolation and often experienced doubts about continuing their pursuit of higher education. Feeling different at university and the isolation this leads to, could reduce the opportunities to form new social capital through the lack of development of social ties. These young people may have fewer resources to draw on in times

of need (Coleman, 1988; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2001) and were evident in several of the experiences of the participants.

For those who had not moved for university or made the move later on in their first term, they reported having fewer people to turn to for support and had developed few new meaningful relationships at university. They were also less likely to be involved in communities of practice at university with other care leavers or study support groups with their fellow students. Having other students to share resources with and collaborating on academic ideas could provide support during the transition to higher education (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Sam's experience was evidence of this. Sam developed strong relationships with his fellow students, whom he was able to share academic ideas with and having fellow students to discuss ideas with, helped ease the transition of the new workload of higher education.

Due to the unique context of each participant's experience, each participant provided their interpretation of this transition. For many of the participants, their previous experiences of transition and education ('lived time') reflected how they managed the transition to higher education. Those reflecting on times of instability at higher education had experienced inconsistent support. The participants' previous experiences of care and education left many participants feeling different from their non-care peers. The participants attribute care as the reason they felt different. Van Manen (1990) argues that previous experiences can alter the present and future transitions. This feeling of 'different' derived from stigma, differences in the ability to exercise agency in decision making, and perceptions held of care leavers, which left the participants navigating how to belong at university.

Cotton et al. (2014) argued that the care leaver status was a protective factor at university, and all participants of Cotton et al.'s study discussed the positive implications this status had on their time at higher education, as they desired to be successful, despite their background. Some of the participants of the PhD research, Thomas and Sam, also found the identity of care leaver had positive implications for their application process. They both felt their experience set them apart from their non-care peers, demonstrating strength in their character. In contrast, the rest of the participants wished to separate themselves from this identity. They resisted and rejected support for care leavers, as they felt this set them apart from other students and higher education was their pursuit of 'normal'. Research by Mannay et al. (2015) supports this finding. Mannay et al. (2015) also discussed the negative aspect of being in care, arguing that young people in care felt they were often treated differently due to the 'looked after' status and how education, in terms of positive experiences, helped alleviate the feeling of 'different'. Harrison (2017) also reported that some care leavers welcomed the opportunity higher education provided them to start 'afresh' in a new environment. Furthermore several of Harrison's (2017) participants encountered their own personal conflict in whether they should disclose their care background, this was more likely to be the case if the care leaver had moved into new

accommodation, where support or no support from their local authority, revealed their status as a care leaver.

In previous research by Jackson et al. (2005), the lack of financial support was a barrier to care leavers' success in accessing higher education. For the main study, some of the participants had access to financial support, although some become resistant to support that reinforces the care leaver identity. As with my research, the risk factors reported by Cotton et al. (2014), demonstrated care leavers felt there was insufficient emphasis on the adjustment to life at higher education and inadequate support. Many students from non-care backgrounds do experience similar concerns, but care leavers also have the added experience of entering the care system and this form of disruption can create instability in an individual's life that can add to their difficulties to proceed in education. Furthermore, in Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) research with mature undergraduate students, they argued that knowing the individual's background and the role it plays is essential in the understanding of transitional periods within education.

9.1.2 Care leaver transition to higher education and stability versus instability

Education can potentially protect a young person from social exclusion, and for an already marginalised and disadvantaged group, education could provide one positive avenue for potentially positive future life prospects (Cameron et al., 2012). Previous literature by Sanders et al. (2000) raised the practical concern of the impact of factors that are 'out of the control' of children in care, due to their life circumstances, which can have a disruptive effect on their experiences of education and their overall success in education. This study concurs with previous research. The instability of outside factors like housing and schooling can impact these young people's trajectories in education, impacting their agency in their academic paths. Furthermore, instability in accommodation and education illustrates the integrative nature of the theme stability versus instability, and the potential these experiences can have on the participants' agency.

The research literature acknowledges that some aspects of the participants' experiences are comparable to that of any student. The transition to higher education in some cases seems typical, but this research argues that identity, stability, agency, the practical process of getting there, embracing university, and fitting in, are different to that of a typical student. This research explored what it meant for a care leaver to enter higher education. Being in care affects nearly every aspect of that young person's life. What sets apart the care leaver participants are often their past experiences of navigating transition and complicated lives (Sebba et al., 2005; Harrison, 2017). Van Manen (1990) considers the experience of the present and the subsequent future to be grounded in past experiences. The participants' previous experience of transition, including those in education and care, can reflect their management of future transitions.

The participants all draw on experiences of instability and entry into the care system can create significant upheaval in a child or young person's day to day life (Stein, 2006). Entry into care for all participants was characterised by times of uncertainty and altered the life trajectory of the participants. This study explored how earlier and current experiences of stability and instability impacted the experience of the transition to higher education. Van Manen (1990) argues that it is our previous experiences that often inform our present and future experiences. Stein (2006) argues that when young people leave care, this time of transition connects their earlier experiences of care to their current experience of leaving care.

Experiences are reflective of the cultural and social context in which they occur (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen argues 'The home reserves a very special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of our being' (Van Manen, 1990, p.102). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1977) contends that the cultural and social context is specific to our upbringing and those around us. Vryonides (2007) argues that the primary source of cultural capital is the home environment. Limited access to people, who hold high educational qualifications, could reduce a young person's access to strong values towards education, inhibiting their access to this form of cultural capital. The development of social and cultural capital of this kind could be limited due to the fractured experiences of homelife and education, as a result of the entry into care (Jackson et al., 2005; Sebba et al., 2015; Harrison, 2017).

In concurrence with Stein (2008), the PhD study supports the finding of the importance of care leavers forming a 'positive identity', having stability in care placements, and access to efficient and consistent support in the promotion of resilience. The promotion of stability is historically linked to the future life prospects of care leavers. Berridge (2017) argues that children in care were more likely to engage in education if their home life was stable. Previous research focused on the role of resilience in the experiences and stories of care leavers. Resilience is the ability to achieve good life outcomes regardless of previous experiences of adversity. The link between resilience and positive outcomes in education and career pursuits has been well documented by previous research (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Stein, 2008; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Cotton et al., 2014). Jackson and Martin (1998) argue that the development of resilience can support children in care during times of transition, including education. Resilience is ambiguous in the present literature and does not fully explain why some people succeed, and others do not.

Instability can lead to the development of resilience. Many of the participants showed resourcefulness in accessing university, often with little support, demonstrating their own resilience during this time. Support, stability, and encouragement were highlighted in previous research to be beneficial to success in education (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jackson et al., 2005; Cameron, 2007; Cotton et al., 2014, Berridge, 2017). Within this research, the use of their own resilience reflected the care leavers

use of their agency, with some participants drawing upon the lack of support they received as a way of demonstrating that they could still act, and could access higher education, even with limited support. Care leavers face many obstacles in exercising their agency and have many constraints placed upon them. However, the participants fight on regardless, but their obstacles often reflect their success and ease of accessing university. Thus, many care leavers gain agency in transitioning to university.

Research conducted by Jackson et al. (2005) explores the experiences of care leavers in higher education. However, similar to the work of Biehal and wade (1996) and Dixon et al. (2004), Jackson et al. (2005) do not focus upon specific transitions within one's educational journey, for example going from further to higher education, or from one academic year to the next. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) argued that this transitional period of going from an educational institute to another, in an individual's education, could be difficult for most students to adapt to regardless of their background. Moreover, Yorke and Longden (2005) found that some university students were more likely to opt-out if they struggled with the financial implications of going, doubted their academic capability, and they had little or no sense of belonging, which was evident in Bethany's experience. Jackson et al. (2005) suggested that care leavers are affected by these issues, and within their sample, this led to care leavers opting out of university. Furthermore, Jackson et al. (2005) argued that care leavers also had the added pressure of being affected by previous experiences of being in care and a lack of support from the family unit and professionals working with them. In support of this, Tobbell et al. (2008) suggest that educational transitions can lead to low academic achievement and can affect the overall educational experience for the individual.

Furthermore, the home environment is where Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital develops. Frequent moves and disruption in education can limit access to cultural capital. It is noteworthy that in the case of Sam, he was the one participant who discussed the influence of graduation pictures around the foster home he had lived in for eight years. He reflected on the influence of these pictures and the cultural influence of his foster parents regarding higher education. There are roots in belonging. To fit the cultural norm of his foster family, he pursued similar avenues to their biological children. Issues of capital can separate any student; the background is usually the defining factor. Bourdieu (1986) argues that this was usually a result of an individual's socio-economic background. Furthermore, social capital can be affected by the trust a person has for another (Johansson & Hojer, 2012). Most participants expressed a time they felt let down by their professionals and carers. This repeated experience led to many young people avoiding potential support networks. The participants often felt there was no reason to engage with support, as their previous experiences of support were fractured or ineffective. The lack of trust in those offering support could limit forming social capital (Johansson & Hojer, 2012).

Driscoll (2011) argued that in contrast to the research conducted by Jackson et al. (2005) and Stein (2004), the birth families of care leavers were not a source of support for these individuals within their educational pursuits. The finding of birth families not being a source of support was also consistent with later findings reported by Jackson and Cameron (2012). Also, the development of self-reliance reflected their ability to accept support (Driscoll, 2011). The PhD research concurs with the previous literature exploring the connection between resilience and positive life outcomes. Building upon these findings, my research reported other factors at play: agency, identity, and stability.

9.1.3 Care leaver transition to higher education and agency

The ability to act freely without the influence of others is something fundamental, at the core of human existence (Etelapelto et al. 2013). Agency can be impacted upon by extraneous factors, specifically public and professional perception of care, which are imposed on children in care, and limit the choices that are available to them (Sanders et al., 2000). Furthermore, negative expectations play an integral part in the prospects of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sanders et al. 2000). The effects of stigma have often featured in previous research, although much of the literature does not focus upon the effect stigma has specifically on a care leaver's agency (Sanders et al., 2000; Jackson et al., 2005; Mannay et al., 2015; Harrison, 2017). Previous research on care leavers' prospects in education has shown that care leavers have often faced low expectations from others within their future life prospects. Historically, children in care and care leavers have encountered a large amount of derogatory stigma aimed at their care or care leaver status. The stigma these young people face has the potential to jeopardise their agency, as previously discussed, although they also face challenges in the expectations people hold of them, which like stigma can often be internalised. Again, the experience of stigma could affect care leavers ability to form new relationships, and, the social and emotional capital available to them (Johansson & Hojer, 2012).

My research offers a detailed exploration of the role of agency in education for care leavers. Previous research suggests that when an individual can exercise their agency and feel in control of their own decisions, they are more likely to experience positive life outcomes and general life satisfaction, demonstrating the importance of personal agency in an individual's life (Cordova and Lepper, 1996). Berridge (2017) connected agency to success in secondary education. Berridge (2017) argued that the more stable their home life was, the more likely they were to engage with education. Berridge's work offers some insight into the additional role of agency in education, providing a rationale for further exploration of the education of these young people to understand their experiences of education better. In aspiring to enter education and later entering higher education, personal agency is a critical factor for the participants. Factors which affected their ability to aspire were associated

with perceptions and stigma surrounding the care leaver identity. For many of the participants, their interactions with others embodied their experiences of this time of transition.

A desire to aspire through education is a crucial characteristic in the academic experiences of all the participants of this study, with each young person highlighting university as the main driving point to succeeding in their educational pursuits. A degree can sometimes be the only way of pursuing a career, and in cases where it is not the only route, obtaining a degree could provide advantages that not having a degree could inhibit. Examples include excelling in a career quicker and beginning a career at a higher position than someone would if they had not obtained a higher education degree. In care, the focus has often been upon survival and getting a placement that is appropriate for that individual. Historically, less attention has been placed on education, and even less so on the possibility of attending higher education. Statistically, only a small percentage of those who have been under the care of their local authority have attended university (Department for Education, 2017c; Harrison, 2017). What is striking about the participants in the present study is that they all demonstrated a keen desire and drive to attend university, showing that they were aware of the benefits of obtaining a degree and the advantages a degree could add to their future life prospects. They often discussed times where they had encountered professionals and foster families that pushed education and encouraged them to access further and higher education. The care leavers who participated in this study self-selected and only those who had at least got as far as being accepted for university were a part of this sample, and they may not be typical (Langdridge & Hagger Johnson, 2009). However, the current research demonstrates that this kind of motivation does exist, at least amongst some care leavers.

Previous research has explored decision making in the transition to higher education for different socio-economic groups. Support in preparation for university is a common theme in the literature (Jackson et al., 2003, 2005; Harrison, 2017). In research exploring the institutional habitus, McDonough (1997) examined four high schools in the United States (US). One of their key findings was the importance of guidance teachers for young people with no family history of entry into higher education. Wray (2012) reported several supportive factors to the educational progress of a disadvantaged group, including the ability of marginalised groups to utilise negative remarks as a way of encouragement to pursue education and to have a deep-rooted focus to enter higher education. The main study concurs with these factors. The participants often saw university as a focal point in their lives, even from a young age, and found negative expectations from others as a driving force to continue their educational progress and regain agency in their pursuit of education. The main study reported that negative expectations could lead to an 'agency in jeopardy' and by fighting against these expectations and the stigma they received, the young people of the study were exercising and re-claiming their agency in their life outcomes. The participants of this study often had strong aspirations,

and all participants aimed to access university. Through the absence and limits on their agency, it was evident that the participants of this study attempted and succeeded to take back control through education.

Instead of the adverse pursuits often associated with children in care, the participants' choices reflect positive ways of seeking back control. As we saw with Bethany, a portrayal of self-control and the ability to exercise her own personal agency was a crucial factor in choices in education. She slightly contradicts herself in saying 'if I could, I would, but I don't want to'. In essence, beginning her statement with a lack of agency in this decision and finishing this statement by stating it is her choice not to act on her desire to see her foster mum and prove to her that she has done what she believed she could not achieve. Taking back control for these young people is not always explicitly related to pursing education, although this may be a characteristic of the experience they share. Nearly all participants discussed times in which their choices reflected proving people wrong. Overcoming the lack of career and academic prospects of other family members is not a new phenomenon amongst care leavers. Jackson and Hojer (2013) reported a similar pattern within the participants of the YiPPEE project, arguing education is a means by which these individuals feel they can best avoid repeating the patterns of underachievement previously demonstrated within their birth families. It is notable from previous research that many young people who have entered the care system report not receiving encouragement to proceed in education. They also stress a lack of encouragement could lead to a belief that people do not feel they have the ability to successfully achieve a place at university, which could affect their own belief in their academic ability.

9.1.4 Care leavers' Modes of Transition to Higher Education

Briggs (2012) argues that exposure to a university can aid the transition to higher education. Research by Briggs et al. (2012) concurs with the current research. General students are encouraged by exposure to higher education through mentoring schemes (though limited) (Clerehan, 2003) and university visits (Briggs et al., 2009). This research supports the importance of positive and encouraging exposure to university, and it could be a critical factor between attending university and choosing other routes. Research by Yorke (2000) reported that unmet or unrealistic expectations of higher education could lead to students 'dropping out' of higher education. The current study corroborates research by Yorke (2000) and argues that these expectations can affect the way individuals engage in their first year of university. Bethany's account is strong evidence of this phenomenon. The expectations of her course were severely unmet, and she was unprepared for what to expect in the general course lectures for her discipline. Bethany attributed the dissatisfaction with her course as one of the reasons she decided to suspend her studies till a later date. Preparations in her personal life for this transition also played a significant part in the incompletion of her first year. It

appeared that insufficient guidance was given to Bethany, even though she was still in contact with her leaving care team. It can be found from this research that preparations for university are essential and require much thought and care in the transition process. It is also evident that support in these preparations is crucial, which was reflective of the experiences of all the participants. The current study concurs with findings of Briggs et al. (2012) and Harrison (2017), who also reported the salience of efficient and appropriate preparation during the application process for university.

Financial support affected all the participants, including the preparations for obtaining this support. Some felt the support was sufficient. However, the majority experienced times of financial difficulties and instability in the lack of information available regarding the financial support available to them. In concurrence with the main PhD study, the majority of the previous research in the UK, and internationally, acknowledge good financial support as a contributing factor to success in care leavers' transition to higher education (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Jackson et al., 2003, 2005; Cameron, 2007; Mallon, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Jackson & Cameron, 2012a; Cotton et al., 2014, Mannay et al., 2015; Harrison, 2017: Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011; Franz & Branica, 2012; Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Wilson et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). The findings of the main study further highlight the importance of financial stability in care leavers' experiences of the transition to higher education, and in the preparations for applying for financial support with student finance and institutes of higher education.

Social connections are an integral part of most people's lives and are argued to be a contributing factor in the ease of transition to higher education (Harrison, 2017). Most people strive to have successful relationships, and for some, meeting new people can be experienced as challenging, however, when developed, such relationships can often create a sense of belonging and comfort. Many felt ease in developing new relationships and particularly for those who had prior experience of social networking before entry to university. The concept of supportive relationships is not new to the theory of transition, and social connections are argued to be a vital component of healthy and successful transitions. Meeting new people can be a challenge for many people, and care leavers have often experienced relationships that have been unsupportive and detrimental to them, which could limit the social capital they form and their ease in the transition to higher education (Johansson & Hojer, 2012).

9.2 Methodological Discussion

> In sum, we should ask how meaning, time, dialogue, embodiment, emotion, inequality, power and globalisation can dwell in stories and shape them (Plummer, 2013, p. 216).

The issue of understanding transition to higher education for care leavers lead to the understanding of the context in which the story is heard and told. Narrative and hermeneutic phenomenology both argue that stories and experiences are context specific (Van Manen, 1990; Salmon & Riessman, 2008). Case studies adopting narrative techniques helped captured the longitudinal data. The adoption of pluralism provides a dual perspective on the participants' transition to higher education. The narrative case studies utilised Plummer's (2013) elements to narrative understanding', outlined in chapter 5, which allowed me to examine the stories for narrative: 'meanings', 'dialogue', 'flow' 'embodiment', 'sensualisation', 'inequalities', 'power', 'space and global' contexts. An example of narrative power is evident in Liz's story. During her transition to university, Liz narrated herself as the one in control. When her agency was under threat, she engaged in trickery and rebellion to reassert her agency. Liz uses the relationships central to her transition to higher education to position herself as the powerful one. In contrast, Bethany constructs her transition to higher education as unstable, drawing upon the relationships she has and her experience of moving during this time. She gives power to these relationships and the transition to independent living, narrating them as responsible for her instability in transitioning to university.

There are relatively few longitudinal studies of care leavers in education, and none which focused specifically on the transition to higher education. Following the participants through this time of transit to university allowed a perspective into this transition as it occurred, as opposed to retrospectively. The initial transition to higher education for students, independent of their background, can be a daunting experience and a time of substantial change. It is often the time many students who leave university will choose to 'drop-out'. The social capital available to these young people reflects the success they have and is narrated throughout their experiences as pivotal to the ease of times of transition. This research contributes to the knowledge of care leaver transition, furthering the knowledge of transitions in education for marginalised groups by utilising hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative analysis case studies.

9.3 Reflexivity

The time-consuming process of template analysis, which led to the development of the essential themes, had me re-thinking and challenging my interpretations of what these experiences meant for the participants, in their essence, as they experienced this transition. I frequently reflected on my position as a researcher, and a care leaver, throughout this process. As a care leaver researcher, there were several challenges and benefits to having inside knowledge of this area. Having the shared identity of care leaver enabled ease of access to some gatekeepers at local authorities for care leavers. These gatekeepers came in the form or leaving care managers, personal advisors, and support liaison officers at universities. See chapter one for definitions.

There have been many times during the analytical process that I felt an emotional pull into the data of these young people. Reflecting upon this, I know that my own experience of being a care leaver brought me close to the data in a more personal way. I did see similarities between my stories and theirs. I often felt I had to question my perspective through the lens of 'would I have analysed it this way if I had not been in care?'. My background was always a part of the decision to choose to research care leavers accessing higher education. My unique stance meant I could build a different rapport with these young people that could add a different perspective to this area of academic research. My background seemed to help the participants in feeling more comfortable in disclosing their experiences. A challenge with one participant (Bethany) was that we were both from the same area and already knew each other when we met but were unaware of this before the meeting. When drawing upon personal experience, this has been done with caution and through the understanding that, although we may share this common factor of being in care, our experiences may differ significantly. After interview two with Bethany, I left feeling concerned about her. She had a come across as entirely down in general and deflated about higher education. Through consultation with the supervisory team, I decided to contact Bethany. On the first occasion that I called Bethany, she answered the phone and quickly told me that she had something to tell me about higher education and asked me to call back because at that present time she was busy. Following this initial phone call, I lost contact with Bethany, and it took a few weeks to get back in touch with her. Following this, I sent a text message to Bethany one last time with the same message, and she then contacted me and agreed to meet for the final interview.

Sam was the first of the participants that I met for this study. I arranged to meet him with one of the leaving care workers within his leaving care team, who took me to Sam's foster home. She introduced me to Sam and sat with me for about 15 minutes while I explained who I was. It was my first interview of this study, I was nervous, although, through interviewing for the first study, I felt better prepared when conducting interviews in this study. As the interviews progressed, the rapport improved. The slight awkwardness of the first interview, could have been, in part, due to, or affected by, my nerves and lack of experience conducting interviews for this study.

Through hermeneutic phenomenology, reflexivity was crucial in the interpretative process, in order to remain open to the data. I considered the impact of my own identity of 'care leaver' and how it may have impacted the research process. My position as a care leaver researcher meant the topic of study was initially driven by my own experience and involvement within the care system. My experience derives from my time in care, and although I am aware that this may give me potential insight into this area, it may also act as a disadvantage, as it may open this research up to criticism, due to my involvement, and the effect this may have on the interview process and the analytical stage. In reply to this criticism, my research had no hidden agenda and participants were made fully aware of my

involvement within this field. I found that by providing this information to participants, it helped reduce some of the initial barriers of attempting to build a rapport.

When embarking on this research, I was open to the possibility that I may already know some of the participants who were taking part, for this study the participants were made aware that the interviews are professional and whatever they disclosed in the interview would not be discussed with them outside of the interview setting. Precautions were developed in case the information the participant provides was sensitive to them, which included appropriate contact numbers, located in the information sheet. The information sheet was given to the participants before the interview began. For example, the details included contact numbers for the researcher, the researcher's supervisors, a counsellor, and the student support and liaison officer at the higher education establishment they attended.

9.4 Conclusion

The previous exploration of a resilience framework concerning children in care and education has mainly focused upon 'risk' and protective' factors in the educational experiences of those who have been in care (Jackson, 1998; Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2014). Much of the previous research focused on issues of supportive influences and resilience. Mallon (2007) discusses resilience as not being a consistent entity and one which may not be drawn upon in all cases when a young person requires it. The current work concurs with these findings, although also found other confounding factors to be at play alongside these themes, and together provides a more comprehensive understanding of this time of transit for these young people. The current work, along with the previous literature aids the development of a more complete picture of the complexities of this transition for care leavers and in their overall experiences of education.

The integrative themes produced by the template analysis show a unique system of play amongst the data produced from care leavers on their perspective of the transition to higher education. The identity of care leavers, whether accepted or rejected, demonstrates how a care leaver may navigate this given identity and the complexities thereof in the decisions they make, and their experiences overall. This area of research epitomises the perspective of a care leaver's journey to higher education. The transition is individually unique; however, there are many common themes which emerge and assist the understanding of the challenges and experiences care leavers face when accessing university. In considering individual experiences of this period of transition, this research is unique and methodologically innovative in providing two perspectives of understanding the data that were produced by both studies during this research process.

10. Conclusion

The previous chapter (Ch.9), discussed the essential themes of the main longitudinal study of the doctoral research. The current chapter will set out the limitations, the implications for policy, practice, and education, and suggestions for future research.

10.1 Limitations

The sampling was opportunity sampling and conducted on my behalf through gatekeepers. The participants' local authorities selected them for this doctoral research. The limitation of this method of sampling is the unknown process of selection of participants by the local authorities, potentially leading to selection bias (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). If a care leaver was more active within his/her local authority, they might be more likely to be asked to participate in this study due to there being an increased chance they would respond. Selection bias is possibly a common problem with this kind of research and research in general with young people for this reason. Those who are less engaged socially are more difficult to contact, and therefore, they are less likely to be asked. However, a bigger question faces us: how do we get these individuals to engage in research of this kind?

Narrative cases studies captured the longitudinal data of the transition to higher education. However, this decision was made after the interview process where semi-structured interviews were carried out adopting a phenomenological framework. The limitation of not conducting narrative interviews meant, when using the data from the semi-structured interviews, I was constructing their stories, rather than them telling me what their story was. The nature of interpretative phenomenology is to attempt to explore experience from the participants' perspective, capturing the essence of this experience for them. There was much description, and interpretations gathered from the longitudinal study, which meant that their stories of this transition began to emerge naturally. Thus, the narrative section of this analysis captures their stories of the transition to higher education, reflecting on past lived experiences and what it means to be a care leaver.

The main study investigated the transition to university for care leavers only, and could be criticised for not including accounts of the professionals and carers who work with care leavers and children in care. However, the focus of this study was the personal experiences of care leavers in education, and further research could also focus on the experiences of professionals. Additionally, the sample did not include a comparison to non-care peers, although this is not required for qualitative research (Langdridge, 2007). Further research could offer a different perspective if the experiences of transition were explored for other non-typical students.

10.2 Implications for Practice, Education, and Policy

The current research provides several implications for practice. Agency was a key finding of this study, and in order to help care leavers access their agency, the doctoral research recommends that children in care and care leavers, where possible, have control and understanding of their decision making. If decisions are made on their behalf, they must be made aware why this decision has been made.

This study offers a practice recommendation of mentoring schemes within leaving care teams as a standard practice. Care leavers who are attending university could be asked, and encouraged to, support other children in care who aspire to, or have the potential to, attend higher education. The doctoral research demonstrated that care leavers who met other care leavers who were aspiring to attend university, or already attending university, were positively influenced by this experience.

There is also a need for clear information and guidelines to be provided by the care leavers' local authorities to care leavers regarding the support their local authority will offer to them in the transition to, and whilst studying at, higher education. Furthermore, care leaver events held at higher education institutes could be more beneficial for care leavers if they focus on the practicalities of entering higher education as a care leaver. The information should include applying for student finance, the support their university offers, and the minimum support they should be receiving following Government regulations. With events of this kind, the emphasis is often on fun, and the young people enjoying their time at university, and as much as these events can be a time to inform, some care leavers felt the information they received was not a direct representation of the reality of university and what it entailed.

10.3 Future Research

Future research could explore both care leavers and their care leaver support worker(s) during the preparation time for university and in their first year, which could provide different perspectives on this time of transition, and address one of the limitations of the current doctoral research. I also recommend exploring other transitions in education for children in care, including primary to secondary education and secondary education to further education. For further research on the transition to higher education, I recommend interviewing all participants before they get their A-level results, where possible, to further build upon the overall experience of success in the transition to higher education.

Dixon et al. (2004) reported a high drop-out rate within their sample for care leavers studying at college. However, far from stating this as an issue, Dixon et al. (2004) do not investigate the reasons for this, or the participants' experience surrounding their time in further education. Currently, research

is limited to care leavers in college. Although, the drop-out rate in this research raises the concern for care leavers' educational experiences of further education (Dixon et al., 2004). Proceeding through college or sixth form is the most common route to higher education, suggesting that this is an area that requires attention, as individual experiences of further education could affect whether one chooses to study at degree level (Cameron, 2007). Transition to university for care leavers appears to reveal its own set of challenges that relate to the care leaver's previous experiences of education and the quality of support, overall, that these individuals have received.

The current climate globally of COVID-19 only makes this group more important to research. Care leavers are more likely to be isolated and living alone compared to their non-care peers in the same age range. Their interactions with professionals and support workers are likely to have been limited too during this time.

10.4 Concluding Comments

All local authorities are different and offer varying levels of support to care leavers who are attending university. These young people are at a disadvantage through the process of entering care. Additionally, a care leaver going through this type of experience could find themselves experiencing different levels of support to other care leavers due to the effects of a postcode lottery. They often encounter care leaver peers who are provided with more, or at times less, support than themselves. The themes raised by the PhD research could be present in any prospective or enrolled student. However, research argues that patterns of instability, a lack of control in decision making, stigma and labelling, and unpreparedness for transitions are common across children in care and care leavers.

Dissemination of Findings

Paper Publication

Bluff, B., King, N., & McMahon, G. (2012). A Phenomenological Approach to Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 69*(24), 952-959.

Presentations

Bluff, B. (2011, August). *Caring About Education: Internal and External Barriers Care Leavers Experience within their Educational Journey.* Paper presented at the East Midlands care leaver and student support (EMCLASS) and Northern England care leaver activities and student support (NORTHCLASS) conference, University of Sheffield.

Bluff, B. (2012, June). *A Phenomenological Approach to Care Leavers' Experiences of the Transition to Higher Education.* Paper presented at Equinox 2012: An Academic Conference for Teaching, Learning and Research, University of Huddersfield.

Bluff, B., King, N., & McMahon, G. (2012, October). *A Phenomenological Approach to Care Leavers' Experiences of the Transition to Higher Education.* Paper presented at International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEPSY), Istanbul, Turkey.

Bluff, B. (2013, September). *Longitudinal Research into Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study.* Paper presented at Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section, 3rd Annual Conference 2013; The British Psychological Society, University of Huddersfield.

Bluff, B. (2014, March). *Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study.* Paper presented at Tranculturalism and Diversity Group Conference: Taking Transculturalism and Diversity beyond Boundaries: Exploring the Experiences of Underrepresented Groups, University of Huddersfield.

Bluff, B. (2014, June). *A Pluralistic Approach to Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study.* Paper presented at Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters Conference; The Institute for Research in Citizenship and Applied Human Sciences, University of Huddersfield.

Bluff, B. (2014, October). *New Belongings: Exploring Care Leavers' Experiences of Transition.* Paper presented at: National Lecture; National Care Leavers Week 2014 – New Belongings, Leeds Beckett University. **Keynote speaker. Asked to give the national lecture for national care leavers' week, 2014.**

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheet for Study One

Title of Research: The journey to University: A Phenomenological Approach to the Educational Transitions of Care Leavers.

Researcher: Belinda Bluff, PhD student at The University of Huddersfield

Introduction: Hi my name is Belinda Bluff and I am studying a PhD at the University of Huddersfield. Currently, I am conducting research into the educational transitions of care leavers, focusing mainly on the barriers care leavers face in going to University. Recent statistics show that only seven percent of care leavers go to University. Therefore, this research aims to examine the educational experiences of care leavers and as you are a care leaver, I would be grateful if you could take part in this research.

Aim: To examine the barriers care leavers face in going to University.

Process: This research will consist of one interview that will last up to an hour. The interview will be recorded and will take place in a pre-arranged venue. It is important to note that only the researcher and their supervisors will listen to this recording. The information you provide will be confidential and your real name will not be used in the write-up. In addition to this the findings may be reported in the PhD thesis, academic publications (journals) and conference papers and presentations, all findings reported will remain anonymous.

Right to Withdraw: If at any point you wish to withdraw from this research before, during or after you have taken part, you can do so by contacting the researcher by email or telephone. This will not affect you in any way and the information you provide will either be given back to you or erased. However, there will be a cut off point to withdrawing, which will take place before the write-up begins. Details of this will be provided.

If you do feel affected in any way by what has been discussed in the interview and wish to talk to someone about this, details of support available to you at the University are provided at the bottom of this page. If you have any questions please feel free to discuss these with me.

Useful Contacts

Researcher - Belinda Bluff. Email: u0758378@hud.ac.uk

University Counsellor (specific details given for each university).

Student Liaison and support officer (specific details given for each university).

Supervisors - Nigel King. Email: n.king@hud.ac.uk

Grainne McMahon. Email: G.McMahon@hud.ac.uk

Appendix B: Consent Form for the Exploratory Research

<u>Consent form</u>

<u>Research Title:</u> The Journey to University: A Phenomenological Approach to the Educational Transitions of Care Leavers.

Please complete this form before taking part in the interview.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet and fully understand what this research entails. ☐

2. I am aware that my involvement in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any point before, during or after the interview has taken place, up until the research is written up. ☐

3. I understand that the interview should take no longer than an hour and I am able to give this amount of time to complete this interview. ☐

4. I am aware that the information I give will be kept confidential and my name will not be used in the write-up. ☐

5. I consent to being recorded and quotes from the recording being used in the write-up. I am aware that they will be anonymous. ☐

6. I have asked all the questions I wanted to ask with regards to this research and I am aware that if I have any further questions at any point I can ask the researcher to answer these. ☐

In regards to all of the above please provide your signature below if you fully understand what this research involves and feel happy to take part in this interview.

Participant's Signature..

Date...

Researcher's Signature...

Date...

Appendix C: Interview Guide for the Exploratory Study

1. Ok (name of participant) so to start could you please tell me what you knew about University before you applied?

      Probes; What were your feelings towards University? What encouragement did you receive? What role models, if any, did you have?

2. To what extent, if any, do you feel your previous experiences have contributed to your decision to go on to University?

      Probes; Could you tell me more about that? Why was that? How do you feel now about making the decision to go to University?

3. Please could you explain your process in applying for University; For example did you apply through UCAS?

      Probes; How did you find this Process? How did you feel about that?

4. Could you tell me about the support you received during your application process?

      Probes; Who did you receive the support from? How did you find the support you received? Did you feel you needed more support? If they didn't get any support; Do you feel you needed support during this process? What support would you of wanted to receive?

5. More specifically could you tell me how you found writing your personal statement?

      Probes; If any, what kind of support did you receive for this? How did you feel about the support available? What were your feelings towards writing a personal statement?

6. Now thinking back on completing your finance forms, how did you find applying for student loans and grants?

      Probes; How did you feel about completing the forms? Do you feel you received enough support with this? Could you tell me more about that?

If the participant has not moved address for University go to question 8.

7. Please could you tell me about you first day at your new accommodation?

Probes; What were your initial feelings towards moving away? How did you find meeting new people? How did you feel after a few weeks? How did you find tasks like paying bills? Cooking? Why was that? Could you tell me more about that?

8. Could you tell me about your first day at University?

Probes; How did you feel about that? How did you feel meeting new people? Could you tell me more about that?

9. Since starting at University, how have you found the level of support available to you?

Probes; Why was that? What kind of support has been available? How did you find the support available to you? How accessible is the support?

10. What information was available to you as a care leaver going onto university?

Probes; How did you find the information? How accessible was it? How did you feel about going to University with the information you had received?

11. If any, what effect do you think being in care had on your application process for University?

Probes; How do you feel about that? What do you think about that? What are your feelings towards that?

12. In your opinion, what if anything can be done to improve the application process for care leavers choosing to go to University?

Probe; Could you tell me more about that?

Ok, so just before we finish I'm going to ask you a few general questions, just in case we haven't covered these points in the previous questions.

What is your age?

Which degree are you studying?

What type of qualification did you do before going to University?

Did you go straight from college to University?

How long did you spend in care?

What type of care where you in?

Did you move to go to University?

Did you tick the box on the UCAS forms to declare yourself as a care leaver?

Thank you very much for you time.

Appendix D: Research Protocol for the Main Study

A Phenomenological Approach to Care Leavers' Transition to Higher Education

Research Protocol

Summary

It is evident from statistics that, on average, care leavers underachieve in education throughout their lives. However, these statistics fail to explain why this is the case. This would suggest the importance of researching care leavers' personal experiences of education in order to investigate the low academic achievement of this group. Previous research has highlighted issues with the educational experiences of care leavers in general, and has suggested that life transitions affect care leavers' later experiences. However, the participation and achievement of care leavers in education, particularly in higher education, remains under-researched. Therefore, this research aims to investigate personal accounts of care leavers' transition to university by recruiting at least eight care leavers, who are preparing to go to higher education (H.E.), from a cross section of local authorities, within the U.K. Those who agree to participate will be asked to take part in three interviews. The first interview will take place before the participant has entered H.E., the second in the care leaver's first term of university and the third will be in their second term.

This is the second stage of the PhD and has developed from the initial research which investigated the experiences of nine care leavers studying in their first and second year at university. An incentive will be offered of £10 in voucher form for each interview the care leaver participates in. For those local authorities that take part they will be provided with a copy of the research when it is completed. In order to protect the identity of the participants and leaving care teams involved in this research, anonymity will be provided. Each individual participating and leaving care team that are involved will be provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity and the information they disclose. Each interview will take roughly an hour and all participants have the right to withdraw at any point up until the write-up for this research has begun. This research is part of a three year PhD project exploring specifically care leavers' transition to university, including the investigation of their experiences of education and how they manage transition during this time. I am also a care leaver and this is why I originally became interested in conducting research in this field. The PhD is funded through the Lemn Sissay scholarship aimed at providing an opportunity for a care leaver to study at PhD level. I hope this research will raise awareness of how care leavers experience transition and what effect being a care leaver has upon transitional periods in one's life.

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University of Huddersfield

Rationale and background information

Last year saw 65,520 children being looked after by their local authority (Department for Education, 2011)[8]. Within the same year 9950 young people age 16 and onwards left care (Department for Education, 2011). However, for those who leave care, statistics and previous research argue that their

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[8]The process of going into care refers to a child entering the care of their local authority, which is the council over the area in which they live (Local Authorities Social Services Act, 1970; Children Act, 1989). Young people leaving care, from age 16 onwards, are referred to as 'care leavers' (Children and Young Person's Act, 2008).The majority of young people who have been in care are placed in foster placements (73%) (Department for Education, 2010). Foster care refers to when a child is housed in a family environment with people who are not related to the child (Children Act, 1989). Other placements include children homes, which are residential facilities, which provide care to groups of young people, who are usually under the age of 18, (Children Act, 1989) or adoption, were a child is within a family which has been granted legal parental rights for them (Adoption and Children's Act, 2002).

future prospects in particular within education, are bleak (Department of Health, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Berridge, 2006; Lipsett, 2009; Department for Education, 2010). On leaving high school, only 14% of young people from a care background achieve 5 A*-C grades at GCSE level compared to 65% of the general population. These statistics have remained very similar for looked after children over the last ten years (Lipsett, 2009; Department for Education, 2010). This pattern of educational performance reflects care leavers' other academic achievements, such as, access to university. The current available figure for those attending university at the age of 19 is 6% (Department of Education, 2011). This is low in comparison to the national average of around 39% of the general population and implies that care leavers are less able to achieve academically (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007).

The education of care leavers, in terms of both participation and achievement, is still an under-researched area. It is evident from statistics that are available that, on average, care leavers underachieve in education. However, these statistics fail to explain why this is: why do care leavers 'underachieve'? This would suggest the importance of researching care leavers' personal experiences of education to investigate low achievement academically amongst this group in society(Goddard, 2000). Previous research on care leavers has tended to focus upon the transition of leaving care to live independently (Biehal and Wade, 1996; Dixon et al, 2004; Wade and Dixon, 2006). Transitions in education have received less attention but Dixon et al (2004) argue that this period of learning to live independently could also contribute towards low academic achievement in further and higher education. This reflects the findings from other previous research investigating care leavers in transition to independent living, which raised a concern for the educational experiences of this group (Stein and Carey, 1986; Biehal and Wade, 1996; Dixon et al, 2004). Goodman et al (2006) argue that the very nature of being in a transient state could affect other aspects of one's life. However, transitions in or during the time of education for care leavers have received little attention in previous literature. Although, Tobbell et al (2008) argue that transitions in education can affect an individual's academic attainment, presenting an argument for a need to explore the transitions experienced by care leavers in education. Therefore, this research will investigate care leavers' transitions within education, in particular those transitions within university and college, as these areas are yet to be explored in terms of how care leavers manage these transitions and what effect, if any this has on their overall educational experiences.

Through exploring the transitions of care leavers in further and higher education, this research will aim to make theoretical contributions to the theory of transition, as this area of academic research is fairly unexplored. Therefore potentially providing knowledge of the transitions care leavers face in and during their time of education and how they adapt to this change in their life. In support of this, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2005) argue that having knowledge of an individual's background and the role it plays

is important in the understanding of one's transitional periods within education.This provides an argument for the importance of investigating these transitions in a care leaver's life, to examine the impact that educational transitions can have on their experiences and to explore whether this accounts for care leavers' low participation in higher education.

Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university and how other life transitions affect them during this time

Research question:

- What are care leavers' experiences of transition to higher education?

The research objectives are to;

- Gain a longitudinal account of experience from care leavers in regards to their transition to university.
- Examine critically care leavers' experiences of the application process for entering higher education?
- Explore the impact 'care leaver identity' has upon one's transition to higher education.
- Contribute to a theory of transition, in particular the educational transitions of care leavers

Research Design

This research aims to investigate the experiences of eight care leavers during their transition to university, through three semi-structured interviews. The first will take place before the care leaver enters university, the second in their first term and the third will be in their second term. When participants are recruited they will have been studying for their A-levels or equivalent, in a further education establishment and will have applied for university. Permissions will be sought from the leaving care teams and were possible colleges that these young people attend and are a part of. Research packs will be given to the teams and the young people to inform them about the research and what it hopes to achieve. Leaving care teams within the UK will be approached. This research is also interested in following up with those participants who participate in the first or second interview but for any reason decide not to go to university or leave in the first few months. Participants will also be informed, that if they wish to do so, they can email the researcher with any information they would like to share, in regards to their transition to university that occurs between interviews. This will be done in order to improve the quality of information, as sometimes events may happen in the

participant's life but the next interview might not be for a month or two and they may wish to share this whilst it is still new to them.

Procedure

Each participant will be asked to participate in three interviews, lasting roughly an hour each. All interviews will take place at a pre-arranged venue, appropriate for the conduction of an interview, that the young person feels comfortable with. Prior to the interview taking place the participant will be given information about the study. In addition, they will also be given an information sheet detailing what the research is about, the aims of the study and their rights to withdraw, before the recording of the interview has begun. Once they have read this and have had the opportunity to ask any questions that they may have, the participant will be given a consent form to sign showing that they have fully understood what the research entails and are happy to take part. After this has happened the recording equipment will be switched on and the interview will begin. The participant will then be asked a series of questions relating to their own personal experiences of education. Once all the questions have been asked the interview will end and the recording equipment will be switched off. However, the recoding may be left on if the participant is comfortable with this till the participant and interviewer has finished talking, as an informal chat may follow the interview questions. They will then be thanked for their time, after which they will be provided with a £10 voucher to thank them for taking part in the research.

Ethics

This research will be carried out in compliance with the British Psychological Society's (2012) ethical guidelines. The main ethical considerations for this research are confidentiality, anonymity, protection from harm and right to withdraw. Participants taking part in this research may wish to keep their involvement confidential. Therefore, everyone who takes part will be interviewed separately in a booked room that is convenient for conducting an interview. Each interview will be recorded. However, this recording will only be listened to by the researcher and researcher's supervisors. The findings will be used for the purpose of this study and will be reported in the PhD thesis and journal publications. All participants will be made aware of this before agreeing to take part in this research. The recordings will be deleted five years after the completion of the PhD. In order to protect the participants' identity, each participant will be provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity and any information they disclose. In addition pseudonyms will be provided for the local authorities the young people are within. To prevent participants incurring any form of harm as a result of this research, precautions will be put in place. For example, if any of the participants express any form of discomfort with the venue that has been chosen, then a new venue will be located. Once the interview has commenced if any of the participants express any form of emotional discomfort they will be asked

if they wish to continue or if they would like a short break. In addition to this, if any participants feel they require any additional support they can phone the number provided for a counsellor or their leaving care team. If the participant wishes to withdraw from the research at any point before the write up has began then their data will be erased from this study.

Dissemination of Results

The results from this research will be presented at conferences, published as journal articles and reported in the PhD thesis.

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Study Two, Stage One.

<u>Interview Guide</u>

Note that the phrasing and order of questions will be modified in response to the way each interview and the relationship with the participant develops. The list below shows the topic areas the interviewer will seek to cover with participants.

Topics;

1. Impact of being a care leaver
2. Application process; UCAS and finance forms.
3. Support during application process
4. Knowledge about university – particular points in the participant's life, e.g. primary school, high school, college and at this present time of the interview.
5. College environment as a care leaver.
6. Knowledge of other care leavers going to university.
7. Thoughts about going to university.
8. Other life transitions during this time, e.g. moving accommodation. These will be dependent on the participant's experiences.

Appendix F: Information Sheet for the Main Study

Exploring care leavers' transition to higher education: a phenomenological approach

Researcher's details: Belinda Bluff, PhD student at The University of Huddersfield

Information: This research aims to investigate the educational transitions of care leavers, focusing particularly on their experiences of accessing higher education. I originally became interested in this area of research from my own transition through university as a care leaver. In addition to my own experience I became aware that, statistically, care leavers are less likely to study for a degree. Recent research findings indicate that only 6% of care leavers access university, although from these statistics it is not known why care leavers, on average, underachieve.

Aim: To explore care leavers' transition to university and how other life transitions affect them during this time.

Process: This research will consist of three interviews that will each last up to an hour. The first interview will take place before you enter university, the second in your first term and the third will be in your second term. The interview will be recorded and will take place in a pre-arranged venue. Only the researcher and her supervisors will listen to this recording. The information you provide will be confidential and your real name will not be used in the research write-up. The findings from the research may be reported in the PhD thesis, academic publications (journals) and at conferences. All findings reported will maintain the anonymity of participants. .

Right to Withdraw: If at any point you wish to withdraw from this research before, during or after you have taken part, you can do so by contacting the researcher by email or telephone. This will not affect you in any way and the information you provide will either be given back to you or erased. However, there will be a cut-off point to withdrawing, which will take place before the write-up begins. Details of this will be provided.

Incentive: A £10 voucher will be given as a thank you after each interview. This does not affect your right to withdraw and it does not commit you to taking part in all of the interviews.

If you feel affected in any way by what has been discussed in the interview and wish to talk to someone about this, details of support available to you are provided at the bottom of this page. If you have any questions please feel free to discuss these with me. In addition, between interviews taking place you will be provided with the researcher's email address, in case there is any information you

would like to share with her in regards to your transition to university that occurs during this time. This contact is optional.

<u>Useful Contacts</u>

Researcher - Belinda Bluff.

Telephone: 01484 471 160

Email: u0758378@hud.ac.uk

Supervisors - Nigel King. Email: n.king@hud.ac.uk

Grainne McMahon. Email: G.McMahon@hud.ac.uk

Counsellor: (Number will be requested from the leaving care team the participant is within)

Support and Liaison officer: (Number will be requested from the higher education establishment the participant attends)

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS).leavingcare.org

Care Leavers Association (CLA). www.careleavers.com

Appendix G: Consent Form for the Main Study

Consent Form

Research Title: Exploring care leavers' transition to higher education: a phenomenological approach

Please complete this form before taking part in the interview.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet and fully understand what this research entails.

2. I am aware that my involvement in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any point before, during or after the interview has taken place, up until the write-up for the research has begun.

3. I understand that the incentive of a £10 voucher for taking part in this study will not affect my rights to withdraw from this research.

3. I understand that the interview should take about an hour and I am able to give this amount of time to complete this interview.

4. I am aware that the information I give will be kept confidential and my name will not be used in the write-up.

5. I consent to being recorded and quotes from the recording being used in the write-up. I am aware that they will be anonymous.

6. I have asked all the questions I wanted to ask with regards to this research and I am aware that if I have any further questions at any point I can ask the researcher to answer these.

In regards to all of the above please provide your signature below if you fully understand what this research involves and feel happy to take part in this interview.

Participant's Signature...

Date...

Researcher's Signature...

Date..

Initial Template

1. **Agency/Choice**
   a. Lack of control
      i. Limited by stigma and other people's expectations
      ii. Affected by instability
   b. Fighting back/taking back control
      iii. Through pursuing education
      iv. Through proving people wrong
   c. Aspirations
      v. Aspiring from a young age
      vi. University as the focus
      vii. Sees benefits of getting a degree
   d. Self-belief
      viii. Academic ability
      ix. Receiving encouragement
      x. Defeating the odds
   e. Searching for accomplishment
      xi. Through education
      xii. Pursing education for own sake

2. **Pre-entry to university**
   a. University trips
      i. Knowledge about university
      ii. Encouragement
      iii. Pre-experience of university life
   b. Role models that have been to university
      i. Family
      ii. Foster parents
      iii. Foster parent's children
      iv. Friends
   c. Foster home environment/Leaving care placements (Supported lodgings)
      i. The home itself (graduation pictures, books, etc)
         1. Normalisation of university

       ii.   Foster parents/carers experience of university

      iii.   Foster parent's children

  d. Peer influence

       i.   Friends that are planning to go to university

      ii.   Friends that have gone to university

  e. Open days

       i.   Provides a sense of what to expect

      ii.   Chance to see the campus first

      iii.   The decider

      iv.   Ability to attend

  f. Applications forms

  g. Moving

  h. Prior to first day at university

       i.   Feelings

      ii.   Anticipations

      iii.   Concerns

      iv.   Expectations

3. Modes of Transition to University life

  a. To Embrace

      v.   Social networking prior to entry to university

      vi.   Involvement in social life

      vii.   Involvement in hobbies

          1.   Developing friendships/socialising

  b. To disengage

      viii.   Course satisfaction

          1.   Managing disappointment

          2.   Disengaging from course

          3.   Lectures

          4.   Leaving university

  c. Ease of 'fitting in'

      ix.   Working as a group

      x.   Social life

      xi.   University course

      xii.   University accommodation

  d. Being Prepared

iv. Financial difficulties/financial security

    e. Benefits of being in care

        i. Independent living skills

        ii. Personal Statement

        iii. Financial support

        iv. Wellbeing support

        v. Standing out

    i. Family units (inc care placements)

        i. Somewhere to belong

        ii. Lack of belonging

        iii. Feeling rejected

Key individuals and agencies refer to:

1. School
2. College
3. Carers
4. Foster home environment
5. Family
6. Leaving care worker
7. Local authorities
8. Other outside agencies
9. Role models

1. Integrative Theme Identity

    a. Care/Care leaver Identity

        i. Knowledge of what care is prior to entry

        ii. 'Normal'

            1. Feeling different

            2. Fitting in/unity

        iii. Identity to embrace

        i. Identity to resist

        i. Identity to Reject

        ii. Stigma

        iii. Academic Accomplishment

        iv. Affect on applications forms

        v. Viewing self as different

      ii.   Education

           1.   <u>Effect of instability</u>

      iii. Group belonging

           1.   Prior to attending university

           2.   Importance of group belonging /searching for belonging

           3.   Social life

           4.   Hobbies

b. Student identity meets care leaver identity

      i.   Managing care leaver identity

2. Integrative Theme Stability versus Instability

a. Effect on education

b. Effect on early life

c. Effect on Well being

d. Effect on Education

e. Care experience

f. Control of own care

      i.   Placements

      ii.   Ability to make own decisions

      iii. Lack of consultation

First Draft of the Template

1. **Control (Power)**
   f. Lack of control
      i. Stigma
      ii. Instability
      iii. People's expectations
   g. Fighting back/taking back control
      i. Pursuing Education
      ii. Proving people wrong
   h. Agency/Personal control
      i. Choice
      ii. Control in own care
         1. Ability to exercise agency (age)
         2. Making own decisions
         3. Given options
         4. Lack of consultation

2. **Integrative Theme?** Identity
   c. Care Identity
      i. Stability
         1. Placements
         2. Care experience
      ii. Education
         1. Instability
      iii. Knowledge of what care is
   d. Care leaver identity
      i. Identity to embrace
      ii. Identity to resist
      vi. Identity to Reject
      vii. Stigma
      viii. Academic Accomplishment
      ix. Affect on applications forms
      x. Viewing self as different

              xi.   Control

                        1.   Taking back control/Fighting back

   e.   Student identity meets care leaver identity

              i.   Managing care leaver identity

3. Security

   a.   Stability and consistency

              i.   Effect on education

              ii.   Well being

              iii.   In early life

              iv.   In education

   b.   Instability

              i.   Disruption

              ii.   Effect on Education

              iii.   Well being

   c.   Financial Security

              i.   During education

4. Exposure to university

   j.   University trips

              i.   Knowledge about university

              ii.   Encouragement

              iii.   Pre-experience of university life

   k.   Role models that have been to university

              v.   Family

              vi.   Foster parents

              vii.   Foster parent's children

              viii.   Friends

   l.   Foster home environment/Leaving care placements (Supported lodgings)

              iv.   The home itself (graduation pictures, books, etc)

                        1.   Normalisation of university

              v.   Foster parents/carers experience of university

              vi.   Foster parent's children

   m.   Peer influence

              iii.   Friends that are planning to go to university

              iv.   Friends that have gone to university

        v. Provides a sense of what to expect

      vi. Chance to see the campus first

    vii. The decider

5. **Benefits of being in care**

  a. Qualities

      i. Independent living skills

        1. Budgeting

        2. Form filling (Application forms)

  b. Personal Statement

  c. Financial support

  d. Wellbeing support

  e. Standing out

      i. Determination

6. **Belonging** *'fitting in'*

  a. Creating bonds/friendships

  b. In family units (inc care placements)

      i. Having a role

      ii. Somewhere to belong

      iii. Creates stability

      iv. Lack of belonging

      v. Feeling rejected

  c. Group belonging

      i. Fitting in/Unity

      ii. Feeling different

      iii. Social life

      iv. Importance of group belonging

      v. Hobbies

      vi. Prior to attending university

        1. Affect of instability

  d. In educational settings

      i. Ease of 'fitting in'

        1. Socially

        2. University course

    ii. Working as a group
  e. 'Normal'
    i. Feeling different
  f. Searching for belonging
  g. University Accommodation
    i. Company
    ii. Social life

7. Aspiring 'Searching for fulfilment'
  a. Succeeding in education
    i. Sense of Accomplishment
  b. Defeating the odds
  c. Aspirations
    i. Aspiring from a young age
    ii. University is the focus
    iii. Foresees benefits of getting a degree
  d. Self-belief
    i. Academic ability
    ii. People's expectations
    iii. Encouragement
    iv. Proving people wrong
  e. Searching for accomplishment
    i. Through education

8. University life
  a. Pre-entry to university
    i. Feelings
    ii. Anticipations
    iii. Concerns
    iv. Expectations
  b. To Embrace
    i. Social networking prior to entry to university
    ii. Involvement in social life
    iii. Involvement in hobbies
      1. Developing friendships/socialising
    iv. Lectures

  c. To disengage

    i. Course satisfaction

      1. Importance of

      2. Managing disappointment

      3. Disengaging from course

      4. Lectures

      5. Leaving university

  d. Expectations

    i. Met

    ii. Not met

  e. Practical difficulties

    i. Moving

    ii. Application forms

    iii. Finances

  f. Being Prepared

  g. Firsts

    i. First day at accommodation

    ii. First night out

    iii. First lecture

9. Support

  a. Developing successful support networks

    i. Knowledge of support

    ii. Access to support

    iii. Trust

  b. Support networks

    i. Key individuals and agencies

  c. Reliable and consistent influences

    i. Key individuals and agencies

  d. Lack of support

    i. Failure of support networks

  e. Quality of the care system

    i. Placements

    ii. Corporate parents

    iii. Inconsistencies in support amongst local authorities

    iv. Hindering support

  f. Tailored support

    i. Tailored to the professionals

    ii. Tailored to the young person

  g. Financial Support

    i. Knowledge of financial support

      1. Surrounded in mystery

      2. Matches what they receive

    ii. Accessing financial support

    iii. Consistent and reliable

    iv. Sufficient financial support

    v. Financial Difficulties

  h. University

    i. Applications forms

    ii. Open days

    iii. Moving

 i. Sources of encouragement

    i. Past

    ii. Key individuals and agencies

10. Theme: Role of relationships in Education

  a. Key individuals and agencies

    i. Reliable and consistent

    ii. Trust

    iii. Encouragement

    iv. Detrimental influence

    v. Quality of support

    vi. Support

    vii. Parental responsibility (corporate parent)

    viii. Absence

      1. On holiday

      2. Neglect

   a. Hindering support

   b. Care

Second Draft of the Template

1. Control (Power)

  a. Lack of control

        i.   Stigma

        ii.   Instability

        iii.   People's expectations

   b.   Fighting back/taking back control

        i.   Pursuing Education

        ii.   Proving people wrong

   c.   Agency/Personal control

        i.   Choice

        ii.   Control in own care

              1.   Ability to exercise agency (age)

              2.   Making own decisions

              3.   Given options

              4.   Lack of consultation

2. **Integrative Theme?** Identity

   f.   Care Identity

        i.   Stability

              1.   Placements

              2.   Care experience

        ii.   Education

              1.   Instability

        iii.   Knowledge of what care is

   g.   Care leaver identity

        i.   Identity to embrace

        ii.   Identity to resist

        xii.   Identity to Reject

        xiii.   Stigma

        xiv.   Academic Accomplishment

        xv.   Affect on applications forms

        xvi.   Viewing self as different

        xvii.   Control

              1.   Taking back control/Fighting back

   h.   Student identity meets care leaver identity

        i.   Managing care leaver identity

3. **Security**

   a.   Stability and consistency

        i. Effect on education

        ii. Well being

        iii. In early life

        iv. In education

b. Instability

        i. Disruption

        ii. Effect on Education

        iii. Well being

c. Financial Security

        i. During education

4. Exposure to university

o. University trips

        i. Knowledge about university

        ii. Encouragement

        iii. Pre-experience of university life

p. Role models that have been to university

        ix. Family

        x. Foster parents

        xi. Foster parent's children

        xii. Friends

q. Foster home environment/Leaving care placements (Supported lodgings)

        vii. The home itself (graduation pictures, books, etc)

            1. Normalisation of university

        viii. Foster parents/carers experience of university

        ix. Foster parent's children

r. Peer influence

        v. Friends that are planning to go to university

        vi. Friends that have gone to university

s. Open days

        viii. Provides a sense of what to expect

        ix. Chance to see the campus first

        x. The decider

5. Benefits of being in care

a. Qualities
     i. Independent living skills
          1. Budgeting
          2. Form filling (Application forms)
b. Personal Statement
c. Financial support
d. Wellbeing support
e. Standing out
     i. Determination

6. **Belonging *'fitting in'***
     a. Creating bonds/friendships
     b. In family units (inc care placements)
          i. Having a role
          ii. Somewhere to belong
          iii. Creates stability
          iv. Lack of belonging
          v. Feeling rejected
     c. Group belonging
          i. Fitting in/Unity
          ii. Feeling different
          iii. Social life
          iv. Importance of group belonging
          v. Hobbies
          vi. Prior to attending university
               1. Affect of instability
     d. In educational settings
          i. Ease of 'fitting in'
               1. Socially
               2. University course
          ii. Working as a group
     e. 'Normal'
          i. Feeling different
     f. Searching for belonging
     g. University Accommodation
          i. Company

       ii.   Social life

7.   Aspiring 'Searching for fulfilment'

    a.   Succeeding in education

       i.   Sense of Accomplishment

    b.   Defeating the odds

    c.   Aspirations

       i.   Aspiring from a young age

       ii.   University is the focus

       iii.   Foresees benefits of getting a degree

    d.   Self-belief

       i.   Academic ability

       ii.   People's expectations

       iii.   Encouragement

       iv.   Proving people wrong

    e.   Searching for accomplishment

       i.   Through education

8.   University life

    a.   Pre-entry to university

       i.   Feelings

       ii.   Anticipations

       iii.   Concerns

       iv.   Expectations

    b.   To Embrace

       i.   Social networking prior to entry to university

       ii.   Involvement in social life

       iii.   Involvement in hobbies

          1.   Developing friendships/socialising

       iv.   Lectures

    c.   To disengage

       i.   Course satisfaction

          1.   Importance of

          2.   Managing disappointment

          3.   Disengaging from course

          4.   Lectures

5. Leaving university
   d. Expectations
      i. Met
      ii. Not met
   e. Practical difficulties
      i. Moving
      ii. Application forms
      iii. Finances
   f. Being Prepared
   g. Firsts
      i. First day at accommodation
      ii. First night out
      iii. First lecture

9. **Support**
   a. Developing successful support networks
      i. Knowledge of support
      ii. Access to support
      iii. Trust
   b. Support networks
      i. Key individuals and agencies
   c. Reliable and consistent influences
      i. Key individuals and agencies
   d. Lack of support
      i. Failure of support networks
      ii. ***Absent parent***
   e. Quality of the care system
      i. Placements
      ii. Corporate parents
      iii. Inconsistencies in support amongst local authorities
      iv. Hindering support
   f. Tailored support
      i. Tailored to the professionals
      ii. Tailored to the young person
   g. Financial Support
      i. Knowledge of financial support
         1. Surrounded in mystery

     2. Matches what they receive

    ii. Accessing financial support

    iii. Consistent and reliable

    iv. Sufficient financial support

    v. Financial Difficulties

  h. University

    i. Applications forms

    ii. Open days

    iii. Moving

 i. Sources of encouragement

    i. Past

    ii. Key individuals and agencies

10. Theme: Role of relationships in Education

  b. Key individuals and agencies

    i. Reliable and consistent

    ii. Trust

    iii. Encouragement

    iv. Detrimental influence

    v. Quality of support

    vi. Support

    vii. Parental responsibility (corporate parent)

    viii. Absence

      1. On holiday

      2. Neglect

  c. Hindering support

  d. Care

Third and Final Draft before Development of the Final Template

1. Exercising agency and regaining control

  a. Jeopardises or could jeopardise control

    i. Stigma

    ii. People's expectations

    iii. Instability

  b. Exercising agency

       i. Fighting back/taking back control

           1. Through pursuing education

           2. Through proving people wrong

       ii. Making own decisions

       iii. Resisting or rejecting support

c. Searching for accomplishment

       i. Through education

       ii. Pursing education for own sake

       iii. Making people proud

       iv. A sense of accomplishment

d. Aspirations

       i. Aspiring from a young age

       ii. University as the focus

       iii. Sees the benefits of getting a degree

       iv. Strong work ethic

e. Self-belief

       i. Academic ability

       ii. Receiving encouragement

       iii. Defeating the odds

2. **Exposure to university: Pre-entry to higher education**

    a. University trips (not open days) and talks

       i. Knowledge about university

       ii. Encouragement

       iii. Pre-experience of university life

       iv. Care leaver support

    b. University role models

       xiii. Family

       xiv. Foster parents

       xv. Foster parent's children

       xvi. Friends

    c. Foster home/Leaving care placement

       x. The home itself (graduation pictures, books, etc.)

       xi. Foster parents/carers experience of university

       xii. Foster parent's children

    d. Peer influence

       vii.   Friends that are planning to go to university

      viii.   Friends that have gone to university

   e. Open days

       xi.   Provides a sense of what to expect

      xii.   Chance to see the campus first

      xiii.   The decider

      xiv.   Ability to attend

      xv.   Care leaver support

3. Modes of transition to university life

   a. To prepare 'getting there'

       i.   Gathering information about university

      ii.   Applications forms

      iii.   Moving

      iv.   Expectations

          1.   University

          2.   University accommodation

          3.   Meeting new people

       v.   Feelings to university prior to entry

          1.   Anticipations

          2.   Concerns

   b. To Engage or To Disengage

       i.   Course satisfaction

          1.   Learning experience

          2.   Thoughts after first lecture

          3.   University work/work load

          4.   Managing disappointment

          5.   Motivation

          6.   Disengaging from course

          7.   Leaving university

      ii.   Impressions of university

      iii.   Socialising

      iv.   Doubts about university

       v.   Unmet and met expectations

      vi.   University accommodation

      vii.   Meeting new people

    c. To Embrace

        i. Social networking prior to entry to university

        ii. Involvement in social life

        iii. Involvement in sports and societies

    d. To Fit in

        i. University course

        ii. University accommodation

        iii. Adapting to new accommodation

        iv. New area

        v. Meeting new people

        vi. Working as a group

        vii. Social life

        i. Ease of 'fitting in'

        viii. Relationship with tutors

5. Perceptions of Support

    a. Developing successful support networks

        i. Knowledge of support

        ii. Access to support

        iii. Support surrounded in mystery

        iv. Opportunities to develop successful support networks

        v. Creating bonds/friendships

        vi. Family units

        vii. Trust

        viii. Failure of support networks

        ix. Resisting support

        x. Rejecting support

    b. Relationships with key individuals and agencies

        i. Reliable and consistent influences

        ii. Encouragement

        iii. Quality of support

        iv. Care

        v. Parental responsibility (corporate parent)

        vi. Trust

        vii. Detrimental influence

        viii. Role in preparation for university

c. **Quality of the care and leaving care system**

    i. Placements

    ii. Supportive environment

    iii. Corporate parenting

    iv. Absence (during a time of need or difficulty)

        1. On holiday

        2. Specific days to access support

        3. Who covers in their absence

    v. Hindering support

    vi. Inconsistencies in support amongst local authorities

d. **Tailored support**

    i. Tailored to the young person

    ii. Tailored to the professional**(s)**

e. **Financial Support**

    i. Knowledge of financial support

        1. Surrounded in mystery

        2. Matches what they receive

    ii. Accessing financial support

    iii. Financial security

    iv. Financial difficulties

    v. Consistent and reliable

    vi. Budgeting

f. **Benefits of being in care**

    i. Independent living skills

    ii. Writing a personal statement

    iii. Standing out

    iv. Financial support

    v. Wellbeing support

g. **Family units (including placements)**

    i. Relationship with family

    ii. Somewhere to belong

    iii. Contact

    iv. Lack of belonging

    v. Feeling rejected

    vi. Unstable

f. **Friends**

       i.   Contact with friends

      ii.   Visiting or visits from friends

     iii.   Belonging

Key individuals and agencies refer to:

1. School
2. College
3. Foster home environment
4. Residential home
5. Leaving care placement
6. Foster carers/parents
7. Family
8. Leaving care worker
9. Local authority
10. Role models
11. Care leaver support
12. Other outside agencies

Integrative Themes

1. **Identity**
2. **Stability versus Instability**

Appendix J: Examples of Narrative Timelines

Participant: Two
Pseudonym: Susanne

Timeline: Two

Strong key themes: Exercising agency and regaining control; Aspirations and university as the focus: Modes of transition to university life; To prepare: Exposure to university; family, friends going to university, open day, university visits and care leaver support: Perceptions of support; friends, foster parents, Local authority.

Proactive in filling out applications forms for university – quickly completed UCAS and student finance applications forms. Rang SF to ensure everything was correct with her application.

Foster carer – appears to have a supportive relationship with one set of foster carers. They have offered to move her to university.

LCW – Is often absent when she needs support from her.

Family – Sister that went to university.

Care leaver support – Lisa has come into contact with CL support at her chosen university. This has led to her visiting the university more than just attending open days and meeting other care leavers who are attending university and have attended university. This has given a sense of what to expect and a few concerns about student accommodation. This has also led to gaining information about possible funding to study a year abroad.

Lives in own independent accommodation – Lisa left foster care in her last year of college. The main challenge she discusses is having to sell all her things for moving to university because she can't take it all with her and has nowhere to store it.

Foster carer – Fell out with foster carers whilst on holiday with them. They did not move her to university and she has less contact with them now.

Relationship with course mates – At first she did not get on with her course mates.

Interest in studying abroad – Susanne really wants to study abroad and found out about a scheme with financial support for a care leaver at her university to study abroad. She received this information from the care leaver support worker at her university.

Moving to halls – Lisa had to be moved early because her LCW could not move her and her sister's LCW could only move her on the Friday

Interview one   Interview Two

Identity – Feels she got away with more at college when she because she was a care leaver, her LCW also confirmed this after a disciplinary meeting she attended at college and was allowed to stay at college.

Wanted to go to university from a young age: From the age of 8.

Leaving care worker and manager absent when needed: Not there when she needs them.

Work – Susanne transferred her place of employment to the city of her the university she is attending.
Involvement in Sports – Rowing

Development of strong friendship – Susanne has made a stong friendship with a woman who nused to live in her halls ad they often socialize togethre.

Moving student accommodation – Lisa moved university accommodation becauseshe was asked to leave the first one. She will no longer be living with another woman who she refers to as her best friend.

Desire to be independent – She desires not to rely on anyone after being let down before. Evidence – Moving.

Participant: Five

Pseudonym: Liam

Timeline: Five

Strong key themes:

Exercising agency and regaining control, modes of transition to university life, perceptions of support

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority: Absent Parent: LA support surrounded in mystery - is unproductive and Sam struggles to get in touch with his worker due to absence when he requires her support – No accommodation with two weeks roughly till he moves. Sam appears to be fighting for support from his LA, who should be actively supporting him during this time.

Accommodation – Concerned about the people he will be living with. Mainly that he will not get along with them

Finances: Student finance – Liam was fighting a SF decision that he would not be awarded the grant from SF. Awarded a university care leaver scholarship

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority is semi productive. Sam finally finds accommodation a week after his university course started. Thus, Sam missed his induction week and had to catch a train down to enroll because by that point Sam still had no accommodation. He also faced a battle getting travel funding for this, as his LA only wanted to fund one trip down and he needed two, one to enroll and one to move. LA eventually provided this funding after Sam fought for it.

Accommodation – Lives alone, would like to live with people though. Faces moving as his landlord is selling the house he lives in.

Discussed missing his friend from where he was from.

Key individual – discussion about a social worker whose influence has been crucial to his progression – had an influence on him going to college, Ghana and university.

Relationship with leaving care worker and local authority – worried they will not fund him to repeat his second year after he failed two modules. No visits from LCW, some phone contact?

Accommodation – Lives alone, is happy living alone now. Has not had to move as the landlord has not sold the house.

Interview one | **Interview Two** | **Interview Three**

Past experiences of placements and the effect this has on his education and him personally – Negative experience of residential placement. Loss of agency in his own choices. Fought back against residential home manager

Exposure to university – Met a master's student on his trip to Ghana.

Motivation to learn something new – Liam was very enthusiastic to learn something new. He feels his college course didn't provide this and was too easy for him.

Course dissatisfaction: Beginning to lack motivation: Good presentation – Apart from a few positive situations, Liam expresses a lack of motivation in general for his course. He appeared unenthusiastic and down in general about his course

Illness during first term that affected attendance at university: Felt overwhelming pressure to catch up – Liam became ill at the beginning of his first term which along with moving later than the average student, severely, affected his attendance during his first term.

Course dissatisfaction: Lacking motivation: Failed two modules due to lack of attendance – Began to fail to attend lectures but continued to complete the work, although, attendance was part of his overall grade.

Relationship with course mates: Library and Italy trip - Liam went on a trip with his course mates and found this enjoyable, he confronted someone on his course to resolve tension between them both. Library incident: Overheard gossiping that angered him.

Friend back home – Talks about his friends back home, that he will be going to visit some of them soon. Previously talked about missing his friends.

Participant: Seven
Pseudonym: Bethany

Timeline: Seven

Course – Was initially excited to be starting her degree and to be on a new course that she was particularly interested in

Student Finance – Application for student finance had still not been fully completed

Leaving care team – Her leaving care team would not support her financially till they had the figures from

Accommodation: Moving – Bethany moved into her grans the week before her first term because her new house was not ready to move into. She could not stay at her previous accommodation whilst she was at university.

Course Satisfaction – Was beginning to be dissatisfied with the layout of her general course. Felt like her course was the outsider to a larger general course as she was doing a 'nursing and" course.
Course – Worried things will change with teaching and she won't get informed of it and turn up late or in the wrong place.

Course mates – Felt a sense of unity with her course mates as there course was a smaller class of a larger general course tnhat they felt pushed out of and that they didn't belong there.

Student Finance - Application for student finance had still not been fully completed. She was waiting to hear back from the NHS bursary to hear their final decision on how much bursary she would be awarded.

Course Satisfaction – Bethany decided to suspend her studies, one of the reasons she gave was her lack of satisfaction in her course layout and the way it was ran. She felt like her course was the outsider to a much more general subject area and the lecturers of that subject treated her course that way.

Student Finance – Finance was a big reason for Bethany suspending her studies, she had struggled with the application forms and thus not received any NHS bursary. SF was awaiting the decision from NHS and believed the final decision to be incorrect. She had no money and was relying on family members for financial support. LA would not offer financial support till a decision had been finalized.

Interview one

Interview Two

Interview Three

Leaving care team – Will provided financial support one received figures from student finance. In the meantime only her rent will be paid. Her LCT are currently helping her with getting her flat, although, they

Anxious about travelling – Worried about turning up late for her lectures.

Relationship with Family – Bethany has a strong support network from her family, whilst waiting for her new flat to be ready she stayed with her grandma.
Exposure to university – Two of her younger sibling are enrolled at university.
Encouragement – Received encouragement from her dad within her pursuits in education.

Accommodation: Moving – Bethany moved out of her grans and into her new house but had to collect her keys when she had a lecture and take calls during university for her house.

Leaving care team – Did not offer financial support during this time for travel but did pay her rent. The LCT supported her with moving in to her new flat and she was given a grant to pay for furniture.
Financial Difficulties – She struggled to get to university because of money.

Financial Difficulties – The financial troubles she had were another reason she left university, she had no income because she had filled out her NHS bursary forms and received nothing from them and was then told by y SF that she might of filled them out wrong. She was living of the financial support of her family

Leaving care team – As soon as they heard she had suspended her studies they met with her and released her from the team because she was 21 and no longer in education. They said she could go back to them if she restarted education before 25 but after her experience she was unsure she would do this.

Accommodation: Moving – Bethany explains that she feels moving into her own home when she did, led to her suspending her studies. She often found herself worrying about her house during lectures and seminars. **Family** – Key source of support.

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