Young People, Individualism, and Welfare Conditionality Over Time

THOMAS ROCHOW

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School of Social and Political Sciences
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow

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Abstract

Recent generations of young people in the UK have transitioned to adulthood during a period of insecure labour markets, unaffordable housing, welfare retrenchment, economic recessions, and the proliferation of self-help discourses. Young people who cannot rely on informal support are increasingly unlikely to realise the traditional cornerstones of adulthood: secure employment and owner-occupied housing. These markers of adulthood have been restructured and restricted for recent generations of young people. However, the market-orientated state enforces onus on the individual to realise a secure future.

Labour activation backed up by behavioural regulation is now ubiquitous in policy approaches which seek to address worklessness and poverty in advanced capitalist societies. Conditionality is fundamental to the design of contemporary social security systems, which operate on the basis that behavioural changes on an individual level can overcome structural barriers. The intensification of this policy trend is associated with the broader political obsession with long-range social mobility and the cultural fixation with self-improvement. Contemporary UK welfare policy encourages young people to psychologise structural problems and internalise the self-improvement discourse.

Self-improvement discourses and individualised futures have been particularly significant for recent generations of young people. Their transitions to adulthood have coincided with the explosion in the self-help mindset that challenges in life should be addressed, and aspirations realised, through adapting the individual. This rhetoric has been pedalled more readily through contemporary education systems, proliferating social media platforms, and influencer culture. The messaging appears empowering; those who have succeeded by neoliberal metrics provide those who are struggling in the contemporary labour market with the tools to supposedly unlock their potential. In practice however, this behaviourist framing of labour market outcomes can undermine structural inequalities and covertly maintain the existing social order by upholding the concept of a meritocracy.

This thesis explores young people's experiences of contemporary conditional social security systems and how they navigate and respond to behavioural regulation, insecure employment, conditional housing pathways, and worklessness over time. The thesis employs secondary analysis of qualitative longitudinal data, of a youth (16-25) sub-sample comprised of 56 young people and 114 total interviews, drawn from the Welfare Conditionality Project (2013-2019), to investigate how young people who experience conditional social security systems make sense of the behavioural regulation and how they conceptualise pathways to their aspirations.

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Acknowledgments

It is difficult to believe that I am actually writing acknowledgements for a PhD. Five years prior to this I, and many of those who knew me, would have laughed at the thought of me beginning a PhD, let alone completing one. Yet here we are, and my first thought is what a real privilege it has been. To have the freedom to read, think, write, and discuss deeply across a range of subjects, scholars, and ideas, is something I will always cherish and wish more young people had the opportunity to do.

My first thanks go to the Wright and Wong supervision dream team. Sharon and Mark really are excellent scholars and supervisors, and they work perfectly in tandem. I was very fortunate to be blessed with their presence. I will always be grateful to Mark for being so kind and making me believe I could 'do academia' if I wanted to. I will always be grateful to Sharon for taking a chance on me and propelling my development as a social researcher in a way only she can. However, this is only a part of their importance to my life during my PhD years. Mark and Sharon are two people with true compassion and care, which has been invaluable during some difficult personal periods over the past few years. It goes without saying this PhD would not be possible without them, but their support has helped me grow as a person and I am sure our friendship will be a lasting one.

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I would like to dedicate my last thought to Evan.

Authors Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Thomas Rochow

Signature:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

It is the 25th of March 2021 on a dreary day in the Southside of Glasgow. I have been wrestling with the dataset for over a year now. I turn to my data diary to write my current thoughts on what my analysis is telling me:

"I did not expect the number of participants who passionately framed their future as something which was in their hands. Many of the young people believed, if they were able to stay motivated and 'keep doing the right things' a brighter future would materialise for them. This had gone completely against all the literature I had just read, detailing the widening structural intergenerational inequalities. Yet, these young people who represent some of the most disadvantaged in contemporary UK society are positive about their futures and suggest that their individual traits will be the deciding factor in terms of whether they 'succeed' or not.

To me this is highlighting something quite profound about young people in contemporary society. They are 'conditioned' to adopt these interpretations of the labour market. Most of these young people have only known individualism and conservative governance for the majority of the time they have had to think about getting a job and transitioning to adulthood. This appears to have had a significant impact on how this cohort perceives their struggles within society, as something deeply personal, something which they can fix if they choose to. This individualised perspective is captivating. To downplay structural inequalities is seen a badge of honour for some young people, particularly among those who are most affected by these barriers."

The contemporary hegemonic corporate and state rhetoric in advanced capitalist societies promotes the idea that mentality is more important than social background as a predictor of individual economic outcomes (Littler, 2018 p.1). It has become contentious to critique this empowering messaging because to suggest this individualised framing as somewhat disingenuous, is perceived as condemning those from a disadvantaged background to a life of poor outcomes (Ashley, 2021). However,

this *psychologisation* of economic and professional outcomes can be unhelpful and damaging for the majority who do not succeed by the metrics deemed valuable in neoliberal societies (Chapman, 2018 p. 141).

This individualised ideology is what underpins the contemporary design of social security policies (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Self-improvement discourses and the concept of meritocracy are fundamental to the now ubiquitous (Dwyer and Wright, 2014), coerced compliance with behavioural conditions to receive basic pecuniary support from the state, in the UK most other advanced capitalist countries (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018a, p.2). Welfare conditionality helps to construct a psychological conceptualisation of worklessness and poverty (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

Now, I want to introduce Jamie's journey. I want the reader to immerse themselves in Jamie's story and try to feel what he feels, as I have done. His story is captivating, emotive, and illuminates many of the concepts and ideas developed throughout this thesis. This will also provide the reader with a taster for the kind of style, structure, and approach this research has taken.

1.2 Jamie's Journey

1.2.1 Wave A

It is October 2014; Jamie is 21 years old and living in homeless accommodation in London. He has depression, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. Jamie recently became a father to a little girl and providing for her is now his main drive. Jamie supports the mother of his child and his daughter as much as he can with his meagre Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) payments, which at the time for his age group was £57.90 per week (DWP, 2015).

There are some fundamental barriers to work he is facing at the moment, such as not being able to afford the travel to go to interviews, commute to a potential job, and visit his daughter. He is angry with how he is being treated in the Jobcentre Plus and feels nothing is ever good enough for the work coaches. When Jamie applies for a limited

number of jobs, he is told he is lazy and other people are applying for more and if he applies for lots of jobs, he is told his job search is too repetitive:

"If we [jobseekers] sit there every day just sat on the computer applying for jobs, [Jobcentre staff] will say to us that we're not spending enough time looking for jobs. [I feel] we're spending too much time just applying for things." (Jamie, Wave A, 21, Jobseeker, White British, London, 2014)

However, Jamie is determined to continue to do the 'right' things, conform to the behavioural conditions that are attached to his claim, and maintaining his flexible multi-track strategy for securing employment. These are his aspirations for the coming year:

Jamie
"The only thing I'm hoping to achieve is to have a job. It's the only thing I'm working towards."

Interviewer
"How optimistic are you about achieving that?"

Jamie
"I'm optimistic, but I do have my doubts. Because there are people out there that have all these qualifications from uni, and there's little old me who only has my qualifications from college."

1.2.2 Wave B

Fifteen months have passed, now 22, Jamie has had sporadic experiences with paid work since his last interview. He had three different jobs, one in a printing factory and two in a warehouse. During busy periods, such as around Christmas time, he could get temporary work but would then be laid off.

Jamie has noticed the Jobcentre becoming stricter recently. At the time of interview, he is subject to a benefit sanction for being late to a Work Programme (WP) appointment. Thus, for the past four months he had to borrow what little money he could from friends and family and rely on a foodbank to feed himself. Jamie internalises this financial punishment as his own fault and character building. Jamie understands being mentally

broken as something one should accept in this system, and he remains eternally optimistic. Jamie's aspirations for the coming year are largely unchanged from the previous. Despite his challenges, his confidence is growing with regard to future employment outcomes:

"Well yes, I was pissed about [my most recent sanction], but I was late, it was my own fault." (Jamie, Wave B, 22, Jobseeker, White British, London, 2016)

Interviewer
"This last four months you've had zero income coming into the house."

Jamie
"Pretty much."

Interviewer
"How has that been? I mean it sounds pretty traumatic."

Jamie
"It is, it is traumatic, it does keep you up and I have had some breakdowns and it's just one of those ones, you just learn to get on with it, or just like finding other ways of getting money or eating."

Interviewer
"Do you feel more or less confident or the same about getting a job as you did a year ago?"

Jamie
"I'm more confident now than what I was a year ago."

1.2.3 Wave C

It is April 2017; Jamie is 23 and at time of interview he is not in paid work. Jamie had a job with a high street retailer, but it was short lived. He was promised full-time hours, but these were gradually cut to 16 hours per week. Jamie was not paid for over two months when he started this job. Jamie left the job because he felt he was being treated

unfairly and demands were unreasonable. He then went back to the Jobcentre Plus to sign on but was sanctioned for leaving the job, another four-month period with no income.

Jamie has accrued more than £4000 in rent arrears since his last interview because of delays and errors with his Housing Benefit when moving in and out of work. Every time Jamie enters work he ends up in debt. His belief and motivation in abiding by the conditionality and finding work are declining over time. In this final interview Jamie begins to discuss some of the hurdles his generation faces in the contemporary labour market:

"I can keep going on all these job websites, sending out my CV, and it's just getting me nowhere. Again, I think it's because some of the jobs, they're looking for things that aren't on my CV, like everyone wants three to four years' experience." (Jamie, Wave C, 23, White British, Jobseeker, London, 2017).

Jamie becomes increasingly disillusioned and frustrated with the lack of stable employment opportunities available to him. He feels he has been doing the right things, doing what he has been told, but it is not paying off. His aspirations have not been realised and Jamie remains out of work, living in homeless accommodation, and in receipt of the same state support as he was at Wave A. This is how the final part of Jamie's narrative tails off:

"I don't need to know how to send an email, because [the Jobcentre Plus will] send you on a course on how to send an email, how to write a CV, how to do a job search; that's not the help I need. I know how to send an email, I know how to format my CV. I learnt all that when I was in school."

Interviewer

"What are you hoping that the future will bring?"

Jamie

"Work [laughs]."

1.3 Aims

This thesis illuminates the narratives of young people on the fringes of the contemporary labour and housing markets, such as Jamie. The aim of this thesis, broadly speaking, is to explore how young people who experience unemployment, underemployment, low-income, and welfare conditionality, conceptualise and rationalise their own circumstances over time. Recent welfare reforms in the UK are characterised by intensified conditionality and behavioural surveillance (Wright, 2016). This research addresses the evident gap in the growing body of literature in this field by focusing solely on young people who experience welfare conditionality. Young people are disproportionally affected by economic recessions (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011), unemployment (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014), underemployment (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019), and benefit sanctions (Webster, 2017).

They are also a group who have been understudied in terms of their specific generational understandings of the contemporary insecure labour and housing markets, as well as the restructuring of the social security system, and the voices of working-class youth are all too often not heard in the policy process. Therefore, this research will investigate the nuanced subjective accounts of young people who encounter welfare conditionality by conducting original, secondary analysis of qualitative, longitudinal data on a cohort of young people who all claimed some form of state support.

Drawing upon data generated as part of the Welfare Conditionality Project (2013-2019), the narratives of 56 young people (16-25) will be analysed across three interview waves, a total of 114 interviews, to generate nuanced youth-centric insights into how young people make sense of contemporary labour and housing markets, intensified welfare conditionality, their place in society, and their futures. The ESRC funded Welfare Conditionality Project, was an enormous undertaking for researchers and participants alike: 481 service users were recruited through 9 different policy-specific areas: ex-offenders, disabled persons, lone parents, homeless individuals, jobseekers, social tenants, those with history of anti-social behaviour, migrants, and Universal

Credit (UC)[1] claimants. A total 1,082 semi-structured interviews were carried out in 11 different localities across the UK.

The primary research team kindly archived the rich dataset and encouraged re-use by secondary researchers, as they acknowledged the unfeasibility to exhaust all the possible findings or new theories in one sitting. Not only will this thesis contribute to our knowledge of youth encounters with welfare conditionality and the impacts of behavioural social policies over time, but it will also drive forward and refine a novel methodological approach of secondary analysis of qualitative longitudinal data. Both Neale (2021a) and Treanor, Patrick and Wenham (2021) argue that qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) should be the preferred method for evaluating polices that seek to alleviate poverty, thus furthering the usefulness of this research. Understanding best practice when recontextualising existing data and building rapport with participants from a distance, with only words on paper, are key methodological contributions of this thesis. As well as demonstrating the wealth of opportunities secondary analysis of qualitative research provides, this research continues to establish the value in optimising the vast quantity of available, existing qualitative data.

The key research questions that this thesis will answer are as follows:

1) How do experiences of welfare conditionality over time shape young people's future aspirations?
2) How does the combination of behavioural regulation and insecure labour and housing markets shape young people's strategies for realising their future aspirations?
3) How do early experiences with the disciplining aspects of welfare conditionality, such as benefit sanctions, shape young people's long-term attitudes toward employment and state services?

Answering these three main questions are important for several factors. It is important to highlight in-depth accounts of how intensifying welfare conditionality and rising

[1] Universal Credit is the landmark UK welfare reform designed by the Coalition Government in 2010 and has been rolled out by successive government since. The reform combines six distinct legacy benefits into one monthly payment, in an attempt to make the system more simplified, streamlined, and increase work incentives (DWP, 2010). After extensive delays the DWP now expects all households currently claiming legacy benefits to be transferred to UC by the end of 2024 (Harker, 2023).

insecurity shape recent generations aspirations for the future and how confident they are in realising their goals. There is a lack of empirical evidence that provides insight into how young people themselves make sense of welfare conditionality and the potential long-term impacts of engagement with policies which seek to change and regulate service users' behaviour, especially among those who encounter these systems at the beginning of their journey to adulthood and employment. The exposure to punitive aspects of welfare conditionality, which have been shown to disproportionally affect young people (Webster, 2017; Van Den Berg et al. 2022), carries different meanings for those at the initial stages of understanding their place in society and the possibility of shaping lifelong conceptualisations of the state. These facets of the recent major welfare reforms in the UK have received limited scholarly attention to this date.

Moreover, according to Fraser and Reeves (2023), there is significant value in contributing to the building momentum established by social security beneficiaries, researchers, and think tanks across the UK, which seek to move lived experience near the top of the agenda in social security policymaking. Engaging with those affected over time is vital to develop a policy that reduces stigma, increases security, and enhances labour market outcomes among those out-of-work. In 2017, the Scottish Government established an experience panel in social security to involve social security beneficiaries in the design and operation of social security policies in Scotland (Scottish Government, nd), indicating the growing push to engage those with lived experience in the policymaking process.

This thesis will also adopt Woodman and Wyn's (2014) social generations theoretical framework. This approach provides an entry point to understand the impacts the contemporary structural make-up has had on recent generations of young people, within a context of what has come before, to conceptualise this cohort of young people's unique initial engagements with the labour and housing markets, and the social world. Rather than trying to understand their experiences mainly within the context of their own generation and how their transitions are restricted compared to their more privileged peers. One key reason for engaging with the social generations approach is that recent generations of young people, those born between 1980-2000, have experienced a unique and particularly restricted and insecure labour and housing

markets, when compared to their parents or grandparents' generation (Furlong et al. 2017, p.8). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge this unique generational perspective.

However, the impacts of intragenerational inequalities on this cohort will not be ignored. This theoretical underpinning will help to achieve one of the key aims of this research: to inform, through synthesising young service users' narratives, how policy could better address specific generational challenges for young people. Woodman and Wyn are careful not to blur the significance of class or fall into the bracket of framing generations as homogenous group defined by supposed uniform dispositions or universal psychological transformations in relation to prepossessing generations, as made popular in the media.

As Woodman and Wyn (2015, p. 1403) assert: *"Sociologically informed concepts of social generation have greater nuance, oriented towards understanding the way in which social conditions create distinctive opportunities and risks that young people must navigate – often with very different outcomes."* This approach will help to make sense of how new forms of widening inequalities impact contemporary young lives in precarious times. However, this does not confine the findings of this thesis and the experiences of this youth cohort to this time and space. These youth experiences tell us about how to better support future generations as structural problems such as, youth unemployment, and policy frameworks, such as conditional welfare support, are set to continue and even intensify.

1.4 How This Thesis Came into Being

During the year when I completed my MSc in Public and Urban Policy (2017-18) at the University of Glasgow, I noticed how my personal life was matching up with concepts that I had been interested in throughout my academic reading; that the contemporary labour market offered restricted valorised employment opportunities for young people, particularly young men (Nixon, 2018; McDowell, 2019). I had a period after I finished my undergraduate degree where I could barely find minimum-wage

work let alone enter a salaried career. This affected my mental health and aspirations for my future substantially.

Entering university, the veil of everything one had been taught prior begins to lift as one is exposed to new forms of thinking and learning. Similarly, when trying to enter the professional labour market for the first time, the romantic idea posited to fledgling undergraduates of gliding into a relevant and well-paid position begins to appear like a fantasy. It was becoming apparent that some of my friends, mostly male, were experiencing long spells of unemployment and some were turning to the state for support. According to the age boundary for reduced UC payments of someone below the age of 25, I was still officially considered a young person at this time. Most of my friends and I had university degrees and were still struggling to find meaningful employment. We would have conversations about how few good jobs there were, how it made us feel worthless, and how no one had prepared us for this inevitability. We would talk about the patronising and stigmatising support available, from parents, careers advisors, and state services, where adults would begin to treat us like children again.

This got me thinking, if the people of middle socio-economic status (SES) were struggling, what must the contemporary labour market be like for those in my generation who had fewer resources to draw upon. I had read about the welfare reforms and the roll out of UC during my master's year. I surmised this to be a two-fold blow for young jobseekers. They were becoming increasingly less likely to find secure employment and more likely to experience behavioural coercion to maintain a basic standard of living. Couple this with the widening intergenerational inequalities in terms of lifetime earnings and owner-occupied housing (Blanden and Machin, 2017), and there was a unique set of circumstances which my generation was attempting to transition to adulthood.

Despite these coalescing factors I could not find any qualitative studies that sought to exclusively illuminate young people's experiences of employment, housing, and claiming state support in contemporary UK society. By the time it came to submit my proposal for my master's dissertation, the rationale and my desire were there to conduct

primary research to explore how young people who claimed state support understood their experiences of the system and the contemporary labour market. I was introduced to a fascinating world of academic theory and debate within youth studies and social policy.

I was first inspired by scholars from my institution at Glasgow past and present, and I started to bring together some of the concepts from contemporary youth studies, social policy, and sociology. Other prominent sociology scholars from the UK who research youth and social policy heavily influenced my research interests, and then I became aware of the vibrant youth sociology community within Australia. Engaging with the scholars that appear regularly throughout this thesis, expanded my knowledge and appetite for youth focused social policy research. I carried out my master's project titled: *'Exploring and Understanding the Lived Experience of Young Jobseekers under Universal Credit',* and I was fortunate enough to be accepted to return to Glasgow a year after graduating to follow on my master's research as a PhD project.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis will first provide a focused review of the relevant existing literature to establish what we already know about contemporary youth transitions and experiences of workfare programmes; the knowledge gap that this project will fill; and where the findings of this project are situated within contemporary scholarship. The literature review, chapter two, which follows this opening chapter, will also introduce each key concept to help make sense of the findings and conclusion chapters. These concepts, such as the rise of paternalism and workfare within the design of social security polices; the pervasive social policy approach of seeking to change behaviours within the individual to tackle structural problems; the cultural obsession with self-help which has been particularly imposed on recent generations of young people; and the *psychologisation* of everyday life, will be explained, discussed, and synthesised. These concepts should be perceived as the toolkit, which helped me and will help the reader, to contextualise the findings of this research and the subsequent conclusions.

Then chapter three, methodology, will detail the approaches adopted and processes involved in reaching the findings of the research. The methodology chapter will present an open discussion of methodological decisions made, why these decisions were made, the values and philosophical underpinning of the researcher, and the key advantages and limitations of the methodological approach adopted. Reflexivity will be weaved in throughout this chapter to acknowledge the role of the researcher in shaping the research design and process. This will enhance the validity of the project and the findings. The reader will be guided through important aspects of the novel methodological approach: the iterative and organic process of secondary analysis of qualitative longitudinal research (QLR), the coding and analysis process, the quote selection process, and the limitations of recontextualizing an existing dataset to answer fresh research questions.

By chapter four, the reader will have been provided with the key conceptual tools to be able to situate the findings and the methodological process which generated said findings will be transparent and justified. Then, the set of three findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) offer empirical insights into young people's experiences. The structure of each findings chapter differs slightly, and each covers a different aspect of the cohort's narrative. They are however interconnected and will flow from one to the next, to develop a moving image of the cohort's journey based on what was most salient to them. The first findings chapter (4) will explore the sample's employment experiences, attitudes, and aspirations. Some patterns within the sample as a whole will be highlighted before more in-depth case narratives will be illustrated to provide nuance and personify the key themes related to employment and conditionality within the data.

The second findings chapter (5) will explore housing experiences, transitions, and aspirations. This chapter compares two distinct conditional housing pathways from Edinburgh, Scotland and Bristol, England. These are supposedly two divergent housing policy landscapes, as Scotland has been praised for its rights-based approach, whereas England has been criticised for not demonstrating enough political will to eradicate homelessness (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2021). This chapter will zoom in and compare the experiences of two sub-groups within the data. One group of three young mothers engaged in a conditional housing programme in Bristol and a diverse group of five

young people engaged in a conditional housing programme in Edinburgh. To analyse the extent to which the lived experience of the different policy landscapes on the ground matches up with the differences in the policy design and language used in policy documents.

The final findings chapter (6) will explore the benefit sanction experiences and responses following a sanction among the cohort. Sanctions played a significant role in the narratives of these young people. They were disproportionately exposed to sanctions during a time of historically high sanction rates (Webster, 2017) and thus this form of punitive behavioural regulation dissected their subjectivities and was a central component for many of the young people from the study. Given that benefit sanctions are fundamental to the intensification of welfare conditionality and disproportionately applied to young people's claims, it is important to explore how young people understand this form of punitive behavioural coercion.

Finally, the conclusion chapter (7) summarises the original contributions of each part of the thesis. It will also synthesise each findings chapter to concisely reinforce the key contributions of this research. Part of the conclusion chapter will be comprised of a discussion section that will combine each findings chapter to further develop and crystalise the main overall arguments. This chapter will then offer some recommendations for future research and policy reform. The findings and the remaining gaps in knowledge from this research, will be used to frame the next steps for researchers in the field and how policy design and practice could be improved to better support young people with limited informal support during periods of insecurity and worklessness to enable them to take more control of their lives. Next, Chapter 2 provides the foundation for the rest of the thesis by synthesising the relevant existing literature and establishing the rationale for this study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will present a critical analysis of the contemporary discourse within youth studies and welfare conditionality. The discussion will focus on what the contemporary scholarly literature informs us about being a young person transitioning to adulthood in contemporary UK society, particularly on trying to secure employment and housing whilst claiming conditional state support. This chapter will also synthesise the largely distinct literature bases of youth studies and welfare conditionality research. The chapter will demonstrate how do the concepts and evidence within these two research areas dissect subjective youth experiences and identities? The chapter will then explore and develop the key academic concepts to contextualise the core findings of my research. Engaging with authors who have written on disciplining social policy and self-help as a political mechanism to address structural problems, to situate my findings in the broader literature and provide conceptual grounding for my findings.

Review of the contemporary literature indicates that the current generations of young people are experiencing a form of accumulative disadvantage, where the organisation and reality of contemporary labour markets, housing markets, and welfare reforms coalesce to further marginalise certain youth cohorts when compared to previous generations (Furlong et al. 2017, p.11). Growing up in a time of intensified conditionality, individualised framing, and insecurity, will inevitably have unique impacts on how young people view work, adulthood, and their sense of self (Woodman and Wyn, 2015). Young people born in the early-to-mid-1990s have no experience of alternative designs of, and interactions between, social security and labour and housing markets, which could have a profound impact on their understanding and lived experience of the contemporary configuration (MacDonald, 2016). Older workers and welfare claimants not only have different priorities, ideas of the future, and entitlements compared to young claimants, but also conceptualise their experience in the context of what has come before, pre-austerity. The constrained perspective of young claimants offers a potential nuanced, age-dependent interpretation of welfare conditionality which has been largely unexplored.

The first section of the chapter will illuminate the policy context in which these young people were transitioning to adulthood. To construct a detailed picture of the period when these young people in the UK were claiming state support and seeking stable work and housing. This will include discussion on the changes in the labour and housing markets over time, how they have become less secure, more exclusionary, and relatively restricted scope for progression. The chapter will unpack relevant Welfare Reforms, most notably the Welfare Reform Act (2012)[2], and how the composition of social security has become more stringent, punitive, and intrusive over time.

Then, the ideology inherent within the pervasive behavioural strategies to tackle problems such as youth underemployment will be explored. The individualised conceptualisations of work and worklessness, economic security and insecurity, and homelessness and homeownership will be critiqued, to understand how these framing shapes, and is shaped by, policy and public discourse. The favouring of nudging individual behaviours to overcome structural problems has become 'common sense' policymaking (Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013). Whereby, promoting labour market participation via stimulating self-responsibilised citizens through forms behavioural economics has been a priority of successive Governments in the UK (Flint and Fletcher, 2018).

[2] Summary of the key measures of the Act are as follows:

"The Bill provides for the introduction of a 'Universal Credit' to replace a range of existing means-tested benefits and tax credits for people of working age, starting from 2013. The Bill follows the November 2010 White Paper, 'Universal Credit: welfare that works', which set out the Coalition Government's proposals for reforming welfare to improve work incentives, simplify the benefits system and tackle administrative complexity. Besides introducing Universal Credit and related measures, the Bill makes other significant changes to the benefits system.

Key areas:

- *introduces Personal Independence Payments to replace the current Disability Living Allowance*
- *restricts Housing Benefit entitlement for social housing tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need*
- *up-rates Local Housing Allowance rates by the Consumer Price Index*
- *amends the forthcoming statutory child maintenance scheme*
- *limits the payment of contributory Employment and Support Allowance to a 12-month period*
- *caps the total amount of benefit that can be claimed."*

(UK Parliament, 2012)

The assumptions, culture, and values that have given rise to the intensification of welfare conditionality will be discussed. Then, a broader exploration of how the popular psychology, positive thinking, and motivational discourse has permeated multiple aspects of people's lives, particularly for younger generations, will be provided. Here, literature will be drawn upon to demonstrate how structural issues, such as economic security, have been reduced to a matter of psychological traits. This refers to the contemporary fixation of understanding labour market outcomes through a lens of individual attributes, such as motivation, resilience, and positivity, rather than something predominantly shaped by external environmental and social factors (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). The exponential growth of self-help and individual psychological governance (Rimke, 2001; Vassallo, 2020, p.4) underpins the solidifying of neoliberal dogmas in public discourse and individual values. The *psychologisation* of everyday life, wherein society and structure are deemed less significant because one can 'fix' oneself with guidance from organisational psychology, will be challenged in this literature review.

2.2 Policy Context

2.2.1 Introduction

This section of the literature review will explore the social, political, and economic context of the period when this cohort of young people were claiming state support, looking for work, and transitioning to adulthood. The focus here will predominately be on the dynamic changes in the youth labour and housing markets since The Great Recession of 2008. This section will provide an overview of the macro level economic and structural forces which have impacted recent generations of young people and to outline the environment in which the politics of austerity and intensified welfare conditionality in the UK emerged.

2.2.2 Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is not a new policy problem, however the forms it takes, how it manifests, and is understood by both young people and policymakers has changed over

time (Furlong et al. 2017, p.11). Moreover, recent generations have experienced a more volatile global economy which has given rise to dynamic changes in youth unemployment rates (ibid). Before discussing unemployment rates of any kind, a caveat should be raised. Official unemployment rates, measured in the UK by the Labour Force Survey (LFS), use the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition for unemployed persons (ONS, 2020). This ILO definition defines unemployed people as being:

- without a job, have been actively seeking work in the past four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks.
- Out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start it in the next two weeks.

Someone is also considered employed by the LFS if they do one hour of paid work per week (ONS, 2020). Hence, we should begin to move away from the idea that the employment/unemployment rates by these official metrics as the primary marker of a healthy labour market and economic stability. These figures do not give an accurate picture of the total number of economically inactive persons or those who are economically secure. This is particularly the case for youth cohorts as these statistics do not include those in education or training, which encapsulates a significant percentage of young people.

With that caveat noted, evidence demonstrates that youth unemployment has declined significantly in the United Kingdom (UK) since The Great Recession, from its peak of 22% in October 2011 down to approximately 9% in the last three months up to August 2022 (Clark, 2022). However, there is concern as to the *quality* of life and jobs available to this new youth workforce (Roberts, 2011; MacDonald, 2016). Underemployment and precarious employment disproportionately affect young people; almost one third of 16–24-year-olds were underemployed in 2012, compared with only 8% of 25–49-year-olds (Bell and Blanchflower, 2013).

Young people also appear to fare worse during times of economic downturn. For example, Bell and Blanchflower (2011) demonstrate that in the aftermath of 'The Great Recession' youth unemployment increased more rapidly than overall unemployment rates across OECD countries. In the UK between 2008-2010 unemployment increased

3% faster among under 25s compared with over 25s (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). A similar disparity in labour market disruptions by age group was established in a recent study of youth labour trajectories in Brazil during the 2014-2017 recession there (Mont'Alavo and Ribeiro, 2020).

2.2.3 Precarious Youth Transitions

Young people comprise the majority of 'the precariat' (Standing, 2011), a term used to describe a growing global demographic characterised by an insecure and fluctuating existence, mainly in terms of employment and housing. This may appear at first to be expected, young people have always had to 'work their way up' so to speak. However, contemporary early encounters with the labour market are not only synonymous with low pay and low status, but also insecurity and limited scope for career progression, thus inhibiting the chances of ever reaching economic independence and secure housing tenure (Cuervo and Chesters, 2019).

Moreover, low quality work is not reserved solely for the most disadvantaged youth cohorts. Increasingly, greater numbers of young university graduates find themselves trapped in various forms of underemployment as participation in higher education continues to rise but quality job opportunities do not (Furlong et al. 2017, p.7). Those in the UK who grew up during the period of economic growth throughout the 1990s and early part of the 21st century, began their transitions into adulthood amidst a global recession and state policy symbolised by cuts to public expenditure (Hills, 2017 p.16), punitive welfare reforms (Fletcher and Wright, 2018), and a rise in de-standardised work (Furlong et al. 2017, p. 40).

Millennials, a generation born between 1981-1996, seem to be an enigma to scientists and social commentators (Arras-Djabi et al. 2023). They are said to be the most progressive and narcissistic (Twenge et al. 2008; Kaplan, 2020), spoiled and tolerant (Bannon et al. 2011; Stein, 2013;) generation ever. These stereotypes are not important for this thesis and categorising generations or pitting them against one another is fraught with contradictions and hyperbole (White, 2013). However, economically speaking, Millennials are the first generation in the post war era that are projected to be financially

worse off than their parents (Antonoucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014). They experience more insecure employment and housing pathways, weaker social protections, and more individualised lives than previous generations. They will be, on average, more excluded from the traditional cornerstones of adulthood: stable employment (Crisp and Powell, 2017), owner-occupied housing (McKee, 2012), and having children (Brown, 2021).

Young people have been ordered through work-first approaches and the market orientated state in many neoliberal welfare states, such as the UK, in no uncertain terms, that the onus is on them to realise secure futures (Rooney and Gray, 2020). It is how young people process the increasing anxieties surrounding labour and housing market futures, behavioural state strategies, and how they enact resilience and respond to changes over time this is of great interest to this research.

2.2.4 Insecure Labour

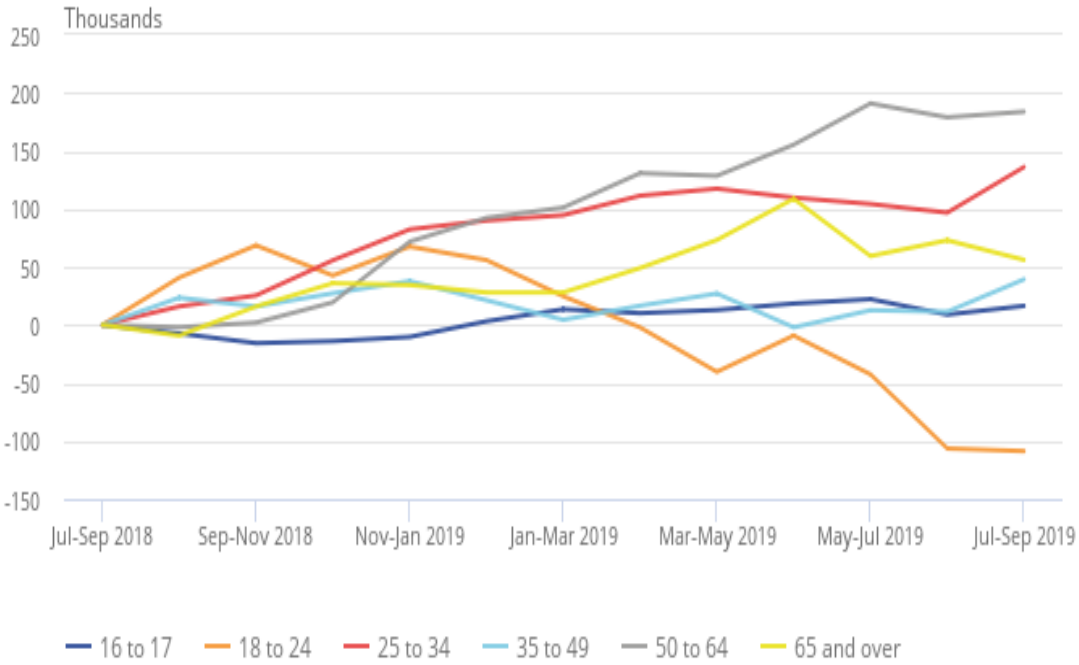
The proliferation of insecure employment, which can be viewed in the erosion of once relatively stable career paths, or the creation of new forms of employment with non-standardised arrangements in terms of status, hours and pay. Young people entering the labour market today face a competitive and exclusionary arena, where initial engagements with work are often temporary. Those with the social, economic, and human capital can thrive in the new economy: be flexible, autonomous, and well paid for skilled labour (Balaram, et al. 2017). However, those at the other end of the new economy are left more exposed to the insecurity and disposability of the precarious labour market.

Although youth transitions are unpredictable and divergent within and between generations, young people as a whole, can be described as a marginalised group within wider society (Barry, 2010). France (1998) argues that young people will be increasingly excluded from secure employment opportunities, not because of their capabilities or attitudes, but as a product of social power. The transition from economic dependence to independence has been elongated in recent years through structural processes, such as the rise in precarious employment, stagnant wages, and unaffordable

housing (Barry, 2010). In fact, although unemployment rates have steadily decreased since The Great Recession, precarious employment and in-work poverty are on the rise (Woodruff, 2018). Young people in contemporary society are particularly exposed to temporary, part-time, and pseudo self-employment when compared to older working age populations and previous generations (Woodman, Furlong and Wyn, 2011; George et al. 2015). These new forms of employment are disposed to inferior working conditions and workers' rights (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014).

In the wake of The Great Recession, unemployment rates across Europe for 16–25-year-olds increased sharply (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). Between September and December 2012, Spain for example, had a youth unemployment rate over 50%, historically high numbers (Eurostat, 2013). Although UK rates did not reach this level, the shockwaves of the financial crash had a lasting impact on a generations' formal education to labour market transitions (Kalleberg, 2020). *Figure 1* demonstrates that between July-September 2018 and July-September 2019, during a relatively stable economic period pre-COVID-19, employment rates increased across every age range except 18-24-year-olds, where we see a significant decrease (ONS, 2019a).

Figure 1 – UK Employment Levels Absolute Change by Age Group, July-September 2018 to July-September 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey (ONS, 2019b).

As part of the strategy to reboot the economy post 2008, new forms of unregulated employment were quickly thrust upon advanced capitalist societies, typically low wage, flexible and insecure work (Kalleberg, 2020). This type of de-standardised employment comes in many forms: agency work, temporary work, part-time work, phony self-employment, internships, and zero-hour contracts (Choonara, 2019, p. 81) All these forms of employment in the so called 'new economy', are more likely to be taken up by younger workers (ibid). For example, in 2016 across EU nations, 43.3% of 15–24-year-olds were working under fix-term contacts compared with 14.1% of all workers (ETUC, 2017). All of this suggests that youth labour markets move in different ways, are subject to distinct pressures and exhibit different characteristics when compared to the labour market as a whole. Thus, offering impetus for specific youth tailored welfare interventions to tackle rising insecurity.

De-standardised and Fluid Employment

Precarity is a term with growing pertinence in certain academic circles (Woodman, 2020), although Furlong et al. 2017 (p.100) preferred the term *liminality* because of its connotations with balance and flow rather than the solely negative connotations of the term precarity. Not everything about growing precarity is harmful i.e., avenues for young people to explore more creative and fulfilling lives outside of the normative employment nexus should be viewed as a positive. However, precarity is the more appropriate term for young people constrained by state agencies and thus will be used here to frame the exploration of youth encounters with welfare systems and labour and housing markets. Precarity, in this sense, is referring to not only to reduced employment protection and ever more stringent social security, but to a multitude of structural factors experienced by young people in a time of increasing anxieties, risks and uncertainties which cultivate a more ambiguous and individualised existence (Giddens, 1991). A generation of young people in Britain, those born after 1990, have been transitioning to adulthood during a time of: economic restructuring (McKay and Rowlingson, 2016); exclusionary housing practices (Wong, 2019); labour market insecurity (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014); and punitive welfare reforms (Fletcher and Wright, 2018). These young people are said to live more precarious and complex lives than previous generations (Furlong et al. 2017, p.8).

The restructuring of the traditional contractual employment relations synonymous with the 'Baby Boomer' generation - relatively stable long-term careers were paved with typically few career changes, a sense of collective employee identity, worker rights and benefits upheld - has altered all these aspects of work (Ferrari et al. 2017). Millennials experience far more fluid and ill-defined labour market trajectories associated with more individuality and therefore diminished worker solidarity and collective power (Beck et al. 2016). Young people who experience inauspicious initiations with the labour market typically realise jagged future employment trajectories (Woodman and Wyn, 2014, p. 84). Therefore, to better understand youth experiences of welfare conditionality during a time of labour insecurity, it is an advantage to be able to engage with longitudinal qualitative data. This helps us to piece together how uncertainties and rapid changes in circumstance impact young people over time. A snapshot of a life would fail to inform us how these processes develop over time and how young people react in the face of heightened precarity in real time (Neale, 2015).

The 'gig economies' do not encompass all insecure workers, but it is a growing workforce which perfectly incapsulates the notion of increasing precarity (Potter, 2019). The gig economy employs a relatively small percentage of the total workforce in the UK, but the figure is increasing, around 15% of working-age adults worked for online platforms in 2021 compared to 5% in 2016 (University of Hertfordshire, 2021). The evidence also suggests young people are more likely to work for 'gig' platforms as 16-24-year-olds made up 31.5% of the total workforce (ibid). The gig economy consists of, but is not exclusive to, app giants like Deliveroo and Uber and typifies the wider process of growing casualisation of work, a movement away from steady long-term careers (Potter, 2019). Workers are employed for tasks or 'gigs' on a more flexible, ah-hoc basis without guarantee of hours and pay (Churchill, Rvan and Craig, 2019). This reconfiguration of the labour market promotes workers as everyday digital entrepreneurs offering freedom centred around a 'you get out what you put in' motto (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019).

The qualitative difference in the context of youth transitions in contemporary Britain is the movement away from relatively rigid and linear pathways to the cornerstones of adulthood, towards a more turbulent process with more elusive destinations, referred to

as ‘yo-yo transitions’ (Walther, 2006). These cornerstones being stable employment, getting on the property ladder, and starting a family are, on average, taking longer to achieve and becoming more difficult to obtain at all without informal support (ONS, 2018; Furlong et al. 2017, p. 7). Not only have school-to-work pathways become more tumultuous for millennials, but the number of available pathways has also multiplied, hence transitions are more troublesome to track and understand (France and Roberts, 2017 p. 70). This is not entirely a classed phenomenon as young people as a whole experience elements of precarity; however, fluctuating between insecure work and unemployment remains closely tied to low socio-economic background (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014). There is also a far greater chance that young people with high human or social capital, can bypass the liminal stage of employment (Furlong et al. 2017, p. 99), when for example working part-time in hospitality whilst completing a degree at university.

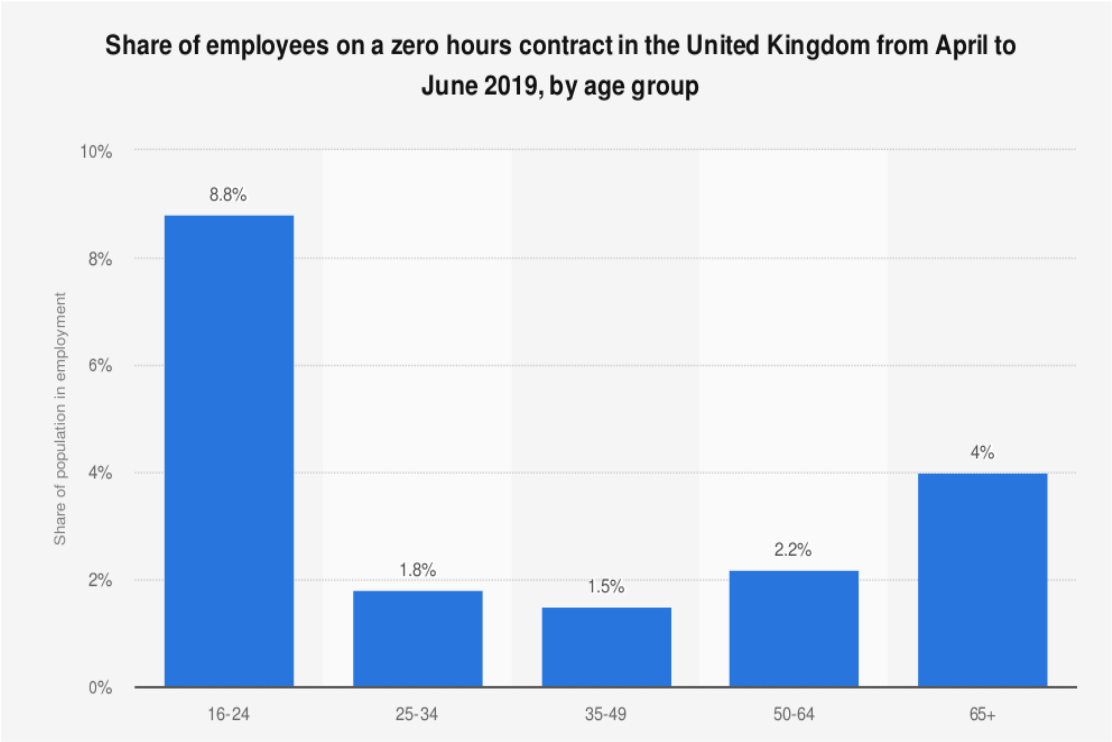
2.2.5 Youth Underemployment

When discussing young people in the contemporary labour market it is important to move away from the traditional employed and unemployed dichotomy, as underemployment is now more prevalent than unemployment (ONS, 2018). Underemployment is a measure of the total number of people in an economy who are unwillingly working in low-skill and low-paying jobs or only part-time because they cannot get full-time jobs that utilise their skills (Prause and Dooley, 2011). This liminal zone should retain more focus, as traditional distinct conceptualisations and connotations of employment and unemployment are more complex and intertwined now (Hill, Hirsh and Davies, 2021). There are a growing number of young people in the UK who are categorised as employed but find themselves unable to afford basic provisions (Giesselmann, 2015). According to the ILO, 14% of employed young people worldwide live in extremely poor households, compared with 7% of adults (ILO, 2018).

The evidence demonstrates young people are more likely to be underemployed than older workers. For example, Clarke and D’arcy (2016) in a Resolution Foundation report found that, in Britain, young people have also been hit hardest by the long-term trend in low-pay work: the number of working 21–25-year-olds in low-pay increased

from 22% in 1990, to 40% in 2015. Additionally, In Scotland 18% of 16-24-year-olds were underemployed, compared with 6.5% of 25–64-year-olds (Scottish Government, 2020). In Australia, 15–24-year-olds made up 35.7% of the total number of underemployed persons in 2018 (ABS, 2018). Young people also dominate the growing precarious labour market: the number of workers on 'zero-hour contracts' increased roughly 400% between June 2000-2017 in the UK, and 16–24-year-olds make-up almost half of the total 'zero hour' workforce (ONS, 2018), as visualised in *Figure 2.*

Figure 2 – UK Zero Hour Contracts by Age Group from April to June 2019



Source: Clark (2019, np)

As paid work remains the best perceived route to improved economic and social outcomes, and contemporary unemployment rates remaining at relatively low levels the logical conclusion drawn is that the contemporary labour market is flourishing (Dwyer et al. 2019). However, swapping unemployment for precarious employment does not necessarily lead to improved economic (Chesters and Cuervo, 2019) or health outcomes (Benach et al. 2014). New common forms of flexible and insecure employment can be as detrimental for well-being and standard of living measures as traditional

unemployment (ibid). Thus, when analysing the contemporary challenges for young people in the labour market we must pay close attention not only to unemployed individuals, as has been the case with analysis of previous generations, but also to underemployed and precariously employed youth.

Evidence to substantiate young peoples' labour market struggles is not ground-breaking, and caveats such as youth employability and wage barriers caused by the inevitable experience gap when compared with older working age populations should be noted. However, what is of interest is how does the structure of the emerging economies further exclude and hinder progression for recent generations of young people and why does it matter?

Increasingly, young people are under pressure from a younger age to think about their employability as the number of quality job opportunities cannot meet the demand of our ever more qualified youth (Roberts, 2011; Furlong et al. 2017 p.111). How young people manage and attach meaning to these challenges has morphed over the past 60 years, as labour market characteristics and composition has evolved (Schoon, 2020). The current environment is arguably the most challenging for young people, as insecurity has become entrenched in early encounters with the labour market (Bell and Blanchflower, 2013; Furlong, France and Roberts, 2018, p. 75). Competition for jobs, even low paid positions, has become fierce as those with university degrees are often forced to compete for low-skilled positions (Roberts, 2011).

There is relatively limited research which examines the long-term impacts of working in the insecure labour market, particularly youth focused studies. Some evidence suggests the gig economy is a force for good, opening new opportunities and avenues into the labour market for people who may have been previously excluded (Odgers, 2017). Flexibility in precarious employment is also a divisive issue, as some scholars champion the empowerment it grants to employees (Hall and Krueger, 2017) and others warn of the increased control it concedes to employers (Aloisi, 2016). A trade-off is made, where workers typically experience a greater degree of flexibility today when compared with the secure labour markets of the 1960s – 1970s, but with less security and greater expendability (Schoon, 2020). Compared to traditional blue-collar

workspaces, the new economy regards high staff turnover as a marker of efficiency and cost-effectiveness (ibid). Moreover, flexibility should not always be correlated with agency as many young people are confined to perpetual pedalling between low-pay and no-pay (MacDonald et al. 2020).

What About Avocado Toast?

Some sections of the media and political class brand Millennials as having a lack of desire for employment and housing security or, are either too unproductive or financially irresponsible to realise homeownership (Fisher, 2019). The rhetoric around the supposed collective psychology of the millennial generation, constructs a false notion of intergenerational inequalities generated by lifestyle choice or preference, rather than broader structural trends (Flynn, 2020). The fact that the current generation are more likely to change jobs and careers more frequently on average than the baby boomer generation, almost twice as much according to a Deloitte (2017) study, is sometimes attributed to preference. Do millennials desire more sporadic and diverse employment opportunities or is this what is available to them?

For instance, despite the stereotypes, evidence from the Royal Society of Arts (2017) suggests most gig economy workers are skilled and do so on their own accord with a relatively high degree of autonomy (Balaram, et al. 2017). According to this study, 54% of gig economy workers are professionals offering accounting, legal advice, IT, and graphic design services. This is not the kind of work or sectors assimilated with the gig economy. Notably, this is largely not the sort of gig work available to young jobseekers. This is part of the growing world of freelance work, where skilled individuals can work on a short or long-term basis and typically can do so remotely, increasing freedom and movability.

However, some managerial surveys portray job security as a top priority for young people across a wide range of contemporary societies (ManPower Group, 2016). There is some evidence to suggest young people desire more flexible working arrangements; a PowWowNow (2019) study suggests that 81% of millennials believe flexible working makes a job more attractive. Hence, contemporary young people still ostensibly desire

the same things as previous generations. However, youth is evolving with the environment they inherit, rather than the other way round. Common lifecycle aspirations remain stable over time, however the ability to reach these milestones, such as homeownership (Crawford and Mckee, 2018), has changed over time.

The practices in place by businesses and authorities - as we move away from standardised employment-based relationships - do not currently protect the new generation of workers from new subordinated labour market pathways. For some young people temporary employment and involuntary precarious living inhibits the ability to plan for a future and thus could have profound impacts on future generations income, housing pathways, and family structure (Woodman and Wyn, 2015; Ferrari et al. 2017).

It is these paradoxes, between the desire for interesting and dynamic work-life balance and the need for stability in young people's lives which this research will explore. It appears growing precarity comes with more fluid employment patterns for young people and for some, accelerated pedalling between work and worklessness (McCollum, 2013). The idea of precarity and turbulent pathways being a steppingstone to future stability is challenged by Batchelor et al. (2020) and Egdell and Beck (2020), as anxieties can curtail future planning and cause future scarring. The growing need for working class communities to be adaptable to the fast-evolving demands of the labour market renders long-term planning a more futile endeavour (Standing, 2011). A reduced ability to, or value in, long term planning in terms of targeting the cornerstones of adulthood could alter the goals of young people and thus our conceptualisations of adulthood.

Although there is a wealth of quantitative evidence to indicate the widening intergenerational inequalities and the growing insecure labour market, there remains a lack of empirical research to inform how young people experience these macro trends and how they make sense of the new forms of marginalisation. Often in workplace discourse and some mainstream media a form of generational gaslighting takes place, whereby Millennials are blamed for their poor economic outcomes as they are framed as work-shy entitled brats (Fisher, 2019). Understanding what this means for young people from their perspective is crucial to developing education and social security

systems which are designed to prepare and support new generations of young people for the specific nature of contemporary youth transitions.

Operating on the assumption that resilience or protestant work ethic will inevitably enable young people to navigate rising insecurity and the radical transformation in the types of jobs available and skills valued in the labour market, appears to be disingenuous, according to scholars such as Bone (2019). Welfare claimants often fluctuate between state support, work, and informal support, back and forth (MacDonald et al. 2014a). Thus, young welfare claimants would likely be a group highly disposed to dynamic status change, ambiguity, and see-sawing (ibid). Engagement with the secondary qualitative longitudinal data in this research will seek to explore how this unpredictable instability impacts young people's lived experience of contemporary welfare systems, ability to future plan, and what forms their aspirations take.

2.2.6 Opposition to Young People as Casualties of the Casualised Labour Market?

Farrugia (2020), one of the key academic voices on contemporary construction of youth labour, provides an interesting angle on young workers in the service economy. Traditional manufacturing pathways for young working-class individuals' entry into the labour market have been gradually replaced by the service and retail industries (Farrugia, 2020). In these sectors, Farrugia suggests, certain youth subjectivities are valorised as they embody fresh, aesthetic, and alternative brand values (Farrugia, 2019a). Service workers in neoliberal consumer societies are expected to be constant brand ambassadors, well-presented with refined emotional intelligence to confer value onto commodities (Batchelor et al. 2020; Farrugia, 2020). In this sense, some young jobseekers may have an advantage over older candidates as 'youthful exuberance' is valued. Knowledge of contemporary trends, subcultures, and music scenes, makes them more attractive to employers than older workers in relation to specific night-time economy and retail contexts. Exactly what type of young person uptakes these roles is unclear, but it would seem the rising student/graduate class with high cultural capital and limited professional opportunities would be prime candidates.

Moreover, there is some opposition to the idea that precarity is wholly problematic for young people. For example, Farrugia (2018) implies, with reference to young hospitality workers in Australia, that youth is perceived as a desirable asset rather than merely cheap and expendable employees. Farrugia also argues that flexible employment is suited to the needs of some young people, enabling earning to fit around studies or other commitments. Hence, contemporary devalorised forms of employment have moved beyond purely the completion of menial tasks to a more competitive, de-standardised and intrusive form of work, where young people are required to mould their identities and behaviours to symbolise brand image (Farrugia, 2019a). In the UK, UC mimics the contemporary precarious labour market in this way: young people are constantly monitored and are expected to 'live' work and align their identity with the post-Fordist 'passionate' work ethic (Farrugia, 2019b). This poses novel challenges for marginalised youth cohorts and particularly for 'redundant' masculinities, in the vanishing industrial sectors (McDowell, 2019). How young welfare claimants understand and manage these contemporary anxieties and pressures to perform the 'passionate' worker is an important avenue for exploration in the data.

2.2.7 Generation Rent

In order to realise more holistic perspectives on the lived experience of contemporary youth transitions, housing pathways must be taken into consideration. Housing has become, for Millennials, a mechanism for widening inter and intragenerational inequalities (McKee, 2012; Hoolachan et al. 2017). It is not controversial to claim the housing market is more exclusionary, on average, for the current generation(s) (millennials and generation Z) of young people compared with their parents (the baby boomer generation and generation X) (Clapham et al. 2014). UK housing policy since the 1980s has promoted homeownership as the esteemed tenure – a milestone which is widely perceived as synonymous with independence, success, and adulthood (Hoolachan et al. 2017). However, since The Great Recession it has become increasingly difficult for first time buyers to get onto the housing ladder (ibid).

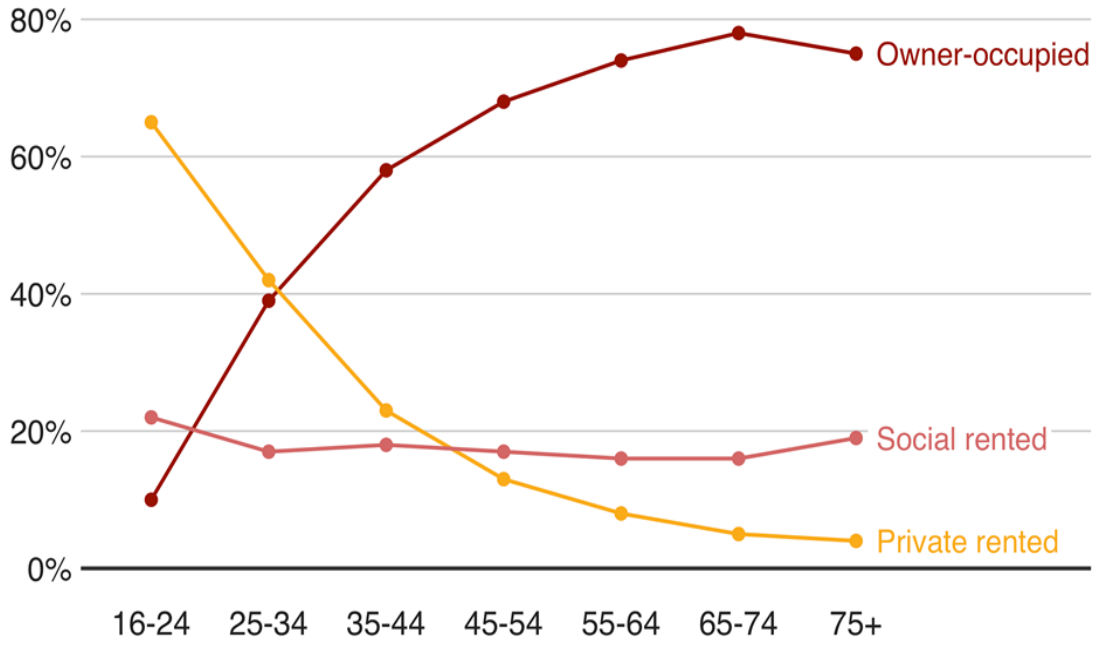
Several factors create barriers for young people, including: the rise in unaffordable housing, social security reforms, stricter mortgage lending and increase in size of the down-payment needed for deposit (Kemp, 2015; Powell, 2015). The outcomes of this are that fewer young people can buy their own property and more tend to remain in the family home for longer, compared with previous generations (Clapham et al. 2014). For instance, between 1997 and 2017 over one million more 20–34-year-olds were living in their parents' homes, as the average age of first-time buyers increased from 26 to 34 (Ministry of Housing, 2018; Bentley and McCallum, 2019).

Furthermore, the unprecedented number of UK citizens living in the private rented sector (PRS) continues to grow, up from 13% of total tenure in 2007 to 20% in 2017 (ONS, 2019c). The young people from this generation are more likely to live in the PRS than any other generation or contemporary age group as shown in *Figure 3*, which can then further exclude them from the buying market over the life course (Soaita and McKee, 2015). As more young people pay increasingly high rents to predominantly older landlords, who often have the potential to continue buying up the shrinking available housing stock, intergenerational inequalities widen. This is the phenomenon described as, 'generation rent' (Hoolachan et al. 2017). In general, young people who cannot rely on 'the bank of mum and dad', increasingly struggle to build up enough capital to compete in the contemporary property market (Toft and Friedman, 2020).

Young people cannot be defined as a homogenised group and housing experiences differ greatly across social determinants, like SES and educational attainment (Soaita and McKee, 2015; Cook, 2020). But overall, young people on average are disproportionately affected by the exclusionary housing markets and marginalised youth cohorts are particularly at risk of experiencing the discriminatory housing practices (Wong, 2019). For young people from low-income backgrounds there is a two-fold blow: the diminishing social housing stock and rapid decrease in affordable housing (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018b). Young people from deprived backgrounds with acute housing needs are increasingly housed in privately rented housing association accommodation or find themselves embroiled in the growing youth homelessness population (Homeless Link, 2018).

Both ‘generation rent’ and labour market precarity are intertwined and pose significant challenges for deprived youth cohorts, particularly those who are claiming UC for in-work/out-of-work and housing support (Clapham et al. 2014). It is also considered by Clapham et al. (2014) that young people who grew up in the social rented sector may be pressured to leave their family homes early, as reductions in the non-dependent allowance means their stay could cut their parents’ benefit allowance. The ability to stay in the family home for longer as a strategy for working toward homeownership is less accessible for young people from low-income families because their extended stay might not be economically viable for the family. Young people in this pathway also appear to be ill informed about their housing options and the potential pitfalls and advantages of different housing tenures (Clapham et al. 2014) thus, exacerbating their vulnerability in the housing market.

Figure 3 - UK Housing Tenure by Age Group 2017.



Source: Guilbourg and Calver (2018) – data from LFS Household Dataset Q4 2016.

Moreover, housing provision for disadvantaged young people does not seem to be a priority for the state, epitomised by the reforms to housing support (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). Since 2012, those under 35 and single are only entitled to claim for the Shared Accommodation Rate (meaning a room in a shared property), whereas

before they could apply for self-contained studio or one-bedroom properties (Melrose, 2012) thus, shrinking the already limited available housing for those in receipt of state support. The housing charity Crisis (2012) estimated only 1.5% of available properties would be accessible to someone in receipt of the Shared Accommodation Rate. Also, UC initially scrapped housing benefit for those aged 18-21, before re-instating it due to public concerns over rising youth homelessness (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). However, the standard amount of housing benefit eligible to under 25s is still considerably lower than that granted to over 25s (Shelter England, 2017). Indicating the state considers young people less deserving of independent living arrangements and should remain in the family home if they are not financially independent. This is often not an option, including the vast majority of the young people included in the analysis of this thesis.

The bulk of research focused on young people and housing inequalities tends to be quantitative in approach and centred around understanding the fiscal side of the housing crisis. There are some scholars such as McKee and Hoolachan, notably in the UK youth housing policy paradigm, who have published qualitative studies that have illuminated how young people make sense of their exclusionary housing transitions and opportunities. However, another unique and valuable contribution of this project is the holistic approach to understanding the key components in contemporary youth transitions, by focusing on employment and housing experiences within the context of welfare conditionality. Typically, youth studies research would focus exclusively on one key aspect of youth transitions or culture, but rarely have both housing and employment experiences, attitudes, and aspirations of young people been combined and analysed in one study before. Hence, this thesis will address this gap and adopt this combined perspective.

Intergenerational Support Cushions the Blow

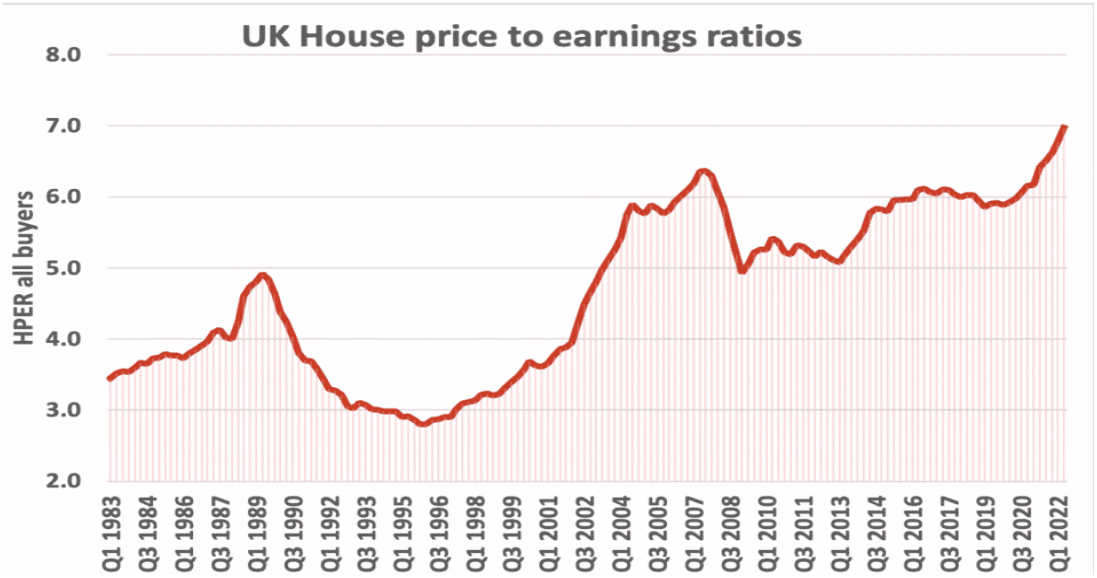
Gaining economic independence is becoming more challenging and drawn out due to the socio-political factors faced by the current generation such as: unaffordable housing and lack of stable employment opportunities (Biggart and Walther, 2006). A prolonged period of financial dependence requires augmented support from parents and/or the

state (ibid). Hence, as the period of dependence increases so does the burden on families to support their children through work experience, education, internships, fix-term contracts and unemployment.

Reimagining how the public purse is spent has put more onus on the family as a privatised welfare provider and unsurprisingly, low-income families fare worse as the burden of supporting young adults on benefits or low-paid jobs can be unmanageable (Horton, 2016). Those who can more readily support their young adults, provide a safety net from which it becomes much easier to navigate the volatile contemporary labour and housing markets. Furthermore, more young people are moving back into their family home in times of economic hardship, as an insurance against labour market risk (Kaplan, 2012). This ties in with the aforementioned idea of the family sphere being required to take up more obligation as the primary welfare provider, therefore cementing existing social inequalities. Young people who can move back into the family home, either during or to avert adversity, can to some extent moderate the risks of insecure employment and the PRS (ibid). Families who are not able to accommodate dynamic toing and froing are perceived as inadequate and their children suffer, as they are disproportionally affected by the continuing privatisation of welfare. This has potential to strain family relationships and cause intensified stress for young people who require augmented support.

Owner-occupied housing has become a pathway increasingly reserved for young people from families with enough capital to fund or at least contribute to the costs (Cook, 2020). The housing market in contemporary Britain is plagued with intergenerational inequalities which show no sign of abating. The structural factors at play here are that wages have not increased in line with house prices over the last thirty years (see *Figure 4*), as the home has cemented its place as the most valuable asset. More young people are coerced to either stay in the family home for longer or enter the PRS. If tenants are on low-income or are out-of-work for a period for time, they will likely be moved on as the PRS becomes increasingly unaffordable and competitive. Especially in urban hubs new tenants will swiftly move in because, like the contemporary labour market, the rental housing market is volatile, and the demand side outweighs the supply side.

Figure 4 - UK Average House Price to Average Earnings Ratios 1983-2022



Source: Pettinger (2022, np)

Cook (2020) discusses how 'intergenerational transfers' are negotiated and the different forms they take. In her study, Cook identified certain strategies and pathways to home ownership for young people from non-deprived backgrounds in Australia. Staying in the family home into adulthood was one of the key strategies for saving to buy a house. Often internal transfers of money was another, when parents would send money to the young person to help with a deposit, and this was perceived as an agreeable arrangement where the parents did not expect the money to be repaid (Cook, 2020). Also, the young people from these families would typically not be sending their parents money as a form of 'rent'. In other cases, the intergenerational transfers to help young people onto the property ladder, took the form of a reciprocated, informal loan. However, the important question here is, how do young people from low-income families realise secure, independent living arrangements with limited intergenerational support?

The dual uncertainties of precarious employment and lack of secure housing tenure interact with one another to produce a form of accumulative disadvantage for recent generations when compared to their parents' generation. This insecure, temporal nature of contemporary youth biographies is not merely a temporary destination which is bypassed but rather has begun to embed itself into young people's sense of self, with

connotations of inadequacy and disposability (Ferrari et al. 2017; Farrugia 2019a). For marginalised youth cohorts, living longer with parents, where ‘digs’ or ‘rent’ may be involved (Wong, 2019) or scraping by in the PRS, is fraught with stressors and anxieties (McKee et al. 2020).

Housing tenure and employment status are also inter-connected; hence it is more difficult to enter the labour market without secure housing and more difficult gain access to secure housing without a stable job (Hardgrove et al. 2015). The ability for the current generation of young people to plan for a future is reduced as precarious living can erode the foundations upon which future planning transpires, as immediate challenges take precedence (Farrugia, 2019b; Batchelor et al. 2020). However, those who do have solid foundations are more able to plan and work towards long-term goals, an advantage which has been found to predict positive employment and housing trajectories (Wade and Dixon, 2006; Clapham et al. 2014).

Evidently, low-income families often do not have the resources to do this, which further excludes their dependents from competing in the labour market with their peers (MacDonald et al. 2014b). Hence, they are forced to turn to the state for support and then find themselves caught up in an intrusive system where they are blamed for their unemployment: this can be considered a form of cumulative disadvantage (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Schels (2018) empirical research demonstrates that young people are a group who are more likely to require state support. Life events like moving home and dropping out of education are associated with increased demand for enhanced support and are more common among young people than older working-age demographics. Thus, a welfare system should look to protect young people who cannot rely on informal support and are dealing with the insecure stage of the life cycle. The future workforce should be nurtured and succoured in order to prevent impending inflated economic and social costs (Aveco, 2012).

2.2.8 Policy Approaches and Young NEETs

Youth unemployment has been a major policy concern across Europe for some time and garnered closer attention following The Great Recession (Bell and Blanchflower,

2011). Across Southern European nations, youth unemployment remains comparatively high, as of October 2022: 32.3% and 23% in Spain and Italy respectively (Eurostat, 2022). Youth unemployment in the UK never reached these rates, however given these statistics do not include students or so-called NEETs (those not in education, employment or training), these figures become more concerning. Clearly there is a need to provide opportunities for marginalised youth cohorts to engage with the formal labour market, for both social and economic purposes (Crisp and Powell, 2017). A Eurofound study (2012) estimated that NEET youth cost the 21 EU nations a total €2 billion per week, taking into account all welfare costs, education and training allowances, and additional health and criminal justice expenditure.

The economic cost should not be key driver for change however, as the long-term impacts on the individual young people and society beyond the economy are profound, in terms of health, crime, and social cohesion (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014). Investment in youth training and education predictably has been shown to improve economic and social outcomes of a society (Knowles and Behrman, 2005). However, recent analysis demonstrates policymakers over-emphasise honing young people's employability, when demand-side shortages persist (Crisp and Powell, 2017).

A recent publication by the Scottish Government (2017) reasserts the need for policy to tackle the growing gap between young workers and their older colleagues in terms of pay, job quality, and job security. This report also corroborates with analysis from the IFS (2016) report, in that unemployment and/or underemployment at a young age increases the likelihood of adverse long-term economic impacts, in terms of low-pay, extended spells of unemployment, and fewer lifetime opportunities. Hence, early struggles in the labour market, be that spells of unemployment or sporadic, insecure employment, are not merely a fleeting endurance but tend to lead to future scarring; adulthood characterised by unemployment and poor work (Egdell and Beck, 2020).

Furthermore, those with few or no qualifications are significantly more at risk of experiencing these jagged trajectories with detrimental long-term effects (Scottish Government, 2017). As 58% of Scottish school leavers with no qualifications in 2015 transitioned to a 'positive destination' compared with 98.7% of those with one or more

passes at SCQF level 6 (Scottish Government, 2016) Admittedly, young people have always been more at risk of low-income, poverty and unemployment when compared to middle-aged adults; however, evidence suggests that intergenerational inequalities are intensifying as youth transitions become increasingly fragmented (George et al. 2015; Scottish Government 2017).

Thus, narrowing the attainment gap and encouraging as many young people as possible to earn an undergraduate degree has been the strategy of successive governments to address social inequalities and youth unemployment (Furlong et al. 2017 p. 67). The number of young people (aged 18-24) in full-time education increased from 984,000 in 1992 to 1.87 million in 2016 (ONS, 2016). This increase is largely a consequence of on-going state efforts to get more young people into higher education, to create a more knowledge-centred and specialised workforce, tailored for the rapidly evolving job market (Roberts, 2011). Moreover, there was a commitment throughout the New Labour administration (1999-2007) and the Coalition Government (2010-2015) to refining university campuses to better reflect the diversity of UK society (ibid).

This has been somewhat successful in terms of increasing higher education participation of young people from low-income backgrounds, since the turn of the century (Bolton, 2019), yet the number attending the 'top' universities remains low (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019). Half of all universities in England have less than 5% of 'poor white students' in their intake (ibid). Hence, equality of opportunity still has a long way to go. Widening access to higher education has largely failed as a great leveller, as those from privileged backgrounds continue to enter the 'top' jobs and the value of an undergraduate degree has been diluted (Reay, 2021). However, encouraging young people to enter higher education and improving access for disadvantaged groups, is a progressive strategy which could enhance potential earnings for young people and increase social mobility (Roberts, 2011).

Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts (2014) argue that, for many ambitious young jobseekers across Europe, precarious employment is the only available route into the labour market. Young people are arguably more exposed to 'work-welfare cycling', whereby young jobseekers can be trapped in a damaging cycle of insecure work and no

work, both of which are correlated with negative social outcomes, leading to further difficulties in the labour market down the line (McCollum, 2012; 2013). One key disadvantage of precarious employment which can induce or exacerbate stress and anxiety is the insecurity (Antonucci, Hamilton and Roberts, 2014). A growing number of young people do not know how many hours of work they will get from week to week and therefore cannot rely on a steady flow of income (ibid). Living in constant fear of the possibility of immediate loss of employment and income has been demonstrated to correspond with adverse health outcomes (Benach et al. 2014). The growing presence of gig economies, agency work, and fixed-term contacts are particularly salient for young workers, which poses unique problems for policymakers, as paid work increasingly fails to pay-off (Crisp et al. 2009).

The worklessness of young people, particularly among the millennial generation, has garnered heightened attention and interventions directed at this problematised group a plenty. Before the broader factors at play in a person's lack of income or stable employment are considered, out-of-work young people are positioned by the centre-right state as intrinsically vandalised souls who require rehabilitation (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). As Boland and Griffin (2022 p. 55) argue in their new book '*The Reformation of Welfare: The New Faith of the Labour Market'*, the blanket approach of labour activation polices, which is now the orthodoxy across Europe, for addressing the problem of young unemployment is ideological and misguided:

"Taken from an EU-level briefing on unemployment – addressing the existence and experience of literally millions of people – a singular remedy is offered: 'Benefit recipients are expected to engage in monitored job-search activities and improve their employability "in exchange" for receiving benefits."

UK Welfare Reform

In the UK, as can be said for all OECD countries, various policy interventions have been introduced with the intention of increasing youth employment, with particular focus on addressing young NEETs and those in receipt of 'long-term' state support (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; McPherson, 2021). Recent state strategies which have

addressed turbulent youth transitions, as articulated by Crisp and Powell (2017), have shadowed the broader public policy trends of the time by putting the onus on individual responsibility. Workfare programmes like, the 'New Deal for Young People' introduced and implemented by first Labour administration (1997-2007), as well as the intensification of welfare conditionality, act to frame the issue as a supply-side problem (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Paid work has been repeatedly cited as the cornerstone of the upstanding citizen, to the point where there is now an accepted hegemony, even for young people, that continuous engagement with the labour market is fundamental to social worth (Furlong et al. 2017 p.23). Non-engagement is therefore perceived as a deviant 'decision', which should be corrected through coercive behavioural change (Wright et al. 2020). Thus, contemporary state strategies frame youth worklessness as an inherent problem within the individual, be it their lack of skills or effort (ibid). It is widely regarded that it is the sole responsibility and duty of young people not in education or training, to obtain long-term, full-time employment (Furlong et al. 2017 p.36).

The pervasive supply side, human capital framing of the strategies intended to bolster young people's engagement with, and ability to progress in, the contemporary labour market is evident (McPherson, 2021). Young people who experience spells of insecure work or unemployment, and cannot rely upon informal support, are met with a benefits system which is designed to drive them away from state support and into any sort of work as quickly as possible (Dwyer et al. 2018). Claimants' behaviour and activity are continually monitored and regulated, with the ideology that the right attitudes will lead to good jobs, and that any job is better than no job (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). Both of these embedded values in contemporary UK social policy are contentious (ibid). Secure employment is structurally contingent and is not predominantly dictated by individual behavioural traits and entering the labour market is not a guaranteed route out of poverty (Reeve, 2017).

This gives the current generation of young people a unique lens from which to experience and understand the contemporary configuration of labour markets, housing markets and social security, as they have no previous experiences of these structures. Their distinct viewpoint as a generation has been largely ignored within recent analysis

of welfare reforms and yet they remain the group most affected by the contemporary composition (MacDonald, 2016; Hoolachan and McKee, 2019). Young people are particularly exposed to the punitive aspects of welfare conditionality, such as sanctions (Webster, 2019), indicating they are considered to require augmented behavioural regulation. Also, their joblessness is often perceived as even less deserving of state support as they are expected to embody fresh and ambitious workers, eager to contribute to society (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017).

Young people who are out-of-work are more heavily scrutinised and demonised within contemporary society, compared with older unemployed persons (Fisher, 2019; McPherson, 2021). Hence, the Universal Credit (UC) monthly standard allowance for a single person under 25 in the UK is £265.31 compared to £334.91 for over 25s (UK Government, nd). This financial disparity is symbolic of the received wisdom that young people are less deserving of financial support than older populations and require greater regulation.

It is important to emphasise here the intersectionality of youth experiences within this generation in terms of punitive behavioural policy frameworks and restrictive support, for example how disability intersects with youth to further marginalise disabled young people within contemporary social security systems (Patrick, 2017, p.88). Young people with mental health impairments are disproportionately impacted by welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions (Dwyer et al. 2020). Their experiences and impairments are not considered by the contemporary social security system and the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process is routinely described by disabled people as economically and emotionally scarring (Dwyer et al. 2020). Under recent welfare reforms in the UK, there is less acceptance from policymakers that some young people may not be fit for work or are not capable of carrying out the job search requirements to receive state support because of mental health or physical impairments (Patrick, 2017, p.90).

2.3 Welfare Conditionality

Conditionality is fundamental to the design of most contemporary advanced capitalist social security systems (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018a p.2). It comes in different forms but primarily it is set behavioural conditions upon which claimants must comply to access and continue to receive pecuniary state support (ibid). Non-compliance with these set conditions is met with threat, or application, of financial sanctions on the claim (Fletcher and Wright, 2018). Framing the problem of unemployment in these terms is predicated on the grounds that policymakers assume (Frieldi and Stearn, 2015) those who are out of work or on the fringes of the formal labour market to be flawed individuals and lack the character traits that those in valorised employment supposedly possess. The intrusive behavioural regulation of welfare claimants is legitimised through supposedly guaranteeing fairness to taxpayers and eradicating the mythologised 'something for nothing culture' (Reeve, 2017).

The concept of benefit sanctions can be traced back to when unemployment benefit was introduced with the National Insurance Act 1911, claimants could be disqualified from benefit for up to six weeks (Adler, 2018). Until 1986 pecuniary punishment remained of this kind remained largely unchanged, when the Conservative Government increased the disqualification period to 13 weeks and then increased it again to 26 weeks in 1988 (ibid). Then in 1996, the New Labour Government introduced Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and made sanctions a key part of the programme. This marked the beginning of surveillance and sanctions as central to the design of the social security system in the UK (ibid). Claimants could now have their benefits stopped for longer periods if they failed to meet a broader range of conditions, including attending job interviews and participating in training programmes.

The move away from a supposedly passive social security system to one that involved a commitment from each claimant and more regular and severe financial penalties for breaking this 'contract', was based on the postulation this would encourage future compliance and labour market participation (Wright et al. 2020). The policy framework justification here being that tackling 'non-professional' habits, such as: being late for a Jobcentre Plus appointment, improper submission of job search, filling out forms or

documents incorrectly, leaving a job voluntarily or for failing to apply for a job vacancy, through financial sanction when looking for work, will help to diminish these behaviours in future and prepare these young people for the competitive labour market (DWP, 2010). As Ester McVey, then minister for Employment, stated in 2013 after the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act (2012):

"People who are in a job know that if they don't play by the rules or fail to turn up in the morning, there might be consequences, so it's only right that people on benefits should have similar responsibilities. We always make the rules very clear – it's only right that there is a penalty if people fail to play by them." (DWP, 2013)

While the DWP denied the existence of sanctioning targets for Jobcentre Plus Officers, Redman and Fletcher (2022) conveyed Jobcentre Plus Officer's awareness of the mounting pressure from superiors, by explicit means, to administer sanctions. This gives a sense of the shift to a demanding workfare approach and the tone and language used to frame the paternalistic management of some of the most marginalised in our society. Tacitly, the intensified sanctions regime which this group of young people experienced was a mechanism to further deter any appeal of claiming state support through greater stigmatisation and disciplining of claimants (Redman, 2019) and to reduce government spending within the context of austerity (Loopstra et al. 2015).

The recent welfare reforms in the UK have culminated in the most stringent conditionality [3] and highest sanction rates in its history (Wright et al. 2020). Under the Coalition Government's flagship policy, Universal Credit (UC), claimants are expected to prove they have completed 35 hours of job search per week or risk being sanctioned (DWP, 2010). Claimants can also be sanctioned for not applying for an available job even if they do not meet the requirements, for being made redundant or for voluntarily leaving a job (DWP, 2010). Conditionality does not cease when a claimant enters the workforce. New 'in-work' conditionality means those in part-time employment can be sanctioned for not increasing the number of hours they work (Whitworth and Griggs,

[3] Following the Welfare Reform Act (2012) "the UK Coalition government introduced the harshest regime of conditionality and benefit sanctions in the history of the UK benefits system" (Reeve, 2017 p.65). For context, in the year to 30 June 2013 saw the highest number of JSA sanctions since statistics in their present form began to be published: 360,000 more benefit sanctions compared with the year to 30 April 2010 (Webster, 2013).

2013), even though this is by in large determined by the contemporary insecure structure of the labour market and individual circumstances, such as lone parenthood, which limit one's ability to work full-time, rather than a lack of willingness.

The roll out of UC has been found to have adverse impacts on mental health (Williams, 2021), result in higher rates of landlord repossessions (Hardie, 2021), and increase rates of food insecurity (Loopstra et al. 2015) among claimants. There is no evidence to support that intensified conditionality has increased labour market participation among claimants (Dwyer et al. 2018). The disciplining of marginalised groups by the state is not a new phenomenon. However, the ratcheting up of welfare conditionality in the UK and its centrality to the design, is symbolic of a new policy landscape (Wacquant, 2010). Popular psychology presents a neat 'scientific' basis for which these behaviourist approaches can be justified. This individualising of social problems is becoming increasingly accepted and largely unchallenged in policymaking that seeks to address poverty and unemployment (Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013).

Not only has the intensification of welfare conditionality been shown to cause direct material hardship and detrimental impacts on health (Pattaro et al. 2022), the threat, and application, of benefit sanctions can shape perceptions of the self and other claimants (Fletcher and Redman, 2022). The way the policy is designed, with conditionality at the core, shapes how recipients conceptualise their own identities and the identities of others who claim social security, whereby 'othering' becomes common among those who experience poverty and solidarity is weakened.

For instance, Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) in a paper titled, 'Poverty talk: how people experiencing poverty deny their poverty and why they blame 'the poor', take a critical look at the common (mis)conception of those who experience poverty to deny their poverty and distance themselves morally and socially from others in poverty. There is a manufactured distaste of the poor amongst the poor, who often adopt the hegemonic rhetoric surrounding those in poverty as 'feckless' and 'scroungers', and therefore individuals wish to dissociate from this stigmatised group. The empirical data from this paper demonstrated the condemnation of the working-class by the working-class. It signified a declining solidarity and the growing dominance of the meritocratic

and neoliberal ideals among some of the most deprived communities in contemporary UK society. This paper had a significant impact on the conceptual grounding of this thesis. It fed my curiosity for understanding how those experiencing poverty understand their situation, others around them, and what they feel the casual factors of poverty are. It is important to illuminate the complex and contradictory ways those who experience poverty make sense of their place in society.

This thesis is interested more in understanding the sociological impacts of intensified welfare conditionality on young people than detailing the material hardship caused. Although still young, some people in the sample will have been familiar with aspects of welfare conditionality for a number of years and how they process and understand these interventions from their specific social generational perspective is an important research aim previously unexplored.

The upcoming findings chapters will explore: (i) *How do young people internalise these disciplinary strategies?; (ii)What are their perceptions of intensified conditionality?; (iii) How do they cope with restricted state support?; (iv) How do they frame successes and setbacks in the labour market?*

2.3.1 Policy Trends

Although UC represents the most stringent social citizenship arrangement in the UK since the Welfare State was established, the principles which underpin the reform can be traced back to well before the Coalition Government (2010-2015) was formed (Edmiston et al. 2017). Entitlement to basic provision being contingent upon compliance with prescribed conditions and emphasising the need to alter behaviours of the individual rather than the structural barriers experienced by low-income groups, are traits by no means exclusive to this administration or to Britain (Edmiston, 2020). Some changes have been made to the original UC structure and full roll out has been further delayed until 2024 due to early evaluation recommendations and implementation problems (Hughes, 2020). However, the current picture remains that alongside the rising precarity in the labour and housing markets, social security in the UK is also becoming more precarious (Pybus et al. 2020). Contemporary social structures impose

a state of incessant worry as the looming threat that paltry pecuniary support from the state, or wages from an employer, can be withdrawn anytime at short notice for those claiming state support or on the fringes of the formal labour market.

A caveat here, the Scottish Government has retained the right for claimants to choose to be paid bi-monthly and for housing support to be paid directly to landlords, through the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (schedule 1). Some recent evidence from the JRF annual poverty report (2020) suggests, increased hardship associated with UC rollout is less severe in Scotland, as devolved powers have been employed to provide improved access to affordable and social housing, which has contributed to Scotland demonstrating lower average poverty rates, particularly child poverty rates, than the rest of the UK. Highlighted here is that, even within a supposedly unifying system like UC design, practices and experiences can be geographically contingent (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013).

Out-of-work support, and indeed in-work support, for those who require state subsidy to bolster their inadequate income is granted on the premise of recipients adhering to behavioural conditions (Dwyer, 2016). This policy trend can be identified across many OECD nations, however in the UK through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the full roll-out of UC, entitlement to basic state support is associated with intensified surveillance and techniques of punitive control (Fletcher and Wright, 2018). Flint (2019) presents the case, with reference to Wacquant's (2016) work, that the contemporary UK social security system is an arena for social control and discipline where new forms of *"bureaucratic domination"* (p. 251) are being employed to heighten class antagonisms. For instance, the obligation for socially excluded individuals to accept insecure employment as a requirement for financial support, is utilised as a repressive apparatus used to dictate the activities of the poor (Flint, 2019).

Welfare retrenchment in the UK has, to some extent, privatised welfare provision, with more expectation on the individual and family as cuts in public spending continue in the wake of austerity Britain (Dowling, 2017). Welfare reforms, particularly the roll out of UC, has increased the emphasis on the family as a means of privatised care, encouraged by the state (Ball, 2019). This puts disproportionate strain on low-income

families as they are asked to do more to provide for their children and increasingly young adults, as contemporary transitions to economic independence extends due to structural factors, like unaffordable housing, with reduced help from the state (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017).

Informal support networks have begun to remedy tightened pecuniary support via redistributed tax, especially during times of wavering state support, like sanctions, or in instances of unforeseen expenses (Hirsh et al. 2020). For some young people getting by is contingent on regular loans or one-off payments from family or friends (ibid). Young welfare recipients may be particularly dependent on informal support networks as they are typically less experienced at managing money, live more chaotic lifestyles and more vulnerable to sanctions. How this support is negotiated, whether reciprocity is involved and how it shapes young people's lived experience of initial encounters with work and worklessness will help guide the analysis of the transcripts.

As the shift away from state provision onto the individual and family responsibility continues, so-called 'problem' families will garner more attention (Batty and Flint, 2012). Families are then expected to be self-sufficient and are subject to state interventions as a collective if they are perceived to be problematic (ibid). Young people from such families are in a position where their life chances are arguably worsened by framing the policy problem in this manner, as they are defined by their family dynamics and their agency shrinks. These young people are more likely to grow up with exposure to conditionality which is increasingly incorporated within welfare policy reforms. Forms of conditionality will likely follow these young people as they transition into adulthood and trying to understand how these specific mechanisms of state craft are processed by young people is crucial to developing more effective strategies to tackle social inequalities in the UK.

2.3.2 Young People and Benefit Sanctions

The rise in the number of benefit sanctions administered has been a hallmark of the recent social security trajectory in the UK (Wright, 2016). The cohort of young people studied in this thesis encountered the highest sanction rates in UK history (Webster, 2019). The total of JSA plus ESA sanctions in the year to 30 September 2013 were

897,690 (Webster, 2017). This is the highest for any 12-month period since JSA was introduced in 1996 (ibid). The available academic evidence portrays a social security system where young people are at risk of experiencing the harshest conditionality treatment (Edmiston, 2017). For instance, from November 2012 to December 2016 white males aged 18-24 were 98% more likely to be sanctioned than white males aged 25-49 (De Vries et al. 2017).

There is only speculation as to why the sanction rate is this much higher amongst young people. However, international evidence from Van Den Berg et al. (2022) also demonstrates that the German welfare system is particularly strict on young individuals. This evidence also suggests that benefit sanctions for young people living on their own are likely to increase exit rates from social security into employment, but this is typically low-wage and short lived (Van Den Berg et al. 2022). Webster (2017) suggests young people are more likely to have access to informal support network, for example parents, and less likely to be able to navigate a conditional system. Other evidence suggests paternalistic practices adopted particularly keenly on behalf of work coaches when dealing with young people, because they feel they require greater levels of behavioural regulation and disciplining (Magnus, forthcoming). The majority of the existing research on sanctions and young people have highlighted the quantitative aspects, such as national sanction rates and the disproportionate rates according to age. This study will contribute to knowledge by exploring how young people make sense of their sanction experiences to understand how benefit sanctions affect young people emotionally and behaviourally.

Regardless of the causal factors, young people find themselves increasingly marginalised in the job market and punished by the benefits system. This has lasting consequences for generations growing up through this behaviourist domain. Future prospects, earning potential and health are all affected by the contemporary structure of work and out-of-work environments (Biggart and Walther, 2006). In fact, a paper by Williams (2021) argues that as localised JSA sanctions increase, anti-depressant prescriptions in that area also increase. Another study which came before but harmonises with Williams (2021) work, is research conducted Dwyer et al. (2020), where new analysis of longitudinal qualitative data was carried out to examine the

impacts of welfare conditionality on claimants who expressed having a history with mental health issues. The research proposes that evidently those who have mental health issues are more likely to be unemployed and that strict conditionality and 'work first' approaches only exacerbate their symptoms (Dwyer et al. 2020). Also, the analysis indicates a lack of understanding on behalf of the welfare system with regard to the lived experience of mental health issues, as some claimants who admitted they were too unwell to work, reported encounters with a rigid system where no accommodations made for their illness (ibid).

Furthermore, the socially embedded stigma synonymous with being deprived and unemployed, reinforces the demoralisation of receiving out-of-work support and evokes notions of a 'us and them' dichotomy between workers and the workless (Jensen, 2014; Valentine and Harris, 2014). Further compounding the weakened well-being and self-esteem of young, vulnerable individuals. Aggravating well-being by inducing excess stress, serves to further delaminate the prospects of such individuals in the labour market. These findings are especially concerning for young people as, the 18-25 age group are particularly prone to experiencing major mental health conditions; 75% of lifetime mental health issues begin by age 25 (Kessler, et al., 2005; McGorry, et al., 2007).

An association between JSA sanctions, 'work first' approaches and adverse mental health outcomes indicates imposing harsh welfare conditionality on young people has potential lasting repercussions far beyond immediate reduction in disposable income. Thus, from the perspective of emerging adults' welfare conditionality is particularly problematic, as they are more likely to be out-of-work and more likely to experience sanctions (Webster, 2017). Sanctions, be they in the form of temporary cessation of out-of-work support payments, restricted access to housing or eviction, will form a significant part of the discussion of this thesis as the rates remain disproportionally high for young people and the consequences of multiple or extended sanctions can be severe (Wright et al. 2020). Chapter 6 of this thesis will exclusively explore the sanctions experiences of the cohort of young people and how they responded to the threat or application impacted in real time. This chapter will also focus on the emotive impacts

of sanctions, beyond the material, and the possible long-term impacts of benefit sanctions on young people's perceptions of employment and state support.

2.3.3 Housing Conditionality

Social housing has become an arena for behavioural regulation (Flint, 2019). Access to social housing is policed in similar ways to unemployment benefits (Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2017). Primarily, housing associations are providing access to affordable housing for young people on low-incomes and benefits, but a persons' ability to meet rent costs is the most important consideration when agreeing tenancy (Preece et al. 2019). For young people in precarious employment, for example, meeting affordability assessments will be particularly challenging, especially because housing support under UC is paid directly to the claimant rather than to the landlord or authority (DWP, 2010). This arrangement has been said to be a contributing factor to the increase in rent arrears of those who transferred from housing benefit to UC (Scottish Government, 2020) and landlord repossession claims in areas of full UC rollout (Hardie, 2021). However, claimants in Scotland and Northern Ireland can still choose to have the money sent directly to their landlord (Scottish Government, 2020).

Conduct of applicants and residents are increasingly regulated by the social housing system through threat of eviction, predominantly in an attempt to reduce anti-social behaviour (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018b). The social housing system has been reimagined to a greater extent in England than in Scotland, but similar trends are apparent across the UK (ibid). For instance, what is known as the *residualisation* of social housing continues, in the sense that it is no longer seen as a secure alternative to homeownership but as temporary last resort (McKee 2012). As is the case with employment support aspects of recent welfare reforms, the safety net in terms of housing is becoming increasingly insecure (Preece et al. 2019). Housing pathways have been narrowed and restricted for the 'generation rent' and the prospects of those with limited familial resources of getting onto the property ladder are worsening (Wong, 2019). Housing benefit is now a branch of UC, where fairness and justice for taxpayers is declared as a key principle behind the reform, to ensure: "*that those receiving housing*

benefit do not have an advantage over those who are not on benefit but have to make similar choices about what they can afford" (DWP, 2011 p.4).

UC seeks to activate behaviour change by withholding or sanctioning basic provision upon the claimant's ability to comply with prescribed conditions and meet assessment needs (Preece et al. 2019). Agency again is key, as increasingly individuals are expected to do more to negotiate their own tenures of a dwindling stock where choice is constrained (ibid). Here, the paradox of increased emphasis on individual responsibility and concurrent curbing of the space for choice rears its head in contemporary social housing policies too. Housing associations now house more social renters than state owned units and tenancy is increasingly granted based on prospective tenants passing an affordability assessment (ibid).

Under the new model of social housing, some working-age social renters may not be entitled to enough housing benefit to cover all their rent (Joyce, Mitchell and Keiller, 2017). Like the 'Claimant Commitment', access to a housing association or council owned home is attached with predisposed conditions. Termination of housing contract and eviction occur if the tenancy agreement is breeched by the claimant. Fletcher and Wright (2018) and McNeill (2019) would describe this as a function of penal conditionality borrowed from the criminal justice system - a corrective design of welfare which seeks to 'normalise' deviant claimants through penal techniques. Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar (2019) demonstrated that young people with housing need are 'worn down' by the state, by the process of enduring everyday hardships and being forced to continually endeavour in relation to *behavioural and outcome progress*. The everyday practices of social housing provision in the UK can lead young people to a state of listlessness and weariness (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2019).

One of the few published studies that illuminated lived experiences of contemporary housing conditionality among young people was carried out by Alasdair Stewart (2019). The qualitative longitudinal research included 43 interviews with 16–24-year-olds who had previously been accepted as statutory homeless, across a range of Scottish Local Authorities to illuminate forms of conditionality within a policy landscape that is has been praised as an international pioneer in homelessness policy (Stewart, 2019).

The research suggests there remains distinct forms of conditionality for young people trying to transition from homeless accommodation to secure housing in Scotland, despite the rights-based approach on paper (Clarke at al. 2020).

Stewart (2019) argues the young people were required to be deemed 'housing ready' by support workers and other decision makers before being granted secure housing. He contends that in practice marginalised young people still need to prove beyond their years that they are responsible and mature to the gatekeepers of social housing, in order to gain access to settled accommodation. Inequalities, existing power structures, and bias are built into the design (Stewart, 2019). Thus, some of the most vulnerable young people, and those who require augmented support, are less likely to be deemed housing ready and therefore less likely to 'progress' to a secure tenancy. Stewart (2019) suggests there is a civilizing process involved, where problematic or deviant identities are conditioned to 'redeem' themselves by demonstrating housing readiness within enclosed parameters of what is deemed appropriate behaviour. Thus, the rights-based housing approach adopted by the Scottish Government, which was duly commended, does face some challenges within the implementation of the policy as access to settled housing is still strictly monitored and contingent upon the behaviour of young people with housing need.

2.3.4 Ideology

Individual responsibility is a key theme which runs through the contemporary composition of Western labour markets, housing markets, and social policy (Peck, 2001 p. 341; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). The state adopts interventions which promote individual responsibility, as is the case with UC, in an attempt to activate the population in terms of perusing stable employment and housing pathways (Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2017). Hence, successes and failures are framed and pinned on the individual rather than policy, society, and social class (ibid). Public sector managerialism characterised by tight performance management, service modernisation and openness to privatisation are now deep rooted in Britain (Horton, 2016).

Notions of traditional welfare systems being a coddling 'hand-out' scheme (DWP, 2010), which fails to incentivise work for low-income populations and leads to dependency, is not a new ideology, but was ratcheted up in public and state discourses during the years of the Coalition Government (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Conditionality, in this sense, is a concept primarily used by academics to describe the arranged behavioural expectations which increasingly dictate a person's access to basic welfare and housing provision, both widely considered fundamental human rights (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018a). For financial state support and access to social housing to impinge upon behavioural conduct, evokes notions of the deserving and undeserving poor and raises questions over the state's commitment to provide basic care for all citizens (Patrick, 2017 p. 23).

This concept of middle-class agencies instructing, manipulating, and moulding low-income populations 'into shape' is troubling for Flint and other scholars (see Fletcher and Wright 2018; Fletcher and Flint 2018). An example of this would be the 'Troubled Families Programme' (2010-2015) a lead on from the New Labour 'Family Intervention Projects' (FIPs), where households, identified primarily on the basis of long-term receipt of state support, were assigned a key worker to effectively train them in how to manage anger, parent their children, and find work (Ball, 2019). Participation in these programmes was mandatory and sanctions were imposed for non-compliance (ibid). This is not a critique of augmented state support for marginalised families but rather the patronising and intrusive framework in which this support is often administered.

The pervasive rhetoric, present in Westminster, promotes individual responsibility and self-actualisation as the gateways to positive labour market outcomes (Wright, 2016). This conceptualisation neglects the nature of the contemporary labour market and realities for disadvantaged cohorts (Patrick, 2014). Young people who fall through the gaps of the volatile new economies and struggle to secure stable employment, are propped up by an increasingly slack safety net (Fletcher and Wright, 2018) and there is reluctance from the state to accept that some individuals require augmented and prolonged economic support (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Stringent conditionality is perceived by successive governments as a viable tactic to deter workers from becoming

workless and to ‘activate’ welfare dependents (MacDonald et al. 2014a). Hence, strategies such as requiring young people to take any job which becomes available regardless of its’ precarity, demanding claimants to provide evidence they have completed 35 hours of ‘job search activity’ per week and immediately cutting the support of those who do not comply, are in operation (Dwyer et al. 2018). Young jobseekers often fluctuate between precarious employment and unemployment (Furlong et al. 2017), as UC claimants can be hurried back to insecure low-paid work (work they are often trying to evade) (Dwyer et al. 2018). Half of all claimants in 2010 who departed the benefits system, returned within six months (Ben-Galim et al. 2011).

The literature predominantly argues welfare conditionality is not an evidenced based approach. There remains no evidence to suggest this punitive approach actually improves labour market outcomes for claimants (Wright et al. 2020). To understand why this seemingly unnecessary and unethical form of social security is being deployed, it is useful to refer to Wacquant’s concept of the ‘Centaur State’ (Flint, 2019). Wacquant (2010) proposes that the expectations and rules imposed on marginalised groups and the poor by the state, are implicit mechanisms of social control. He is critical of ‘workfare’ strategies, as he highlights, those with high economic and social capital experience relatively free and deregulated forms of governance, whereas those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder encounter increasingly restrictive systems (Wacquant, 2010). For instance, the obligation for socially excluded individuals to accept insecure employment as a requirement for financial support, evokes an image of a repressive apparatus used to dictate the activities of the poor (Flint, 2019). It is important to remember that the demonised, marginalised and unemployed youth are concentrated among low-income households in deprived communities (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Scottish Government, 2017).

Millennials have only known, expanding workfare regimes, the demonisation of the so called ‘underclass’, intensified surveillance and intrusive behavioural coercion practices targeted at marginalised populations, deregulated market expansion, and insecure labour markets (Chesters et al. 2019). Their unique generational perspectives are largely absent from the recent growth in the body of literature centred on the lived experience of welfare conditionality and thus provides a ‘hidden’ lens from which to

analyse the subjective impacts of the intensification of the recent crystallisation of these trends. Finally, honing in on and understanding young people's perspectives of this extension in intrusive behavioural strategies imposed on those who require state support, is vital to interpreting how initial engagement with state services could shape lifelong attitudes and feelings toward the state, conditional state support, and employment.

2.4 The Psychologisation of Social Problems

The existing literature on welfare conditionality has predominantly theorised the ratcheting up of behavioural regulation of social security beneficiaries in terms of the criminalisation of welfare claimants (Fletcher and Wright, 2018) or from the regulationist perspective (Peck, 2001 p. 341). Fletcher and Wright (2018), among other scholars, frame the intensification of welfare conditionality as policymakers borrowing from the criminal justice system, and policing benefits claimants as a means of correcting perceived *deviant* behaviours. Whereas from a regulationist perspective, the sharp growth of precarious and low-pay jobs has led policymakers to subordinate social policy to the demands of labour market flexibility, by forcibly ensuring capital has 'a continuous and compliant supply of labour' that will take low-quality, devalorised jobs. Thus, for Jamie Peck (2001 p.341), workfarist welfare reforms have emerged as a 'logical social policy compliment' to the emergence of a neoliberal accumulation regime.

However, this thesis strives to develop a new conceptualisation of welfare conditionality as a product of the self-help society. There has been a recent invasion of self-help and positive psychology into almost all aspects of life, be it health (Ehrenreich, 2009 p. 7), career (Du Plessis, 2021), romantic life (Hazleden, 2003), or corporate and state strategies (Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013). The doctrine of self-help governance is rife, in the sense being a master of the 'self' is increasingly seen as both a choice and the gateway to success in all aspects of life (Rimke, 2000; Hazleden, 2003). Economic success being of greater relevance in this instance. Framing the social world as a 'battle' of psychological selfhood, in which individuals have the ability to carve out their own 'destiny' with distant guidance from 'experts', is pervasive in advanced

capitalist societies and is reflected in, or informed by, contemporary governance and social policies, such as conditional welfare models (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

A strong belief in self-governance reduces the need for state intervention and eases pressure on the state to care for citizens as self-improvement is positioned not only as a matter of free will but also as a *"natural undertaking by well-meaning citizens"* (Rimke, 2000 p. 63). One's ability to resist this framing has been considerably reduced in recent years due to its all-encompassing nature, especially among younger generations, who have been fed this framing from birth and through more intrusive means, such as social media (Gill and Ograd, 2017). Millennials' transition to adulthood has coincided with the explosion in the psychologisation of everyday life and social justice (Eccleston and Brunila, 2015). The belief in the omnipotent power of projecting or adopting behavioural traits, such as confidence, motivation, and outgoingness, has been pedalled more readily through proliferating social media/online platforms and the trending celebrity/influencer culture (ibid).

The doctrine of self-help governance, in the sense being a master of the 'self' is increasingly seen as the key to labour market participation and progression (Rime, 2000). Framing the social world as a *battle of psychological selfhood*, in which individuals have the ability to carve out their own 'destiny' with distant guidance from 'experts', is pervasive in advanced capitalist societies (Gill and Orgad, 2017). Self-improvement discourses are reflected in, or informed by, contemporary governance and social policies, such as conditional welfare models (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

The popularised method of attempting to overcome challenges in life, be it economic or romantic, through adjusting one's own behaviour with guidance from idolised figures, such as young CEOs or self-help gurus - who can provide crash course workshops with inspirational quotes and nuggets of wisdom to help those who are struggling in the labour market 'unlock the key to their own success' - has intensified its influence among recent generations of young people (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015) and particularly among young women (Allen and Finn, 2023). In the sense these contemporary cultural icons, young affluent capitalists, may not instruct one exactly what to do but will offer one the tools and ways of thinking - which they credit for their

success - to self-regulate and formulate one's own solutions. In practice, this self-help approach serves to maintain and justify the social order under the guise of promoting social mobility and self-actualisation (Folkes, 2021).

As Rimke (2000 p. 72) argues, freedom is the bedrock upon which modern liberal democracies exist, however the governing of individuals by individuals and in turn constraining other forms of being or structuring society is itself a restriction of freedom: *"it is a matter of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a regulated freedom"* (Rose and Miller, 1992 p. 174). Foucauldian scholars, such as Rose and Miller (1992), assert individual autonomy, instead of being the antithesis of political power, is rather a key mechanism in the exercise of power over citizens, particularly disadvantaged groups.

Conversely, Evans (2007) counters these conceptualisations of strengthening beliefs in individualism among young people, as she argues this desire to overcome structural barriers through the self is bound in agency. The theory of *bounded agency* suggests when young people buy into self-improvement discourses, particularly when they discuss their future employment aspirations, they are actively striving to challenge existing structures and inequalities rather than accept *the way things are* (Evans, 2007). Rather than being wholly reducible by their environment, according to Evans (2007), marginalised young people often choose to resist the fatalistic futures, habitually conveyed within contemporary social policy and sociology literature.

However, this thesis argues that Evans (2007) misinterprets 'the way things are' and instead of individualism being a form of resistance to the status quo, it is in fact a key mechanism in the maintenance of the existing social order. Young people cannot be rallying against the elites if they are aligning their values to the hegemonic ideology of the mainstream state and corporate sphere. The belief system that elevates the power of the self over structural inequalities is endorsed by contemporary education systems, social policies, and culture.

2.4.1 The Perfect Storm for Young Welfare Claimants

The young people form this study are instructed to align their goals, behaviours and values with the entrepreneurial self. This pervasive conceptualisation, endorsed by recent UK Governments (Treanor, 2017), suggests pointing to structural barriers as an 'excuse' for poor employment outcomes within disadvantaged communities is emblematic of mental fragility, and the strong and worthy characters will pull themselves out of poverty. This psychologisation of everyday life (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015) presents a convenient 'scientific' basis from which liberal states can govern citizens and urge citizens to self-govern whilst maintaining existing power structures: *"The rise of self-help psychology should not be dismissed as a transitory cultural fad. It should be seen as a complementary correlative of practices and techniques based on 'governmentality', a particularly modern mode of rule"* (Rimke, 2000 p. 71).

The proliferation in the flexibility of labour, the growth of the service economy, individualised pathways to valorised employment, and the "*discontinuity and dispersion of occupational paths*" (Wacquant, 2009 p.5), has had a particularly significant impact on the transitions to employment for recent generations of young, working-class people in the UK (McDowell, 2019). When young people, such as those from this study, turn to state services for support during job seeking periods, their behaviour is more heavily regulated than ever before (Fletcher and Wright, 2018). They are monitored closely, and their character is constantly undermined as they are perceived as morally corrupt and a threat to market expansion. Young claimants are punished more frequently and more harshly for non-compliance with state authored behavioural expectations (Van Den Berg et al. 2020). The young people from this cohort are marginalised in new ways and experience new forms of bureaucratic discipline, and to an extent not previously encountered, when compared to socially similar youth cohorts from earlier generations and socially similar cohorts of contemporary older claimants (MacDonald, 2011).

The intensification of welfare conditionality in recent UK reforms is an example of the broader trend in advanced capitalist societies psychologising structural problems

(Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Charter and Loewenstein, 2021). This framing has gradually taken a hold and is now ubiquitous, resulting in a common-sense narrative in mainstream public and political discourse, that stimulating behaviour change in the individual is the most effective method of reducing social inequalities (Payne, 2018 p.9). Social Mobility has been a priority of successive governments in the UK (Lawler and Payne, 2018 p.6). An ideal espoused to instil belief that anyone can move up the socio-economic ladder and to activate the so called underclasses to take up low-paid, insecure work (Ashley, 2021; Folkes, 2021). New Labour (1997-2010) were enthusiastic about social mobility and talked of building an 'Aspiration Nation' to stimulate individual responsibility and social citizenship through paid work, targeted at those who were considered to be deficient in motivation to enter the workplace (Folkes, 2021).

Embedded within new forms of welfare conditionality is the pressure to believe in the system, from both claimants and advisors (Kaufman, 2018). The ethos of conditional employment support is central to the design and implementation of contemporary policies, in the sense advisors must demonstrate faith in their clients, to elicit belief from them in terms of realising imagined transitions to meaningful employment (ibid). The values of employability programmes require a charade of faith that is disconnected from the lived experience of un/underemployed persons. In contemporary managerial culture, belief in the system or company and passion for one's labour is integral to embodying the high performing employee (ibid). The modern Jobcentre Plus pushes this agenda by applying targets to work coaches and encourages strong belief in the system - blindly, without evidence for the desired outcome of secure employment for clients, actually transpires from advisors who adopt the inspirational mantra - as the key mechanism to reach these performance targets.

Young NEETs are a group which attracts considerable attention and vilification from public bodies because their lack of participation is perceived as particularly problematic given their potential as the future of the workforce (McPherson, 2021). Furthermore, the disparity between educational attainment and labour market outcomes across the socio-economic scale, has been largely understood by policymakers for some time, as a problem with 'the poverty of aspiration' (Roberts and Atherton, 2011). Meaning that

young people from lower social status have the capabilities and opportunities of their more privileged peers, however they lack the ambition or belief that they should pursue higher education or a high-status occupation (ibid). Thus, to raise aspirations among disadvantaged youth has been a key policy solution to reducing social inequalities.

Therefore, marginalised youth are the focus of behaviour change in policy circles and they disproportionately experience the penal aspects of the welfare state (De Vries et al. 2017). Young people's worklessness is recognised as more damaging long-term and less deserving of financial support because, they are expected to embody the enthusiastic upwardly mobile subject, eager to demonstrate their social worth through labour (McPherson, 2021). Therefore, the idea of shaping individual aspirations through a middle-class lens of conforming to neoliberal ideals, such as fulfilment through consumption, was particularly aimed at young people transitioning to adulthood (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). For instance, the Coalition Government (2010-2015), encouraged all young people to "*dream of their first pay cheque, their first car, their first home*" (Cameron, 2012).

2.4.2 The Religion of Social Mobility and Self-Improvement

> "*And for us Conservatives, this is not just an economic mission – it's also a moral one. It's not just about growth and GDP…it's what's always made our hearts beat faster – aspiration; people rising from the bottom to the top"* (Cameron, 2012).

Young people are socialised to understand lofty aspirations and self-reliance as the key to reaching the cornerstones of adulthood (Reay, 2021). This rhetoric is particularly targeted at marginalised young people who do not have the resources to conform the ideal neoliberal subject. However, if they align with the individualised aspirational self, they will look internally to realise these increasingly out-of-reach milestones, such as secure employment and homeownership (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). Both aiming high and the ability to reach one's aspirations is placed firmly on the individual, shifting responsibility away from the state (ibid). Failure is therefore perceived as individual shortcoming rather than structural disadvantage. This conceptualisation of poor economic outcomes not only individualises the problem of underemployment and

worklessness by minimising structural barriers and promoting human capital as the dictator of improved circumstance, it pathologises the problem (Vassallo, 2020). The self-help discourse informs disadvantaged young people that their subordinated social position is because of psychological deficiencies, not solely because they have inferior education attainment or skills.

Vassallo (2020) unpacks the concept of a growth mindset, a popular term among self-help gurus and educators, and the idea that in contemporary society young people are expected to perpetually improve (p. 17). This pressure to *"continually project oneself into the future, the commitment to perpetual improvement, and the requirement for self-assessment for personal lack"* is what Vassallo contends underpins educational and broader polices to tackle social inequalities in neoliberal societies (Vassallo, 2020 p.18). The political obsession with social mobility is linked to this psychological concept of a growth mindset, where disadvantaged groups are conditioned to be malleable and continually strive for self-improvement, while structural barriers remain fixed.

The cornerstones of adulthood are becoming increasingly difficult to realise, even among affluent young people (Furlong et al. 2017). Thus, placing the emphasis on marginalised youth cohorts to overcome the widening inter/intragenerational inequalities by embodying the entrepreneurial self (Witmer, 2019), is a deliberate tactic by successive governments to conceal the disproportionate impacts economic recessions (Bell and Blanchflower, 2013) insecure labour markets (Kalleberg, 2020) and unaffordable housing (Hoolachan et al. 2017) have had on recent generations of young people. As Pimlott-Wilson (2017 p. 289) asserts:

"Despite ubiquitous disparities, increases in university tuition fees, record levels of youth unemployment and the retrenchment of the workfare state, a powerful rhetoric of 'aiming higher' and personal responsibility for well-being and social cohesion persists. Political leaders place the onus on the individual to 'aspire' to dominant visions of adulthood rather than on the Government to address broader inequalities and barriers that young people face."

Prominent contemporary scholars, such as Diane Reay, have written extensively on the paradox of how the political fixation with promoting social mobility and the concept of a meritocracy (Littler 2018 p.2) has coincided with the decline in social mobility in the UK (Reay, 2021). Instead of tackling social inequalities, social mobility discourses justify existing intersectional disadvantages. Other scholars such as Ashley (2021) and Lawler and Payne (2018) contend, championing social mobility appears on the surface like a progressive endeavour for recent UK Governments.

However, when one looks more closely at what social mobility in this context means, with the scaling back of state support and the privatisation of the public realm, it is the covert maintenance of the social order (Ashley, 2021). Policies which seek to instil behaviour change in the individual, where rare examples of 'rags to riches' stories are held up to disadvantaged young people as the archetype, only serve to reproduce social inequalities under a guise of tackling said inequalities (Reay 2013; Chapman, 2018). In reality, even for 'successful' socially mobile people it is not a fairytale process where people move smoothly up the rungs of social worth and are cleansed when they realise increased wealth and status (Folkes, 2021). As Reay (2013, p.667) argues:

"[Social mobility] rips working-class young people out of communities that need to hold on to them, and it rips valuable aspects of self out of the socially mobile themselves as they are forced to discard qualities and dispositions that do not accord with the dominant middle-class culture that is increasingly characterized by selfish individualism and hyper-competition."

Young people are being fed, via self-help podcasts, influencers on social media, motivational speakers, and self-esteem workshops, that there is an open playing field where aspiration and determination prevail (Witmer, 2019), there are no excuses, all can succeed with the 'right' attitudes (Gill and Orgad, 2017). These beliefs are then reinforced by public policies, such as welfare conditionality. Hence, young people who experience welfare conditionality are ripe for internalising this notion of individualism. Boland and Griffin (2022) contend that workfare and activation strategies can be traced back to theological ideas. There is a powerful messaging within policies which seek to address youth unemployment, that talks of the need to transform and salvage

individuals seeking work. The gospel of labour and it is supposed redeeming characteristics are targeted at supposedly disenfranchised youth, in the hope they follow the new religion of upward social mobility and gain salvation through paid employment.

Our late capitalist culture celebrates those with wealth and followers: influencers, streamers, and entrepreneurs: *"education has been reinvented as an aspirational project for the self, social mobility has taken its place and we are all supposed to aspire to becoming doctors and lawyers, or even princesses, footballers, celebrities and billionaire entrepreneurs"* (Reay, 2013 p. 665). These cultural icons are particularly salient for young people. Their daily routines and recalling of their back story are glorified, as they assert a strong work ethic and perseverance as the key to their success. This can be used to justify their wealth and social inequalities.

Some prominent celebrities, motivational speakers, CEOs, politicians, and others who are successful by the neoliberal metrics of status and wealth, understand their success to be an individual struggle (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015). They profess to those who are less privileged that all they need to do is believe and endeavour, as the winners in society have done, and they too could realise valorised employment and wealth. This messaging is then internalised, and the concept of meritocracy is endorsed to a greater extent by those with lower SES (Darnon, 2018). Encouraging self-help is perceived as the fundamental means to improve well-being and economic outcomes in contemporary advanced capitalist societies and public policy reinforces this belief system. In fact, evidence from Germany indicates that young people from low SES, who more strongly hold meritocratic values in their teenage years, are more likelihood to realise an adulthood of precarious and part-time work than those who do not hold these strong beliefs (García-Sierra, 2023). Thus, these discourses preserve the status quo, as social inequalities are increasingly understood as an authentic reflection of natural ability and work ethic and are therefore reproduced.

2.5 Conclusions

This critical review of the contemporary literature provides the reader with the relevant concepts that will be drawn upon throughout this thesis. The review has demonstrated what is already known and published on the subject of young people and welfare conditionality. It provides the platform upon which this thesis will expand the existing scholarship and address the gap in knowledge in terms of understanding young social security recipients' experiences and aspirations over time.

The first half of the chapter explored the macro-economic trends that are affecting young people's ability to realise the traditional cornerstones of adulthood, such as the insecure labour market and generation rent. Then the chapter turned to discuss the recent state strategies focused on addressing these structural problems. This chapter argues that the ideology inherent within recent welfare reforms, coercing individual behaviour change, demonstrate a lack of understanding of how issues such as youth unemployment or homeless arise. The chapter then goes on to highlight the individualisation of structural inequalities more broadly and culturally. Signifying how the scholarly concepts that underpin this are particularly applicable and useful for understanding how young people experience poverty, unemployment, insecure housing, and welfare conditionality in contemporary society.

Contemporary forms of welfare conditionality, epitomised by the design of UC, have potential unique impacts on young claimants when compared to older groups. Individual responsibility is central to social security in the UK. Firstly, behavioural state strategies for targeted populations disproportionately affect young people. State support is restricted for those under 25 and young people are more aggressively targeted by welfare reforms and benefit sanctions when compared with older claimants. The policy design mimics components of the new economy, in that there are increased expectations on the individual whilst social protections are weakened. The onus is on the individual to succeed in work; retain more hours, earn more money, earn a promotion and when out-of-work; to find a job, abide by the 'claimant commitment', and get by. In both cases, there are limited assurances, one must earn it, and either low pay or basic pecuniary support can be reduced or retracted for any form of 'non-compliance', be that

intentional or not. These activation policies are supposed to motivate claimants to find work. Typically, this means pushing claimants to take any job regardless of its insecurity, often compounding rather than mitigating young claimants' susceptibility to frequent pedalling between insecure work and worklessness.

Popular psychology has become embedded in recent welfare reforms to encourage young people to believe that individual behaviour is the key to realising future aspiration; to persuade low-income groups that valorised employment and housing only materialise for those who buy into the power of self-improvement. The vibrant social policy literature base on the behaviourist ideologies which underpin welfare conditionality and the broader political magnetism toward self-governance, provide a solid grounding to explore and understand the transitions of young welfare claimants in the UK. The psychological framing and self-help movement discourse plays a significant role in how contemporary young people perceive the social world. Hence, the smaller literature base that critically analyses the self-help movement among Millennials is important too. Popular media has helped to thrust the romanticised notion of cultivating an apolitical neoliberal selfhood, which is synonymous with upward mobility and economic rewards, among recent generations of young people. The literature drawn upon in the final three section of this chapter will be central to grounding the analysis of the young people's narratives. The attention will now turn to the methodological approach the project adopted, to identify how the eventual findings were reached.

Chapter 3- Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail the intricacies and, challenges, and justify the decisions I made in handling and analysing a secondary, qualitative longitudinal (QL) dataset. I was fortunate to be granted access to the full, unredacted ESRC-funded Welfare Conditionality study (2013-2018) dataset with permission of the primary research team. I contacted the University of Glasgow College of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Committee for ethical clearance; however, they informed me no ethics application was necessary because the dataset was archived and publicly available at the University of Leeds Timescapes website[4]. This original study sought to better understand the lived experiences of welfare conditionality over time. Generally, with these kinds of sanctions and support, the aim is to get people to change their behaviour and into employment. The original study wanted to incorporate *all* the effects of sanctions and support on people's lives. The two key research questions of the original study were: 1) How effective is conditionality in changing the behaviour of those receiving welfare benefits and services? 2) Are there any particular circumstances in which the use of conditionality may, or may not be, justifiable?

The original sample included a total of 481 participants and 1,032 semi-structured interviews across three waves. The participants represented a range of specific groups who claimed some form of state support. These 9 groups included: ex-offenders, disabled persons, lone parents, homeless individuals, jobseekers, social tenants, those with history of anti-social behaviour, migrants, and Universal Credit (UC) claimants. Each group were recruited separately according to policy-specific criteria, however young people were not separately sampled. Across these different research groups there were individuals aged between 16 and 66 years old. My interest was solely on the young participants from the study, those aged between 16-25 at Wave A interview, and their experiences, attitudes, and trajectories. This age range was chosen because I wanted to focus on a wide range of youth experiences, from 16 (the youngest age group from the

[4] https://timescapes-archive.leeds.ac.uk/

original project) and 25 as the upper limit because this is what the welfare system in the is entitled to augmented financial support from the state after they turn 25 (UK Government, nd).

This subsample of young people, generated for the purposes of my research, included a total of 56 participants and 118 interviews. Young people were not originally considered a specific subset of participants and their unique generational narratives were not illuminated in isolation. Hence, I extracted a cross section of the original dataset which included participants from all the main groups mentioned above but only those who were all aged 25 or below when they entered the study. This would be my unique subsample to be engaged with for generating new findings.

However, for the purposes of the housing analysis, the age range of the young people's narratives analysed was extended from 16-25 to 16-35. This is because according to UK welfare policy, the *"Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) limits the amount of Housing Benefit that single person under the age of 35 can receive"* (Hobson, 2022 p.4). As with UC payments being reduced for those 25 and under, housing support is restricted for those under 35. Thus, in terms of housing the period of 'youth' has been extended (Clapham et al. 2014) and UK social housing policy considers all those under 35 as less deserving of full housing support. This meant an extra 17 young people were included in the analysis for the housing chapter.

The choice to structure the subsequent findings chapters to enable the narratives of some young people come through strongly, was made to allow their stories to be set out in more detail and allow individuals' personality and biography to be a part of the analysis. I employed the use of in-depth narratives of a group young people rather than trying to include as many voices from the 56 participants as possible. I adapted the approach of Lulle and King (2016), who use in-depth case studies to explore the experiences of ageing among female migrants in the UK. Whilst I cannot claim that these narratives are wholly representative, I aspire to combine insight and richness in the data, particularly insofar as it responds to my key research aims of illuminating subjective youth narratives of behavioural state support.

This chapter will begin with the key components, aims, challenges, and advantages of qualitative secondary analysis (QSA). Then my own methodological approach, a combination of QL and QSA (QLSA), will be outlined and defended. This will begin with how I familiarised myself with the dataset, followed by the coding process, generating themes, quote and case selection, main challenges and how I overcame these, and finally limitations. Reflexivity will be interwoven through each stage in this chapter (see appendix 4 for an example of how I used my data diary for reflexivity throughout my research process). My own preconceptions, research background, and values will also be highlighted prior to discussing the methodological approaches chosen. This chapter is composed with the help of my data diary from when I first accessed the dataset, back in March 2020 and continued to update until December 2022, whenever key challenges arose or decisions and breakthroughs were made, and how I was feeling at each stage of analysis.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

3.2.1 Intersectionality

Firstly, it is important to understand the theoretical underpinning of the analysis. An intersectional approach will be applied to make sense of how aspects of the identities within this youth cohort, such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape their experiences of welfare conditionality. Intersectionality is a term that was coined by Crenshaw (1989) to describe how multiple forms of inequality intersect and interact with each other. It is a framework that recognizes that individuals have multiple social identities that cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as overlapping and interconnected.

Intersectionality is a way of understanding the complex experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups (McCall, 2005). For example, in the context of this thesis, a young black unemployed person may experience forms of discrimination and stigma due to their skin colour (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2002), worklessness (Jensen and Tyler, 2015), and age (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006). Intersectionality has been typically applied to gender and race studies, and less so in youth studies. Therefore, this

study will demonstrate the usefulness of intersectionality as a theoretical framework to explore the complex and unequal interconnected forms of inequalities experienced by the different youth identities within this cohort. For intersectional scholars, such as Nash (2008), it is not enough to simply focus on one aspect of an individual's identity, such as their race or gender, without considering how it intersects with other aspects of their identity.

Despite the importance of intersectionality, it is not always embraced in mainstream discourse. Some people may resist the idea of intersectionality because it challenges the notion that privilege and inequalities are linear and straightforward (McCall, 2005). It can also be difficult to implement intersectionality in practice, as it requires a deep understanding of the ways in which different forms of inequalities intersect and interact with each other (ibid).

However, this thesis will embrace intersectionality, by recognising the complexities of identity and the ways in which different forms of stigma and discrimination intersect, to work towards creating policies and practices that are inclusive and effective for all individuals. It is only by embracing intersectionality that we can truly address the unique challenges faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. This is important for the reader to keep in mind when engaging with this methodology chapter, and the subsequent findings chapters.

3.2.2 Youth Aspirations

It was important to follow up on issues salient to the young people in their narratives. For this reason, aspirations became a key focus of the analysis, and then relevant literature was engaged with. The young people's aspirations were influenced by the contemporary cultural significance of concepts such as self-help, self-reinvention and positive psychology, ideas that were in the ascendancy prior to these young people being born, and then ballooned in popularity over the past 30 years (Elliot and Lemert, 2009 p.4). I wanted to gain insight into what extent a cohort of young people who were excluded from valorised labour market transitions rejected or bought into these notions of self-reliance, resilience, and the power of positive forethought.

Moreover, the decision to focus on aspirations was related to applied aspects of contemporary policy. For instance, St. Clair and Benjamin (2011) note the increasing pertinence of aspirations in UK educational policy. Levelling-up or reducing the attainment gap among young people, and therefore increasing social mobility, the ideal for recent UK administrations on the left and on the right (Lawler and Payne, 2018), is targeted through bolstering aspirations among marginalised youth cohorts (St. Clair and Benjamin, 2011). Like St. Clair and Benjamin (2011), I was concerned about the pervasive framing of the policy problem and the assumptions such strategies are based upon. These forms of self-actualising, self-help interventions have also surfaced in the social security system, whilst this governance ignores the structural factors and political contexts that are restricting certain groups of young people's opportunities.

The current policy discourse insinuates that young people from deprived backgrounds and communities are not competing in the labour market because they exhibit inferior character traits, such as low motivation and self-esteem, and they can learn to improve themselves with external support and internal motivation. This conceptualisation pays little attention to the underlying factors which contribute to the attainment gap and labour market inequalities across the socio-economic scale, and it seeks to censor the social settings where young people's aspirations and expectations are embedded and constrained. This is a problematic interpretation of the policy issue and as St. Clair and Benjamin (2011 p.502) state:

"We refute the possibility that aspirations are indicators of personal shortcomings in young people or families and suggest that it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the socially constructed aspects of aspirations more fully."

There is debate as to whether young people from more deprived backgrounds express more diluted aspirations compared with their more privileged peers (Kintrea et al. 2015). Yet, it remains a policy priority in the UK to lift the aspirations of disadvantaged youth in the hope this will translate into a more desired outcome for the labour market and greater economic security (St. Clair and Benjamin, 2011). However, there is some evidence to suggest that aspirations communicated by young people are shaped by the

expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than representing a free choice of desired outcome, and are influenced as much by the needs of the moment as by a genuine expectation for the future (St. Clair et al. 2015).

State strategies to 'raise' the aspirations of young people as a means of addressing the attainment gap and labour market inequalities are pervasive (St. Clair et al. 2015; Littler, 2018 p.144; Vassallo, 2020). It is important to understand how these policies shape young people's aspirations, and pathways to them, to better understand impacts of individualised policies on young people. This is precisely what this research aims to do: develop the existing literature and theory by analysing young people's narratives over time, who have experience with policies focused on moulding the individual to tackle structural inequalities.

There is very limited existing literature that has explored contemporary cohorts of young people conceptualisations of future employment aspirations. However, Pimlott-Wilson (2017) adopted a qualitative lens to explore how young people (15-16), about to take their GCSEs, make decisions about their future, what forms did their aspirations take, and how did they envisage pathways to realising their aspirations. The young people in this study also understood labour market outcomes to be largely shaped by individual endeavour. Her empirical analysis argues (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017 p. 291): *"Young people articulate the emotional blame and shame they personally anticipate experiencing, should they fail to meet normative benchmarks of success. Failure in the education system is associated with a future inscribed with failure. This illuminates the affective operation of neoliberal governance, which seeks to address collective problems at the scale of the individual."*

There is a wealth of literature that identifies, unpacks and critiques the individualised state strategies targeted at reducing the attainment gap, socio-economic inequalities, and increasing employment opportunities and outcomes among young people from low-income backgrounds (Reay, 2013; 2020; 2021; Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013; Crisp and Powell, 2017; Vassallo, 2020; Charter and Lowenstein, 2021; Boland and Griffin, 2022). This literature is valuable in terms of understanding the ideology underpinning recent state strategies. However, there is a lack of research that engages

with young people directly to explore how they understand these policies. Hence, I decided to focus my initial analysis on these two questions, asked toward the end of each interview: "over the next year what do you hope will happen?" and "is there anything that is important in helping you achieve your goals over the next year?" This was partly because future aspirations and planning are most salient to young people trying to enter the labour market (Skrbis et al. 2014), and partly because I wanted to explore how interaction with a conditional system shaped and impacted young people's aspirations over time.

3.2.3 Holistic understanding of Youth Transitions

Moreover, this project took a holistic approach to understanding the lives of young people to claim state support. Thus, given the intersectional inequalities faced by this generation in the contemporary housing markets, exploration of the cohorts' housing experience was important to understand how these intertwine with employment experiences and welfare conditionality, to shape these young peoples' conceptualisations of transitions to adulthood. Housing experiences were significant for two main reasons: the majority of the young people from the cohort (47/56 at Wave A) were living independently in either private tenancies, social rented accommodation or homeless/hostel accommodation and many were also experiencing various forms of housing conditionality.

Therefore, housing tenure, conditionality, and aspirations featured considerably throughout the interview transcripts. Housing plays a prominent part in the contemporary youth studies paradigm, given the disproportionate impacts the financialisation of housing and the rise insecure tenancies have had on recent generations of young people (McKee, 2012). This thesis advances existing research, such as work by Hoolachan et al. (2017), McKee and Soaita (2018), and Preece et al. (2020), who have all contributed to the nuanced qualitative understandings of contemporary housing transitions in the UK, intergenerational housing inequalities and 'generation rent', as well as the frustrated housing aspirations of recent generations of young people. This research furthers these notable contributions to the discourse by focusing more specifically on subjective accounts of housing conditionality and how

interaction with state services impacts young people's housing aspirations, transitions, and sense of housing security. Thus, a chapter dedicated to housing experiences was well grounded.

Furthermore, given young people experience disproportionately high benefit sanction rates (De Vries et al. 2017), and more than half of this sample had experienced at least one sanction, it was crucial to illuminate these experiences. For instance, 30% of this youth sub-sample experienced multiple sanctions and were left without formal financial support for extended periods of time. The key questions for this analysis were *How do young people respond emotionally to benefit sanctions? And, how do they benefit sanctions impact behaviour long-term?* The young people in this study represent a cohort particularly impacted by benefit sanctions and there exists a lack of research focused on understanding subjective narratives of benefit sanctions among young people specifically.

This research also contributes to our understanding of how punitive welfare reforms play out over time from the perspective of recipients, and the outcomes of negative emotional responses to conditionality. Not only is illuminating and making sense of their experiences important because they are a group at risk of high sanction rates, but also their transitional life stage provides an opportunity to explore how initial engagement with social security systems in the UK shapes future perceptions of the state and understandings of its function among marginalised groups. This will provide insight into how initial engagement with conditional welfare policies shapes young people's perceptions of work, employment, and employment services. How these policies are experienced, understood and responded to by young people have significant bearing on their relationship with, and interpretation of, the state throughout their lives.

The choice to structure the subsequent findings chapters to enable the narratives of some young people come through strongly, was made to allow their stories to be set out in more detail and allow individuals' personality and biography to be a part of the analysis. I employed the use of in-depth narratives of a group young people rather than trying to include as many voices from the 56 participants as possible. I adapted the approach of Lulle and King (2016), who use in-depth case studies to explore the

experiences of ageing among female migrants in the UK. Whilst I cannot claim that these narratives are wholly representative, I aspire to combine insight and richness in the data, particularly insofar as it responds to my key research aims of illuminating subjective youth narratives of behavioural state support.

3.3 Secondary Qualitative Longitudinal Research

The re-use of qualitative data has gained traction in recent years and scholars such as Tarrant and Hughes (2018) have been at the forefront of the growing interest in this approach. Given the abundance of rich qualitative datasets, such as the Welfare Conditionality Project, there is ample scope for adjusting the lens of enquiry and re-analysis. The primary researchers from the project archived the dataset because they are aware, given the amount of rich data, that there is no possible way for the original research team to exhaust the possibilities to generate fresh findings. The huge resource and energy put into generating such a large qualitative dataset also meant that the primary team obliged re-use.

Secondary analysis is a more established approach for quantitative projects. Qualitative data was predominantly perceived as inextricably linked to the primary researcher(s) privileged position of proximity to the data collection and therefore secondary researchers were perceived as ill-equipped to dive in and re-analyse (Tarrant and Hughes, 2018). However, more recently there has been a recognition that re-contextualisation can provide opportunities for new analytical engagement and that distance from data generation is not subordinate to traditional forms of qualitative research, but rather presents broadening opportunities for secondary researchers (Hughes et al. 2022).

There is an argument that all qualitative projects have aspects of temporal and secondary analytical ‘remove’. A longitudinal study will require even the primary research team to span temporal zones back and forth, and each individual researcher may have varying degrees of involvement in the primary data generation within a research team (ibid). Hence, distance from the original data collection for a secondary researcher should not be perceived as a disadvantaged standpoint because varying

degrees of distance are inevitable for all researchers (Hughes et al. 2022). This does not mean however that one can simply jump into a dataset and extract from it at will. It is a long and arduous process of re-contextualising and re-connecting with the primary data (ibid).

From the outset it is important to highlight the relatively unexplored nature of this methodological approach. The combination of both secondary and longitudinal data posed many challenges but many exciting avenues for novel inquiry. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to walk alongside a group of young people, to hear their stories and make sense of their narratives across time and produce a qualitative movie. Instead of a snapshot in time like a one-off interview or camera flash on holiday, qualitative longitudinal research enables researchers to compose a rich, evolving, and nuanced film of a cohort of individual lives intertwining (Neale, 2021b).

Like other forms of qualitative research, QLR is seeking to dig beneath the surface of quantitative, wholesale changes over time (Corden and Miller. 2007), for example moving from unemployment into employment. Qualitative research can be described as a *"naturalistic, interpretive approach, concerned with exploring phenomena from their interior and taking the perspectives and accounts research participants as a starting point"* (Ormston et al. 2013 p.3). Thus, QLR more specifically is adopted to explore how transitions and trajectories for an individual or a group transpire and what processual factors are involved in unfolding changes in the social world (Neale, 2021b). One unique and attractive facet of QLR is its foundations in garnering an intimate narrative, where personal insights, attitudes, and life events can be mapped out. This approach also allows the researcher and the reader to move forward and back in the narrative to pinpoint key moments and identify potential catalysts for changes in outcomes and emotions.

The secondary aspect of this research brings with it another layer of methodological distinction. This was a purposeful component of the research as it was built into the ESRC funding for my project. As the rise in data archiving continues and the access to quality qualitative datasets increases, the push for the re-use and extension of existing qualitative datasets also increases. This is for practical, ethical, and methodological advancement motivations (Tarrant, 2017). Firstly, the re-use of existing datasets when

possible is preferable to carrying out similar primary research, for example recruiting and interviewing a new cohort when parallel data already exists (Irwin and Winterton, 2011). In theory, this would save time and resources. Secondly, it appears unnecessary or unethical, particularly with this project engaging with marginalised young people, to ask vulnerable groups to recount potentially troubling accounts which could lead to distress, when similar data already exists (ibid). Thirdly, the re-use of qualitative data provides opportunities to gauge and develop effective approaches to shifting the lens of inquiry from original research project and its aims, to generate new findings and theories, which help us understand a different angle of a social phenomenon from looking exclusively and more closely at a syphoned off group within a larger sample. As is the case with this project.

For instance, in my own project I was able to focus specifically on the imagined futures of each participant and see how the young people's aspirations changed over time. The aspirations for the next year of each interview were just another component within an abundance of unanalysed aspects from the original study. However, given that future aspirations are particularly important for young people (Skrbis et al. 2014), and my freedom as a secondary researcher, I could explore any of the facets of the original study that was salient to my sub sample. My research then begins to move away from the original study and expands its parameters whilst using the same data. My distance to the original study from this perspective gives me an advantage, a clean slate, to re-focus the analytical lens away from; *how effective is conditionality at changing behaviour among those who claim welfare and services?* To, how do young people who claim welfare envisage their future and pathways to their aspirations? Are they closer to realising their aspirations over time? This is a unique capability of QLSA, it enables a researcher to change the angle of inquiry and scope of an existing project, whilst maintaining a longitudinal aspect of temporal developments.

3.3.1 The Key Challenges and Opportunities of Qualitative Secondary Analysis

Some traditional qualitative researchers, such as Mauthner et al. (1998), have questioned the legitimacy of QSA and claim it is "not capable of enabling new

substantive and theoretical advance" (Irwin and Winterton, 2011 p. 5). The historical, social, biographical, and political contexts in which research projects are funded, carried out, and in which researcher(s) construct relationships with participants and in which participants attach meaning to their experiences, are inextricably linked. For some, this constrains the validity of new insights generated by a secondary researcher accessing, from the outside, the unique relationship the data had with the primary researchers (ibid). The distance from the original study is problematic for some scholars, such as Mauthner and her colleagues (1998), as they reflect that the dislocation from the original context in which the data was produced means the secondary researcher cannot access the privileged and unique position from which the primary researcher(s) generated the original findings. Indeed, even when the original research team revisit the dataset, seeking to generate new theories or findings, they cannot recapture the specific interpersonal and intellectual insights available to them at the time of the primary research (Hammersley, 1997).

However, in the context of the original study that I have extracted my dataset from, because the amount of data was so large and the research team was extensive and diverse, there would be no one single or few researcher(s) whom had a comprehensive picture of the whole sample. Therefore, the privacy and attachment smaller studies may have with the original researcher(s) is less relevant in the case of the Welfare Conditionality Project because it was a large-scale design. Hence, with my smaller sample size I feel more closely in-tune with the overall trends and specificities than one single researcher did with the Welfare Conditionality project data, as a whole.

I argue that the distance or time elapsed from the original study is not damning for the re-use of qualitative data. Although the original researcher's presence and proximity to the data is unavoidable, there is no guarantee they have all the tools to best make sense of the data and that secondary researchers cannot assimilate with the original data because of their absence from the primary data generation (Irwin and Winterton, 2011). For instance, Mason (2007) suggests it is the reflexivity which is most salient for all qualitative researchers be it from a primary or secondary lens, and that proximity to the data generation has no impact on validity on findings. As a QSA researcher, I was careful not to simply re-analyse existing data but rather to re-contextualise the data. It

takes the form of a completely fresh endeavour with a unique research design and aims, whilst drawing upon archived data.

The distance from original data collection is one of the challenges specific to QSA, in the same way there are specific methodological difficulties inherent within any research project. Overcoming this distance, immersing myself in the data, and realising the quirks of the dataset, would be key to firstly getting to grips with the secondary data and then putting myself in a position where findings could be generated from analysis. However, this should never take away from the validity of the findings as it is merely a different approach and challenge, rather than inferior. As McLeod and Thompson (2009, p. 125) argue:

"The richness and value of qualitative studies is not exhausted or fully captured in one reading or telling, or in one time."

I had to put myself in the shoes of the primary researcher and the participant intermittently and simultaneously. This can be perceived as a benefit of QSA, as it allowed me to step back in retrospect and view the whole research process and interview transcripts in a mosaic format, in a way the primary researchers may not have, in the moment and pressure of primary data collection and analysis (Neale, 2021b). Especially with QL datasets, secondary researchers can elongate the time and space which the original dataset covered and enhance the value and highlight the contemporary significance of legacy data. Although the data generated from the Welfare Conditionality Project was realised during a specific time period, the usefulness of the insights garnered are not entombed in time and can help us understand contemporary youth transitions. For the purposes of my project, from the outset it was important to keep in mind: what can my analysis tell us about the time of original study looking back and what the past can tell us about the present and the future looking forward.

For instance, with this sample of young people I could develop a more detailed biography for the participants than was the case in the original study. Each young person's narrative could be traced from before they entered the study, in some cases

quite far back, then all the way through the study and beyond. By focusing on youth aspirations this elongated the time and space of the original project, as the narratives and experiences can help to form an understanding of the impacts of intrusive statecraft beyond the timeframe of the study. Moreover, it enables researcher to apply the findings to what similar youth cohorts would encounter in contemporary systems. We can think about how similar youth cohorts today, making comparable transitions within a comparable social security framework, even though sanction rates decreased since the peak in 2013 (Pattaro et al. 2022), would make of this imposed reduction in income and the qualitative impacts it would have on their lives, given what we learn from the similar experiences of this cohort.

In the process of data generation and analysis in QL studies, processual data is continuously revisited and therefore the lines between primary and secondary researcher become blurred (Neale, 2021b). QL provides the best platform for revisiting archived data because interpretations shift through time and the supposed 'privilege' of the primary researcher is diminished (Hughes, Hughes and Tarrant, 2020). Therefore, the transformative nature of QL data through time should not be suppressed by these drawn up boundaries between primary and secondary research. This elongation of space and time enabled me to gain further insight into young people's change in attitudes toward conditionality over time. Such as how perspectives of housing conditionality could transform the longer the behavioural regulation attached to their tenancies is experienced. Or, how the conceptualisation of benefit sanctions could mutate from how the young person felt in the aftermath of experiencing a sanction or how they looked back on the experience a year later.

3.4 Familiarising Myself with the Data

Before I began my analysis, I thought I had a good sense of what sort of accounts I would be engaging with: young people with limited familial support (either financial, emotional, or both), limited educational attainment, restricted employment opportunities, strict behavioural regulations, and mental health issues. I thought there would be many participants living in the family/friends' home and many in part-time employment. When I started looking at the data, I could see my assumptions were

somewhat inaccurate. There were very few who lived with their parents or other family members and very few who were employed. Most of the sample were living in social rented housing on their own or with their partner/children. It was clear to see from the first few transcripts I read each person had their own story and personal struggles, there were feelings of isolation and helplessness. I will now discuss how I familiarised myself with the diverse range of participants and their narratives.

My goal was first to familiarise myself with the data. I had a general idea of the kind of responses or stories the participants would articulate, given my close connection with the Welfare Conditionality project, my previous study of young people's experiences of Universal Credit and engagement with the relevant literature. I felt the participants would have particularly harsh experience of sanctions, for lengthy periods and potentially for common 'offences', like being late for a Jobcentre appointment. This was a semi-accurate predication, as the sanction rate was comparatively very high among this cohort. I also assumed that many of the young people would express a distaste for the Job Centre Plus and strict conditionality. This was only partially true as many participants noted the ineffectiveness of the Job Centre Plus but felt conditionality was mostly warranted. I did not know that participants were even asked about their aspirations for the coming year but when I did see this I was immediately fascinated. This is one of the key elements of being young. In terms of employment, health, family and housing: what do you wish for yourself, and how confident are you in being able to reach your goals.

As a secondary researcher having never met these young people, seen a picture of them, known what their home was like, or even what they sound like, it was an alien concept to build rapport and empathy with only text. To bypass this visceral barrier, it required me to develop an image, sound, character, and feeling for the individual. It was a creative undertaking to get closer to these young people, to understand their stories and illuminate their narratives with honesty and integrity. Emotion is a central theme of this research project; how do these particular state practices make young people feel and how do they impact their sense of self? In order to explore these young people's emotions and share them sincerely, one must connect with each transcript on an

emotional level. It cannot be rigid and removed content analysis, it must be an immersive, emotionally laborious process.

3.4.1 My Process

In this study I began connecting with the youth subsample as a whole. I visualised the sample transitions across and between each wave: employment status, housing tenure, types of support claimed. This was the foundation to getting to grips with the subsample, the characteristics and overall picture. Given the amount of data I was dealing with, these initial stages resembled a quantitative project: tidying the data, creating graphs and tables of the sample information (see *Figure 5*, a sample of the cohort's employment transitions visualised, for an example). I logged all information and comments about each young person and their interviews in an excel sheet (see appendix 1). Other graphs and tables were creating to visualise the transitions of the group at each wave in terms of employment and housing. This was useful to identify there were relatively immobile transitions within the cohort in terms of employment status or housing tenure at each interview wave. However, after engaging with more of the transcripts later on it became apparent that many of those who displayed inactivity at the quantitative level, for example they were unemployed and a social tenant at Wave A and B, had actually had several jobs and moved home in this time. The sample information does not account for movement between waves but just a snapshot at the time of each interview. Now it was time to begin the qualitative analysis.

Working with a secondary dataset was overwhelming at the beginning. I was thinking how am I going to 'build rapport' or even get to know these individuals? Having never met them and all I had was words on a screen. I wanted my findings to be authentic, to be driven by the participant responses and translate these interview transcripts into stories which the reader will hopefully feel connected to. I feel it helpful here to include an excerpt from my data diary when I was thinking about how to build rapport from a distance:

*"**29/09/22***

Something which has come to my attention is the importance for a secondary researcher to build up a sense of who a person is without ever meeting them or hearing them talk. Body language is so important to get a better understanding of context, with just words on paper it can become easy to misinterpret what a person is meaning. This happened to me on occasion when I thought the participant meant something in a particular way and then later in the transcript it would become apparent, I had misread or misunderstood exactly what they meant. To build up a character profile as a secondary researcher and get to know each participant, the nuances of the transcription become paramount. When a participant laughs, chuckles, pauses, hesitates all these things help to paint a picture of what this person is like and how they really feel about what they are discussing beyond their word choice. Moreover, the primary researcher becomes an active part in this story too. Rather than merely asking the questions, their interaction and reaction to participant responses, how the dialogue flows and when it falters gives more clues to what the participant is like as a person. The minute details are under the magnifying glass. The continuous engagement with both interviewer and participant is demanding but it helps to get closer to the humanity of the person who is telling their story, at a distance. Researching at a distance requires augmented in-depth study of the text prior to analysis. Distance from the original project requires intimacy with details in transcripts."

Once I had an idea of the quantifiable points of the data, I could delve more deeply into the young people's narratives. I began carefully reading one participant transcript at a time, chronologically from Wave A to C. I took notes as I went and constructed a *'participant profile'* for each of the 20 young people who completed all three interview waves, since the longitudinal component of the analysis was important to this research. An example of a participant profile, a detailed the journey of each young person over the course of the study, can be seen in appendix 2. I composed these profiles by beginning with background, prior to the study, then what was happening at Wave A, and not just what was happening at the jobcentre or work, but how was their overall mood? Did they appear enthusiastic about the future?

Figure 5 – Employment Transitions Across Interview Waves

Key: = Not in paid work = Any form of paid work = Left Study

Pseudonym	Employment Wave A	Employment Wave B	Employment Wave C
Molly			
Erin			
Greg			
Liam			
Josh			
Neil			
Bradley			
Dean			
Patrick			
Beccy			
Francis			
Tegan			
Catriona			
Adam			
Callum			

This was to create a narrative timeline for the young people from the study, to be able to look beyond even the timeframe of the original study and map out a transitional history to think and analyse through time. The profiles included their family background, employment history, intimate relationships, and anything important they noted at each wave. The key here was to map out each trajectory over time, what

changed, or did not, between each wave and why. Instead of a snapshot in time like a one-off interview or camera flash on holiday, QLR enables researchers to compose a rich, evolving, and nuanced film of a cohort of individual lives intertwining (Neale, 2021b). As Bren Neale (2021b) posits, QLR should encapsulate the fluidity of human experience, where the researcher explores dynamic processes and follows the intricacy of lives forward and backward in time, in order get a better understanding of how structural forces shape individuals and groups in real time, and what social processes drive change.

The participant profiles include direct quotes from the transcripts to support or elaborate on the narrative I was relaying. Assembling the participant profiles was both time consuming and rewarding. After spending much time going back over each transcript and giving a detailed account of what was happening across the three waves, I was becoming emotionally invested in the young people's lives. I would be reading the next transcript eager to find out if things had changed/improved for that individual and felt a sense of anguish when typically circumstances either remained static or had worsened. These profiles were an ideal way for me to break down the rigid barrier of secondary researcher and data and helped unlock the humanity within each transcript.

I was now somewhat familiarised with the data set; although, there were a few obvious connections between these participants, such as lack of informal support, mental health issues, and lack of security nothing was immediately jumping out at me as a common theme to join them. This was because the stories were quite different and specific to locality, whether the young person was a parent or what benefits they were in receipt of. The stories across this sample are quite individual, primarily because the young people were recruited by many different research strands, such as jobseekers, social tenants, homeless, lone parent, those with anti-social behaviour orders. It was apparent that within each of these groups, shared experiences and attitudes were common because of their similar biographies. The interviews were also driven by these 'main classifications', thus those who were 'jobseekers' would mostly be discussing employment history, aspirations, conditionality and then a little bit about housing. Whereas lone parents, since they tended to have young children, were currently not looking for work and so the discussion focused more on housing and family. This is

where the in-depth analysis can begin in order to identify more complex and subtle shared experiences and attitudes.

I also used strategies more commonly associated with quantitative research to get an idea of the overall picture of the sample across the three waves. I created an 'information sheet' on excel which included all the key descriptors for each young person at each wave, for example their pseudonym, age, main classification, what benefits they were claiming, their housing and employment status, and a short summary of their story after I had completed reading all their interviews. Moreover, I used word frequency searches pre and post coding to get a sense of collective narrative. *Figure 6* shows a word cloud for the coded housing aspirations.

Figure 6 – Word Cloud from Early Analysis of Housing

This enables me to gain insight to how the cohort are making sense of their housing experience, and this word cloud suggests the cohort were tentative with regard to their housing futures. Some notable words indicate this general sense of apprehension or hesitancy expressed by the participants, such as 'hopefully', 'maybe', 'anything', 'permanent' and 'probably'. These computational forms of analysis are less familiar with traditional primary qualitative analysis. However, QL researchers, for example

Davidson et al. 2019, have recently adopted techniques such as key word searching, data mining and pattern recognition. These techniques for investigating the data are more commonly associated with big quantitative data analytics (Tinati et al. 2014). These more quantitative approaches can be helpful particularly for QLSA researchers to get a sense of the make-up of their dataset and a big picture of the sample quickly and effectively. Now I will elaborate on the processes involved in moving from a detailed overview of a sample, toward an in-depth participant analysis.

3.5 Coding and analysis

After familiarising myself with the data for months, I then transferred all the transcripts over to a new NVivo file, so I could re-code the data for the purposes of my research. I needed to be clear about what I was asking the data: what do I want to find out? The slightly unusual but possibly helpful thing about this dataset is that it came pre coded. Thus, potentially a lot of that work had been done for me. However, the kinds of aspects central to youth experiences may have not been coded and therefore could be missed. Also, the questions that were asked to these young participants were less about their age or generation and were more blanket questions about housing, employment and conditionality. This is also potentially a robust aspect of the data, as when youth specific experiences arise, they will have done so organically without any framing or guiding from the researcher conducting the interview. Alternatively, this could be a limitation as youth as a concept or as a basis for their stories may be somewhat neglected.

I took all those who had at least two interview waves and coded their responses to the two questions asked in the final section of each interview: "*over the next year what do you hope will happen?*" and "*is there anything that is important in helping you achieve your goals over the next year?*" The process of re-coding the data further help to familiarise myself with the sample and participants, as I was now fine combing each transcript looking for specific identifiers. Moreover, it would make it less likely that I would follow in the footsteps of the original study and give me a freedom to seek the issues most salient for the youth cohort within the Welfare Conditionality study.

The codes for the first question regarding aspirations for the coming year included education, housing and employment. They were then subcoded into more specific

things like, *college to university*, *move to different city*, *full-time employment* to highlight all those who had similar goals. The next main code was for the second question, "*what could help you achieve your goals*?" or "*what barriers do you face to achieving your goals*?" The main codes for these responses were, *individual factors* and *structural factors*. Subcoding included headings such as, *intrinsic motivation* and *working hard* under individual factors, and *lack of support* and *limited employment opportunities* under structural factors. After the coding it became apparent there were a lot more 'references' in the individual factors node. Reading some the responses over and over it became clear that even under push back from the interviewer, some participants were so staunch in their belief that the only thing standing in their way of stable employment was themselves.

This was startling to me. The rhetoric pedalled by institutions like the Jobcentre had been totally embodied by some participants. I had spent the last year engaging with the piles of evidence indicating how the contemporary labour market in the UK for young people is becoming ever more challenging and unequal; a factor which completely out of the hands of a young person looking to get some experience and find economic independence. However, these young people were blaming themselves for their struggles.

The analytical process involved NVivo 12 software and Microsoft Excel. The process at the beginning as iterative and organic. Over time the process became smoother. For these findings on aspirations, it involved searching all those who had been asked a question about where they want to be in 12 months and what could help them achieve these goals, which was majority of the sample at the end of each interview (see appendix 4). I then copied the dialogue into word and colour coded certain words and phrases. Words such as 'motivation' and phrases such as 'it's up to me' were reappearing in the document. So, given this was the most numerous shared response I went back into NVivo and looked at the full transcripts for each young person in this category. Those who had more to say about aspirations and barriers were selected for further analysis. Once a type of response was established the next most numerous coding bracket would be analysed. In this case it was a counter narrative, 'I am not confident in reaching my aspirations because there are no jobs' for example.

3.6 My Preconceptions, Research Background and Values

As a qualitative researcher it is important to acknowledge and be transparent with myself and the reader about my character, where I come from both socially and politically before carrying out the research and to be aware of these inherent qualities throughout the research process (May and Perry, 2017 p.4). This will help to contextualise the macro and individualistic settings that lead up to the beginning of my research project, its subsequent design, and how it was carried out. Reflexivity, according to May and Perry (2017 p.4), is:

"A guard against […] hypodermic realism: that is, the assumption that there is an unproblematic relationship between us and the world, including social scientific practices and its products, which results in a valid and reliable representation of the world."

They also comment that reflexivity is a guard against the opposite, in the sense that nothing can be true because all knowledge is subjective. May and Perry (2017 p.2) posit that reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of intelligence and wisdom, as it gives space for an admission of error. We should be self-conscious enough to entertain the idea that we may have misrecognised an object, concept, or experience. There should be room for revision. Openness and doubt are the at the heart of good academic practice and are crucial elements particularly in my study, as it would be untrustworthy of me to blindly imply the participant narratives and my analysis to be taken as fact. As Berger (2015 p.221) notes:

"Reflexivity enhances the quality of the research by allowing researchers to ponder the ways in which who they are may both assist and hinder the process of co-constructing meanings, frees them to handle and present the data better, and consider its complex meanings and contribution to the understanding of social phenomena and of the process involved in knowledge production."

It is therefore vital for me to take a step back and reflect on how I got here and how my experiences have shaped me as researcher. I must self-reflect on my research design and findings to continuously question if I was reflecting the data rather than my own biases. Reflexivity is not a step in the research process to be passed, it is an iterative and constant component of quality qualitative research.

3.6.1 Biography

I grew up in a single parent household, but I would still consider my upbringing to be a relatively privileged one. I attended a state secondary school in Fife. This is where my interest in social inequalities sprouted. I am a very observant person, and I experienced a range of diverse social settings and groups during my high school years. I was in a rather unique position to have friends from both some of the lowest and highest socio-economic backgrounds, whilst only realising this retrospectively.

For instance, I played football for Kennoway FC (a deprived post-industrial town in West Fife) between the ages of 10-14 and contrasted my time there with the middle-class sensibilities of many people from my school. I was also surrounded by affluent students from the prestigious University of St. Andrews, which allowed me to be aware of performed class and cultural capital before I had read about it. At Kennoway FC, we would sometimes have to abandon training and run in to the dressing rooms to avoid pre-arranged gang fights on the pitches. On matchdays dads and coaches would scrap with opposition dads, coaches, or the referee. I remember learning about the intimate lives of my teammates, some of whom had no family support, some living with their grandparents who they were caring for on their own, so were forced to grow up a lot quicker than me. I would then come into school the next day and socialise with drama kids whose fathers were playwrights and listen to other classmates talk of their aspirations to become a politician. I used to think some of the boys from Kennoway may never have seen a play or have little interest in politics, and I questioned this deeply: why were these lives so different? This was before I was aware of the unequal structure of society beyond the confines of Fife.

I was not someone who read much during my school years and academically I was behind many of my peers. I did not really show much interest in schoolwork even though I was fascinated with some of the lessons in English, History, and Modern Studies. I drifted through school daydreaming. However, I had a burning interest in people and all the different lives that were intertwining in my increasing, diverse circle of friends and acquaintances. I was still unsure what sociology was. After my performance at Highers, which my parents and teachers were disappointed in, I decided to study social sciences because there was scope to choose what I wanted to focus on; I thought it would suit me and I liked writing essays. My inquisitive appetite would not be wetted fully until the final two years of my Undergraduate degree in Applied Social Sciences BA (Hons) at Robert Gordon University.

The match was lit, and I thought, how could I use my honed sociological imagination to make a real impact on the people around me? I felt policy was the perfect hybrid between the theoretical sociological understanding I had, and examining the real world, contemporary problems, and what to do about them. I was eager to specify and refine my new-found lust for knowledge. Thus, after focusing on a similar, smaller scale primary research project titled: *'Exploring and Understanding the Lived Experience of Young Jobseekers under Universal Credit'* for my MSc in Public and Urban Policy dissertation from the University of Glasgow (completed 2018), I was more informed than most about the kinds of structural barriers and shared experiences that young welfare claimants in the UK were encountering. It also meant I was somewhat familiar with the Welfare Conditionality study prior to working with the dataset myself, as this was heavily referenced in my master's thesis, and was part of the inspiration for my keen interest in this specific discourse.

From the outset of my PhD research, I was sympathetic towards those with restricted opportunities who were then stigmatised for their subsequent unemployment and underemployment in the mainstream media and political circles (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Due to personal experience, I was particularly cognisant about the pressures on young people to enter the labour market rapidly and the exclusion one feels from peer groups and society when one is out of work. I felt there was an augmented, top-down pressure on young people to demonstrate a strong desire to work and go out and find a

good job, during a time when quality employment opportunities were narrowing. I was in a privileged position in the sense that I had obtained a university degree and could draw upon family support. I experienced some spells of depression during relatively short periods of unemployment, and I had witnessed first-hand the devastating impacts of longer spells of unemployment had on the well-being of some close friends, who would also be considered privileged in the context of wider UK demographics. This made me fear for those who could not draw upon informal financial support or qualifications to help them through the struggle that is seeking secure employment as a young person in contemporary UK society.

I also felt this specific generation of young people, the one I belong to, have had unique experiences and untimely set of circumstances during our transitions to adulthood: a rapidly changing labour market, the exponential growth of technology and social media, the rise in de-standardised employment, and exclusionary housing markets. Yet, my mum would still instruct me to hand out CVs on the high street, as the high street was in collapse and tech industries boom, because *that is what they did in her day*. Growing up with two parents who could barely work a computer trying to tell you how the world of work functions, leads to a sense of frustration and despair many of my generation are all too familiar with. I felt a sense of helplessness and injustice at the lack of opportunities. Ultimately, these factors lead me to begin this journey in trying to capture the intimate insights into marginalised youth transitions in the UK, during a time of heightened precarity and punitive welfare design, and all the struggles and achievements that come with it.

I am no more a neutral researcher than any other – I come with my own philosophies and values which have been shaped by my upbringing, and in later years, my reading and studies. When it comes to power and the brandishing of marginalised communities, I am motivated to challenge received wisdom and political rhetoric. These personal philosophical and political backgrounds are what makes research in social policy and sociology so interesting and vibrant. To try and disguise the subjective make-up of the researcher would be both disingenuous and damaging to a qualitative project. Each participant and researcher from the original project came with their own specific set of attitudes and values, and this is what fosters quality, in-depth discussion and analysis.

I then come with my own background as an independent secondary researcher and therefore my own stamp will be inseparable from each step of the research design of my project.

This discourse is important to recognise and share, and it should be made clear that I will not allow these inherent biases to dictate the direction of this research project. It will have an unconscious impact, but I have ensured from the start I want to let the data speak for itself and illuminate the narratives of the young people from their perspective. To cherry pick would be disrespectful to the young people who gave up their time for the original project and to the academic community. However, with the amount of data available to me and the purpose of the project being primarily to encapsulate nuanced lived experience, the need to be selective to some extent, with justification, is apparent because it is not possible to include everything.

3.7 Limitations

One possible limitation of the study is the potential for socially desirable responses from young people. Social desirability bias is a problem for almost all qualitative research, however, may be particularly relevant here. The power dynamic between the researcher and the young person in these interviews is particularly pronounced, given the age and status of both the young person and the typically older academic. The young people may have favoured, or felt pressured, to express their narratives and attitudes in line with the policy context. Given their relatively low SES, the perceived esteem or influence of the researchers', could influence the young people to understand professing to be abide by, and endorse, the principles of conditionality to benefit them in some way. They may have thought a connection between the researchers and the practitioners (Jobcentre Plus advisors) and thus, concurring with the policy rhetoric could show them in a positive light to authoritative figures, such as the Jobcentre advisors and researchers. However, the original research team have made every precaution possible to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses through building rapport, yet it is not possible to wholly eradicate social desirability bias.

Furthermore, although I have recontextualised existing data to answer new research questions there are potential limitations to this. For instance, the original project was not designed or tailored to the aims of my project. The types of questions asked, and themes explored in the interviews were not fitted to this research project, hence there are certain restrictions on what one can explore as a secondary researcher. Sometimes there was no data on the kinds of questions this project is interested in regarding youth and aspirations, and other times there was a lack of focus on these themes. This could inhibit the fullness or amount of data available for analysis in terms of youth-centric and aspirational themes.

However, this could also be perceived as a strength of secondary analysis. The questions that I am asking of the data and the themes important to my study were not a key focus of the original study and interviewers were interested in other aspects. Therefore, the aspects of the data I am interested in arise more naturally and largely without interviewer pressure. Bornat (2003) also argues this is a strength of secondary analysis, because by recontextualising existing data to look for something the original researcher(s) were not looking for, the secondary researcher is seeking essentially narratives or themes that are evident because the participant deemed said theme to be important to them. They are spontaneously raising the issue without prompt. Thus, reducing the opportunity for interviewer bias in the findings.

3.8 Conclusions

This chapter has detailed firstly, the dataset I have been working with. The fifty-six young people (aged 16-25) from the Welfare Conditionality Project (2013-2018), where transcripts were spread across three waves and 20 of the 56 completed all three waves of semi-structured interviews. Secondly, my methodological approach of qualitative, secondary, longitudinal analysis (QSLA) and defence of adopting this approach to explore marginalised young people's experiences of conditionality and their aspirations over time. I also include some of the challenges, distance from the original data collection, and benefits, maximising the potential richness of primary research through the ability to generate fresh insights into a subset of participants from a secondary dataset, of this relatively novel methodology. Thirdly, my theoretical

background is discussed to situate my findings in the scholarly sphere of work that has come before this project that has influenced my research design and analysis. This includes the contemporary cultural significance of concepts such as self-help and positive mindset, and the contemporary policy pedagogy of setting out to bolster the aspirations and shape the behavioural traits of disadvantaged youths in order to mitigate the attainment gap and unequal labour market outcomes across SES.

Fourthly, the chapter highlights my social and academic background. I understand the importance to reflect on how my relatively privileged experiences throughout my adolescent years have shaped me as a person and therefore my research approach and style. This is important for me to be aware of how my inherent biases influence my research and findings, and for the reader to be aware of where I have come from, and my beliefs: individuals are constrained by their social environment to a large extent, and my political attitudes: giving voice to marginalised identities can reduce social inequalities, before reading the findings of my analysis. Finally, the process and decisions I made to familiarise myself with the secondary data are summarised. I am transparent about the approaches I adopted to get to know the participants, composing participant profiles, and my coding process, why I decided to focus on the young people's future aspirations as a gateway to understanding their narratives, which guided the identification of themes and eventual findings.

Chapter 4 - Employment Aspirations: Internalised Individualism

Internalised individualism: *"It's down to my motivation. There's nothing really going to stop me at all."* (Mia, 19, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three findings chapters. It will explore the employment experiences, attitudes, and aspirations of a cohort of young people in receipt of social security, typically in the form of JSA and Housing Benefit or, in some cases, UC. The chapter will begin by outlining one key finding from the QSA data analysis. This finding being: the individualised conceptualisations of social ills, such as un/underemployment, are broadly reflected in, and embodied by, the narratives articulated by this cohort of young people. The chapter will focus on four participants stories in-depth, all of whom explicitly adopt an individualised, behaviourist understanding of their own, and others, lack of secure employment. There were, however, a few young people who reject this individualised narrative (see appendix 3). The attitudes and beliefs of the young people in the counter narrative tend to favour the scholarly understandings of the structural barriers faced in contemporary youth school-to-work transitions. The chapter will then conclude by tying together the themes explored throughout and summarising potential reasons for, and impacts of, the prevalence in the adoption of behaviourist understandings of insecurity by this group of young people.

4.1.1 Key Finding

The young people in this study predominantly articulated a belief that their employment goals for the next year would be achieved. Confidence in meeting aspirations tended to be incumbent on a belief that intrinsic motivation and determination would lead to a secure future (see appendix 4 for exact numbers). In the following section, the narratives of four participants will be explored in-depth to illuminate the nuanced nature

of worklessness being perceived as a mindset, by a group of young jobseekers. I have termed this concept, *internalised individualism*. This is the assimilation of young people's identities with the idealised job seeking subject – one which adopts the ideology that securing stable employment is a matter of individual ambition, and to demonstrate resolute self-belief and motivation will necessarily lead to elevated employment opportunities and outcomes. An embedded principle of welfare conditionality is that the behaviour and the psyche of workless populations must be 'fixed' through intrusive practices, to motivate claimants and instil the intangible individual qualities those in professional roles apparently enjoy (Fletcher and Wright, 2018).

The notion that embodying key behavioural traits associated with employability and maintaining a positive mindset can offset social inequalities and growing labour market precarity is one that is nurtured through punitive welfare designs (Crisp and Powell, 2017) and encompasses the broader, ubiquitous fixation with self-help, apparent in advanced contemporary societies (Ehrenreich, 2009 p.56). These young people are conditioned to believe that they must continually prove they deserve fundamental support, such as housing and basic income. To behave appropriately, and abide by the prescribed rules, is positioned as essential to realise an 'improved self' and thus a more secure future. Some of these young people inevitably internalise this message and therefore accept the behaviourist design, even when articulating the distress caused by the behavioural conditionality they experience. There are also evident discrepancies between the supposed outcomes the self-improvement discourse espoused by labour activation polices promises, and the employment outcomes of the young people who buy into this belief system. They become largely constrained from the material rewards of adopting the endorsed behavioural ideology, such as stable employment.

Redman (2021) is one of the few scholars to focus specifically on the subjective accounts of young social security recipients in the UK. Drawing on longitudinal interviews with 15 young men, Redman (2021) argues that young claimants enact forms of agency to bend the official policy implementation to meet their own needs and 'survive' the hostile practices of welfare conditionality. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that, although agency is present among young claimants, they are

coerced to conform to the optimistic and obedient job-seeking subject, one which buys into the notion that secure employment is on the horizon with the 'right' attitudes. Agency among these young claimants is enacted in different ways than Redman (2021) and Whelan (2021) suggest. Other international evidence from Parsell et al (2020) also argues that those in receipt of state support tend to articulate a motivation to enter paid work but are aware of the structural barriers to work they face. The findings form this thesis suggest young people are more likely to internalise the self-improvement discourse and downplay broader structural inequalities.

This chapter argues that this individualised perception has permeated the psyche of young people who encounter welfare conditionality. The young people from this cohort tend to self-blame even when they are repeatedly excluded from secure employment opportunities. They adopt language popularised by positive psychology, reiterating aphorisms such as 'it is up to you' and 'nothing can stop me'. There is a meeting here between broader trends in self-help culture and welfare conditionality, where these young people are swept up in a coalescence of trends that strengthen individualism and are instructed to understand their un/underemployment as something to be corrected within themselves. They are conditioned to believe that if they embody the traits which those who succeed in the labour market apparently display, such as motivation, belief, and resilience, they too could realise valorised employment. The young people buy into this mantra and are deliberately obfuscated from the structural barriers they face.

The chapter will now introduce four in-depth narratives from young people. Each of them in unique ways understood their employment status and aspirations to impinge upon individual traits and attitudes. Firstly, Freya's narrative will be explored, then Azi's narrative will be followed by Callum's and then Carla's, to emphasise not only prevalence of this self-framing of worklessness among this cohort, but also the strength of the beliefs in self-actualisation and willpower as central to securing future employment.

4.2 Participant Narratives

4.2.1 Freya

Freya's narrative provides a sense of the context in which these forms of self-actualised, aspirational youth emerge. At the time of first interview Freya was 23, actively looking for work and living by herself in socially rented housing in Inverness. She has been living in the same accommodation for roughly five years. Freya was not in paid work at the time, but she was doing unpaid care work and other work experience. She enjoyed doing these activities and wanted to enhance her CV and skills. Freya was eager to tie down a career and was confident she would do so:

"So, I needed to work out what I wanted to do and what my strengths were […] my dad helped me to see my strengths and what I'm good at, and I know that I'm good at hairdressing, and that's my career, that's my career goal. I want to do better than I am. I really want to do better. I feel that I can because I want to." (Freya, 23, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Inverness, 2014)

This quote gives us a sense of Freya's approach and values. She believes she needs to fit the mould of the young professional by improving herself and locating her calling. Freya has fully internalised the notion of bettering oneself through self-actualisation and 'doing whatever it takes' to realise greater security in the future. This framing has been shaped by recent UK youth policy interventions which seek to address the uneven distribution of employment opportunities and outcomes across the SES, by targeting grand and exceptional, but often unrealistic, goals for marginalised communities (Chapman, 2018 p.141).

Policy aims of the multiple youth employability initiatives, often partly or fully funded by private or third sector organisations, tend to be centred around this notion of long-range social mobility (Lawler and Payne, 2018 p.6). Thus, individual 'success' stories of 'bright and talented' deprived young people that go on to achieve high status occupations and economic security through engagement with a specific programme are championed (Chapman, 2018 p. 141). In reality, the majority of the young people who engaged with a specific programme realise immobile trajectories (*ibid*). There appears

to be a lack of acceptance that *"worthy but dull"* (*ibid*) outcomes such as empowering young people to take more control over their lives are valuable. Or that these goals do not inspire policymakers, funders, or young people. Instead, overly ambitious targets are set for all the young people who engage with such programmes, who tend to face significant barriers to secure employment and are set up to fail. Now, to return to Freya's narrative. Here, she is talking about the 35 hour a week job search, deemed unrealistic by many other participants:

"Yes. I think, to be honest, it's a tiny amount. It really is a tiny amount. It may seem a lot, but if you think about it there's only 24 hours in a day, so if you look at it that way it's like you've got plenty of time. Do you know what I mean? You've got to do a minimum of 35 hours a week, otherwise I think you're probably sanctioned. I've never been sanctioned on Universal Credit. Fingers crossed it doesn't happen. I really hope it doesn't happen."

Freya has taken on board intensified conditionality and accepts intrusive behavioural regulation. However, her enthusiasm for behavioural conditionality appears to be linked to this notion of embodying the 'ideal' job seeking subject, one which accepts that stable employment is lying in wait if one demonstrates the 'right' attitudes and approach. Freya aligns herself with the confident, entrepreneurial workaholic revered within contemporary culture (Allen and Finn, 2023). Her narrative foreshadows the 'Girlboss'[5] trend which has become popularised on social media, epitomised by the infamous comments of reality TV star turned entrepreneur, Molly Mae, who said in an interview for the Diary of a CEO podcast in 2021, *"we all have the same 24 hours in a day […] if you want it, you can achieve it"*. This psychological interpretation of unemployment is internalised strongly by Freya, as she implies that the only thing holding her back is herself:

"But I think it's more maybe a psychological thing with me, because I need to let go of the past and move forward. I think that's what I need to do, and I think part of it is like there's a job and it's like, 'Oh, waiting' [waiting tables at a restaurant]. I want to do waiting, I'm

[5] A 'movement' spreading through popular culture, centred around empowering neoliberal feminist selfhood. An aspirational and stoic playbook for millennial females who seek not only economic independence but exponential wealth accumulation. As Martin Fradley (2022 p. 15) puts it: *"a postfeminist culture which celebrates positivity, individual agency and material success while blithely derogating anxiety, unhappiness and personal "failure."*

interested in it, you know? Then another part of me says, 'Oh, what if you break the tray, or what if you fall over or something?' Stupid little things like that. It's the Devil's voice."

Her main aspiration for the coming year is to secure a job, a goal she shares with the vast majority of the young people from the study. She is asked what could help make it more likely that she will realise her employment aspirations:

"Being prepared. Doing everything that I can in order to prepare, from having a decent meal to enough sleep, hydrated, paperwork and all the rest of it. Well, preparation for myself, with college I mean, and being dedicated as well to stay on that path of hard work and keep on going. Even when you feel down and low and that, you've still got to keep on going. Sometimes it's better when you're feeling low to just take a wee bit of time out to recover and that, so that you can do a good job, an even better job; that's what I find sometimes in life."

Freya's psychological framing is central to her narrative. We can imagine her scrutinising her own behaviour and character if she were to fall short of her employment aspirations. Services like the Jobcentre Plus (Friedli and Stearn, 2015), but also the contemporary cultural magnetism toward the power of positive thinking and intrinsic motivation across a range of institutions (Ehrenreich, 2009 p. 2), present Freya with a lure of quality employment and a brighter future, all she has to do is believe, adopt the 'right' behaviours, and endeavour without relent. The evidence suggests youth transitions in contemporary Britain have been re-structured to the point where it has become increasingly difficult for young people to realise secure employment pathways, even for those who are highly qualified and motivated (Furlong et al. 2017). Hence, contemporary UK youth policy encourages young people from working-class backgrounds to assimilate middle-class values and strive for exponential self-improvement and long-rage social mobility (Vassallo, 2020) through replicating the isolated individual cases of those who came from working-class backgrounds but managed to realise a middle-class adulthood.

Wave B

A year later in 2016, Freya is interviewed for a second time and her beliefs in individualism have strengthened. During the past year, she has been diagnosed with

borderline personality disorder and she remarks having a degrading experience at work; she was cleaning toilets at a supermarket for an outsourced company and her manager was belittling her. Freya is not employed at the time of Wave B interview. She demonstrates remarkable resilience given all the challenges she faces and has bought into the idea that those who claim state support require paternalistic interventions to help motivate them seek employment. Here she is discussing her thoughts on sanctions:

"I think sanctions is a good thing because, sort of, because it does help people sort of remain focused, that they know they need to provide for themselves and do the work that they need to do in order to achieve that." (Freya, Wave B, 24, White British, Jobseeker, Inverness, 2016)

When she was asked if she felt she was in a better place twelve months on from her Wave A interview, she responds:

"*I'm learning the importance of money, managing money. How important it is to pay your rent, and your debts and your bills, and you know, to be self-reliant. So yes, better and I feel better for it. Unfortunately, because of my last job it's made me feel - kind of lost confidence. But what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."*

Again, we get a sense of the embodied resilient post-Fordist worker. Setbacks are reframed as character building and being self-sufficient is the primary goal. Many of these young people view the fact that they claim state support positions as a burden to society or that they are doing something morally wrong. This could be the lived impact of a gradual shift in attitudes and values, expressed by a cohort of young people who have no recollection and limited understanding of secure welfare systems.

Also, for their generation, the prioritisation of individualism over collectivism from a young age was more pronounced than previous generations (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.14). What special qualities does one possess? How does one stand out in an application process? These are questions which have been at the centre of schooling (Reay, 2020) and the socialisation of recent generations of young people. External factors, such as insecure labour markets and socio-economic inequalities become less important when one's ability to navigate contemporary labour and housing markets is

perceived as largely down to meritocratic hierarchies or the power of self-belief. Freya offers her aspirations for the next year, again notice how her own ability to stimulate improved well-being or control negative thoughts is central to her ability to procure full-time work:

"Well, I want to be working full-time, and I want to have more of an idea how to help and control my emotions, and my feelings and my general mental wellbeing. That's going to take time so I have to be patient, so it might not, it probably won't happen in 12 months, but I feel that it will get better. But I don't think it will ever be perfect because it just won't. But I want eventually to be working full-time. And as a minimum working part-time. Being more self-reliant, like not relying on benefits for money."

Something to note here is that there is possibly some participant bias at play, where the young people are relaying what they deem to be socially desirable responses to interviewers. For instance, Freya may have been individualising her experiences and strategies for success because she felt it would reflect favourably on her in the eyes of the interviewer or could even in some way benefit her prospects and relationship with state services. This should be acknowledged as an unavoidable limitation of this research. However, there are enough accounts of this conceptualisation that social desirability bias cannot explain the full spectrum.

To further this discussion, we will focus on three more participant narratives in detail to get a sense of how this psychological understanding and blaming the individual for low income could represent a generational perspective. They are a group of millennials, who have been fed this philosophy from institutions for their entire life and through mechanisms more intrusive than previous generations (Littler, 2018 p. 49). The intensification of welfare conditionality is symptomatic of this behaviourist approach and because all these young people have direct experience with this system, they are particularly at risk of adopting individualised understandings of labour market security.

4.2.2 Azi

At Wave A, Azi was living with his brother in Peterborough after moving to the UK from Nigeria the previous year. Although officially it was not possible to claim JSA

whilst being in full-time education at the time, according to the transcripts Azi was in receipt of JSA despite studying business full-time at a local college. Azi found it challenging when he first arrived in the UK, to understand the system and how to navigate welfare conditionality. However, a year on and he was pleased with the support he was receiving from the Jobcentre and had a good relationship with his work coach.

Azi talks of going over and above the job search requirements, despite being in full-time education, just to prove to his advisor how motivated he is to comply and to find work. He emphasises throughout the importance of positive mindset and individual psychological management are to him and his capacity to realise his lofty employment aspirations. Here are Azi's aspirations at Wave A, notice how confident he is and the psychologising of the barriers he perceives to his future employment:

Azi

"This time next year I hope I've got in a job already, I'm hoping […] I should have got a good job and again, adhered to my business plan exactly, I pray that my business plan should be come into existence. So yes, that's what I'm hoping." (Azi, 19, Wave A, Jobseeker, Black Nigerian, Peterborough, 2014)

Interviewer

"Do you have any barriers in your way of getting your aspirations and your dreams? Is there anything holding you back or any obstacles?"

Azi

"Yes, I would say I am sort of a negative thinker. I used to think I can't do this, I can't achieve this, I can't make it. Which I could."

Drawing on work by Friedli and Stearn (2015), Azi's narrative can be contextualised within existing research. The behavioural turn inherent within recent UK welfare reforms can be seen playing out in the psyche and values articulated by the young people from this cohort, and more strongly in Azi's case. He, along with motivational encouragement he has received from his support worker and tutor at university, has transitioned from a non-believer into a believer. This develops Gill and Ograd's (2017)

work on ‘confidence culture’, whereby traditionally marginalised identities in the labour market are being trained not so much in terms of skills for the labour market, but in terms acquiring and honing the power of self-esteem as means to secure valorised employment. In the sense Azi demonstrates unwavering belief in realising his employment aspirations and he trusts this change in mentality will propel him to realise economic stability. For Azi, the key components to reaching employment aspirations are internal.

Wave B

The following year Azi is completing his college course. He has had some temporary paid work and other work experience since Wave A. His brother had moved away so it was now up to Azi to get by independently and pay the rent. He worked in a warehouse during the Christmas period, but he did not meet his productivity target, so he was made redundant. He discusses how the paid work affected his attendance and performance at college because he was working long hours and how he managed this challenge:

“I think I just endured it; I had the endurance, I had that strength to just handle it because if I say I'm going to quit along the line, my rent just reminds me that I've got a debt of £1000 to pay for my rent.” (Azi, 20, Wave B, Jobseeker, Black Nigerian, Peterborough, 2016)

Azi embodies the idealised post-Fordist worker (Farrugia, 2019), one who endeavours through insecure and low-wage labour driven by anxiety and determination to pay increasingly larger portions of their wage on rent. This idea of enduring the competing demands of his labour and his study were also indicative of Azi’s internalised individualism. He is committed to overcoming economic challenges, such as rent arrears, by being mentally resilient. This is something Davidson and Carlin (2019) have discussed, the idea of youth-focused social policies seeking to stimulate resilience among disadvantaged young people to foster individual acceptance of adversity, rather than seeking to address wider social inequalities. Reflecting on his sanction experience, Azi is one of the few from the study to suggest their own sanction experience had a positive impact. He adopts a strong notion of self-responsibility and suggests that young people who reflect on their sanctions internally, as he did, will learn and benefit long-term from financial punishment:

"So, I think it changes behaviours more in a positive manner to make you more active. Let me say some people, once they're sanctioned they're like, 'Oh, I'm sanctioned. This Jobcentre don't know what they're doing. Why did they sanction me? They're too mean' and all that, but they didn't think back, 'oh, what have I done wrong? Let me look at my own side to see why they sanctioned me', that kind of thing."

This understanding of his own sanction experience gives us insight into how he perceives the system and his role in the system. He is committed to the system, which he perceives to have his best interests at heart. Furthermore, another participant, Tegan, emphasises this perception within the cohort when she is asked whether being evicted from one's tenancy for non-compliance with conditional employment support is a positive measure for young people:

Interviewer

"In those cases, when someone's not doing what they're supposed to at the Jobcentre, or they're not doing what they're supposed to in the housing, and they get sanctioned or they get chucked out of their house, do you think ultimately the fact that that happens helps them or harms them?"

Tegan

"Well from my point of view people, some people will see it as a, like getting sort of put down. But really, I think if they sat down to speak to somebody about it, they would probably see the good - like not a good side to it but actually see what they've done wrong to obviously get chucked out or whatever. Or lose their benefits. Because it's simple, straight tasks that they're asking you to do. It's nothing." (Tegan, 21, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

Azi and Tegan are accepting even of the punitive components of behavioural conditionality. They both perceive the system to be working for the benefit of young claimants. The extent to which the young people regurgitate the welfare myths and side with the effectiveness of conditionality is difficult to explain. There is a possible internalisation of the hegemonic stigmatisation of low-income and workless populations (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Or the young people align with the policy framework because they assume the validity of high-status policymakers to

design effective and evidence-based policies. Or there is a power imbalance where they feel pressure to endorse the policy principles, as they believe it will reflect kindly on them in the eyes of the state or the interviewer. Azi's aspirations are to go to university in the next year. His sights are set on continuing his education and completing a Batchelor degree in business studies:

"Hopefully I should be in my university and should be trying to get my degree."

Interviewer
"Is there anything standing in your way of achieving your goals?"

Azi
"Apart from financial issues I have sometimes, nothing else; it's fine, no, because that's the only challenge I face."

Azi is excited to move away from Peterborough and begin a new life as a university student. He wants to find part-time work when he starts his degree because he understands his only barrier to completing university are his financial constraints, something he considers he must overcome himself.

Wave C

Azi has now finished his college course and is still set on going to university. He has been working full-time at a hardware store for over a year now and is still trying to work out how he will afford the degree he is eager to pursue. He again adopts this individualised, human capital and optimistic outlook towards his decision to pursue higher education. He believes his degree will inevitably lead to expansive employment opportunities; another myth recent generations of young people are encouraged to assume (Chesters and Wyn, 2019). Azi details his reasoning behind pursuing an undergraduate degree in business and marketing:

"I was planning to do an apprenticeship, and I just thought that if I have a degree, I could be able to work anywhere, any company and stuff like that, so I was thinking it's worth me

going to uni. I'll have a degree and no doubt I can, obviously, get employment anywhere, really." (Azi, 21, Wave C, Jobseeker, Black Nigerian, Peterborough, 2017)

Azi has consistently internalised the individualised model for progress and success in the labour market. He understands that if he believes and strives, future valorised employment will materialise. However, he is yet to realise his aspirations of entering an undergraduate degree and then valorised employment. Azi, like Freya, has been somewhat betrayed by internalised individualism, as a university degree appears out of reach due to lack of financial support. There are certainly aspects of psychological traits that shape labour market trajectories, such as confidence and motivation. However, evidence suggests there is only so far mindset and investment in the self can take those who face multiple structural barriers (O'Brien et al. 2016; Abrahams, 2017). Given Azi is an immigrant and a young black male, his intersectional disadvantages are greater when compared with the white males from the study in terms of employment outcomes (UK Government, 2021). Unfortunately, there is no data to indicate if Azi made it to university or completed the degree, or then secured valorised employment.

However, Azi's commitment to moving up the socio-economic ladder through the mechanism for higher education is strong and consistent. As is the case with the other young people in the cohort, internalised individualism largely failed to deliver the outcomes the policy framework and the young people professed it would. The promise of social mobility through education or through abiding by the claimant commitment is targeted at young people through contemporary policy design (Reay, 2021). The possibility of long-range social mobility is positioned to young people with restricted opportunities as the noble pursuit of any well-meaning citizen (ibid). It creates an individual struggle for the huge number of disadvantaged young people in the UK and pits them against one another for the limited number of places on the upward socially mobile conveyor belt.

Young people, such as Azi, buy into the idea of a meritocracy but most fail to match the employment outcomes of their more affluent peers. This advances evidence from (García-Sierra, 2023) who demonstrated that firm beliefs in meritocratic ideals, among teenagers in Germany of low SES, increased the likelihood of realising precarious work

situations later-in-life and decreases the chances of being in full-time employment. Even the very premise of increasing social mobility among traditionally excluded groups of young people in the UK is called into question by scholars such as Reay (2013) and Folkes (2021). Social mobility drags up a few working-class young people away from their communities and can isolate them in their newfound social class. It can be a very turbulent and traumatic transition for young people which does not necessarily lead to increased individual well-being.

4.2.3 Callum

At the time of first interview in 2014, Callum was 18 years old and living alone in a 'training flat' in Edinburgh. A training flat is a form of supported social housing where those seeking permanent accommodation are housed in temporary units assessed over a period, and potentially moved into more independent and secure living arrangements when deemed *ready* by support staff. Callum had recently lost his job as a Kitchen Porter in a restaurant, he explains what happened:

"It was full time. It was originally meant to be part time but because I was putting the effort in and stuff, they moved me to full time. The fact that [it did not work out was because] I couldn't get enough money to get to work every single morning. I was up, I was ready, but I never had the money. One time I [could not make it to work because I could not afford the bus fare] the manager just went, 'No' because he couldn't risk it." (Callum, 18, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

From the outset Callum highlights that 'putting the effort in' is important to him but external factors, such as not having enough money to commute to work, were holding back his ability to progress in the labour market. There are evident barriers which Callum faces in trying to secure stable employment, given he is relying on state support whilst simultaneously trying to realise secure housing, and transitioning to adulthood during a time of heightened precarity (Furlong et al. 2017, p.8). However, these barriers are disguised from Callum through regimes of welfare conditionality, even though he explicitly outlines that in his previous work, he was motivated but lacked the finances to maintain low-wage employment.

Later it will become clear that Callum remains committed to the belief that individualism and motivation can overcome these structural inequalities. In one sense, Callum would not perceive his lack of money for bus travel as a structural barrier because in this framing Callum would suggest it is up to him to ensure he has enough funds to maintain employment. This is one of the embedded principles within welfare conditionality and other contemporary interventions to address youth unemployment: work ethic, motivation, and self-belief on an individual level are enough to enable young people to realise secure futures. Inevitably, young people begin to internalise this rhetoric, even when their lived experience does not match up with this pervasive framing. Despite his recent struggles, Callum remains confident of finding another job and is not selective about the type of employment.

Callum has been claiming JSA on and off for almost two years. He has never been sanctioned and he is in a perpetual state of fear about doing the 'wrong' thing and losing his income or his tenancy. Like Azi, he talks about going over and above the claimant commitment just to make sure nothing will be taken away from him. It is argued this is what intensified conditionality was designed to breed (Flint, 2019); a particularly frightened precariat who are coerced into accepting welfare provision mirroring a competitive corporate environment. However, instead of demonstrating worthiness for a promotion by going 'the extra mile', these young people are doing so in return for necessities. Given their age, socio-economic background, and the period they have grown up in, these young people have been repeatedly exposed to the welfare myths of *'strivers and skivers'* (Valentine and Harris, 2014) to create a *'anti-welfare commonsense'* (Jensen, 2014). Thus, these messages have become ingrained in the psyche of this cohort of young people. The following dialogue from Callum encapsulates the lived reality of the punitive design:

Interviewer

"So, you're also on Jobseeker's Allowance, so what is it that you have to do to keep receiving your benefits on that?"

Callum

"Searching jobs; there was a claimant commitment, so I follow that, and I even do more just to keep my benefits and stuff. I'm trying to look for more work experience just now just to make sure my benefits are in place."

Interviewer

"Have you ever had any problems with it? Have you ever been sanctioned, for instance?"

Callum

"I've never been sanctioned because I've always tried my hardest to keep my benefits in place. I would hate [to be] sanctioned because that would put not only the way I live and stuff out the window, but that would put my tenancy at risk. I had a panic attack outside the Jobcentre because there was a certain worker - no names will be said - but yes, I do feel a bit uptight when I go to see her and stuff."

We begin to see Callum's well-being has been negatively impacted by the fear of sanctions and despite his ardent commitment to following the rules, he is yet to reap anything from his hard work. His employment prospects are stationary and this was indicative of many young people in this cohort. Even when young people abide by the rules, say all the "right things" and give their all to *move up,* as they have been instructed to do (Chapman, 2018 p.141), secure employment and moving off state support often fails to materialise. In most cases, such as Callum's, the young people dare not shift blame and articulate unwavering support for the power of optimism and hard work, even when they suggest they have been trying their best and their employment aspirations continue to be out-of-reach. Callum is then asked about how he perceives the support he receives form the Jobcentre, to which he replies:

"They are supportive, they really are, they've got computers downstairs now that you can job search on at any time. Yes, they'll let you know if there are any upcoming things and anything when you go and see your advisor and stuff and it's pretty good."

Again, we get this sense of paradox. Callum is sometimes having panic attacks because of the anxiety he feels when going for his meetings at the Jobcentre, yet he stands up for the support and conditional design he interacts with. There is an acceptance that he is to blame for his worklessness, and it is only him that can drag himself up to full-time employment. From Callum's perspective, the Jobcentre have done their part because

they provide computers he can access. He is then asked how important sanctions are in terms of him achieving his goals:

"So, you've got to keep that even balance of it because you can't let this place get on top of you like, 'Oh, I'm never getting chucked out' [of his training flat] kind of thing because you've always got to think, am I doing the rules right? You've got to just bring yourself back down and don't get too big-headed about it. With the Jobcentre you've got to boost yourself up more and then you've just got to think, yes, I'm getting paid because I've done the right things. I've done plenty of job search; they shouldn't complain because I'm doing everything right and I'm following the set rules."

This represents an interesting paradox which appears sporadically throughout the interview transcripts within the sample. Conditionality is often seen as an essential pre-requisite, for 'other' claimants (Fletcher and Redman, 2022a). These young people are conditioned to believe that they must continually prove they deserve fundamental support, such as housing and basic income, and that to behave appropriately and abide by the prescribed rules are essential to realise a more secure future. Some of these young people inevitably internalise this message and therefore, on the surface support conditionality, even when articulating the distress caused by sanctions, or the fear of. When discussing employment aspirations, the young people tend to offer behaviourist strategies for their future success. Hence, this analysis suggests if desired employment outcomes fail to materialise, these young people will look to themselves, *'how can I improve myself?'* For instance, rather than look to failings in the system. Callum's aspirations at the end of his Wave A interview are highlighted in this exchange:

Callum

"A job, basically. That's it; just a job."

Interviewer

"I think you said earlier that you were quite hopeful that you would get a job quite soon?"

Callum

"Yes."

Interviewer

"So why is that? Is that just because you're finding stuff out there that suits you and…"

Callum

"Because I'm trying to keep myself in this mental state of, I will find a job and I will look for it."

This last quote from Callum is key. He is confident about finding a job because he is keeping himself in the "mental state" that it will happen. This behaviourist, psychological conceptualisation of pathways to employment is so pertinent for Callum. Friedli and Stearn (2015) highlight the growing psychological component of welfare provision in the UK. Boland and Griffin (2022) talk of an almost religious aspect, wherein strategies to encourage engagement with the labour market for young unemployed persons, target 'healing' the corrupt soul or the damaged mind of workless individuals. Callum has internalised these strategies and perceives his 'positive mindset' as the key driver to his redemption through paid employment.

It is difficult to discern precisely how individualised responses to labour market barriers materialise. We can only speculatively interpret whether it is shaped through interaction with an education system centred around individualism, or a conditional welfare system, or if it is a desired coping mechanism for young people with restricted opportunities. This research is trying to understand how these internalised behaviourist conceptions of employment impact young people over time.

Wave B

When the study catches up with Callum a year later in 2015, he became less positive about his circumstances and his future. He remains out of work and has moved from JSA to ESA (support group) [6] because his mental health had deteriorated significantly. He had lost some of the drive he had at Wave A to find work. The wearing impact of unemployment and welfare conditionality over time has taken its toll on Callum:

[6] The ESA Support Group is type of benefit provided for those, upon completion of a work capability assessment, who have been deemed to have such severe health problems that it is unreasonable for the DWP to expect them to be able to work or look for work (DWP, 2010).

"I've actually been assessed, I tried to take my life a few times. It was just being on my own and stuff. When you're in here, it doesn't really help. I've tried to get it out my head and that but sometimes it's just, I prefer to be here on my own." (Callum, 19, Wave B, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2015).

Interviewer

"Is it a bit of a relief to be off the JSA and have that pressure off you in a way?"

Callum

"I still don't feel satisfied enough because I know, I want to work, but I just completely lost the motivation for it. I just need to find something that will give me that oomph to do it again."

In his Wave B interview Callum was dejected in many ways. His positivity about his living arrangements and his future had faded. However, Callum still longed for a brighter future for himself but seemed despondent about the chances of employment aspirations materialising because of his lack of educational attainment:

"I've got a lot of things I want to do. I want to go to college and stuff but I've no idea how to do it. I've had college interviews and that before, but I've always been put on a waiting list because it's always been the second interviews that I've gone for, so it's always been the waiting list for me."

Callum's aspirations in Wave B are no longer employment-related and are more focused on family. Him and his partner had a baby on the way, and he was looking to find somewhere they could all live together:

"This time next year, the little one will have been born and stuff. I don't think I'm going to be in my next tenancy for long because I want to try and get a two-bedroom."

Despite Callum's desire to pin down secure work at Wave A, his employment prospects and aspirations had regressed a year later. Callum's mental health had worsened to the point he no longer felt employment was a realistic goal for him in the next year. This appears to be related to the notion that a setback, such as not being able to hold down a

job, move into permanent housing or move off state support for a prolonged period, from Callum's perspective represents a character flaw. Thus, Callum could begin to believe he is not suited for the contemporary labour market and does not possess the right attributes despite him being motivated to procure stable employment, without the consideration that quality job opportunities are considerably limited for Callum's generation (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Callum has internalised the behaviourist understanding of difficulties in the youth labour market and committed to the motivation and mindset discourse. However, more than a year on he is further away from full-time employment. The chapter will now introduce Calra, who's narrative and understanding of her situation are aligned with Callum's narrative.

4.2.4 Carla

In 2014, Carla, a 23-year-old jobseeker from Peterborough, took part in the Wave A interview. Carla was one of the few young people from the study to be living in privately rented accommodation. However, at the time of first interview Carla was not in paid work but was in training and had been accepted to start a caring job in the coming months. She is receiving housing benefit and JSA. Carla is eager to find a full-time job and is adamant it must be full-time, having accepted a part-time role in the past led to financial troubles:

"Yes, I'm pretty sure [the Jobcentre advisor said] I can't refuse any employment. And I said to them, 'Well, if I get a job I want it to be full-time, because I've got my house to pay for. I've got my bills to pay for. If I go for a part-time job I'm just going to be no better than I was a few years ago when I got in so much debt because I got a job.' And that really did me over, that did." (Carla, 23, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Peterborough, 2014)

Carla is more nuanced about her views on conditionality and sanctions than the other young people who internalised individualism. When Carla is asked about how her sanction affected her, she replies:

"I don't know. It worsened the situation at the time, but I think it's made me a lot wiser now, to see what they really do to you, and they really won't pay you or help you or do anything to help you if you're struggling. And you've just got to help yourself, basically."

Interviewer

"It's kind of changed your perception and your attitude a little bit."

Carla

"Yes. You have to grow up now. Nobody's going to help you. You have to do it for yourself."

This dialogue suggests that Carla has accepted the conditional system she relies on and is learning how to adapt to the demands, even if she does not necessarily think it is how things should be done. "You have to do it for yourself" is the mantra of contemporary social security in the UK and many of the young people in this study are either reluctantly or wilfully buying into this form of governance. Carla's phrase, "you have to grow up now" indicating, that for her, a sign of maturing and transitioning into adulthood is partly achieved through rejecting support. When asked a question which not many other participants were asked directly: *"What do you think causes unemployment?"*, she provides an enlightening response and one which is broadly representative of the sample when others discussed why conditionality is required to some degree:

"I don't know. Like, people that don't have enough experience. Some people just don't want to go out and work because they know they can get money for free. There's a lot of people that just have kids out there to just get benefits, which I think's really wrong. I don't know. I've always wanted to have a job, but I've always found it hard because I've never had - I never finished school, to be honest. I never sat any exams. I never got anything. So, all I've ever had is cleaning jobs. I'm really lucky to have got accepted for this job that I've got now."

Carla rationalises her own worklessness because she has low educational attainment, something which scholars, such as Reay (2019), would suggest is a structural problem rather than an inherent fault within the individual. Whereas Carla uses the 'othering' of fellow young claimants to delegitimise their worklessness and distance herself from the stigmatised group (Fletcher and Redman, 2022). Some young people discussed the hardship they had faced, or their bad luck despite being motivated to do well and find work yet would express a certain level of distrust toward other groups of claimants whom 'simply want to live off the system'.

This statecraft also helps to reposition an individual's social status as something which is inherently their doing. This helps to explain why a young person who is out of work can more readily denounce other groups who are claiming social security, since logically there must be a culprit for the stigma attached to young welfare claimants. One finds it difficult to self-identify in a stigmatised group, especially when mechanisms of disciplinary control operate to 'fix' and 'mould' youth identities toward a 'market-ready' individual who continually strives for self-improvement. Therefore, to distance oneself from the contemporary derogatory labels placed on those who receive state support is to protect oneself from stigma and elevate one's own character (Ashley, 2021). To be suspicious of other groups of social security claimants is a rationalisation of engagement with welfare conditionality over time. Returning to Carla, her aspirations for the following year are centred around her finishing her probationary period and becoming a full-time career, which she is excited about:

"And I'm hoping I'll get this job, and I do really well at this job, because you get like a six-month probationary period to say whether, if I like it, or if they think I'm crap at it or good. So, I hope I get that job, be really good at it, and I just hope I'm really good at that. I think I'll enjoy that job. So, I'm really looking forward to just doing that and being busy with that."

Wave B

Carla did get the full-time caring job and was also expecting a baby since the Wave A interview:

"I think I told you last time that I might be getting the job and I just started in January after my references come through. I've only just stopped working there recently because I was going to work up until March until maternity leave, but I got attacked at work by one of the residents. So, I had a word with the manager, and I said I don't think it's safe for me to keep coming in and then after a while he agreed, and he's given me my annual leave and then suspended me with full pay until my maternity leave starts." (Carla, 24, Wave B, Jobseeker, White British, Peterborough, 2016).

Thus, Carla stopped working a bit earlier than planned but her employment aspirations had mostly been met over the twelve months. After having been in paid in employment

Carla vows to never go back to the Jobcentre, she is much more secure now and is looking to move to a bigger home with her partner before the baby arrives:

"I don't even want to be on benefits ever again, but if it came to me being sanctioned again I don't even know - I wouldn't even be on benefits again to be honest, I really wouldn't. I wouldn't even go down that road."

Here Carla frames social security as a choice, suggesting people can choose not to go down that road. Carla is critical of the support she received at the Jobcentre, stating her work coaches were too interested in tick-boxing exercises. She felt the support was patronising and futile and is glad she does not have to go back on JSA. Carla's aspirations at Wave B are focused on more on her child than employment for herself. Har main goal is to move to a more suitable home to raise a child:

"I've got a two-bedroom house, so I've got the space, but it's just the landlord said that he's going to put the rent up soon and the kitchen is all rotted and falling apart, but he won't do anything to fix it or make it better […] So, I want to save up money so I could get a deposit to buy a house and that's what I'm looking to do."

Interviewer

"*Is anything standing in your way of achieving your hopes and your goals?"*

Carla

"No, not really. Just me I suppose. I've just got to go out and do it haven't I?"

This last quote is telling, Carla believes her future is in her own hands. Her experiences have shaped her values and like in her Wave A interview when she said "*Nobody is going to help you. You have to do it yourself"* Carla is of the persuasion that, even if she does not agree with this encroached pressure on the individual, that the system is not going to, and should not, support her. Conditionality, form Carla's perspective, is there primarily to make her aware she must help herself. In this case, Carla is not as beset as Freya in terms of praising conditionality or offering intrinsic psychological explanations for struggles in the labour market. However, the result is the same. Carla adopts the notion, pedalled by services like the Jobcentre Plus, that in terms of her future

aspirations, she should not expect comprehensive state support and can achieve her goals with the 'right' attitudes.

There is a tendency within contemporary social policy discourse to promote long-range social mobility for all (Payne, 2018 p. 14). This attempts to enforce a prescribed set of behavioural guidelines and traits upon young people, without much consideration for what happens to the majority of young people who engage with such interventions and require support (Folkes, 2021). These strategies serve as a kind of talent competition for those from deprived backgrounds, where the rare success stories of those who "overcame the odds" and realised a middle-class lifestyle are pinned up as aspirational targets for all those with reduced employment opportunities and help to reinforce the idea 'that anyone can succeed if you put your mind to it' (Chapman, 2018 p.143).

4.4 Discussion

Young people who experience conditional social security systems are susceptible to internalised individualism, a conceptualisation where economic inequalities are understood to stem from individual attributes and thus, realising future aspirations impinge upon behaviours and psychological traits rather than primarily being shaped by existing structural inequalities. There are alternative theorisations of this individualisation of future labour market aspirations among marginalised youth cohorts. For example, Evans' (2007) theory of *bounded agency* suggests that young people enact forms of agency to resist a structural framing of their futures. Evans (2007 p.90) states: "*young adults were rarely fatalistic. Even among unemployed people, responses suggested frustrated agency rather than fatalistic acceptance of things as they are. The overriding perspective is that the future is in one's own hands and, while setbacks will be encountered, it is down to the individual to find ways to cope and overcome them."*

However, this thesis argues that although individual agency is not absent, recent generations of young people have been repeatedly encouraged to internalise individualism, in part because this helps to maintain the existing social order. Young people in the UK, especially those who experience state policies for employment

support, are socialised to understand lofty aspirations and self-reliance as the key to reaching the cornerstones of adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This rhetoric is particularly targeted at marginalised young people who do not have the resources to conform to the ideal neoliberal subject. However, if they align with the individualised aspirational self, they will look internally to realise these increasingly out-of-reach milestones, such as secure employment (Furlong et al. 2017 p.11) and homeownership (Hoolachan et al. 2017). Both aiming high and the ability to reach one's aspirations is placed firmly on the individual, shifting responsibility away from the state (ibid). Failure is therefore perceived as an individual shortcoming rather than a structural disadvantage.

Thus, placing the emphasis on marginalised youth cohorts to overcome the widening inter/intragenerational inequalities by embodying the entrepreneurial self, is a deliberate tactic by successive governments to conceal the disproportionate impacts economic recessions (Bell and Blanchflower, 2013; McPherson, 2021) insecure labour markets (Kalleberg, 2020) and unaffordable housing (Hoolachan et al. 2017) have had on recent generations of young people. This conceptualisation of poor economic outcomes not only individualises the problem of un/underemployment by minimising structural barriers and promoting human capital as the dictator of improved outcomes, it pathologises the problem (Vassallo, 2020).

The self-help discourse informs disadvantaged young people that their subordinated social position is because of psychological deficiencies, not solely because they have inferior education attainment or abilities. There is an assumption that social mobility is something which can arise from particularly aspirational and ardent lower classes (Lawler and Payne, 2018 p. 6). A firm belief in meritocracy is used to justify the vastly unequal outcomes in our society, whereby those at the 'top' recount their personal struggles, perseverance and character which enabled their 'success' (Littler, 2018 p. 11). Whereas those at the bottom, according to this conceptualisation, are also deserving of their 'failures' because they do not possess the right attitudes and attributes to warrant access to a higher social status (Lawler and Payne, 2018 p. 6). Stemming from this is the simplistic idea that, if only those who have 'failed' in this 'open' competitive playing field could garner some of the same characteristics, strive for high educational

attainment and be ambitious like the 'winners' in society, more people could achieve upward social mobility and therefore a better quality of life. It is in this persuasive and empowering argument that many of the young people in this study perceive pathways to their future aspirations.

This could be a lingering by-product of the relatively dynamic social mobility available to working class youth transitioning in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s when compared to those transitioning in contemporary Britain (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 2010). As social mobility declines among recent generations of young people, the strategies in place to reduce social inequalities remain affixed to this notion that upwardly mobile trajectories are still largely accessible and that targeting long-range mobility for all disadvantaged groups should the strategy (ibid). It is not a simple formula, as policy interventions which seek to address youth unemployment try to suggest. It is not solely a matter of character, of mental strength and will power.

Labour market transitions and economic outcomes are predominantly determined by where, and into what family, one is born (Laurison and Friedman, 2016). To indoctrinate some of the more marginalised young people in our society to individualise and psychologise labour market aspirations may seem to some as means of giving hope to disadvantaged young people. However, this chapter argues this approach encourages self-blame among this cohort, who predominantly realised static employment transitions or pedalled between low-pay and no-pay. It avoids what could be the central policy focus; re-structuring external factors, away from the young person's behaviour, to enable them to have more agency over their lives and realise more secure futures.

Education has largely failed as 'the great leveller' (Reay, 2020) and when the possibility of social mobility through asset accumulation in the form of property has been significantly reduced for young people (Blanden and Machin, 2017). The ideology of contemporary interventions to address this stagnation of mobile trajectories should be revaluated by policymakers to match with the reality of the contemporary labour market. The idealistic strategy of strengthening lofty employment aspirations for those with lower economic prospects leaves the majority of young people, who share similar biographies to the cohort in this study, with high expectations, inferior outcomes, and

a sense that their position in society is unsatisfactory. That they ought to have done more to "overcome the odds" but they either did not want it badly enough, or unfortunately did not possess the inherent abilities of their more affluent peers.

Questioning the legitimacy of behavioural conditionality becomes more difficult for this generation who have grown up with behavioural economics dominating multiple aspects of life, including social policy, and thus begin to perceive these practices as inevitable or warranted (Boland and Griffin 2022; Pykett, 2013). Policies based on behavioural economics help to detach social problems from a broader context and frame every decision as a matter of individual cost-benefit analysis.

As Rimke (2000 p. 72) argues, freedom is the bedrock upon which modern liberal democracies exist, however the self-governing of individuals and in turn constraining other forms of being or structuring society is itself a restriction of freedom: *"it is a matter of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a regulated freedom*." Individual autonomy, instead of being the antithesis of political power, is rather a key mechanism in the exercise of power over citizens, particularly disadvantaged groups (Rose and Miller, 1992). This thesis argues that instead of being an empowering discourse, internalised individualism, and the psychologisation of poverty is an exercise of power by the state over certain groups in our society, such as young jobseekers, to maintain existing power structures under the guise of tackling social inequalities.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter has drawn upon the narratives of young people to illuminate an interesting dynamic of worklessness largely neglected from an academic lens – how do young people who experience un/underemployment, low-income, and welfare conditionality conceptualise and rationalise their own circumstances over time? This chapter has focused on exploring the narratives of four participants in-depth, all of whom adopted the individualised conceptualisation of worklessness. This analysis suggests the young people from this cohort are more likely to blame themselves and tend to offer individualistic understandings for un/underemployment, such as lack of motivation or not having acquired specific employability traits. These findings further evidence from

Pimlott-Wilson (2017), who also illustrated how and why marginalised young people often self-blame rather than blame the system.

There was an internalised individualism, whereby the young people embodied the notion that future success, in terms of securing stable employment, is incumbent on displaying the 'right' attitudes and behaviours. Thus, from their perspectives, labour market outcomes are less bound by external structural factors and socio-economic inequalities. The belief that economic stability and independence are the project of the individual is intense for some young people in this study. In this cohort, long-range social mobility was deemed desirable and achievable. Thus, the young people tended to align their aspirations with the aims of contemporary youth policy interventions, wherein targeting exceptional and distant goals was prevalent. These findings build upon work by Lawler and Payne (2018, p.1) and Chapman (2018, p.133), who critique the concept of social mobility as an empowering framework. These findings provide empirical evidence to support the argument that seeking to address the policy problem of youth labour market engagement through the lens of social mobility tends to stagnant the transitions of the majority of young people who require support.

The young people from this study largely comply with the conditions, exhibit the endorsed behaviours, maintain the positive mindset, and embody the motivated jobseeker. Despite prescribing to the promoted behaviours and values, such as psychologising pathways to realising their own aspirations, the vast majority of the young people fail to realise their employment aspirations within the timeframe of the study. As García-Sierra (2023) also demonstrated with quantitative evidence, this indicates there are other factors which shape and restrict labour market transitions and pathways to secure employment. The young people are encouraged to understand their own labour market failings as an individual shortcoming and that they can, and should, 'fix' internally, as instructed by the contemporary conditional social security system (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

The young people from this study are also distorted from the view that their own insecure labour market transitions are predominantly shaped by factors external to their control. They place great emphasis on the power of psychological attributes, which

they believe one can adopt and maintain by merely wishing to do so. Motivation and belief in reaching future goals are central to the values of these young people, as they internalise the messaging of the recent intensification of welfare conditionality, self-help governance (Rimke, 2000), and the culturally entrenched ideologies of meritocracy and self-improvement discourses (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015; Gill and Orgad, 2017). However, conceptualisations were diverse, and some participants rejected this individualised framing of their circumstances and preferred to redirect the onus for their unemployment onto the state and the key welfare institutions (see appendix 3).

Chapter 5 - Comparing Youth Conditional Housing Experiences Across Divergent Policy Domains

Infantilising housing support: "*It's like school for houses."* (Callum, 18, Wave A, Jobseeker, Wite British, Edinburgh, 2014)

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will present analysis of the housing experiences, trajectories, and aspirations of specific groups of young people within the cohort, where housing played a significant role in their narratives. The majority of the young people from this study, 41/56 at Wave A, experienced forms of housing conditionality, whereby they must operate within behavioural parameters or risk being evicted. Examples of behavioural housing conditionality experienced by this cohort will be explored throughout this chapter. Their behaviour is scrutinised as they are largely denied a sense of 'home' and security within their living space (Flint, 2019). They are restricted from being independent and curating their own space whilst simultaneously being asked to grow up, be mature, and perform adulthood, without many of the liberates afforded to the majority of the adult population (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2019). It is in these constrained and conflicting housing contexts and experiences which this chapter explores to understand how young people understand, respond to, and rationalise these intrusive policy practices.

There is noted policy divergence between Scotland and England in terms of approaches to social housing and provision of homeless accommodation (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2021). In Scotland, a trailblazing policy framework to tackle homelessness has received international acclaim and *"the removal of priority need has undoubtedly led to much better treatment of single homeless people by Scottish local authorities… and is very likely related to the overall decline in rough sleeping"* (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2021 p. 182). Conditionality, however, remains embedded in this system. Prospective tenants

are assessed to decipher whether they have become intentionally homeless before they are granted access to homeless accommodation, and they are then assessed to be 'housing ready' by professionals before being moved from temporary to mainstream housing (Clarke et al. 2020).

England still operates a system that is closer to the conditional staircase model, where accommodation is provided less universally and is typically reserved for those with the most acute housing need (Preece et al. 2020). Both policy landscapes espouse a commitment to ending chronic homelessness through provision of settled accommodation. However, conditionality is becoming increasingly detached from homeless services in Scotland compared to the implementation in England.

According to a review of contemporary literature (Gibb, 2021), there are fundamental differences in approaches to social housing provision, and how housing conditionality operates, within Scotland and England. Thus, this chapter will present a comparative analysis of conditional housing experiences between the two policy domains by drawing on narratives of two clusters of young people living in socially rented accommodation: one cohort from Edinburgh (Scotland) and one from Bristol (England). This will give a sense of the lived realities of housing conditionality for young people who are seeking to obtain secure tenancies across two distinct housing policy landscapes.

It is important to look beyond the overarching policy documents, rhetoric, or language and get a sense of how young people experience social housing policies on the ground. The two clusters were selected firstly due to the extent to which housing appeared to be the most prominent feature in their narratives. Moreover, the young people within each distinct cluster experienced the same housing programme respectively, and therefore it was possible to discern or compare a shared narrative. Conversely, in other cases, housing experiences or pathways tended to be idiosyncratic or did not play a significant part in the narrative of the young person.

The analysis suggests that the young people from Bristol were more restricted in their tenancy, which reduced their sense of home and their regard for the housing

programme, compared with the young people from Edinburgh. The Bristol cluster experienced a wearing impact of conditionality over time, where they were all attached to the area they lived in, but the paternalistic surveillance they encountered in terms of their housing arrangement mostly prevented them from feeling attached to their flats and a sense of home was largely absent. The Edinburgh cluster had diverse housing experiences, but the data suggests they collectively felt more comfortable in their tenancies as time went on, as the shackles of conditionality loosened.

The Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement was pivotal in increasing this sense of ontological security for three of the five young people in the Edinburgh cluster, who transitioned from temporary accommodation to a secure tenancy during the study. However, despite the opportunity for home to develop with a long-term tenancy, there is evidence from the Edinburgh cohort to suggest worsened mental health among the group as time went on. This highlights that housing security on its own cannot offset the myriad of detrimental impacts low SES can have on the individual wellbeing of young people.

One key shared perception between the Bristol and Edinburgh cluster was a requirement, enforced by the respective housing associations', to be 'mature' or risk losing their tenancy. This is the idea that young people with acute housing need in the UK must stay away from supposed immature and deviant behaviours, such as having parties or playing music, as this could lead to either delay in future housing transitions or eviction. The need to bypass one's youth is palpable amongst the two clusters of young people. Avoiding neighbour complaints, and generally averting 'unhealthy' behaviours, is a central requirement for progression within each programme. They grow to accept and internalise that they must adapt their behaviours to earn a place in the housing market. The ability for these young people to question the strict housing conditionality they experience is continuously eroded by the everyday practices which dictate whether they progress in the specific housing programme, or merely retain their current accommodation.

This chapter will now present and zoom in on a collective, chronological narrative for each of the two clusters of young people. Beginning with the Bristol group comprising

of three young people, followed by the Edinburgh group comprising of five young people. The evolving experiences, attitudes, and identities over time of both cohorts will be compared to help identify any commonalities or differences in youth interpretations of housing conditionality and sense of housing security between Scotland's rights-based approach and England's more liberal model. However, before the chapter gets underway to explore in-depth narratives, it is important to give context and understand the housing status and transitions of the sample as a whole. See *figure 7* for breakdown of housing tenure at each wave.

5.1.1 Overview of Sample Housing Trajectories

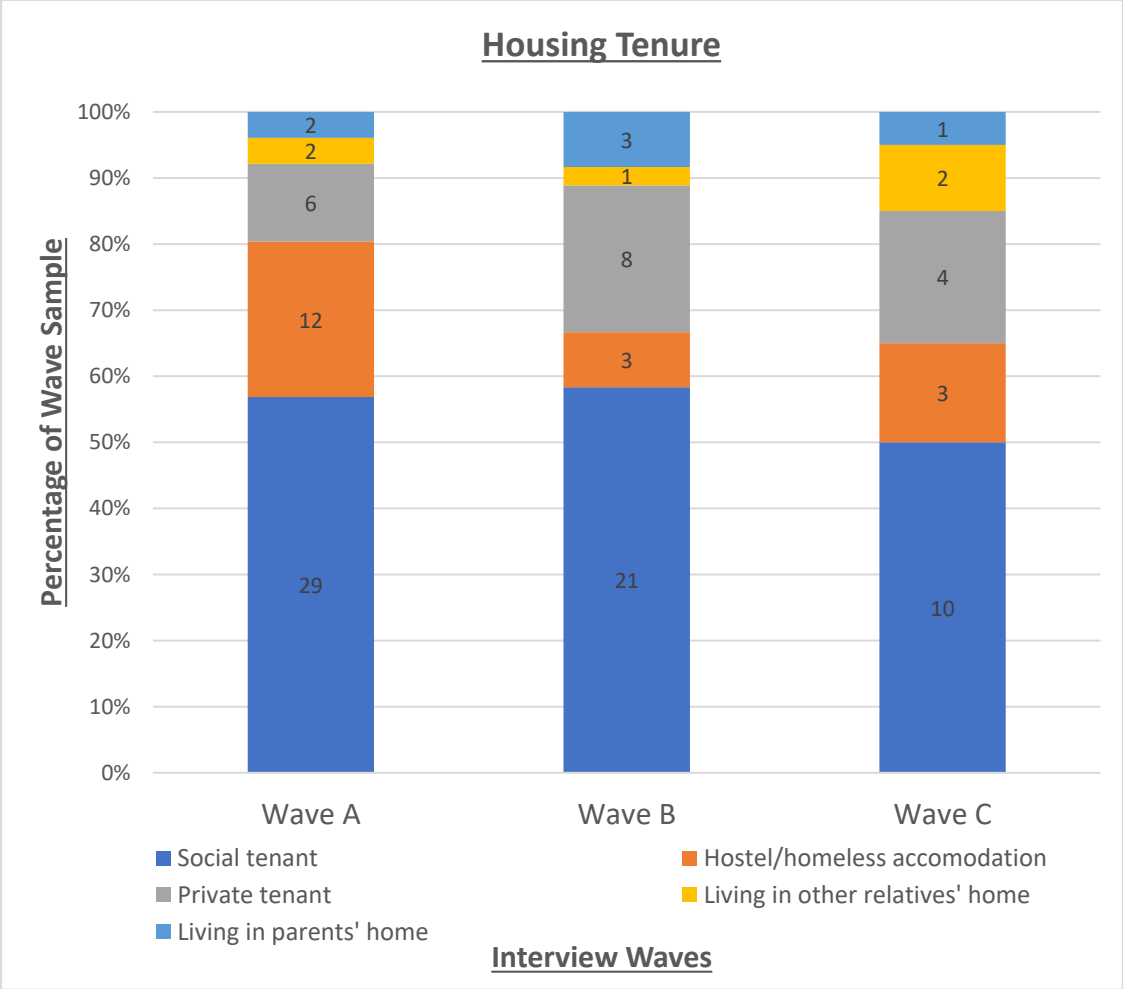
Of the 38 young people who had at least two-wave interviews, 23 began the study as social tenants, seven in homeless/hostel accommodation, five private tenants, and three living in the family or relatives' home. Of the 23 social tenants, 18 remained as social tenants at Wave B, two moved back into the family or relatives' home, two were homeless, and one became a private tenant. This demonstrates there was not a lot of movement between tenures in this group even though many did move home between waves.

Of the seven who were in homeless/hostel accommodation, four remained in homeless/hostel accommodation, one became a private tenant, one moved back into the family home, and one became a social tenant. In this group, more than half remained in homeless/hostel accommodation 12 months on even though the young people were aware, as it was made clear to them, that this accommodation should be a temporary 'stop off'.

Of the five private tenants, all remained private tenants at Wave B. This suggests those who were in private accommodation to begin with were more likely to stay in the PRS. This appears contradictory given the insecurity and increasing unaffordability associated with contemporary PRS markets, however those from the study who were living in the PRS tended to be either full-time employed or could draw upon informal financial support, hence could offset the precarity and unaffordability of the PRS. Of the three living in the family other relatives' home, one remained in the family home,

one became a social tenant, and one moved into homeless/hostel accommodation at Wave B.

Figure 7 – Cohort Housing Tenure at Each Wave



The housing experiences, pathways, and trajectories of all the young people from the WelCond Project were diverse. Since the study incorporated young people from across the UK, housing experiences and outcomes were linked to the specific locality where the individual was trying to realise an independent and secure housing future. Even within these localities' experiences were diverse, as some had been part of distinct small-scale housing programmes available within a specific city, typically operated by housing associations, whereas others in the same city were on different programme with different conditions attached.

5.2 Bristol Cluster – The Wearing Impact of Conditionality Over Time

5.2.1 Introduction

This section will begin by introducing the three young people who comprise the Bristol cluster. In their own words each will help us to understand what kind of housing arrangement they have, the conditionality involved, and how they construct meaning and attachment to their new tenancies.

Kirsty (33), Rose (22), and Lisa (21) are all young mothers. They were all lone parents and had recently moved or were in the process of moving to a new-build housing association development from council housing. The three young women had been given higher priority 'banding' on the council property list for various reasons. This new housing programme was proposed as a 'superior' housing pathway compared to council housing, as it was said to encourage and support tenants for 'progression' to the PRS and homeownership.

Wave A

Kirsty and Lisa were both nearing their move to the new housing association flats at Wave A and had been given higher priority status because of domestic abuse issues with ex-partners. Rose was already living the in the new flats at Wave A and had been granted higher priority because she had been on the council property list for a long time. For each young woman here, this was also a transition from housing largely void of conditionality to an independent tenancy with conditions attached. This new housing association project consisted of a five-year tenancy agreement, with the first year acting as a 'probation' period, where tenants would be assessed over the year and, if deemed to have behaved 'appropriately' by support staff and there had been no issues with rent payments, they would be granted a further four-year tenancy. Kirsty gives us a sense of her feelings toward the new housing programme prior to moving in:

"*But they [other people she knew who were considering the new housing programme] got worried about the description because obviously it says about how you've got to pay your first week's rent and stuff like that. Some people are backing off because you had to do four workshops because they haven't actually sat there to listen to what [the housing association] are doing, the whole programme they're doing, the new scheme. But this new scheme is better off in the long run so I reckon what [the housing association are] doing is really good."* (Kirsty, 33, Wave A, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2014)

Kirsty highlights others in the area who had been weary of this new housing project given the conditions attached to the tenancy. However, Kirsty was enthusiastic about her move and the 'new scheme' in general. Here, she details some of the specific conditions attached to this tenancy:

"We've had four workshops. […] one was about what sort of volunteer work you can do and work you can do in college and that. What was the other one about? How to manage your money and then the other one was just the manager saying about the whole property situation and stuff like that, like the rewards we get because we're basically their guinea pigs. That's what he said, 'You're basically our guinea pigs, sorry to say that'."

Now, Rose gives us her perception of the workshops:

"There was one about how you live on your money and how to control your money and stuff. There was another - what was it about? There was a few. I can't even remember now because some of them didn't even make sense, so yes […] I think it was too long and boring, I don't know. Because I'm young anyway, I need something more exciting and stuff, and I don't think that was." (Rose, 22, Wave A, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2014)

These mandatory workshops and volunteering go beyond typical forms of housing conditionality, such as keeping the flat clean and avoiding noise complaints, experienced by other young people across the study. In the cases of Kirsty, Rose, and Lisa these workshops and 'community engagement' responsibilities were additional forms of behavioural regulation. Another interesting dynamic here is the concept of 'rewards' for being a 'good' tenant. Kirsty offers her interpretation of this positive reinforcement conditionality:

"What [the housing association] are doing is basically every year, is a year reward thing. If you pay your rent on time, you don't get any antisocial behaviour and no complaints and you keep the flat how it's meant to be and when they do their reviews on the flat every year, then the first reward they're on about is paying for you to decorate your house. Then for the other years they'll talk to you and see what sort of things you want. They'll give you a year pass to the zoo or three months' bus pass or stuff like that; just it depends what's best for you and you talk to them and they'll give you it if you win it."

This attempt at behavioural coercion or regulation has been discussed at length in terms of benefit sanctions acting as a 'stick', but there are few examples of this form of conditionality, where the possibility of decorating your home or a trip to the zoo act as 'a carrot' for marginalised youth cohorts. This echoes a configuration of Wacquant's (2009 p.43) 'centaur state', whereby punishing practices found in behaviour manipulation of marginalised groups, in terms of contemporary workfare policies, are also alive and embedded in contemporary social housing policies in the UK. However, this 'rewards' scheme is behavioural motivation through the prospect of an additional benefit rather than the threat of basic provision being taken away.

In Stewart's (2019) study on youth experiences of housing conditionality in Scotland, he notes the particular emphasis placed on young people to demonstrate housing 'readiness'. Young people are perceived by the state as a group which require augmented assessment and surveillance, as they are deemed to be lacking the appropriate skills or character to live independently or perform the 'good neighbour' role (France, 2008; Stewart, 2019). The young people in this Bristol housing programme are perceived as unable to behave appropriately without the prospect of threats and 'rewards', for which they must demonstrate 'worthiness'. Furthermore, these 'rewards', such as being able to decorate your house or going to the zoo, are activities most of the population take for granted and do not have to 'win' the ability to do so. Lisa is positive about the reward scheme at Wave A but feels she would have been keen to volunteer anyway:

Lisa

"*If we do something good within the community you get rewards and stuff like that and like it could be like a family pass to the zoo. You get something back as well, because like it feels even*

better, if you're putting something into your community, sometimes you don't feel like you're getting enough back. So, it is nice to know that you will be getting something back." (Lisa, 21, Wave A, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2014)

Interviewer

"*Do you think it will change what you do, that these rewards are there*?"

Lisa

"*Yes, well I feel like I'm quite out there anyway. I will go and try and do something. I don't know what I can do, but yes it's just finding something to do.*"

Lisa gives the impression she would want to help in the local community anyway but feels for other residents the rewards could be a motivating factor:

"*Yes, I think it will change people's views to actually want to volunteer because there was a lady that was in another group, she came from another group into my group and she was saying, 'What's the point of volunteering?' Being quite rude.*"

Lisa then highlights what she believes to be the conditions attached to 'passing' the probation year and suggests she is not concerned about them:

Lisa

"Just like misbehaving, just being a bad neighbour and not doing as we're told really."

Interviewer

"Does this worry you, that this plays a role in whether your tenancy gets renewed or not?"

Lisa

"No, because I'm quite quiet any way so there won't be any noise round from me [chuckles]."

Lisa encapsulates the infantilising noose placed around herself and all those who are living in this housing programme. She offers, and subliminally accepts, that 'misbehaving' and 'not doing as we're told' are reasonable parameters to decide if a young tenant can maintain their tenancy. She does not lay out any specifics, but Lisa

casually normalises this kind of behavioural conditionality where young people are simultaneously expected to behave like adults whilst being treated like children.

This also relates to the *extrinsic incentive bias* (Heath, 1999) which appears repeatedly throughout the interview transcripts. Extrinsic incentive bias is a theory from social psychology, which helps to explain the tendency for individuals to perceive their own values or behaviours to be intrinsically motivated, through a desire to help others, for example. Whereas, when one considers what others are motivated by, one tends to suggest money, or other extrinsic factors (Heath, 1999). There is a tendency among this youth cohort to perceive conditionality as something which will motivate 'other' claimants but is not important for them personally because they are intrinsically motivated to be 'a good citizen'. This following dialogue with Rose suggests she also feels the conditions are not going to affect her. She is also opposed to the concept of conditionality in general:

Interviewer

"Okay. So does the fact that it's a five-year tenancy and they've said that how you behave is linked to whether your tenancy gets renewed, does that affect you at all, does that make you feel differently or make you behave any differently?"

Rose

"Not really because I think I'll be fine. But I think it's kind of bad because people with kids, if they go homeless that is really bad, that is really, really bad. So, I don't know why they've done it like that. I don't agree with it anyway."

Interviewer

"Do you think that what they're asking you to do is reasonable or is it a bit much? Are they asking a bit much? Are they being a bit too strict or is it fair enough?"

Rose

"*I don't agree with it, but I think it is kind of fair because we're all grown, you should be able to like not put rubbish in your corridor and not smoke in the house anyway because you've got kids and smoking around kids is kind of bad, so.*"

Kirsty also holds these views about conditionality:

Interviewer

"So, you don't think it will change your behaviour because…"

Kirsty

"No, I'm going to be quite good anyway because I'm one of those. You've got some mums that are mums on benefits that are still drinking and smoking cigarettes and stuff like that. But then you've got some that are sensible, but obviously I'm one of those ones that give up everything for my son. So, I'm a committed mum sort of thing. Yes, sorts of things like that so I'm doing the best for my children so everything can be fine for my children's sake."

Again, Rose and Kirsty are confident the conditions of the tenancy will not be an issue for them because they would adopt and carry out the prescribed behaviours and tasks regardless of the looming threat of termination of tenancy, or because of the prospect of rewards. This demonstrates the unnecessary application of housing conditionality placed on young tenants, as they are already motivated to do the 'right' things, be a good neighbour, and look after their property (Dwyer et al. 2018).

These attitudes toward conditionality among this cohort is a product of internalising the individual responsibility hegemony espoused by recent welfare reforms and the contemporary stigmatising media rhetoric surrounding welfare recipients. Those who are in receipt of state support learn to distance themselves from the stigmatised group and champion their own social worth and moral value by 'othering' fellow claimants and thus, solidarity among these groups is weakened (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). The punitive turn within social security policy is rationalised by social security recipients through framing fellow recipients are amoral, as the persistent welfare tropes suggest (Fletcher and Redman, 2022).

The collective narrative at Wave A from the Bristol cluster is one of enthusiasm, commitment, and anticipation. There is a sense that conditionality is something that will not impact their living arrangements considerably as, from their perspectives, conditions are in place for other, more "problematic" tenants. This perception could stem from the very practice of intensified housing conditionality. Because it is in place those who experience it must believe there are others who 'require' paternalistic

measures because otherwise why would it be ubiquitous in the social security system? However, Lisa and Rose are wearier from the beginning about certain aspects of the new housing programme. Here, Lisa articulates her reservations about the lack of security she feels moving from a council property into a housing association:

Lisa

"Yes, it is a bit worrying though because with Bristol City Council is just, you're on a year probation and then it's yours. So, like in this sense I don't know, it feels like I could only be there five years. I don't know, I am happy with it. But it's just, if there was like, it's not a council, do you know what I mean? It feels like it's rented, a private rented place […] It feels different."

Interviewer

"Is that because of the five-year tenancy, or is that because dealing with the housing association is a little bit different practically than the council?"

Lisa

"[The housing association] said that after four years they come and reassess our living conditions and stuff like that. And if we've behaved and everything like that, and then if they feel we should move out we can appeal against it. Then it will go to like another board to see if we can stay."

Lisa is concerned about the regular assessments and the possibility she would lose her tenancy after five years, even if she did not want to. Her housing security has been restricted by the housing conditionally she now experiences. However, she remains positive about the prospect of the new hosuing programme. Rose was the least enthusiastic of the three women from the beginning. She was critical of the probation year as she felt tenants should not have to wait a year to decorate their flats and she also questions the validity of strict housing conditionality:

Interviewer

"So do you think it's fair for [the housing association] to say, 'Actually, you know what, we don't want you to do that and if you do it, we might not carry-on housing you.' Do you think is it good that they have that system or is it bad? Is it a bit strict?"

Rose

"I think it's strict because it's your home now and you should be able to do what you want in your own home. So that's the reason why I don't think it's fair on other people."

Rose highlights the lack of agency inherent within these housing pathways (Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2017). The ability to curate a 'home' is stripped away from the young person and they are treated as objects for social control. These young people are under scrutiny by service providers, they are under pressure to bypass their youth, to be mature, responsible and a model citizen or risk being homeless. There is a restriction of freedoms and surveillance that would appear alien to many other youth cohorts. Besides moving into a tenancy with conditionality attached, these young mothers, due to the looming transition to UC, will soon have to budget for their rent payments themselves rather than the Housing Benefit going directly to their landlord. To conclude our Wave A narrative, Kirsty expresses her worries that some neighbours will struggle to pay their rent when the transfer to UC occurs and how this may impact their future housing pathways:

"I just think when [UC] goes on, people are going to spend their rent or if not, their rent is going to be late. The rent goes in your bank on the Monday, but they want the rent by Tuesday, so they're giving you a day, 24 hours to give that rent over. But obviously I reckon people are going to be borrowing money out of it. Then they're not going to pay it […] Obviously all of that will be put on your tenancy so if you ever went to go to private, you're not going to get a private because you've got a bad record."

Wave B

More than a year later and the study catches up with Kirsty, Lisa, and Rose. They have all completed the probation year and have been granted a further four-year tenancy. Although the Bristol cluster felt the conditionality would not affect them because they 'stick to the rules', the collective narrative at Wave B is more tense than at Wave A. The principles of conditionality itself and the regular interrogation of one's behaviour has begun to wear on Kirsty, Lisa, and Rose despite abiding by the conditions and passing the probation period. The indirect impacts of intensified conditionality have constrained the Bristol cluster's ability to create a sense of home.

We begin with Lisa, who enjoys living in the flat itself because it is quiet, and it suits her family. She is less in line with the purposes and practices of the behavioural conditionality attached to her tenancy than at Wave A. Lisa discusses how the housing association are "*sending texts out and always complaining about everything*". Her concerns about the lack of security in this new housing programme have solidified over the year and she is anxious about having to get permission to do anything to the flat, she does not feel like it is really her place whereas she did in her council property:

Interviewer

"So how does that change the way you feel about the place?"

Lisa

"When I was decorating, I was like oh I shouldn't decorate because I painted my cupboards. So, I'm waiting until [the housing association staff] come in now and it will just be like, 'Why did you paint the cupboards?' whereas when we were in a council property my mum ripped out the whole kitchen and the bathroom and they didn't say anything about it." (Lisa, 22, Wave B, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2015)

Interviewer

"So, they tell you not to do that?"

Lisa

"We weren't allowed to decorate for the first year and if there were any repairs, they wouldn't have done it, but I did start decorating after and obviously I've got a couple of things on my floor, like I've got bubbles all over my floor and stuff they're meant to be coming back to do, but I've not heard from them to come back to do it."

Lisa is deterred from homemaking in her new tenancy. She is trepid about forming a home and feeling settled because the tenancy is designed to ensure tenants are aware this is not a long-term home, but rather a fixed-term dwelling which should be perceived as a route to the PRS or homeownership. Hoolachan (2022) illuminates the lived experiences of young people attempting to curate a 'home' in highly monitored homeless accommodation in Scotland. In Hoolachan's (2022) research, she highlights the constraints placed on the autonomy and privacy of young people residing in hostel

accommodation and the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to construct a home and meaning according to social norms. Those who live in owner-occupied housing and to a lesser extent the PRS, when compared to those who are homeless or in social housing *“have a greater capacity to homemake in ways that suit their preferences, away from the gaze of others”* (Hoolachan, 2022 p. 16).

The ability to ‘homemake’ and personalise a space is central to one’s self-formation, identity, security, and well-being among many other qualities (Jacobs and Malpas, 2013; Neumark, 2013; Hulse and Milligan, 2014;). Although, the Bristol cluster have greater freedoms in terms of avenues for home curation than the young people from Hoolachan’s study, their remains a degree of trepidation, particularly from Lisa and Rose, over feeling fully comfortable in their flats. They do not get a sense in this housing programme, that these flats are theirs or represent ‘home’. Lisa epitomes this perception in this quote:

“I don't know. I feel like because it's a five-year tenancy I feel like it's not really mine. I feel like if at the end of the five years they say, 'You can afford to privately let' or anything like that then I'll just have to move on if you know what I mean, but if I feel like I'm not comfortable with doing something like that or I don't know, yes it's a bit worrying knowing in five years they could just be like, 'You don't need that flat anymore' and just take it off of me if you know what I mean.”

Rose then offers her sentiments on a sense of home:

Interviewer

“Do you feel at home in the property? Have you been able to make a home there?”

Rose

“Yes, but sometimes I just feel like what's the point because they're always blaming me for stuff. Like I'll probably move anyway, so what's the point of like actually decorating and doing stuff I want to do?” (Rose, 23, Wave B, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2015)

There is a lack of confidence in feeling secure, or in Rose’s case more of an apathy toward the whole programme because she is not satisfied with the setup and wants to

move out whenever possible. These findings expand on research by McKee, Soaita and Hoolachan (2020). In their qualitative study engaging with young low-income PRS tenants, there was a sense of uncertainty and inability to feel settled, disrupting the young person's transition to independence, secure housing tenure, and adulthood. Despite living in the social rented sector there is a feeling among the Bristol Cluster that they are renting from a private landlord. There is a sense of the tenancy as an interim stay, where one's identity through home curation is somewhat dislocated through regulation. Lisa's housing aspirations denounce this sense of insecurity and detachment to one's home, as she longs for 'a place to call her own' but suggests this goal is 'a long way off':

"Obviously eventually I do want to be able to get a job once I've got [my children] somewhere in nursery and stuff. My eldest will be going into nursery next year hopefully. I just want to save up and have my own house somewhere I can call my own really yes. It's going to be a long way off but I'm hoping to get that."

Rose, who was born and raised in the same area as the housing association flats now wants to move out of her hometown of Bristol because she cannot find a place where she feels at home. She has had some struggles with the housing association over the past year. She feels she was wrongly accused and harassed about littering, and she has repeatedly asked for the mould on her windows to be looked at but there has been no response:

Interviewer

"Why do you want to go somewhere else?"

Rose

"Because I can't get anywhere to live here, and I don't really want to stay [at current address], so I might as well move out. Because […] this will happen again, I'm going to be blamed, and I can't be bothered to be finding out who's doing it. That isn't my job."

Rose suggests the interaction with, and accusatory tone of, the housing association staff (the operationalisation of conditionality) is the only aspect of her tenancy she dislikes. Her and Lisa have grown to despise the housing association because of living with an

omnipotent eye watching them with a reproachful lens. Kirsty feels a bit more secure in the current setup because she feels the housing association will be forced to rehouse her after the five-year period runs out, she is confident she will not be homeless. She accepts her lack of agency in her own housing pathway and aspirations. When she is asked if she would like to stay in the same area she says, '*I don't mind really, it depends where they send me'*. At this point, all three women would choose to return to their council properties if they could, for various reasons. Their tempered support for this new housing programme is wavering.

Since Lisa's mum was present for here Wave B interview, we get an intergenerational insight into the changes in housing security and conditionality over time. Lisa's mum had been living in a council house for many years and was concerned about how her daughter and grandchildren were being treated in this new housing association composition. She expresses her feelings and offers a nod to the past, where social housing was more secure and there was a sense of 'home', an experience many young tenants would have little understanding of:

Lisa's Mum

"Wherever you live you want to feel that this is mine and I know it's not, it's rented, but I've been in council for years and years, but I always felt that it was mine."

Lisa's mum had also been rehoused to the Housing Association programme a year prior to Lisa. However, does not have the same level of conditionality or contact from the organisation:

Interviewer

"So does it feel like you two are in quite different situations then with your secure tenancy?"

Lisa

"Yes, I feel like they're always on it, not me in particular but obviously everybody in the flats, but not my mum. My mum doesn't have much contact with them at all."

Lisa's Mum

"Yes, I don't hear from them because I think it's because it's a flat, isn't it? Do you know what I mean? You get good tenants; you get bad ones, don't you? So, like I said it's mostly been about

the bins really hasn't it, oh and the prams downstairs [referring to complaints made by the housing association to Lisa]."

This is an interesting dynamic here. Housing conditionality appears to be firmer and targeted for younger tenants, possibly because younger tenants are those whose behaviour and attitudes are seen to require greater regulation and can be more readily moulded, and they represent a group with potential need for long-term support (Flint, 2019). We are also beginning to see a change in attitudes toward the conditionality components of the tenancy from Lisa. She was quite positive about the mandatory workshops and volunteering in her Wave A interview:

"Yes, yes. I think that's a good idea really, yes. Because we should all give something to each other […] If we do something good within the community you get rewards and stuff like that." (Lisa, 20, Wave A, Lone Parent, Bristol, 2014)

Now, after having lived in the new housing programme for 14 months and having had direct experience of these forms of conditionality rather than just the concept of them, some of that enthusiasm for the project has drained. Here she asked a similar question at Wave B and her response is markedly different:

Interviewer

"Do you think that it's part of the role of a housing association to encourage people to volunteer, find work, live healthily?"

Lisa

"No, I don't think it is because as long as their rent is getting paid in whichever way then they shouldn't be like, 'Oh you should go to work'. Obviously, there is a lot of pressure on us to go to work. Obviously, I've got two [children] under two that my mum can't have. She can't look after them. If I went to work, I wouldn't be able to afford to put them into nursery or anything like that. If I go and volunteer, I've still got no-one to have my children. They are with me all the time. There's not really a time when they're not with me, so yes, it is hard for them to say that I'm to live healthily and stuff like that, I don't know. I feel like what's it really got to do with them. It's a bit nosey, isn't it?"

Here you can feel Lisa's stress as she is being pressured from all angles in terms of what she should be doing and how she should be conducting herself, when she is also trying to raise two children by herself on social security. Kirsty, who was most on board with the housing programme from the beginning, had received one of the rewards after the probation year:

"You get to pick roughly what rewards you wanted like out of £100 limit or stuff like that. You could either get a bus pass, £100 decorating reward, £100 love to shop and stuff like that. I just said like shopping and clothing sort of things for the kids […] they put underneath my door £100 worth of love to shop vouchers." (Kirsty, 34, Wave B, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2015)

However, in retrospect, even Kirsty was having doubts about the legitimacy of mandatory workshops and volunteering. She describes the workshops as 'worthless' and offered to tidy up the bin area in return for payment, indicating she felt these sorts of tasks should be enumerated rather than a requirement of tenancy, but nothing materialised:

Kirsty

"Well, some of them were worthless. Literally we had like five different ones, and they were just ridiculous some of them, not even worth going to."

Interviewer

"Do you think that it should have been voluntary, or you should have been able to choose?"

Kirsty

"Yes, we should have been able to choose to do it, but we had no choice but to. The only way to get this property was to go to about five workshops and to pay £125 rent when you first move in […] Yes it should be choice. They shouldn't be forcing it on you […] They said we've got to do 15 hours volunteering a year and just certain stupid things really. What was it they were texting about the bins? I did offer to do the bin thing because obviously my partner said he'll do it for money, but obviously they didn't get back to me on that, so they haven't got anyone doing that. So that's their fault, but I did offer to do it."

Rose, was the most sceptical form the beginning and her feelings had remained largely the same in Wave B. Here, she highlights the patronising aspects of the workshops:

Interviewer

"What do you think about the fact that it was something you had to do?"

Rose

"It felt like they were treating us as a kid, like we had to go there. It's not like we're getting a job out of it or anything, we're just going into a property to live. They didn't even try to get to know us, not really. It was all about them."

Here, we can begin to see the commitment to the housing programme that was present at Wave A begin to fade. The three women are finding some of the conditionality components unnecessary, intrusive, and as Rose describes here: infantilising. Drawing upon work from Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar (2019), these findings link to the concept that contemporary welfare designs often result in the wearing out of young claimants over time, in the sense they are expected to constantly be optimistic, making progress, and jump through hoops. The Bristol cluster were looking ahead to their new tenancies in the housing association in Wave A and had implied their new homes would be an upgrade on the council properties they were used to. At least in terms of housing quality or scope for moving toward more valorised housing tenures such as PRS or eventual owner-occupied. Possibly this is what was presented to them, as they were given greater housing priority on the council list, a move into this housing programme was positioned as an improved housing pathway in the local area.

After experience of this housing pathway, Kirsty, Lisa, and Rose feel less secure in their current circumstances at Wave B than they did prior, despite all being granted the four-year tenancy after the probation year. They would all choose to return to the security of their council houses. The narrative of the Bristol cluster has shifted toward one of apathy or disregard for the housing association and their demands. A collective sense of home and belonging is largely absent. All three young women are resigned to being rehoused again after the four-year tenancy and to living with uncertainty about the future for their families. This imposed insecurity on young people with housing need is deliberate, to ensure that living in social housing is conditional and experienced

as a continual challenge rather than a secure home. This quote from Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar (2019 p. 159) evokes a sense of the ontological insecurity subjected upon contemporary, young social renters, "*the continual reassessment of welfare claimants ensures that people remain in a perpetual state of anxiety, ensuring that a life on welfare is never as comfortable and secure as a life without.*" This framing helps to encapsulate the narrative for the Bristol cluster at Wave B.

Wave C

Another year has passed and now only Lisa remains part of the study. She has secured a part-time job at the local newsagent, which she is happy to have even though it has had little impact on her income. Lisa says she will be better off working in the long-term, however delays and complications with her housing benefit had left her in arrears. Lisa has managed to reduce the arears from £1900 to £300 but says her mental health is worse than it was at Wave B. Her ex-partner has been harassing her and she is looking to move out. Even though Lisa is given higher priority on the council list, she says it is difficult to find somewhere:

"A lot of hassle from my daughter's dad, so the housing association have been trying to help me move and they've said if I need emergency housing like a hostel or anything, just call straight away, so they've been really good on that […] I'm on band 2 at the minute but in Bristol, it's quite hard to get somewhere, so I'm probably still going to be here for the next two, three years." (Lisa, 23, Wave C, Social Tenant, White British, Bristol, 2017)

The crux of Lisa's story throughout her first two and a half years in the new housing programme and been the lack of security she has experienced. From Wave A she was concerned about being forced to move out after the five years. Lisa is asked what factors contribute to her being moved on after the five-year tenancy at Wave C:

"*I think it's just if you earn too much, they can help you find a private rented place.*"

This is idea of earning 'too much', indicating an adequate amount to be able to afford a private rented property in the area was also a worry for Lisa. She knew about the insecurity in the PRS and thought she would not be able to maintain such high rent

payments in the long term. Her main focus is housing security for herself and her two children and being close to her mum. Now we will let Lisa describe how she is feeling about her tenancy midway through her fixed tenancy. First, she is asked about the behavioural conditionality attached to the tenancy and if it is fair:

"I don't really agree with it too much, only because I don't really get on with my neighbours, so I don't really agree with the complaint side of it because my neighbours next door, obviously because we live in a block, you can't really tell where the noise is coming from, but they automatically assume that it's coming from me. So, I've had quite a few complaints saying I've had parties and stuff and I haven't even been here."

Lisa has had similar issues to Rose, with complaints being made and then being harassed by the housing association for incidences they were supposedly not involved. Lisa has grown attached to her flat and remains anxious about the thought of having to move out. She is then asked if linking the tenancy to income is fair:

"I do but I don't at the same time because five years is quite a long time. You get attached to your home and having to move on and then private renting nowadays, you don't know how long you're going to be there, especially as I've got children and stuff like that, I don't want to keep upping and moving with them […] I do love my flat, I don't think I'd want to leave it to then go somewhere maybe that I wasn't going to stay. I've got a job here, I've settled where I am, so I wouldn't really want to move out of the area or around somewhere different in Bristol."

Lisa has now been able to decorate her flat the way she wants it and has managed to curate a home for her family despite her lack of resources and the conditionality attached. She is not looking forward to the future as she expects greater housing insecurity and regular moves. Lisa is longing for a tenancy where she can raise her children in a safe environment and without the looming threat of having to move out, either because she has received too many complaints from neighbours or disobeyed other aspects of the behavioural conditions, because her ex-partner is putting her family at risk, or because she manages to pass the financial threshold for being pushed into the PRS. Any lingering support Lisa had for the housing conditionality imbedded in this housing programme has gone at Wave C. Lisa had pointed out previously in Wave B that she found the behavioural conditionality intrusive:

"For them to say that I'm to live healthily and stuff like that, I don't know. I feel like what's it really got to do with them? It's a bit nosey isn't it?"

In Wave C, Lisa tries to make sense of her housing situation and perfectly captures the absurdity of the disparity between the invasive components of behavioural regulation placed on social renters compared with other more valorised housing tenures:

"I just think when you move into your home, I don't know, like say if you were private renting, your landlord is not going to tell you that you've got to live healthily and stuff like that, I just think it was a bit odd!"

There is a gradual realisation among the Bristol cluster that the principles that underpin housing conditionality, are intrusive and undermine the agency and character of the individual young people. Although on the surface to justifications for housing conditionality appear reasonable: reduce anti-social behaviour and improve well-being among young people with acute housing need, the focus on nudging individual behaviour over time begins to ware down those who experience welfare conditionality. Even those who were enthusiastic from the outset can, in time, understand behavioural housing conditionality as patronising, unnecessary, and ineffective (Dwyer et al. 2018). Particularly salient at the end of the Lisa's narrative was the recognition that these behaviour strategies were unethical and as with the final quote above, the understanding that they were the unfounded target of punitive housing policies.

5.2.3 Bristol Cluster Summary

Kirsty, Lisa, and Rose all shared a housing pathway at similar life stages. They were some of the very first tenants to experience this new housing programme in Bristol, with new forms of conditionality attached. Kirsty was the eldest of the three and was most on board with the housing programme and least prone to challenging the conditions of the tenancy. Rose was the most explicitly opposed to some of the housing conditionality these young women were subjected to, and Lisa was somewhere in the middle of the two. The key thing to take away from the Bristol cluster is the collective disconnect and disregard for the housing programme over time. At wave A, Kirsty,

Lisa, and Rose were all excited to be moving into a new housing complex and start afresh, away from the recent hardships they had been each experienced. There was a sense that the conditionality was in place but would not really affect their lives, their ability to homemake, and feel settled.

However, as time went on the three young mothers grew gradually more frustrated with the intrusive nature of the housing conditionality they were experiencing and their lack of agency even within their own homes. This wearing impact of conditionality over time had dried up any enthusiasm the Bristol cluster had for the housing programme three years previous, and they were increasingly contradicted by the measures which dictated their tenancy, their housing security, and their lives. In contradiction to what the policy framework for addressing young people with housing need suggests, anxiety and insecurity was swelling up among the Bristol cluster as time went on, instead of feeling more comfortable and settled after navigating the probation period.

5.3 Edinburgh Cluster – The Possibility of Housing Security

5.3.1 Introduction

The Edinburgh cluster is composed of five young people who were all out of work at Wave A and all seeking secure, independent tenancies through the same housing programme. Tegan (21), Callum (18), Adam (16), Catriona (17), and Molly (17) were all living in what they described as 'training flats' at Wave A, which were self-contained studio flats that acted as intermediate stage between hostel accommodation and secure social tenancies. This housing programme was designed to support young homeless individuals. All these young people had recently moved out of their parent's or family member's home for various reasons. Some had spent time sofa surfing or had a few nights sleeping rough prior to entering the hostel accommodation and then being transferred to the training flats.

This housing pathway shared by the Edinburgh cluster had conditionality attached at each stage: the young person must demonstrate an ability to live independently, pay the rent and bills on time, keep the space clean, and avoid numerous complaints from neighbours to first move from the hostel accommodation into the training flat and then again to move into a secure tenancy. The time between each stage can vary and is dependent on when the support workers deem the young person housing 'ready' in conjunction with the young person themselves. Typically, time in the hostel accommodation would be between two and six months and the training flat period would be longer, potentially over 12 months, before a secure tenancy would be granted.

One key aspect to note prior to exploring the narratives and analysis of the Edinburgh cluster is that they are considerably younger, with a mean age of 18 years, than the Bristol cluster, with a mean age of 25 years. This should be highlighted from the outset as the age gap between the two cohorts could play a significant role in their experiences and attitudes toward housing (in)security, conditionality, and aspirations. Moreover, the Bristol cluster were all lone parents whereas none of the Edinburgh cluster were. However, despite these key differences each cluster can be compared to explore how conditional social housing programmes are experienced by young people in the distinct housing policy landscapes of England and Scotland.

Wave A

The first unifying experience identified at Wave A from the Edinburgh cluster was how they came to be living in the training flats. They had all been forced to seek housing support from the council and homeless accommodation at various hostels in the city because they had been 'chucked out' of their family homes. For example, Catriona explains how she came to be living in the training flats:

"I threw a house party in my sister's flat, because I lived with her, and then she chucked me out." (Catriona, 17, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

Tegan recounts a similar experience:

"I was living with my dad, his girlfriend and my little sister at the time and, myself, my father and his girlfriend had a little bit of a, like a sort of argument and it came to like chucking me out." (Tegan, 21, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

Furthermore, Adam – the youngest participant from the cohort – explains how he was also having arguments with his family members which culminated in him being pushed to find a place of his own:

"Well, my parents were moving to [another city] and we started having arguments like mostly once or twice every day, like quite big arguments, and eventually it just got to the point where we both decided it would be better if I moved out. So, it was sort of like, 'You're moving out.' And I just sort of went, 'Yes, that's fine.'" (Adam, 16, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

We begin to see a similar pattern. A single incident or an accumulation of disputes and unrest in the family home, led to these young people seeking independent living arrangements. Although there was a sense among the Edinburgh cluster that they had been instructed to leave by their guardians, there was also a feeling from the young people that it was in their best interests given how difficult the environment was at home. Molly's dialogue helps to embody this shared perception:

"Well, actually got referred from the [youth centre] because I've been working with them for years now and I was just having a really hard time at home. Thought I'd just rather be away from that environment." (Molly, 17, Wave A, Social Tenant, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

This gives an idea of the background of the Edinburgh cluster prior to joining the study and what events and circumstances had brought them all together to be a part of the same social housing programme. Now, it is possible to dig deeper and get a sense of how these young people feel about their housing pathway, the 'training flat' scheme, and how it compares to the experiences and attitudes of the Bristol cluster.

To grasp an understanding of what may be different for the Edinburgh cluster in terms of their living arrangements in the 'training flats' compared with fellow peers in the PRS, it would be best to allow the participants explain themselves:

Interviewer

"So, you've been in the training flats for about eight months; can you tell me little bit about your tenancy? What's the setup here, what's the agreement, if that makes sense? How long is your tenancy for?"

Callum

"I'm not too sure; no-one explained that, but they did say that it could be up to a year, maybe, but during that time obviously they see how you're coping in your own house, basically the training flat. They see if you can keep it clean, if you're keeping on top of your bills, trying to make sure you're not getting on the bad side of your neighbours and stuff and that. See how you can empathise towards neighbours and stuff, to keep the noise down and that and that, basically." (Callum, 18, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

Here Callum helps to humanise the forms of surveillance and behavioural expectations the Edinburgh cluster must adhere to if they are to progress in this housing programme. Although Callum was positive about the design of the training flats, he gives us insight into the behavioural aspects of the tenancy where being a good neighbour plays a central role. This is similar to the experiences of the Bristol cluster, indicating that youth housing policies are composed with the consensus that young people who require social housing tend to be flawed characters who would constitute undesirable neighbours. Thus, the threat of eviction is used as a means to enforce 'good neighbour' practices (Watts, Fitzpatrick and Johnsen, 2018). This form of conditionality is also reliant on external factors out with the control of the individual, whereby a young tenant could accrue complaints from a particularly pedantic neighbour which could cost them their tenancy. This condition was also highlighted by the Bristol cluster.

When the Edinburgh cluster describe what forms of conditionality are attached to their tenancy, the importance of neighbour relations and 'not throwing parties' are particularly prominent. For instance, here Adam details what is expected of him to progress to the secure tenancy:

Interviewer

"So, what is it that you have to do to keep hold of the flat that you're in now and to be able to move on to the settled housing?"

Adam

"Just show that you're not a nuisance basically, like not having parties, neighbours not putting complaints in against you, making sure that you're keeping the place tidy, just basically showing that you're a good tenant in general, that you can survive on your own."

Then he asked what could happen if he did not meet these requirements, to which he responds:

"Well, you can have neighbours giving you complaints, you can have police round at your house, you can get in to trouble with the police, you can get in to trouble with the council, as well as [hostel accommodation] for having parties in your house. Basically, you can get evicted from your tenancy, you could have to pay for repairs, all that kind of stuff."

Interviewer

"Do you feel at all worried or at risk of not being able to move on to the settled tenancy?"

Adam

"Not really because I know I'm probably a good tenant compared to others that are living in scatter flats and training flats and all that kind of stuff, because I know a lot of people get evicted from them for various reasons. I'm more than likely not going to get evicted, touch wood. But I don't think that I'll be evicted or anything like that and I'll be a good candidate to move on to a different place."

Adam's narrative is similar to Kirsty, from the Bristol cluster, in the sense that in the face of an insecure and conditional housing environment he is convinced he does not need to worry about these behavioural expectations. Adam considers these conditions are in place for the other 'more deviant' young tenants, who require punitive measures in order to behave 'appropriately'. Tyler (2020) suggest that stigma is a powerful tool which can indoctrinate and divide subjugated groups. Those who are stigmatised, such as the young welfare recipients, are prone to mistrusting or distancing themselves from other subjugated identities, as shown in Shildrick and MacDonald's (2013) research.

In trying to attach meaning to the behavioural regulations imposed onto them and fellow tenants, Adam, Kirsty, and many other young people form the cohort, promote their

own character and behaviour as being admirable compared with other tenants. This is a rational response to conditional and intrusive welfare design. Those who experience these punitive systems are attempting to understand why they are subjected to strict behavioural regulation when they perceive themselves as someone of reputable moral fibre.

Therefore, young people understand the rationale for punitive measures are, presumably, for the 'other' tenants who are considered morally deviant from the perspective of the policymakers, thus justifying behavioural coercion techniques (Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2017). These narratives display the effects of ideological policy on young people. Those who encounter the regimented conditional approach to social housing provision in the UK, form pejorative attitudes about fellow service users, which in turn 'individualises' and undermines solidarity among marginalised groups.

Catriona, the young woman who was kicked out of her sisters flat because she threw a party, shares Adam's emphasis on 'not being a nuisance', as carrying significant weight in terms of her ability to progress in the housing programme. The following dialogue highlights how Catriona gradually assimilated having parties and socialising as something that she should move away from as these behaviours were seen as being immature and unethical in the eyes of the housing programme:

Catriona

"Oh, no, the woman that I had [support worker] was always really, like, strict. But she was just strict to help me."

Interviewer

"What are some of the things that happened? Like, how was she strict? Can you think of any examples?"

Catriona

"Like, she'd always come up to my door and ask what I'd been doing, ask if I'd been going to my course, ask if my benefits were okay. Tell me stop throwing parties. [Laughs] Kind of like a mum, sort of thing."

Catriona goes on to describe how she used to have parties in her flat but then stopped after a series of threats and being put on a final warning. Those who support welfare conditionality would suggest this is an example of a success story. Catriona's narrative suggests she gradually assimilates throwing parties with amoral behaviour, as though it is an activity well-meaning citizens avoid, and it is right for her to be discouraged from this sort of act. This encapsulates the lived experience of the punitive state, as social policies impose different rules and expectations on individuals from different social classes.

Flint's (2019) applies Wacquant's (2009) concept of the 'centaur state' to theorise the adoption of disciplinary tactics the contemporary UK state operates when drawing up and enacting policy for marginalised groups. In this conceptualisation, the system reinforces the perception of young people who receive augmented state housing support as requiring specific and enhanced behavioural regulation because their lack of resources (according to contemporary social housing provision policies) implies a lack of individual integrity and the most effective way to achieve the desired outcomes of obedience and self-regulation is through punitive measures.

According to Wacquant (2009 p. 79) and Flint (2019) it is this policy response to housing need that helps to create a common-sense for the divergence in rules, regulations, and expectations of individuals from marginalised communities compared with those more affluent, and more deregulated, communities. This helps explain why the young people in the Bristol and the Edinburgh cohort experience distinct and more repressive behavioural expectations from the state, compared to more affluent youth cohorts. Catriona then describes her feelings before and after experiencing conditional housing practices:

"Well, when I first moved in it was like, 'Yes! Got myself a nice flat. I can throw parties now, do whatever I want.' And then after the parties I was like, 'Right, I need to start thinking about my future.' Because I didn't want to go back to a hostel, because I'd come this far already. And then I just - I grew up."

Interviewer

"So, is that what would have happened if you'd had a complaint after that: you would have gone back to the hostel?"

Catriona

"Yes."

Interviewer

"Obviously you've said you'd rather not do that, but what it is that's better about here than the hostel? Why are you particularly keen not to do that?"

Catriona

"Because the hostel, you've got, like, a curfew of 12 o'clock, so it means, like - it interrupts with any jobs that you get, and if you're out for more than two nights a week, I think, they'll threaten to chuck you out."

When young people get their first taste of independence, when they move out of the family home, they tend to push the boundaries and there is often a surge of socialisation and risk taking linked to identify formation (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; France, 2008). As Catriona says when she first moved in, she thought, *'Yes! Got myself a nice flat. I can throw parties now, do whatever I want'*, however this was short lived. She quickly realised she was living in a conditional system and could not enjoy the full freedoms enjoyed by her more affluent peers, typically those at university. These young people, as with the Bristol cluster, are expected to bypass their youth quicker than other cohorts of young people solely because they cannot draw upon augmented informal financial support.

The punishment for having parities is therefore central to the Edinburgh cluster collective narrative as it is something inextricably linked to youth. They are instructed to believe having parties is an undesirable behaviour that should be avoided and staying quiet in your room is a good, adult behaviour. Catriona conveys her association between, and endorsement of, abiding by housing conditionality and maturity when she says, *"and then I just – I grew up"* after she stopped 'having parties'. As with the disguising of structural barriers in terms of employment, these young people are

shielded from the disproportional behavioural regulation placed on them by the state compared with more affluent youth cohorts.

This understanding of how one should be behaving may not be the case for young people from affluent backgrounds and attending university, for example, as socialising and making connections is encouraged (Threadgold and Nilan, 2009), and because there is little threat or worry about being homeless even if behaviour was anti-social and complaints are directed after a party. As in Catriona's case, a 17-year-old girl, she had recently moved from a hostel with a curfew and strict conditionality, where she was one slip-up away from being homeless. Then she 'passes' that stage and wants to enjoy a place of her own the way other youth cohorts would, by inviting friends' round and having parties. However, she is denied this ability by housing conditionality. In this scenario youth is curtailed and policymakers are demanding greater 'maturity' or obedience from disadvantaged young people than is expected of more affluent youth cohorts (Wacquant, 2009 p.81).

The Edinburgh cluster are on board with the with conditions attached to their tenancy. Adam and Tegan feel the setup is fair and supportive and in Adam's case, like Catriona, the conditions have made an impact on his behaviour as he claims he has matured since moving into the training flats:

Adam

"I've become a lot more mature. Noticing that anything like having parties every night will get me in to so much trouble, make me have to go through the whole situation again basically."

Interviewer

"Did you have a period when you were doing those things and you realised that that wasn't going to work out well, or was it just that they told you and you realised?"

Adam

"They basically just told me how much trouble I can get in to by doing this kind of stuff. Keeping up with bills and stuff like that, just making sure that I'm doing everything that I'm meant to be doing."

Again, it appears as though the desired behavioural outcomes of the conditional tenancy have materialised in Adam's case. However, it is interesting to pay attention his tone and phrasing. Adam suggests he is more mature because it has been reinforced to him 'how much trouble' he would be in if he were to be a disruptive tenant. Adam may have been a responsible tenant and matured as a person in the training flat had he been allowed to grow free of paternalistic structures, as other youth cohorts are. Other cohorts of young people can typically afford to take more risks, experiment, and therefore learn from those experiences, poor choices, and risks (France, 2008). However, those from the Edinburgh and Bristol cluster, because they receive state support and behavioural conditionality is attached, cannot afford to slip up and realise quickly that their chances to increase their future housing security and quality, is facilitated by sticking firmly to the narrow tramlines of code of conduct and hoop jumping laid before them by contemporary welfare policies.

At the end of Wave A, the Edinburgh cluster are looking ahead to the possibility of moving into a secure tenancy within the next year. All have ambitions to transition from the training flats and some, like Molly, talk of saving up to buy her own flat one day: "*I hope one day I can buy my own flat, after university and everything and get a job*." The Edinburgh cluster are more sympathetic to housing conditionality than the Bristol cluster from the outset. They are all positive about the setup in the training flats and although discussing how having a party could result in termination of tenancy, they are in agreement that this is fair, and that the behavioural regulation will benefit them in the long run. This could have something to do with the implementation of social housing policies in Scotland, and the promise of a secure tenancy that the Bristol cluster did not have. Some even believe that losing one's house for breaking the conditions is reasonable.

These young people here are keen to take on the self-responsibility of having their own living space and abiding by the conditions attached. The Edinburgh cluster envision pathways to a more secure housing future as an individual struggle where they must demonstrate all the appropriate behaviours and attributes. From their perspective, reaching one's housing aspirations are a matter of individual decisions rather than structural determinants, such as lack of informal support, affordable housing, and stable

employment opportunities. For instance, here are Tegan's goals for the coming year and how she intends to achieve these goals:

Tegan

"Well hopefully I move from the training flat into a - I prefer a new build and I would like it obviously in a certain area. I hope to go into an area that I like and that I'd be settled, and maybe one where I will get on with neighbours and stuff, and that I get the job and just sort of make money, save, when I move into my next flat I get to do it up the way I like it, and maybe start saving up for a wee holiday [chuckles]."

Interviewer

"What would help make that more likely, that you could achieve those things?"

Tegan

"Just sort of, the way that I do it, I sort of write down in my book targets, what I may achieve and stuff like that. For example, it will be wee things like maybe just the like wee'ist things ever, that sort of make me take another step. Like maybe I'll make a new list what wants to be done and stuff like for example, revise your [driving theory], doing that every day and stuff like that. Just sort of ticking stuff off, it's sort of like a relief and that's what makes me want to continue and want to go the way that I want."

Tegan's narrative implies she believes her housing aspirations, and more broadly, her ability to become socially mobile and realise greater economic independence stems from her being organised and attentive. From her perspective, if she successfully avoids the deviant behaviours, such as having parties, and embodies the valorised behaviours, such as determination, Tegan perceives her future to be bright. This conceptualisation of housing security is shaped through coercion by the conditional system she is experiencing. Scholars, such as Coulter (2018) and Hoolachan and McKee (2019), would support that regardless of which attitudes and behaviours Tegan adopts, her life chances and housing opportunities are significantly shaped and restricted by her SES and growing macro intergenerational housing inequalities. Whereas a more affluent peer could more easily adopt deviant behaviours in their youth and still realise middle-class adulthood due to the social, cultural, economic capital at their disposal (Threadgold and Nilan, 2009).

Callum shares Tegan's approach to navigating the housing market. He understands that his compliance with the conditions is not only essential for his progression in this housing programme but also that this design is optimal for his personal development. When Callum is asked about his monitored housing setup and whether he thinks he requires augmented support, he states:

"It's a bit of everything really because the support that they've got, the wanting to move into your own tenancy to prove to everyone that you can do it, it's just the willpower there to fight through it. It's keeping a hold of the training flat to show [support staff] that you can do it as well to get moved on to that next tenancy."

This is a recurrence of the internalised individualism seen in chapter 4, but in relation to housing security. Callum's use of words like 'willpower' reflects his individualised framing of his situation and he indicates that one should have to prove one is worthy of obtaining secure housing. At Wave A interview, Callum was very positive about his experience in the training flat. He was asked earlier in the interview if he would have preferred to go straight into a permanent tenancy over a training flat, he responded:

"No, this setup is a lot better because it's like, I don't know. It's like school for houses; that's the way I think of it, it's the easiest way to explain it. It's just like you're going to school in your own house like, right, what do I need to do today? What do I need to do the next day?"

This is the key message to take away from the Edinburgh cluster at Wave A. They are largely accepting that their home is an arena for behavioural training, and even positive about the housing conditionality they experience. Without much contact with parents, the support staff have significant influence in shaping the views and values of these young people. They are all confident they will move to secure tenancies at Wave B and that their future housing prospects will be largely determined by 'not throwing parties' and getting along with their neighbours. This is what has been communicated to them by the housing programme. Now, this is not necessarily a damaging belief to hold, however there should be some candidness from the system, where these young people are aware that keeping the noise down will not enable future homeownership. Next, the Edinburgh cluster at Wave B will be analysed and explored to help map out what

happened to them over the 12 months and how their housing status, attitudes, and aspirations have changed (or not).

Wave B

More than a year on from Wave A and there has been considerable change in the living arrangements across the Edinburgh cluster. Three of the five (Adam, Catriona, and Molly) are now living in permanent housing association flats under Scottish Secure Tenancy agreements. Tegan moved back into her dad's house and Callum remained in the training flats. Hence, although all were set on realising independent secure tenancies within the next year, and had felt they were on track, only 3 out of the 5 young people managed to do so.

Firstly, it is important to return to Tegan's narrative, as at the end of Wave A she made it clear, from her perspective and in concordance with the support staff, she was adopting the optimal attitudes and behaviours to enable her to 'succeed' in the housing programme. She talked of moving into her own flat and being able to stamp her personality on her new living space. However, this did not materialise and a year on Tegan is back living in her dad's house, where she was previously, in her words, 'chucked out'. Despite this possible 'setback', Tegan is pleased about living with her dad again:

"It's been really good. Basically, since last time, myself and my dad, we had made up and we came to an agreement like what would happen and things like that and it's worked out really, really well and I'm quite glad it went this way." (Tegan, 22, Wave B, White British, Jobseeker, Edinburgh, 2015)

Tegan now lives in a council flat with her dad, his girlfriend, and little sister. She and her little sister pay their father 'dig' money for groceries and bills, because his benefits are reduced because his daughters are living in the house. Despite the dispute which led to Tegan leaving to find independent accommodation, she maintains that her relationship with her dad and little sister is now more solid than ever, and she is happy to remain living here while she seeks stable employment:

"I think for now with me still being in my early 20s, I'm able to stay here for the next good few years maybe. I've not really got an age limit. I would move out here probably before I'm 30 though. I'm not really too sure. I am quite a family person and me and my dad and stuff, we get on very well. I just want to get my stable job with more hours and be able to save and then maybe look onto a mortgage in the near future."

This is quite different to Tegan's aspirations at Wave A. She was eager to move into her own secure tenancy. A year on and Tegan claims she is happy to be back living in her dad's house and suggests it was her choice to move back there. Tegan indicates instead of saving up for a holiday now she is more focused on saving up for a mortgage, which she feels is more likely to materialise living at her dad's than it would be in her own flat. A relatable phenomenon for many contemporary youth cohorts across the socio-economic scale. The desire to be independent and have a place to call your own, offset with unaffordable rents and the pressure to get on the property ladder, tends to compel young school leavers or university graduates to stay in the family home for elongated periods or return after temporary periods of living away (Hoolachan et al. 2017).

In contrast to Tegan at Wave B, Catriona now has her own secure tenancy. There is no value judgement attached to either housing pathway, be it longer periods in the family home or living independently, it should be a matter of listening to the young person and understanding what works for them individually, what their goals are, and how they evaluate their own living arrangements. Catriona is now 19 years old and has seemingly put her partying days behind her. She was forced out of her sister's home for throwing a party and was in trouble again for doing so in the training flats. Catriona is pleased with her new set up post training flats. Catriona has progressed in this housing pathway and now has a secure tenancy she can call her own. Her housing aspirations for the past year have been met as she gleefully narrates here:

Catriona

"Oh my God, it's my perfect area! I was so lucky!" (Catriona, 19, Wave B, White British, Jobseeker, Edinburgh, 2015)

Interviewer

"So that's working out really well, then?"

Catriona

"Yes, I love it here."

However, despite this, Catriona has moved onto ESA (support group) in the past year because her depression has worsened. Her educational and employment aspirations have not been met in the past year. She discusses often feeling too anxious to leave the flat:

"*Well, I've always suffered with depression and anxiety, but I had a certain situation [not discussed] and it got worse. I'm trying to, I think I'm getting a bit better now […] Since I've not been able to really go out, I've been buying a lot of gym equipment and doing a lot of fitness in my house. It's pretty hard to get out. So that's basically what I do every day […] I live by myself but my boyfriend, well, he works seven days a week, so he just comes down on his breaks to check how I am and see if I've eaten and stuff.*"

Catriona no longer has regular contact with support workers like she did in the training flats, hence her boyfriend is coming to check up on her given her current vulnerable mental state. Thus, although Catriona's housing aspirations have been met, other aspects of her life are unsatisfactory from her perspective. She is less optimistic and more disillusioned than she was at Wave A when she was discussing her desire to go to university to study Biology. She goes on to discuss how her mental health is preventing her from reaching her employment goals:

"Well, it's still pretty hard to get out the house as well. I definitely wouldn't pass a mental health assessment in the police force. I would definitely fail that with just my mind set right now."

Although Catriona is pleased about her new home she is stressed and concerned about her future labour market opportunities. For Catriona, like many other young people from the study, her mindset is key and if she feels she is not in the right mindset, it is firstly unlikely that she will procure employment, and secondly that her mental health

is detached from broader structural barriers that impact Catriona, it is a health problem that should be addressed by her.

Callum's overall situation at Wave B is similar to Catriona's. At Wave A, he was confident he would transition from the training flats to a secure tenancy before long. However, at Wave B he remained out of work and living in the training flats. He, like Catriona, has experienced deteriorated mental health over the past year. He is now also claiming ESA (support). Callum was unable to carry out the conditionality attached to a JSA claim because his mental health had worsened significantly. He had incurred some rent arrears because as Callum states:

"I don't know how to really explain it and stuff, it's just I lost all the motivation." (Callum, 19, Wave B, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2015)

Callum's partner is expecting a baby in the coming year. And he is planning on moving back to his hometown:

"I'm planning to move back there [town outside Edinburgh]. They did have a house for me but obviously I didn't have my utilities paid off and stuff, so they had to give that house to someone else."

The Edinburgh cluster are collectively positive, on the whole, about the setup of the training flats and feel the conditions are fair. However, when it returns to the topic of keeping the noise down, they are more conflicted. They are constricted from suggesting they should be allowed to play music in their own flat every so often, or have visitors over, because this would signal a challenge to the system which his housing them and it could therefore appear ungrateful or impudent. These young people are conditioned not to challenge the conditionality they experience. Callum talks of a formal warning he received for a noise complaint when he had a friend round to his flat:

"[The neighbours] said it wasn't music, they said it was mainly the voices. So, it's embarrassing when you speak louder than your music! […] In a way I think the building should have more sound proofing […] They gave me a formal warning not to do it again and stuff […] you're like oh no, what if I lose the tenancy and stuff. It gets you thinking and you're like right, well, I'll

just not do that again […] In my very first tenancy, I got complaints for just walking around the house […] I was getting complaints left, right and centre because there was an old couple, and I was just walking in my living room and they'd be banging with their brush and that. Oh my God!"

This could have played a role in his delayed transition from training flats to secure tenancy. This passage highlights Callum's, and the groups, lack of conviction in questioning the conditions attached to their tenancy. Instead of suggesting neighbour complaints for minor noise should not affect their ability to progress in the housing programme, Callum asks that there be better sound proofing installed in the building. He also talks of how he was worried that he could lose his tenancy, thus Callum accepted he should not invite friends to visit his flat. However, the ability to have friends enjoy one's home and to socialise in a safe environment is a key factor in home making and can enhance individual well-being (Hoolachan, 2022), particularly when Callum is struggling with his mental health. Pernickety neighbours should not dictate a young person's access to social housing when the alternative is homelessness. Callum's housing aspirations or expectations have not been met over the past year. However, he remains confident that in the next year he will realise his housing aspirations:

Interviewer

"Hopefully, this time next year you'll be, have a baby, living in a new place?"

Callum

"Staying in [hometown], everything's worked out as planned, hopefully I'm on the right track to getting a job and stuff. I'm hopefully no longer seeing the psychiatrist and just moving on with things, yes."

On the other hand, Adam has transitioned into a secure tenancy. He had also been offered a temporary contract working at Edinburgh Airport but had not started yet. Adam's housing aspirations had been met and he was now looking forward to concentrating on his employment, starting his career, and providing for his partner and their new-born. Although Adam had not started in his new role at Wave B, he was looking ahead to keeping the job and 'moving up'. Adam felt settled in his new home

and this enabled him to focus on his employment goals, here are his aspirations at the end of Wave B:

"Just to progress in life. Just get a bit more experience and move up in my job or get a better one and probably try and move further out of the benefit system […] it's temporary but most people get kept on at the end of it. It's usually over the summer so it's until about September." (Adam, 18, Wave B, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2015)

Molly had also successfully transitioned into a secure tenancy by Wave B. It is refreshing to come across a positive story in the data and hear the young people articulate life satisfaction. Molly is attending College and aspires to study social sciences at university once she has completed her HNC. She is receiving Income Support, Education Maintenance Allowance, and Housing Benefit. Molly discusses how significant a step it was for her to get her own secure tenancy this past year:

"I think just finding this flat, really; that's been the best thing that's happened to me. This is the perfect flat for me; it's in the perfect location. There's no trouble with anyone, no neighbour trouble or anything like that […] I think just having full independence. Just little things like going to the shops and doing your groceries by yourself. I think just little things like that; I really like doing that. Yes, just inviting people round and you don't have worry; oh, my parents are in or anything like that. It's just really nice." (Molly, 18, Wave B, Social Tenant, White British, Edinburgh, 2015)

Molly highlights how important independent living is for wellbeing, something these young people have to prove they deserve. The freedom to curate the space and have friends and family come and go is crucial for enhanced wellbeing (Hoolachan, 2022). She has been able to settle in to her new flat and focus on her studies. Molly discusses how inviting friends over is important for her and enables her to feel more grown up and independent. Molly also volunteers at a local youth centre where she helps prepare and run 'self-esteem workshops':

"We do this thing called the peer mentors, where it's self-esteem and confidence workshops for young girls. So, we go into high schools and primary schools and delivery the sessions over a couple of weeks. We ask them, has your confidence improved by doing this workshop and that sort of thing."

This is interesting, as Molly has experienced the contemporary youth focused initiatives which seek to tackle social inequalities by trying to 'fix' character 'faults' within the individual (Flint, 2019), and is now helping to establish the individualised mindset among the new generation of young people. Aforementioned, many of the young people from the study support this framing of their own struggles in the labour market. Boosting self-esteem of disadvantaged youth is increasingly perceived as an opportunity to narrow the attainment gap (Reay, 2021) and therefore, according to this ideal, labour market outcome disparities between young people from differing ends of the socio-economic scale. Molly gives more insight into what she helps deliver as a volunteer for the youth centre:

"We do this self-esteem flower where everyone has to write a little positive word about everyone else and pass it on. Then you get your flower back and it's all positive words. Just little things like that to boost their self-esteem."

This illuminates the nature of individualised strategies to address economic inequalities, where young people and practitioners believe in enhancing psychological well-being of young people as a means of overcoming structural inequalities. A caveat here, the author does not intend to argue that attempting to boost young people's self-esteem is a worthless cause. Merely to highlight the implicit messaging within the self-esteem workshops which Molly describes here, those which are prominent in contemporary society from corporate settings to labour activation policies, that economic insecurity and devalorised housing pathways arise from individual deficiencies rather than the structures of the contemporary labour and housing markets. Molly then offers her aspirations for the coming year:

"Hopefully, completing the HNC course and looking on to university. I also want to get a part-time job this summer. I know that'll affect, I'm quite scared to get a job because I know that might start affecting my housing benefit and everything. It's complicated but yes, hopefully get a part-time job."

Moving on from Wave B, the collective narrative of the Edinburgh cluster is one of relative satisfaction with their housing situations. They are subjected to far less conditionality now that that four out of the five young people have moved out from the

training flats. Their accounts do highlight however, the importance for other needs to be met besides housing. The Edinburgh cluster are more praiseworthy about their housing arrangements over time, in contrast with the Bristol cluster. This could be related to the relative housing security afforded to the Edinburgh cluster compared with the Bristol cluster, who experienced somewhat static housing trajectories in terms of conditionality and security.

The Edinburgh cluster were increasingly satisfied with their housing tenures, whereas the Bristol cluster were moving in the opposite direction at this stage. However, the Edinburgh cluster collectively espoused worsening mental health at Wave B and two of the young people, Callum and Catriona, transitioned from work orientated support (JSA) to unconditional related support (ESA) because they were assessed to be too mentally unwell to seek, or enter employment. There remained a lack of paid work for the Edinburgh cluster, as none had transitioned to into paid work at Wave B. Molly's narrative would represent the optimal transition among the Edinburgh cluster, she is in full-time education, in a secure tenancy, and positive about her current living arrangements and future.

5.3.2 Edinburgh Cluster Summary

The Edinburgh cluster represent a diverse group of young people with different housing biographies, aspirations, and perspectives. However, they did share similar housing experiences over the timeframe of the study. They collectively discussed the pressure, and their desire to, grow up, mature, and embody the responsible tenant, as constructed by the policy framework. The social housing programme the Edinburgh cluster were experiencing urged these young people to bypass their youth as there was a limited capacity independence and self-expression. Other groups of young people would be enabled without fear they could become homeless.

The conditional system instructs these young tenants to demonstrate exemplary behaviour and the Edinburgh cluster felt the pressure to grow up quickly which also constrained their ability to construct meaning and attachment to 'home'. However, in terms of their housing experiences, the group on the whole, left the study with greater

housing security than was the case at Wave A. Collectively, at Wave B, the tangible emotion of greater housing security was evident and although other challenges impacted each member of the Edinburgh cluster, it would be fair to suggest as a group, they felt increasingly comfortable with their living arrangements over time. This contrasted with the Bristol cluster, who experienced a regressive trajectory in terms of a sense of subjective housing security and satisfaction over time.

5.4 Conclusions

This chapter analysed youth experiences of the contemporary conditional mechanisms embedded in social housing provision in the UK, by drawing upon narratives from the Bristol housing programme and Edinburgh's 'training flats' scheme. The chapter brought recent policy reforms to life by exploring the experiences of social housing pathways among two cohorts of young tenants. The analysis illuminates the nuances of living within each distinct policy landscape and how young people make sense of their housing transitions during a time of heightened precarity and conditionality.

Both the Bristol and Edinburgh cohorts articulated a pressure to be mature and avoid what the conditional housing policies deemed as 'misbehaving', in order to maintain their tenancies and progress up the social housing rungs. The young people recognised their youth being curtailed as the intrusive behavioural regulation attached to their tenancies restricted their ability to personalise and enjoy their space (Hoolachan, 2022), where a sense of home was largely absent. Particularly, the young people in the Bristol cluster experienced extended forms of conditionality in the form of mandatory workshops and volunteering, and restrictions on behaviours within the property complex, such as smoking. Although conditionality was present in both contexts, the framing and the intensity at which it was applied differed between the Bristol and Edinburgh cohorts (Clarke et al. 2020). The Bristol cohort were made explicitly aware that failing to abide by the conditions would result in eviction and that after the four-year tenancy they would be moving to the PRS. The Edinburgh cohort experienced a less harsh paternalism, where abiding by the conditions would lead to a long-term tenancy.

However, even with the supposedly more dignified Scottish model, the Edinburgh cohort realised worsening well-being over time. Thus, indicating that housing security alone cannot offset a precarious existence relying on state support. This highlights the multiple barriers faced in contemporary youth transitions, realising employment and housing security is becoming increasingly rare and those who claim state support have limited agency to take risks and move fluidly with the flexible economy in the PRS and ride the wave of precarity. Not only are their opportunities structurally restricted, but their behaviour is also more closely monitored and policed, where they are the target of state authorities (Flint, 2019); one slip up or misdemeanour, according to the intensified behavioural conditionality, could lead to homelessness (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2019).

The housing conditionality this cohort of young people experienced in many ways mirrors the employment support they experience. It constrains young people's agency and the constant threat of financial sanctions or eviction for noncompliance with strict behavioural conditions, stimulates fear and acceptance of insecurity among many young people who experience these policies. Anxiety is imposed on these young people by the state (Boland and Griffin, 2022 p.55) and they are again encouraged to understand their housing insecurity as an individual problem. The key difference between typical employment support conditionality and the housing conditionality experienced by the young people, is the enhanced infantilising nature of the housing conditionality.

The narratives in this chapter illuminate the pressure to 'grow up' and mature in the eyes of the state. The housing pathways the young people experience mimic training centres and they largely refrained from critiquing this as state control because they are being provided with shelter. They are restricted from decorating their homes or expected to volunteer in order to maintain their tenancy. They are encouraged to perform adulthood in the eyes of the state by, for instance, avoiding having visitors in one's living space. Without experiencing the true markers of adulthood, these constructed conceptualisations of adulthood are understood by these young people as a necessary process to realise housing security. These findings enhance Stewart (2019) and Hoolachan's (2022) evidence, that young people with housing need in the UK have

restricted ability to homemake and are required to do so in ways deemed appropriate by the state. This has a detrimental impact on individual well-being and housing security (Jacobs and Malpas, 2013). There is evidence that there is some resistance to these policies over time, as demonstrated by the gradual aversion to the housing programme articulated by the Bristol cluster.

To compare the experiences of the two distinct housing policy domains, Scotland and England is a challenge, given within each policy landscape there are a range of social housing programmes operating distinct conditionality practices. However, in this small-scale sample we can see similarities within how young people understand housing conditionality and desire long-term housing security. The young people demonstrate not only compliance but enthusiasm for abiding by the conditions attached to their tenancy. Both clusters expressed aspirations for greater housing security and to be free from behavioural regulation at home.

The Bristol cluster experienced a more invasive behavioural regulation and for a longer period. As they progressed in the housing programme, they did not feel a greater sense of satisfaction or security. They in fact felt more detached from a sense of 'home' as the end of the fixed tenancy grew closer. In contrast, the promise of a secure tenancy, after the probation period, maintained drive and optimism among the Edinburgh cluster over time. The young people in Scotland who had been granted a secure long-term tenancy were glowing about the impacts of feeling in control and independent in one's home. Hence, the approach and implementation of Scotland's social housing model gives young people a greater sense of security, which provides a platform to progress in the labour market.

The analysis suggests, England's model of pressing the residualisation of the social housing sector (McKee, 2012), where social housing is reserved only for the most deprived young people, and where young people with housing need are being prepared to move into the PRS, can have adverse effects on young people's well-being. As with conditional employment services (Fletcher and Flint, 2018), young people in these housing programmes tend to become disillusioned and critical of and state policies,

whereas before their experiences they remained enthusiastic about upwardly mobile housing trajectories.

This chapter highlights the unique challenges of young people who experience conditional support in social housing face and the disparity in the behavioural regulation and intrusive state practices experienced by marginalised young people. There is need for greater attention from scholars and policymakers internationally, to better understand the barriers faced by contemporary marginalised youth. The continual precarity that is enforced on the young people discussed in this chapter is by no means preserved for these select young people within these specific housing programmes in the UK. Across advanced-capitalist societies, young people with limited informal support are being additionally psychosocially damaged through interaction with state services, and their life chances are being further curtailed by intrusive practices at the initial stages of their transitions to adulthood (Crisp and Powel, 2017; Friedli and Stearn, 2015). Rather than supporting marginalised youth to help reduce inequality of opportunity as the pathways to homeownership narrow for recent generations of young people, conditional welfare polices exacerbate already existing anxieties and disadvantage, especially through intensified behavioural conditionality in social housing systems.

Chapter 6 - Young People and Benefit Sanctions: Anger and Alienation

Anger and alienation: *"I just felt angry, I just thought I go to the Jobcentre, literally beating up the guy that sanctioned me because he did it so many times."* (Bradley, 23, Wave A, Ex-Offender, Black Caribbean, London, 2015)

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have explored and analysed the employment and housing aspirations of young people who experience welfare conditionality, to understand how they envisage pathways to future security, and make sense of social policies centred on behavioural regulation. This chapter will explore and analyse the interviewees' benefit sanction experiences. This chapter will go beyond understanding how young people perceive punitive welfare in principle and focus on how young people with direct experience of benefit sanctions, typically in the form of basic unemployment subsidy being withheld for a temporary period, conceptualise this punishment in real time and retrospectively.

This cohort of young claimants were subjected to the most stringent conditionality and highest sanction rates in the history of UK social security (Adler, 2018 p.65). Officially aimed at getting more people from state support into work, the Welfare Conditionality Project (2013-2018) demonstrated that benefit sanctions were ineffective, unethical, and often lead to damaging behaviours among recipients who were sanctioned, pushing them further away from paid employment. Benefit sanctions have also been found to be disproportionately distributed within the most deprived localities (Parkes, 2023) and among the most vulnerable recipients (De Vries et al. 2017), with the greatest disparity coming between young and old recipients (De Vries et al. 2017).

Of the 56 young people at Wave A, 25 had experienced at least one sanction. Of these 25, 17 were male. Moreover, 17 young people from this cohort were sanctioned multiple times and for extended periods, in a few cases over 12 months went by with no formal financial support to help with employment related activities (see appendix 5

for full table). Young people, in particular young men, during this time represented the demographic of claimants most at risk of facing a sanction. For instance, from November 2012 to December 2016 white males aged 18-24 were 98% more likely to be sanctioned than white males aged 25-49 (De Vries et al. 2017). The intersection of youth and male identities remain subject to the highest sanction rates in contemporary analysis (Parkes 2023): overall men are 2.6 times more likely to be sanctioned than women. However, sanction rates have decreased since the 'great sanctions drive' (Webster, 2019), where 24% of all those who claimed JSA between 2010-2016 were sanctioned (NAO, 2016).

The analysis will illuminate what kinds of emotional response arose from experiencing benefit sanctions and how this impacted the behaviour of these young people. The analysis suggests that young people are more likely to critique the system rather than blame their individual behaviour in relation to sanctions. This opposes the findings of the previous chapters within this thesis, on employment and housing aspirations, which found that young people tended to self-blame and internalise the rhetoric that hard work and intrinsic motivation will enable them to reach their future goals. When faced with benefit sanctions, it seems young people are more likely to blame structural factors, policy design, and bad luck for their circumstances rather than adopt the self-responsible role model espoused by contemporary social security systems.

This chapter goes beyond describing the material hardship faced by young people with limited informal support as a direct result of benefit sanctions and analyses how the experience, or looming threat of sanctions made them feel and how it affected their behaviour over time. The desired policy outcome of benefit sanctions is that withholding financial support from young people, will condition them to abide by the rules, become more 'obedient' to the demands of the system, and motivate them to maintain low-wage employment. The findings from this analysis demonstrate that direct experience of sanctions, and threat of sanctions, are more likely to evoke feelings of indignation than stimulate conformity among young people. Particularly among young males these feelings of anger and resentment towards the system, from their perspective, either elicit a desire to lash out at someone or something, or to disengage from employment services and reject state support.

6.1.1 Structure

This chapter will take shape using the two main types of response to sanction experiences among the young people, identified through narrative analysis. These two types are: 1) Anger and Compliance; 2) Anger and Disengagement. These types will form the structure of this chapter and within each type, individual narratives will be highlighted to bring to life each type of emotional response to sanction(s), or threat of sanction(s). Within each type of response, the sanction stories of multiple young people will be harmonised to illustrate the degree of shared experience. However, the idiosyncratic situation of each young person and their unique background and experience will not be lost, as this chapter will demonstrate the range of sanction experiences within this cohort, even within response types.

Type 1 explores young people who articulated feelings of anger following a sanction, or threat of, but continued to engage with the conditional system due to lack of informal support. Then, type 2 explores young people who expressed similar feelings of frustration and resentment toward the system following a sanction experience, but who, for various reasons, had the ability to choose to disengage from conditional state support and did so. The narratives of those who were not sanctioned or threatened with a sanction will crop up sporadically throughout the two main sanction types to provide balance to the analysis and acknowledge the importance of understanding the attitudes toward sanctions across the whole sample. The majority of the young people had not experienced a sanction and were predictably more likely to suggest sanctions were easily avoidable and accept the rationale for the application of sanctions for other recipients. The two main sections will be followed by a discussion and then a conclusion.

6.2 Type 1 - Anger and Compliance

This type of response to benefit sanctions depicts the young people from the study who purported feelings of anger when either subjected to a sanction or threatened with one, but who continued to abide by all the conditions of the claimant commitment. For the

young people within this type, there was a sense of entrapment as they often felt they had no choice but to bend themselves to the demands of the Jobcentre Plus, no matter how much stress or frustration it caused them, because they had very limited informal financial support to draw upon. These young people typically could not afford to be sanctioned. The conditionality experienced within this group was often viewed as confusing, contradictory, and sometimes unjustifiable. These young people were careful not to step out of line but the constant surveillance of their behaviours, combined with the looming threat of punishment, made them feel resentment toward the state and the policy. The criminalisation of welfare claimants in the UK, as theorised by Fletcher and Wright (2018), is impacting these young people in harmful ways, inciting feelings of anger, even though they are determined to abide by the pre-set behavioural expectations.

6.2.1 Lived Experience

This section will draw upon the sanction stories of four young men to help clarify and personify type 1: Omar (a 20-year-old black migrant living in Bristol), Patrick (a 23-year-old white British ex-offender living in Peterborough), Bradley (a 23-year-old black Caribbean ex-offender living in London), and Josh (a 25-year-old white British Universal Credit claimant living in Warrington).

Omar's narrative will be the central case study which runs through this section, while the other three young men will appear more sporadically throughout, in order to strengthen the sense of shared experience and attach meaning to the lived experience of 'anger and compliance' in the face of sanctions.

At Wave A, Omar has been living in the UK for two and a half years. He reunited with some family members and is living in shared accommodation with other migrants. He is desperate to secure a stable job so that he can move out and provide for his wife and children back in Somalia. Being a young black male, who is also a migrant, Omar represents arguably the most policed, scrutinised, and vulnerable identity in contemporary UK society (Sharp and Atherton, 2007). In the sense Omar is at greater risk of being a victim of both state and physical violence and being arrested for acts of

violence and other offences when compared with white British males (UK Government, 2021).

Omar is aware of his precarious citizenship status in the UK, as a young unemployed male migrant. He states that he has been very careful to abide by all conditions attached to his JSA claim. Omar viewed his move to the UK as a fleeting opportunity to make a better life for him and his family and thus was conscious to keep the authorities satisfied. In his Wave A interview, he defends the rationale for the job search activities he is required to carry out:

"For me to prove that I'm looking for a job isn't beneficial to me to find a job. But it actually is helpful for me to give [my Jobcentre Plus advisor] the confidence that I'm doing the right thing. I've already been looking for the job, but from my end I'm doing what I was supposed to do, but from their end it's giving them the necessary proof and confidence that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing." (Omar, 20, Wave A, Migrant, Black African, Bristol, 2015)

The extensive job search was deemed by many young people as unreasonable. However, Omar is eager to demonstrate he wants to work and is willing to do whatever it takes and what is asked of him, in order to gain secure employment. Although he does not feel this will inevitably lead to employment, Omar espouses it is important regardless for him to demonstrate he is available for work. To infer confidence onto his advisor, that Omar will find work. He is positive about the claimant commitment and suggests complying with the behavioural expectations will better enable him to realise full-time employment. This is possibly why Omar managed to avoid a sanction prior to and during the timeframe of the study. However, he had been threatened with a sanction recently for failing to apply for a job vacancy:

"I was once threatened that my benefit would be stopped, and it was because all the job announcements I saw needed substantial experience [I did not have] and I didn't apply. And when I met with the officer in the Jobcentre, they told me that I have to apply whatever experience, it's required, I have to make the effort to apply. And if I do this again, they will stop giving me the benefit."

Omar used his agency and discretion to establish that he was ineligible for a particular job opportunity and hence decided not to apply, yet he was threatened with financial punishment for not abiding by the conditions of his claim. At this stage, the sanction threat did not seem to faze Omar and he remained supportive of the claimant commitment:

Interviewer

"Why is it that you think it's reasonable for them to ask for the number of jobs et cetera that you do?"

Omar

"Because it has been in the agreement that I have reached with the Jobcentre staff, before two years, that I have to put down those number of jobs and apply for them."

There are close similarities with Omar and Patrick's narrative at the end of Wave A, even though their biographies are disparate. Patrick, a white British male, had two short spells in the prison system and had recently been released at Wave A. He had moved into social rented accommodation that was conditional upon him entering apprenticeship training. He and Omar perceive the system in a similar way; however Patrick is less on board than Omar in terms of the worth in demonstrating job seeking activity:

"I just think it's bullshit [applying for jobs in Universal Job-Match] to be honest. If the jobs were worth applying for and if they were even real jobs, you know, then it would be good. I just think it's pointless, like completely pointless." (Patrick, 23, Wave A, Ex-Offender, White British, Peterborough, 2015)

Patrick also made sure to abide by the claimant commitment like Omar did. However, their approach varied. Instead of doing everything by the book, Patrick admitted to doing what he had to avoid a sanction, even if this involved 'blagging' the Jobcentre Plus:

"I've always done what I've had to do to get my Jobseeker's Allowance, even if I had to blag it, which you do most of the time. I've done what they've said on Universal Job Match and just

gone out and handed out my CVs anyway. Just because that is basically the way I'm going to get a job, that's how I've always done it."

Thus, although Patrick had not followed the conditions precisely, he has managed to avoid a sanction to this point. Like Omar, he felt the online application for work through Universal Job-Match was unlikely to lead to employment so he did what had to and continued to hand out CVs in person because he felt this would be more effective. Patrick is using his agency to formulate a behavioural approach that he thinks is reasonable for him and will satisfy his advisor. He is not fully compliant or committed to the conditions imposed on him but rather he is 'getting by' in the system to minimise personal distress. Finn (2021) also found that claimants in Ireland would find their own ways to navigate the conditionality and manage the relationship with their work coach that usually involved some level of 'blagging' of job search activity. Both Patrick and Omar had been threatened with a sanction at this stage, however Patrick reacted differently in the immediate aftermath. Here, he is asked if the threat of sanctions has affected his behaviour in any way and he described how it stirred emotional response of anger:

Patrick

"Yes, I think it does, because it makes you angry and you just - I don't know, I guess you just want to lash out I guess and maybe some people get tempted to go shop lifting and all the rest of that because they've got nothing else to do. They've got no other way of getting food or anything like that, so yes."

Interviewer

"But for you personally knowing that you're going to be sanctioned, if you don't do what they want you to do, does that make you abide by their rules?"

Patrick

"Basically, yes, basically like if they say, 'Well if you don't do this, you're going to get sanctioned', you kind of have to do it, otherwise they're just going to sanction you. You're just going to get well angry."

The language used in important here. For Patrick, even the threat of a sanction makes him want to 'lash out'. He is angry about the threat of sanctions because he is being

forced to abide by conditions, he deems arbitrary to his goal of securing employment. There is another incidence in the data, where similar word choice is used in relation to conceptualise a sanction experience. Bradley, a 23-year-old black Caribbean male with a criminal record was subject to sanction for incomplete job search at the time of his Wave A interview. He believes the sanction was unjust and the way he was treated by the Jobcentre enraged him:

"They put you through long procedures and when you go on it, there's barely no jobs there. All the jobs there, they don't fit your criteria. All the jobs, they're saying that you need certain qualifications." (Bradley, 23, Wave A, Ex-Offender, Black Caribbean, London, 2015)

Interviewer

"So, it's quite hard to get a break in that sort of set-up."

Bradley

"Every time you apply, you never get the job and then they get angry saying you don't look for jobs […] They call security guards on you because I was getting angry. They sanction me for no reason and then he's being rude. He called security, they told me to get out of the Jobcentre."

His narrative has many similarities to Patrick's, in the sense he considers Universal Job-Match site to be futile and he is angry about how he is being treated, but Bradley's ethnic background adds another layer of vulnerability when compared to Patrick (a white male), and thus Bradley's anger and desire to lash out could have different connotations and more severe repercussions (Ministry of Justice, 2016). It is important to recognise how Bradley's ethnicity shapes his interactions with, and understandings of, state employment services and how his aggravated response to a sanction holds different meanings to his white counterparts in the racialised context of contemporary British policymaking and policing (Gaston, Brunson and Grossman, 2020).

The fact that Bradley is one of the few young people to explicitly mention the presence of a security guard at the Jobcentre, suggests the criminalisation of welfare claimants (Fletcher and Wright, 2018) could be particularly triggering and disconcerting for young black males given the history of the criminalisation of the black community in the UK (Watkins-Hayes, 2009). Bradley eventually transitioned to ESA (Support

Group) because of his epilepsy, but whilst on JSA he was sanctioned for over two months. Bradley also adopts aggressive language to describe how his sanction experience made him feel:

Interviewer

"Do you think that it would be better if you did have to go to the Jobcentre at all now or receive any kind of employment support?"

Bradley

"No, to be honest with you, I don't want to be contradictive, but ESA is better. I don't ever want to take a trip to the Jobcentre again. They put me through hell."

Interviewer

"When you received the sanction, did that change your behaviour in any way?"

Bradley

"Yes, it got me angry. I just felt angry, I just thought I go to the Jobcentre, literally beating up the guy that sanctioned me because he did it so many times. He did it to all my friends and he laughs about it."

These findings illuminate the experiences of young working-class men with frustrated aspirations and being disproportionately targeted by punitive welfare design. There is some evidence to suggest that young working-class men have been marginalised to a greater extent within contemporary labour markets (McDowell, 2019). Nixon's (2018) analysis of masculinity and post-industrial economies during this contemporary period of welfare reform. He suggests the 'feminization' of the new flexible labour market - in the sense new jobs are more likely to be part-time, customer facing, and higher importance is placed on social and emotional skills in expanding service roles, traits which have been traditionally constructed as feminine (McDowell, 2014). This, it is argued, has further disadvantaged masculine working-class identities and somewhat marooned this demographic from traditional standardised employment, typically in the form of full-time manual labour roles. This supposed emasculation of young working-class men has led to frustration and disorientation among those who have struggled to pave their way in the contemporary insecure labour markets (Nixon, 2018).

Hence, Bradley's reaction to being sanctioned is far removed from the stated intended outcome of this policy design. Instead of a burst of action or a commitment to obedience in the form of employment related activity, Bradley says the way in which the sanction changed his behaviour was that it made him want to hurt the Jobcentre Plus staff. He and Patrick both talk of sanction experience or the looming threat of sanctions as a catalyst for anger and lashing out. This is a damning choice of words from vulnerable young males with criminal records.

These findings elaborate upon Redman and Fletcher's (2022) analysis of street level bureaucrats (SLBs) behaviour within the Jobcentre Plus during the time of this rife sanctioning regime. They argue that although officially it was denied that there were sanctioning targets and dehumanising practices, on the ground and at a local level, SLBs were operating within a competitive and pressurised environment to distribute sanctions and not be seen as 'soft' within the workplace. Redman and Fletcher (2022 p.318) highlight here the experience of a Jobcentre Plus worker, one of many within the study who shared similar experiences:

"Worker three proceeded to explain how they would frequently treat claimants with 'disrespect' and use psychological harm as technique: 'they were pushing them until they either just cleared off because they couldn't take the pressure or they got sanctioned' (cf. NAO, 2016:28). This chimed with worker five (JCP Executive Officer), who suggested that some staff intentionally tried to antagonise claimants in efforts to dissuade claims. Morally abject strategies to surpass targets were also evidenced in the case of one manager: 'who just thought s/he could get anybody sanctioned because they weren't complying. It didn't matter that they couldn't speak English. S/he misinterpreted the role to the point that s/he felt that the team would only be successful if they had an average amount of sanctions (worker seven)'."

Redman and Fletcher's (2022) research unpacks the many 'hidden' practices that were adopted by managerial staff in the Jobcentre Plus to encourage higher sanction rates and reduce empathy among front line staff. For instance, another Jobcentre Plus advisor from the study explains how their manager would try to pit workers against claimants using stigmatising language and welfare tropes in formal settings, such as meetings

(Redman and Fletcher, 2022 p. 319): *"there was a point at which s/he [manager] said, 'It's your money! It's your taxes that they [claimants] are living off! You know, you should be sanctioning them!'"*

The work of Fletcher and Redman (2022) also allows for a nuanced insight to how the system could be additionally penalising for young people like Omar and Bradley who are black and were not born in the UK. In theory, given migrants augmented challenges and barriers to securing work and housing in the UK (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018), they should be provided with augmented support but, often is the case, migrants are further excluded by the policy design of employment support services (Dwyer et al. 2019). Crafting hostile environments for immigrants in the UK includes deterrence through restricting access to welfare provision and making it as difficult as possible to get by on state support (Mills and Klein, 2021).

There is also an argument that Street Level Bureaucrat's (SLB's) operate within a particularly racially charged environment where internalising the anti-migrant media discourse is prevalent and therefore deprecating the potential or value of migrants and ethnic minorities becomes an easy, warranted tactic to increase a worker's sanction rate (Redman and Fletcher, 2022). However, there is also evidence that SLB's resist structural pressures and use their discretion to resist managerial pressures by being more 'lenient' toward vulnerable claimants (Casey, 2019; Kaufman, 2020). Apathy, toward individual circumstances of marginalised groups on the part of the state and punishment, in the form of benefit sanctions imposed on young males, according to young men who claim state support, could directly lead to violence or anti-social behaviour and thus increasing the risk of judicial punishment, particularly among those with existing criminal records.

This analysis of first-hand accounts from Jobcentre Plus staff give an indication of the culture within the workplace at this time of intensified conditionality. Redman and Flecther's (2022) research illuminates how the young people from this study may have been treated when they entered the Jobcentre and provides rationale for their disregard for the system and their frustration at the casual, frequent sanctions. To give perspective from the receiving end of this culture of hostility, Craig, a 25-year-old Jobseeker from

London, describes how he perceived the nonchalant attitude his advisor had toward sanctioning claimants. Craig had been sanctioned 4 times previously:

Interviewer

"Do you feel regularly like you're at risk of getting a sanction?" (Craig, 25, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, London, 2014)

Craig

"Yes, just depending on what mood the advisor is in."

Interviewer

"So, you think that it's possible that if they do actually read your book [Jobseeker Diary] that if they're in whatever [mood] – they could decide to sanction you."

Craig

"They want you to argue back and as soon as you argue back then they've got you. If you don't argue with them, you're fine. If you nod your head 'Yes, okay, yes okay, do this, do that' then you're fine, but if you start arguing with them then they start calling in the managers and then you could even be sanctioned for even longer and things like that."

This account also enhances Redman and Fletcher's (2022) findings but from a claimant perspective, as Craig understands his sanction experience as something which is predicated on the whim of his advisor on a given day rather than a transparent punishment for a specific 'misdemeanour'. He also articulates the vulnerability and insecurity he feels in standing up for himself in the Jobcentre as the staff and managers have full control over Craig's financial security. The analysis will now transition to exploring how Omar made sense of his threat of sanction experience at Wave B, one year on, to understand what has changed and how he reflects on it in hindsight. Omar is the only young man from type 1 remaining in the study at Wave B, however Josh's narrative will be introduced here to enhance the sense of shared feeling among those from type 1.

Wave B

At Wave B, Omar is now in full-time employment and is no longer claiming JSA. He is sending a portion of his wage back to his family in Eastern Africa. After being away from the system for a period he reflected on his experience with the Jobcentre Plus and the threat of sanction. Since moving to the UK, Omar has been very careful to abide by all the legislation, rules, and welfare conditions laid before him. He sought to do whatever he was told without fuss because he wanted to find work and stay in the UK. Despite this, Omar was threatened multiple times with sanctions. After Wave A he was told he would be sanctioned if he kept inaccurately filling out his forms. Omar explains:

"Sometimes the advisor at the Jobcentre, they are different. One of them tells you one way to complete a form, and the next time the one you see is different, and they will say, 'This is wrong, and I'm supposed to stop your benefit because you did it wrong, you completed your form wrongly. Next time if you don't complete [the workbook] this way, we will sanction you'." (Omar, 21, Wave B, Migrant, Black African, Bristol, 2016)

Interviewer

"Just with receiving such opposing guidance on how to fill it in, how did you feel the next time you filled in your form what to do?"

Omar

"They said I was confused but I always tried to do whatever they tell me, if somebody said, 'Tell do it this way', I used to do it. The next time if the other one tells me to do it, I was trying to do it whatever they tell me. But I was confused also, different people telling me different things."

Interviewer

"When they said as well in that sort of phrasing of if you don't do it this way next time, I would have to sanction you, how did that make you feel?"

Omar

"I was feeling angry."

Interviewer

"And what about the situation was it that made you feel angry about it?"

Omar

"Yes, that somebody, one advisor tells you something and then the advisor threatens you with sanctions because you did it this way. So that's confusion, the way they were treating us."

Interviewer

"As well when you were saying that you always did whatever they asked you to avoid a sanction, was there any other change in your behaviour or anything else from having that threat of a sanction?"

Omar

"I couldn't do anything else, even though I was not happy with it. So, I had to come back because I couldn't afford the sanction, so I had to come back and do whatever they tell me."

Omar went to great lengths to appease his various work coaches, who he suggests provided him with contradictory information. Although Omar was not sanctioned, he felt angry with how he was being treated. Again, a marginalised young man who is particularly committed to jumping through all the hoops laid before him, Omar is left feeling a sense of frustration when threatened with a sanction. This tactic appears to conduce anger more than activation of work-related activity. We get a sense of the entrapment Omar felt, he considered the treatment unethical given he was committed to abiding by the behavioural conditions, but he understood there was no option for him but to comply.

To further this theme within the data of young people understanding sanctions as arising from poor communication and systematic errors rather than an objective approach to non-compliance, Anna a 23-year-old white British Jobseeker from London shares Omar's concerns about having different advisors' week to week, and what implications this could have for a young person's claim. Anna, who during the timeframe of the study was not sanctioned or threatened with one, does not worry about sanctions herself as she feels she can easily navigate the conditional system. Potentially, because Anna is a native speaker, she can more readily deal with the confusion of working with multiple advisors in the Jobcentre:

Interviewer

"Do you feel that it would be quite easy to receive a sanction? Do you feel at risk of being sanctioned, or are you quite clear on what you have to do to avoid that and quite confident that you can avoid it?"

Anna

"I'm quite clear and confident about certain things, but it comes down to the adviser. Like I said earlier, miscommunication, where it goes, say if you were my adviser, I'd see you one fortnight and you gave me all this information, and I'm like, do you know what, this is actually really helpful, and there's something I have to follow up with you next time I sign on. I sign on next time, 'Oh, so-and-so's not in today, you're going to have to see this person'. I'll try and explain what I want, like 'I saw blah-blah last fortnight, they told me all this information and I'm really interested, and I actually want to get a bit more information about how I could do any of this', and none of them have got a clue." (Anna, 23, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, London, 2014)

Although Anna had not experienced even a threat of sanctions she sympathises with Omar's story, having to navigate organisational shortfalls such as having to appease and explain things to multiple advisors puts additional strain on young claimants, particularly those who are not from the UK and are not well versed in such bureaucratic processes. Anna is also feeling angry despite never being sanctioned and always abiding by the conditions:

"I get so angry to the point where it's like what else can I do? I'm doing my job search each fortnight, I'm going to these appointments."

Anna managed to avoid a sanction throughout the three waves of the study and continued to engage with the system. Her use of anger as a form of voice is for other claimants as well as her own stressors with engaging with the system of continual harassment. Unlike some of the young people who had not experienced a sanction, Anna is critical of the application of sanctions and extends empathy towards fellow claimants who are sanctioned.

Another finding within the sanction data was that besides the potential for the inaccuracy of the application of sanctions, young people also contend sanctions can

often be realised without warning. There were examples where young people were not given clear reasoning for their sanction and only found out in retrospect when trying to pay for something. The arbitrary nature of this punishment was apparent for these young people, as behaviour change is a redundant mission when a young claimant is not aware why they had been sanctioned and only discovers they do not have any money randomly.

Mia, a 19-year-old Jobseeker from Edinburgh was sanctioned for not informing the Jobcentre about a work placement finishing. She had not been notified of a sanction and discovered her depleted funds when she went to the bank, she also called up the helpline to try and rectify the issue:

Interviewer

"How did you find out that you'd been sanctioned?"

Mia

"I went to the bank, and I had no money […] I had been phoning them. I had been saying to them, 'listen I just moved into my home tenancy. I can't have gaps. I've got gas. I've got electric. I've got food. I'm young. I'm worried. I'm stressed'. They just don't care. […] So, I phoned them. They gave me a number. I phoned that number. That number gave me a number […] Every single person has told me phone this number you can apply on the phone. I phoned can I apply? No, you can't apply on the phone, phone another number. Can I apply? No, you need to phone this number." (Mia, 19, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Edinburgh, 2014)

This gives a sense of Mia's spiralling frustration and anxiety with the bureaucratic barriers, more challenging for someone young and inexperienced. There is a lack of transparency from her perspective and the alienation one feels from the system and vague support is palpable within Mia narrative. When Mia is asked whether the sanction changed her behaviour, she says she became more assertive and performative with her dealings with the Jobcentre Plus. Mia explains she did not actually change her behaviour with regard to job search activities and her motivation to find work remained high. However, she felt she would be less likely to be sanctioned in future if she were more forthcoming, even if her job seeking activity remained the same:

Interviewer

"So, the fact that you were sanctioned that time has it affected your behaviour since then? Do you approach things differently now?"

Mia

"Yes, I'm totally different when I go to the job centre now. Before I was quite timid like I shouldn't be here, I'm so cheeky. I felt quite embarrassed like they were looking at me thinking oh another wee idiot that's coming in, can't get a job, doesn't want a job, but now I go in and I'm no, I've done my fair share. I've worked and I want a job and I'm trying to get a job. I'm even thinking of doing volunteer work just so that the job centre can see genuinely how much I want to get a job. They just don't understand. So, yes when I go in now, I take a totally different approach and I'm not scared to ask about things anymore."

Kaufman (2020) argues that 'job readiness' is a key determinant used by welfare-to-work advisors on mandatory work programmes, to deal with management pressures and caseload. In the sense that more resources and support would be directed towards 'clients' who were subjectively deemed to be 'close' to entering the labour market compared to those who faced multiple barriers to finding work (Kaufman, 2020). Targets are placed on each advisors' caseload, where a set number of clients are expected to enter the workplace. Hence, Jobcentre Plus staff prioritise those who are closer to finding work to help appease the short-term targets and keep managers satisfied. Kaufman (2020) also suggests that job readiness is a key indicator of how punitive measures would be applied on a client. Once Mia was sanctioned, she decided she would do everything she could to appear more 'job ready' by being more vocal rather than embody the 'timid client', even though her circumstances and restricted opportunities remained. This was in the hope she would be less likely to face a sanction rather than further motivation to secure employment, as this was already present.

Another participant from type 1, Josh, had a similar sanction experience to Mia. Josh was a 25-year-old white British Universal Credit claimant from Warrington. Josh had recently transitioned to UC at the time of his Wave A interview, he had been subject to sanction for each of the first four months of his claim. Most of his sanctions were for missing or being late to appointments with the Jobcentre. He was despondent about the system and although he felt the sanctions' he had received were unjust, he was weary

about appealing them because he considered the process gruelling and to favour the system. Josh describes ringing up the appeals helpline after he realised a sanction had been when he tried to pay for shopping:

"You ring up those numbers, no-one cares. That's what I mean, every department from the Jobcentre, they've all got the same types of people. There's the odd one person who turns up and is like, 'Hello, how can I help you? […] The rest of them are all, 'Can I have your social number? Can I have your National Insurance number? Right' and then the worst thing is if you don't get paid, you'll be like me, 'I'm ringing up because I need my money; where's my money?' You're a bit angry." (Josh, 25, Wave A, Universal Credit, White British, Warrington, 2015)

Josh suggests a few of his sanctions he was not informed about directly from the Jobcentre Plus. This cropped up in the analysis, young people stated going to the bank or being denied payment for something and realising, they had been sanctioned, without prior warning.

To further the theme within the data of young people understanding sanctions as a subjective attack rather than a systematic approach to non-compliance, Anna will again flesh out a perspective of a young person who did not have a direct sanction experience. Although Anna was not sanctioned, she understands Mia and Josh's frustration in relation to the lack of transparency around sanctions. She believes pecuniary punishment for non-compliance is not an effective strategy and sanctions are more dependent on an advisors' personality or mood than claimant behaviour:

Interviewer

"Do you think when people are sanctioned, afterward they look for work harder to avoid it, and it means they're more likely to get into work?"

Anna

"I think it, in a way it will push them a bit more to look for work, but I think as soon as that sanction happens their morale goes down ten times lower, because they're trying to - anyone's reason or situation, they're trying to get around in their head why they've been sanctioned, and they don't actually tell you that you've been sanctioned, they send you a letter four, five, six weeks after the incident of whatever you done to get sanctioned happened, and I don't agree with that whatsoever."

Anna believes the sanction strategy is not effective in terms of fostering future compliance and boosting motivation among young claimants. She feels the system is not transparent in terms of application of punishment and that claimants can get unlucky, as Mia and Josh have conveyed here in type 1. Sanctions are not administered in an objective, consistent fashion (Kaufman, 2020), both 'clients' and advisors understand this to be true. This makes sanctions even less likely to be responded to in a positive manner by young claimants, as they are often ambiguous and sometimes reflect a scatter gun approach.

Returning to Josh's narrative, like Omar, Patrick, and Bradley, he is angry in the face of sanctions. Josh expresses feelings of anger and despair in the face of repeated sanctions but also his desire to keep going despite these setbacks, because he needed the financial support. He discusses how interaction with the system and experience of going to the Jobcentre Plus makes him feel:

"When you walk into that place it's horrible, it's a drag; everyone knows it's the walk of shame. From the front door to the couches is a walk of shame. But there are so many people in our situation that they'll all agree it's just tedious, it's horrible, it's depressing. It just brings the worst out of people, like you'll go into the Jobcentre; I guarantee you when you leave, you'll be angry, you'll want to hurt something."

He 'wants to hurt something' because of the constant behavioural harassment and punishment he experiences. Monrad and colleagues are working on a research project in Denmark called, "*ANGER: A Study of Norms for the Expression and Justification of Anger*" which is a qualitative study to investigate the power of anger among citizens to bring about change across multiple contexts in Denmark. Although nothing has been published from this project yet, Monrad has given a keynote address to the 6th International Conference on Participation, Co-creation and Service Users' Positions (2023) on the ways in which anger is used by young people in the context of the Jobcentre as a form of voice. Anger is not usually considered as an empowering emotion, however the young people from this cohort could be using anger as a form of resistance against employment services they feel discriminated by. However, this research also notes that legitimate forms of anger are typically dictated by a person's

gender, age, class and ethnicity and anger among these young people could contribute to further marginalisation of their disadvantaged identities.

Lastly, Josh gives a final interesting insight. When discussing sanctions, he suggests that those young people who live with parents or guardians can typically 'afford' to get sanctioned:

"As I say, people who live at home with their parents still sit there and they're on claims and they've been sanctioned. They don't notice it because they've got mummy and daddy buying them stuff."

Whereas, because Josh is living on his own any sanction is devastating. Sanctions are experienced unilaterally by young people and sanctions are, on average, less impactful on those who can rely on informal support networks. As we will see in the next section, those form type 2 could exercise greater agency with regard to choosing to engage with the system following a sanction experience that generated anger. The young men from type 1, are criminalised and trapped by bureaucratic practices (Wacquant, 2009 p.5), they are in many ways possessions of the state, to be manipulated. They have little choice but to continue to engage with a system they feel is harmful and disruptive to their efforts in finding employment. The next group of young people will symbolise those within the study who were also deterred from the system by their sanction experiences, but because they enjoyed the resources and capacity to choose, decided to disengage from the system.

6.3 Type 2 - Anger and Disengagement

This type of sanction response represents those young people who expressed feelings of anger similar to those from type 1. However, in type 2, individuals responded to their emotions differently, they are more likely to withdraw their efforts from conforming to the behavioural expectations imposed on them. Instead of having the sense of injustice and resentment toward the conditional employment services but continuing to engage with them, the young people in type 2 indicated experience of sanctions coerced them to move away from the system and try to progress in the labour market on their own

accord. As Josh, from type 1, posits at the end of his Wave A interview, that possibly the young people in type 2 have the resources available to them to exercise their agency and abandon state support completely.

These findings also draw upon the work of Fletcher and Flint (2018), and more specifically their application of the concept of alienation to help understand ex-offender's intermittent or withdrawn engagement from employment services and their alienation from front line workers in the face of intensified punishment in the form of benefit sanctions. They draw upon qualitative data to demonstrate how punitive welfare reforms are experienced by ex-offenders and how this can lead to rejecting support and work-related activities organised by the Jobcentre Plus and their staff (Fletcher and Flint, 2018). Often this would mean going without the pecuniary component of the claim as the conditionality 'contract' would be breeched. This conceptualisation of alienation relates strongly to the young people in type 2. The experiences of the young people in Type 2 are pushing them away from the system and they are willing to accept the insecurity of going without formal financial support for job seeking, or as a top up for part-time wages. Typically, there is a 'tipping point', either a specific sanction or other incident, where the young people decide it is no longer worth their concerted efforts to engage with a system they perceive as arbitrary and demeaning.

6.3.1 Lived Experience

The narratives of four young people will be analysed in-depth to help bring this type of response to life. Liam (a white British 19-year-old Universal credit claimant living in Manchester) will be the central narrative. The narratives of Eve (a white British 24-year-old lone parent living in London), Greg (a white British 23-year-old Universal Credit claimant living in Manchester), and Alina (a white Polish migrant 25-year-old lone parent living in Sheffield) will be intertwined in Liam's story to strengthen the sense of shared experience.

At Wave A, Liam is living with his mother and brother in social rented accommodation. He is one of the few young people from the study to live in the family home. His brother has Down's Syndrome, so he has some caring responsibilities too. Liam is part of the

early cohort of UC claimants. At the time of interview Liam is subject to a sanction for incomplete job search. He had previous experience of sanctions and would be sanctioned a further three times between Waves A and B. He does not have internet in his house and thus cycles into the Jobcentre to complete the agreed 35 hour per week job search. Liam is asked if he sees the Jobcentre as support at all:

"No, I see it as a hassle. I see it as, whenever I get a sanction or something like that, whoever sanctioned me probably got a bonus or something. That's probably a financial gain to them, was me getting sanctioned. You don't have to pay me now; you know what I mean? So, it's just there to hassle you and harass you." (Liam, 19, Wave A, White British, UC, Manchester, 2015)

From the outset it is apparent Liam feels somewhat alienated from the system and the front-line workers. His experience has led to him to understand the Jobcentre Plus as a surveillance-based arena for bureaucratic control. He has little affinity with the place, the behavioural expectations, or the staff he interacts with. Liam's narrative also corresponds with that of Bradley and Craig's from type 1 in the sense he perceives the Jobcentre and the advisors as against him (and all claimants). From Liam's perspective the staff are seeking ways to punish claimants and casually handing out sanctions.

These accounts from service users enhance the findings of Fletcher and Redman's (2022) qualitative study on how service providers (Jobcentre Plus advisors and mangers) perceive sanctions. Their research found that performance targets and frequent team meetings where individual staff members would be singled out for their 'good' performance in the sense they had sanctioned many claimants, compelled even empathetic workers to push claimants they knew were not fit for work into employment and increase their own sanction rate (Fletcher and Redman, 2022). The structured bureaucratic violence becomes difficult to combat even among workers who were aware their acts were unethical. Hence, this gives credence to young people from this study who perceive the actions of their advisors and work coaches as disingenuous, that they are seeking to punish and in some ways are benefitting from sanctioning claimants.

At the end of Wave A, Greg has a similar outlook to Liam. After a sanction experience, he is becoming disillusioned with the Jobcentre. He was also currently on a sanction for going on trial shift and not informing his advisor. He has not received UC for four

months now and is eager to find work by his own means because he feels he is not going to get anywhere with the official approach:

"Yes, this is when I got sanctioned. I did a week's work for free and at the end of the week he wrote me a letter, signed it and everything and then when I went into [the Jobcentre] again and made an appointment and showed [my advisor] he was like 'Oh it's not good this. You can't be doing this'. I said 'Well that's the only way I can get work if I can do a trial for them unpaid, show what I can do'." (Greg, 23, Wave A, White British, UC, Manchester, 2015)

Greg used his initiative after repeated unsuccessful attempts to secure employment through Jobcentre opportunities and Universal Job-Match. He was sanctioned because he took on a trial shift without informing and receiving the permission of the Jobcentre. Greg is becoming alienated from the system and the front-line staff because, although he has tried to abide by the conditions, he does not see any avenues for progress with his future employment aspirations within the inflexible system. To further this sentiment, Ewan, at the time of his Wave A interview was subject to a 3-month JSA sanction for leaving a job voluntarily. Ewan could not afford the travel from South to North London any longer and he was having to wake up at 4am every morning to get to work on time. He was burnt out and decided to leave and look for another more suitable job. However, this is deemed an offence by the contemporary social security system:

Interviewer

"So how do you think being sanctioned - has that changed how you interact with the Jobcentre or how you look for work at all?"

Ewan

"Yes."

Interviewer

"Can you tell me a bit about that?"

Ewan

"Now I just hate Jobcentre, don't want to go. I don't see the point in going because I'm not getting paid. Looking for jobs, it hasn't really stopped me looking for work, it's just frustrating." (Ewan, 20, Wave A, White British, Jobseeker, London, 2014)

Ewan was living in homeless accommodation at the time and had a number of jobs in the past few years. Ewan has no close friends or family around, so his ex-partner helped him out when he was subject to the sanction. He was committed to securing employment and stated his sanction had not stopped him looking for work informally, but had left him feeling disheartened by the system, like he has been abandoned. Ewan's narrative fits with Fletcher and Flint's (2018) conceptualisation of the 'folly of the tutelary state', in the sense he is alienated from support because he is not obeying the principles of stringent welfare conditionality: take any available job, no matter the insecurity or financial cost, and remain there or face a financial penalty.

Dunn (2021) argues in favour of this stringent behavioural conditionality and that young jobseeker's agency should be restricted. His conclusions drawn from survey data, which suggest that agreeing or disagreeing with general employment attitude statements, such as 'having almost any job is better than having no job' and 'if I did not like a job I would pack it in, even if there was no other job to go to', are: *"important predictors of whether someone has spent substantial proportion of their time unemployed between the ages of 16 and 46"* (Dunn, 2021 p. 237). Putting aside all the possible confounding variables that could predict 30 years of labour market activity beyond the responses to an attitudes survey, Dunn does challenge the hegemony within contemporary social policy discourse by suggesting that job choosiness is a significant problem among those with low SES.

He proposes that the behaviour and work attitudes of those who are out-of-work are central to an individual's level of engagement and success in the low-wage economy (Dunn, 2021). Dunn appears to ignore or reject the wealth of evidence which suggests that the vast majority of claimants are motivated to find work, move away from state support and they typically experience fragmented interactions with the insecure labour market during a time of welfare retrenchment. Dunn does little to acknowledge the quality of jobs available, the lack of agency in a young jobseeker's life, and the non-

existent evidence that a young jobseeker would choose to endure a life on state support instead of working to gain independence.

Therefore, according to pervasive state ideology and scholars such as Dunn, welfare claimants are expected to behave in ways most of the working population are not. Their restricted agency is legitimised through the statecraft of positioning the lack of valorised employment opportunities and informal support available to young claimants, such as Ewan, as the responsibility of the individual to overcome (Mills and Klein, 2021). Thus far, the three young men in type 2 are more despondent and disincentivised following a sanction experience. At Wave A, Liam, Greg and Ewan are feeling somewhat alienated from the system.

To counter this narrative among those from type 2, Tegan's attitude towards benefit sanctions is opposed to critique of the punitive design discussed thus far. Tegan was part of the group of young people who had no direct experience of sanctions. This may be crucial in shaping her perceptions of benefit sanctions. Tegan, a 21-year-old jobseeker from Edinburgh is bullish about sanctions and believes, like many of those who were not sanctioned, that they are easy to avoid:

Interviewer

"You said at the moment you're on Jobseeker's Allowance, have you ever been sanctioned or threatened with a sanction on that?"

Tegan

"No, because I always make sure I turn up 15 minutes early and make sure I do all my jobs, I just try and do everything to make sure [chuckles]…" (Tegan, 21, white British, Jobseeker, Wave A, Edinburgh, 2014)

Interviewer

"So, have you ever felt that that was a risk that you might, or you felt vulnerable to it, or do you think it's pretty straightforward?"

Tegan

"Yes."

Interviewer

"You know what you've got to do. It's pretty easy."

Tegan

"Yes, I think it's pretty straightforward. You hear all the time about these people that don't write their book out, or they can't be bothered to apply for jobs where it's pretty easy. People have got phones these days and near enough every bus in Edinburgh literally has got WiFi. Now I mean for me I'm on buses every day, so I apply for jobs every day."

Interviewer

"Are there any cases or any situations or circumstances in which you think it wouldn't be fair to sanction people for not looking for work? Or evict people for doing something wrong?"

Tegan

"No, I wouldn't say that it's bad, like to sanction them or anything. If they're not looking for work and they get sanctioned, I think it's their own fault."

Tegan's narrative is on the extreme end of the scale with regard to hardened advocation for benefit sanctions. She internalises the notion that nudging claimant behaviour through conditionality is both appropriate and essential. Most of the young people who had not experienced a sanction were supportive of sanctions in principle as a deterrent but would caveat this with some extenuating circumstances or say the regime at the time was too harsh. However, Tegan, and the policy design, suggest there should be a 'stick' for those claimants who avoid work, although existence of these claimants remains inconclusive (MacDonald et al. 2014b). Tegan goes on to describe her views on sanctions:

Interviewer

"So, in these cases where people aren't looking for work and they're not doing what they're supposed to do, what the tenancy agreement says they should do let's say, is there a basic minimum in terms of housing and/or income that they should get?"

Tegan

"I think that's reasonable because for example, I'm not going sort of age wise here, but I'm just sort of saying for my generation and like people that I know are not having to spend that money.

It will all go on fags, drink, drugs, and nothing to like maybe clothing, food, you know, stuff they give you it for. Where maybe people that are maybe a wee bit older and that maybe have got [chuckles] a head on their shoulders, they maybe will spend it towards that."

Interviewer

"So, imagine in a completely differently world you were a really bad tenant, you didn't do any of the stuff you were supposed to here, and you didn't do any of your looking for work?"

Tegan

"Yes."

Interviewer

"Do you think that in that situation you should be chucked out of here and have no income from the Jobcentre?"

Tegan

"Mm-hm."

Interviewer

"Is that the fair thing?"

Tegan

"Definitely."

Tegan assumes the welfare tropes used to construct an othering identity of undeserving claimants. This is a finding which appears particularly disturbing and prevalent among a generation of young people who have never known any alternative framing and have been subjected to particularly intense statecraft (Wacquant, 2009 p.76). Tegan even highlights her notion that, under this normative framing, young claimants should be paid greater paternalistic attention from the state given their supposedly reckless nature and idle tendencies (Gabriel et al. 2021). Vulnerable youth are more heavily monitored, and their agency more widely restricted by public and social policies compared to more privileged youth cohorts and adult populations (Gabriel et al. 2021). This is partly because adults, and particularly old white men, hold most of the power in decision making circles and thus social control is exercised over vulnerable youth because, left

unrestricted, they are perceived to present a threat to the stability of power and social order (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). The young people within this study rarely affiliate their own identity with these contemporary understandings of marginalised youth within policy circles, where young people are said to be despondent and demonstrate a lack of self-responsibility and therefore require strict surveillance and behavioural regulation (France, 2008). However, when discussing the principles of welfare conditionality and sanctions many of the young people who have not had direct sanction experience, such as Tegan, support the contemporary policy approach because they buy into the conception of the 'mythical' families and communities who are not interested in finding work (MacDonald et al. 2014b).

However, Alina, one of the minority of females from the study to be sanctioned, rejects Tegan's perspective of benefit sanctions, as she argues they are a weapon of manipulation rather than effective punishment. Alina's sanction story correlates with both Liam and Greg's attitudes toward sanctions, their advisors, and the system. Alina's narrative deepens the sense of despondency toward the system among those from type 2. She is a 25-year-old lone parent living in Sheffield. Alina is a white Polish migrant who had been living in the UK for four years, she had one daughter who was 2 years old and was working part-time in a petrol station at the time of her Wave A interview. The following discussion illustrates Alina's emotions toward her advisor following a sanction for incomplete job search:

Alina

"It's very hard. I am very angry about that [sanction]. I very remember, I good remember her, and still she is working for Jobcentre, and how many times I see her I remember how many times I don't have food, when she sent me that letter." (Alina, 25, Wave A, Lone Parent, White Polish, Sheffield, 2015)

Interviewer

"So, it makes you very angry when you see her."

Alina

"Yes, very angry, and I'm very sad because I know today, okay, today I've got food, and today she is eating."

This discussion from Alina is important to further embody the alienation some of these young people felt toward the system and their advisors following a sanction, elaborating on Fletcher and Flint's (2018) findings. Alina expresses her anger about being sanctioned and the lingering bitterness she feels toward her advisor as she indicates the disconnect and power imbalance between the Jobcentre staff and the young claimants is driving antipathy. Moreover, her anger persists well beyond the immediate aftermath of a sanction. Furthering evidence from Van Den Berg et al (2022), the findings here suggest there is a lasting impact of sanction experiences that could emotionally scar young claimants as they transition to adulthood. Thus, the tactic that was designed to nudge young people to conform with the system, can generate prolonged alienation toward state services.

Conversely, Eve is in a different mindset compared to the rest of those in type 2 at Wave A in relation to the Jobcentre Plus and conditionality. She is yet to experience a sanction at this point hence why her perceptions differ. Her daughter had recently turned 5 years old which meant Eve was moved from Income Support (no conditionality) to JSA (intensive work-related conditionality). She, like Alina, is currently on a part-time contract but is under pressure from her advisor to increase the hours to full-time. Eve is battling between wanting to provide for her daughter, paying for childcare, and wanting to work part-time so that she can spend time with her daughter. She believes continuing to do exactly what the Jobcentre asks of her will lead her to a more secure future because she got a job quite quickly after moving to JSA:

"I just went along with everything the Jobcentre wanted me to do, I was like, 'Yes'. My adviser would call me up, and it would be like, 'Go here, there's a group interview taking place, go there', and I used to just go and do whatever they wanted me to do." (Eve, 24, Wave A, White British, Lone Parent, London, 2015)

Eve starts out in the study being an ardent defender of conforming to the conditionality and is eager to appease her work coach. Subsequently, Rob, a 22-year-old disabled person from Sheffield, supports Eve's attitudes at Wave A and typifies a common response among the 21 young people in the study who did not experience a sanction or threat of sanction:

Rob

"I've never been sanctioned myself, but I had a friend who was sanctioned for I think it was two months I think he was sanctioned for because he failed to turn up to two appointments, but I think they cut his money by half. That used to make sure that he was on time every time to the Jobcentre after that." (Rob, 22, Wave A, White British, Disabled Person, Sheffield, 2014)

Interviewer

"Do you think that if you had the threat of a sanction, would it change your behaviour in any way?"

Rob

"Yes, yes, I'd make sure that I was at every appointment. Obviously, I need the money to live, so I can't risk not having. You can't risk like just by missing a five-minute appointment to ruin like two months' worth of my life, so how can I?"

Rob takes the stance that sanctions are easily avoidable and are an effective strategy for behaviour change when applied to a young persons' claim. Rob's perspective also fits with those from type 1 in the sense he understands he cannot afford to get sanctioned; the impact of reduced support would be devastating to him. This was shared by other young people who were also lacking robust informal support networks and suggested they did all they could to avoid a sanction but unlike Rob, did not manage to do so. This framing of benefit sanctions as easily avoidable, could be because Rob was fortunate, in the sense he had a more lenient 'counsellor' like advisor instead of a 'hardnosed' advisor (Kaufman, 2020), and the support for the notion of sanctions as a tactic could be attributed to the hegemony of distrust for 'other' claimants among contemporary unemployed persons (Fletcher and Redman, 2022).

Wave B

By Wave B, the four young people from type 2 have moved away from the system to varying degrees. Liam now has a part-time retail job and is living in the same house with his mum and brother. He is more resolute in his views on not just the incompetence of the Jobcentre but now understands his experience as systematic meddling, that

formed a barrier to his employment prospects. Meaning he felt he trapped in a cycle of carrying out arbitrary tasks to maintain his UC claim but in doing so he was regressing in terms of finding work. Liam is determined he will never go back to the Jobcentre again even if he becomes unemployed again:

Liam

"*Well, I've not seen them for a few months now, about six months; I just stopped engaging with the Jobcentre. They were doing nothing for me. I didn't even want the money that they were paying me. I phoned up and made a complaint that my advisor, she was constantly putting on sanctions."* (Liam, 20, Wave B, UC, Manchester, 2016)

Interviewer

"You decided, you know what, you're not going to go on?"

Liam

"*Yes, not going to go. I went back in and got another sanction and that was the last straw."*

Interviewer

"Because you were under a sanction when I spoke to you."

Liam

"*I was getting sanctioned almost every time I went in, especially [previous advisor] would just look at me and sanction me."*

Interviewer

"Looking back, if you've been sanctioned again, do you think you've behaved differently at all?"

Liam

"Well, yes, they sanctioned me and - what do you call it - I stopped interacting with them, so yes, I behaved differently after that sanction."

This dialogue demonstrates Liam's animosity for the system and his deep desire to disassociate from the Jobcentre. His sanction story indicates that repeated sanctions can push young claimants to reject the support from the Jobcentre and pursue alternative

paths to finding work, without formal employment support. Liam suggests there was one sanction too many and that pushed him over the edge. He decided that was 'the final straw' for him and the Jobcentre, he would not engage any further. Thus, when asked how sanctions have altered his behaviour, he states that it encouraged him to withdraw from the system altogether, rather than encourage him to engage fully as is the goal of the punitive strategy. However, pushing claimants away from state support is part of a disguised agenda within the contemporary system (Flint, 2019).

In a similar fashion, Greg at Wave B describes his attitude and behaviour as a result of sanctions in terms of frustration and dejection. He has been sanctioned a further three times since Wave A. He wants to keep going and keep abiding by the claimant commitment, but he fears another sanction would leave him with little choice but to disengage like Liam. He is asked how another sanction would change his behaviour:

Greg

"I'd be just more annoyed, more depressed, just probably end up giving up because that is always down to me, like always being sanctioned for stupid things." (Greg, 25, Wave B, UC, Manchester, 2016)

Interviewer

"Would you say that every time, because it's happened repeatedly..."

Greg

"Yes, it is."

Interviewer

"...every time it's just not encouraging you to do something or not, it's just making things..."

Greg

"Yes, yes, just making me think like why me? Why is it always happening to me? Then they expect you to go and do everything still when you've got no money."

Greg suggests any further sanctions would lead him to feel more annoyed, depressed, and despondent. The utter frustration at the system constantly punishing Greg and expecting him to be ultimately resilient is clear to see from his interviews. He is angry

like the other young men but instead of wanting to lash out, Greg appears to be more likely to express his resentment via a more passive means, a complete withdrawal of his efforts.

What appears to be important about these types of responses to sanctions is that there is a tipping point. Whereas the previous chapters in this thesis have talked of how young people have internalised and individualised pathways to reaching their aspirations, when it comes to experience of sanctions there seems to be a realisation of the faults within the system rather than a self-blame turn. There is possibly only so much punishment these young people can endure before they feel dehumanised and their self-reported ambitious and committed tendencies become undermined and unattainable. As with Liam and Greg, they each perceived a certain number of sanctions as the 'final straw'. The specific number or severity of sanction that triggers disengagement from the system may differ between the young people, but it is clear that some individuals from the study who had experience of multiple sanctions were likely to withdraw altogether after repeated punishment.

This could be the case even amongst those who started off totally committed to abiding by the conditionality attached to their claim and who had limited experience of sanctions. Eve, for instance, at Wave A was relatively positive about the Jobcentre and stated her intention to always do what was asked of her. She was careful to avoid a sanction because she could not afford to lose the vital top up to her part-time wages provided by JSA. At Wave B, Eve had gone from a 4 hour to an 8 hour per week contract, although usually works extra hours. She is no longer claiming JSA and gets by with a combination of Working Tax Credits and Child Benefit, which means she is no longer required to carry out regular behavioural conditionality. Eve talks of how she was sanctioned despite her being in work and having full caring responsibilities for her daughter, and this pushed her to disengage:

"I've been sanctioned a couple of times, yes, because of the job search. I just thought, no, it's ridiculous how they treat people. I just feel some of the advisers' attitudes are, 'Well, you know what, it doesn't really matter to me, so it's only you that's going to starve', basically. […] I was very angry all the time because I didn't have any money or anything. That's the one that affected me the most" (Eve, 25, Wave B, Lone Parent, White British, London, 2016)

Eve was sanctioned twice for incomplete job search between Wave A and B. She was confident at Wave A of sticking to the claimant commitment but there was a turning point for Eve as well, where she thought that the intrusive nature of the conditionality was not worth the top up to her wages. She describes the anger she felt after being punished for doing what she thought was expected of her. After her second sanction Eve decided to withdraw from JSA and redo all her claims for housing and child support. She felt the Jobcentre was simply not worth the stress even though it was crucial money for her and her daughter:

"They [Jobcentre Plus] still wanted me to do job searches and look for jobs and do things while I had my job, because it wasn't enough hours for them, so I just completely signed off so they would back off […] I just thought, well, I'm going to work, I'm looking after my daughter, I don't know what else they want me to do. I just thought they were asking too much. But I didn't get any money from them, so I just thought, you know what, that's it, no more. I'd rather do without it."

Echoing Eve's narrative in many ways, Alina also discusses her distain for the social security system as a lone parent who was also in employment. At Wave B Alina is in between jobs but is no longer claiming JSA because of the stress it has caused her in the past. As a migrant Alina encounters additional barriers compared with Eve. Alina encapsulates the struggles of claiming employment support in the UK as a migrant, being sanctioned, and understanding her ethnicity being associated with the financial penalty:

Interviewer

"You don't want to claim Jobseeker's Allowance again?"

Alina

"No. Because these people isn't going to understand. I've been to a few interview, and I've been here, and people are going to read the letter, because I said maybe my English is no good. I ask for some explain person who can speak English very well […] Nothing is not going to help. Nothing." (Alina, 26, Wave B, Lone Parent, White Polish, Sheffield, 2015)

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, there is a tendency for the most vulnerable claimants to be sanctioned more readily (De Vries et al. 2017). In different ways, Alina and Omar share this experience of having a precarious citizenship status and being eager to find work in the UK. They also discuss the problems they face when trying to understand the competing demands of the system and instead of encountering some flexibility, given they are both committed to finding work, they are punished. Alina was working part-time at Wave A and was about to start a new job at Wave B, Omar was in full-time employment at Wave B, yet both recount their threat and experience of sanction as only serving to discourage and aggravate, as well as distress them, rather than furthering motivation.

These findings expand on the work of Wacquant (2009), who was at the forefront of theorising the intensified surveillance-based correctional trend in social policy across advanced societies since the turn of the century. Wacquant (2009 p.42) adeptly deconstructs the ideology and mechanisms behind the correctional shift toward the more aggressive policing of the growing number of low-income individuals and groups within post-Fordist societies, who endure a range of urban marginalities and are deemed to require the full force of the penal state. As Wacquant (2009 p.4) notes:

"These castaway categories—unemployed youth left adrift, the beggars and the homeless, aimless nomads and drug addicts, postcolonial immigrants without documents or support—have become salient in public space, their presence undesirable and their doings intolerable, because they are the living and threatening incarnation of the generalized social insecurity produced by the erosion of stable and homogenous wage work."

This chapter exposes the impacts of intensified disciplining of 'castaway categories' such as unemployed youth and migrants. The chapter has also highlighted the intersectionality of sanction experiences, in the sense that migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK are prone to greater levels of 'policing' within welfare services as well as within the legal system. Therefore, unemployed young people are a demographic that fall into this vulnerable and stigmatised category, who are exposed to punitive state regulations (Crisp and Powell, 2017), however the intersectional

inequalities experienced by unemployed young migrants and ethnic minorities further exclude and punish these individuals, as this chapter has illuminated.

Another young person from the study provides depth to this concept of sanctions inducing feelings of anger. Francis, a 20-year-old ex-offender living in Sheffield, states that despite having not experienced a sanction herself, if she were subject to a sanction, it would alter her emotion but not necessarily her behaviour in the desired way:

Interviewer

"Do you think it's fair to sanction people if they don't do what they're asked? So, for example, if you didn't sign on, do you think it would be fair to sanction you?"

Francis

"Yes." (Francis, 20, Wave A, Ex-Offender, White British, Sheffield, 2015)

Interviewer

"Do you think that would change your behaviour?"

Francis

"If I'd like got sanctioned, it would probably change my behaviour because I wouldn't have any money. I'd probably get angry."

Francis suggests she would respond with anger, as many of those from type 1 & 2 did. However, she did not articulate that this would make it more likely she would commit herself to greater job seeking activities. As discussed previously with narrative of other young claimants, anger does not stimulate a young person to stick closer to the claimant commitment in future. It appears anger and alienation are the two key emotions generated by benefit sanctions among young people and then the reactions and outcomes to these emotive responses, depends largely on the personal circumstances of the young person: do they have the resources to disengage from the system or must they continue due to the limited informal support?

It appears the young people in type 2 personally identify a 'tipping point' in terms of sanctions or detrimental interactions with the Jobcentre, where they decide a specific

sanction or moment was a step too far for them to continue to engage. Both Liam and Eve were in part-time employment when they stopped engaging with the Jobcentre, which could be a factor in their decision. They may have considered they were on their way to economic security and did not require state support. They, Alina, and Greg, share similar emotions toward being sanctioned as those from type 1, however the young people in type 2 choose to disengage. The ability to disassociate is not an option for all young people and those from type 2 possibly did not face the same extent of intersectional disadvantage as some of those from type 1, such as Omar for example, and therefore had more agency in terms of engaging with the Jobcentre.

6.4 Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter provide a range of insights into young people's attitudes and responses to benefit sanctions over time as well as implications for future generations of young people and conditional welfare design. The diverse sample of young people's narratives that were analysed resulted in nuanced narratives and types of response related to sanction experience and non-experience. The most common emotional response among those who had been sanctioned was one of anger and despondency. It is important to illuminate young people's experiences of benefit sanctions for three key reasons.

Firstly, young people are a group, and particularly young males, who are at risk of high sanction rates (De Vries et al. 2017). Thus, it is important to understand how young claimants react to benefit sanctions in real time and explore first-hand accounts of those who have experienced the system to get a sense for how effective they feel the contemporary policy design is at achieving the goal of instilling behaviour change. Secondly, this generation of young people has grown up during a time of particularly ardent statecraft in terms of the intensified regulation and stigmatisation of those in receipt of social security (Wacquant, 2009 p.78). Modern Western societies are based on traditional liberal principles of restricted state interference and individualism, however since the proliferation self-help around the turn of the century has embedded principles of behavioural regulation in state strategies that seek to address social inequalities (Rimke, 2000). The contemporary digitised society has cemented the

authority of the largely unchallenged notion of self-responsibility above collective or corporate responsibility (Charter and Loewenstein, 2021), within mainstream policy circles and the public discourse.

The young people from this study discuss how direct experience of benefit sanctions provoke feelings of anger and alienation. The ways in which many of those who had been sanctioned, just under half of the total sample, express their emotions when reflecting on their sanction experience raises some valid implications for the current punitive framework state support is administered. The policy approach is explicitly justified on the notion that young people who are not in stable employment require behavioural regulation through pecuniary reductions or restrictions. These young people are perceived by the state as lacking some psychological traits that those who are active in the labour market supposedly have acquired, such as ethereal characteristics such as 'work ethic' or 'aspiration'. Therefore, imposing strict behavioural conditions attached to each claim and with-holding support for non-compliance operates under two key modern assumptions; 1) that for personal economic circumstances to improve change must come from within the individual psyche, and 2) the individual can choose to better themselves and has a moral obligation to do so.

In the previous two chapters of this thesis there have been plenty examples of young people buying into this normative framing. There is a tendency among young people who are on the fringes of the labour and housing markets to frame strategies for their future stability as something that must come from within themselves. Meaning they understand employment and housing security to be their individual responsibility and that to achieve greater success in the future is largely predicated on how motivated and diligent one is. Not all, but many of the young people endorsed this almost religious conceptualisation of the social world as *"being the sum aggregation of atomized, autonomous and self-governing individual persons"* (Rimke, 2000 p. 62), and that social ills should be addressed through the voluntary modification and improvement of the self through direction from behavioural experts. Those who profess the power of individual psychological development, in contemporary Western societies, have been granted authority over alternative ways of understanding the world. The self-help gurus

and public intellectuals, such as Jordan Peterson, promise personal growth and self-fulfilment through encouraging discipline and self-regulation (Du Plessis, 2021).

Hence, it is understood even amongst marginalised young people whose opportunities have been manipulated and restricted by the state, that to realise their aspirations for better paid work and conditions, more rewarding employment, more valorised housing tenure and quality of housing, is in their hands or 'heads'. Interestingly, this chapter offers more push back from young people. When discussing benefit sanctions, particularly those who had multiple sanction experiences, young people were less likely to internalise and self-blame in relation to punitive welfare practices. Many expressed their anger toward the system, the organisational shortcomings, the policy design, the personnel in the Jobcentre Plus, and lack of empathy for individual circumstances. When faced with sanctions the young people were more likely to offer external and structural failings rather than acknowledge accountability for their sanction(s) or comprehend them as character building. Some of the young people use anger as a form of voice to resist the behaviourist framework upon which the contemporary social security system operates (Friedli and Stearn, 2015).

There was a collective sense of the punishment being arbitrary, it was often not clear to the young person a sanction was being placed on their claim until long after the financial penalty, and the young people claimed that a sanction experience changed their behaviour in harmful ways rather than in the intended manner: being more motivated to abide by the claimant commitment and find work. The emotional response was one of frustration which led to either, begrudgingly continue with the conditional system or, for those with the resources available, choosing to disengage from the Jobcentre Plus. The findings from this analysis indicate that young people will more readily critique the state and self-help approach when they have direct experience of the penal practices involved, such as benefit sanctions. They suggest the system has set them up to fail (Reeves and Loopstra, 2017) and is seeking to punish them. Here the young people move away from individualising their struggles.

However, when they discuss broader issues of securing employment, they tend to buy into the notion that the self-responsible self can overcome structural barriers. Moreover,

those who had no sanction experience were more likely to believe in the principle of benefit sanctions for the importance of benefit sanctions, claiming it is a necessary and effective stick for non-complying claimants and suggesting a benefit sanction would have a positive impact on a young claimant's behaviour. Hence, this research argues that young people are coerced to endorse the modernised psychologising of the world and the tackling social problems through self-improvement. However, when young claimants are faced directly with punitive state practices and it affects or reduces their quality of life, they tussle with their beliefs in self-responsibility.

Possibly there is only so much hardship and bureaucratic disciplining a group of young people can endure before they turn on the state and look to external factors for redemption. It could be that, in theory, they adopt the self-help approach because it is deemed in modern society to be moral and praiseworthy. If young people are fortunate enough to be passively receiving state support or are navigating the system effectively to meet their own needs, they could buy into punitive welfare design because it is not impacting them directly. Yet, when young people experience the punitive aspects of corrective behavioural state policies, in the form of benefit sanctions, there is a realisation that they are being subjected to bureaucratic violence despite adopting the promoted psychological framing. They are trying to say the 'right' things, do the 'right' things, and still they are being punished for it. This has the potential to flip young claimants from advocates of state authored ways of thinking to challengers of the dominant political discourse of individualism and placing the emphasis on marginalised groups to make their own way up the social hierarchy.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted and synthesised how both the threat, and experience, of benefit sanctions impacts the attitudes and behaviour of a cohort of young people during a time of intensified welfare conditionality (Webster, 2017). As young people disproportionately experience benefit sanctions when compared to older claimants, it is important to amplify their voices and understand their experiences. The young people in this study represent a cohort particularly impacted by benefit sanctions and there

exists a lack of research focused on understanding subjective narratives of benefit sanctions among young people specifically.

This research also contributes to our understanding of how the criminalisation of welfare recipients (Fletcher and Wright, 2018) plays out over time and the outcomes of negative emotional responses to conditionality. Not only is illuminating and making sense of their experiences important because they are a group at risk of high sanction rates but also their transitional life stage provides an opportunity to explore how initial engagement with social security systems in the UK can shape future perceptions of the state and understandings of its functions among marginalised groups. To provide insight into how early experience of conditional welfare policies shapes young people's long-term perceptions of work, employment, and employment services. How these policies are experienced, understood and responded to by young people have significant bearing on their relationship with, and interpretation of, the state and the labour market throughout their lives.

Analysis of the range of incidences and experiences of benefit sanctions across the whole cohort of young people from the Welfare Conditionality Project, carefully identified two main types discussed in this chapter. There is not a unanimous sanction experience or response, however the overriding emotions during and post benefit sanction among the cohort were anger and alienation. There was a tangible sense of frustration and despondency within the transcripts when analysing sanction experiences, particularly among those who had direct experience of multiple sanctions. Males in this sample were more likely to experience a sanction, reflecting national sanction rates (De Vries et al. 2017), and they were also more likely to express anger in the aftermath of a sanction.

The young people were grouped into two main categories based on their emotional and practical response to sanction experience, or non-experience. Those from type 1: anger and engagement, were more inclined to express their feelings of anger toward what they felt were unnecessarily harsh sanctions that they often considered ambiguous in terms of why financial punishment was being applied. Patrick, Bradley, Craig, Liam, Greg, and Josh explicitly articulate the anger they felt, their resentment toward the Jobcentre

Plus as an institution, and a desire to hurt or eschew their advisor following a sanction. These young men on the fringes of the formal labour market are associated with higher rates of violence and withdrawal from conventional school-to-work transitions because of the lack of opportunities available to them. The sanction regime appears not to instil a drive and nudge people to comply with welfare conditionality, as the policy intends, but in fact furthers this disadvantaged group's propensity for acts of violence and pushes them toward the informal economies for work.

Type 2: anger and disengagement, describes those from the study who also felt anger and despondency following a sanction, but chose to disengage from the conditional system. They grew to perceive the Jobcentre Plus as a hindrance to his employment prospects and the persistent sanctioning meant they were barely provided with financial support. Liam and Greg felt so alienated they decided to totally withdraw from conditional state welfare and choose to seek employment without formal support. There appeared a 'tipping point' for those in type 2, where a specific sanction or negative interaction with the Jobcentre that triggered their disengagement from the system. By Wave B, those from type 2 had multiple sanction experiences and decided to disassociate from JSA because they believe it to undermine their efforts as working lone parents. Therefore, they were able to exercise their agency and choose to disassociate from workfare policies. All the young people from type 2 were either employed, soon to be employed, could rely on some other forms of state support (in the case of the two single mothers), or could rely on some informal support.

The key finding from this analysis is that sanctions, and threat of, are damaging to how young people view state support and are counterproductive in terms of fostering engagement and willing compliance among young claimants. Sanction experiences from this cohort were widely considered an aimless punishment which they had to endure either because they were stigmatised for being out-of-work or because they were not a White British native. It was accepted that even if one followed the claimant commitment one could be subject to a sanction at any point. The looming threat of withholding vital support meant the young people were in a heightened state of insecurity and fear given the already precarious nature of contemporary youth transitions. This would then spill out of some of the young people when a sanction was

administered, stirring feelings of anger and despondency. In relation to the official policy strategy for benefit sanctions, this research indicates that intensifying benefit sanctions for young people only serves to inflame an already strained and unstable group, fosters a negative outlook among young claimants toward state support which can push them away from cooperating with formal employment services, and there is no evidence to suggest sanctions promoted enhanced employability traits or job seeking activities.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

Over the past 3 chapters, concepts from the contemporary youth sociology and critical social policy literature have been applied to theorise the individualisation and psychologisation of structural problems, such as unemployment, homelessness, and poverty, to contextualise a cohort of young people's experiences of welfare conditionality over time in the UK.

This thesis explored the youth transitions of a cohort of young people (16-25) in the UK, all of whom claimed some form of state support. The main aim of this study was to illuminate young people's experiences of, and attitudes toward, welfare conditionality and contemporary precarious labour and housing markets, to better understand the impacts of interaction with conditional welfare services on recent generations of young people.

This chapter will bring together the key points discussed in the findings chapters, to synthesise the key arguments of this thesis concisely. This chapter will also focus on the significance of the findings in a broader research context in terms of youth studies and welfare conditionality research and discuss the practical implications of this thesis in terms of future research and policy recommendations.

7.2 Internalised Individualism

In the growing body of literature focused on understanding lived experience of welfare conditionality young people have been neglected despite being particularly exposed to the most severe aspects of recent welfare reform, such as the intensification of benefit sanctions (De Vries et al. 2017). The young people from this study experienced the most stringent conditionality and highest rates of benefit sanctions the UK has ever seen (Webster, 2019). The findings presented in this thesis suggest that, although agency is present among young claimants and they do enact forms of resistance to punitive state

practices, they are coerced to conform to the optimistic and obedient job-seeking subject, one which buys into the notion that secure employment is on the horizon with the 'right' attitudes. A phenomenon I have termed 'internalised individualism'. It was more common for the young people to psychologise labour market participation or progression, than blame the system or other external factors.

This thesis has argued that young people who claim state support in the UK are prone to accept the contemporary hegemonic conceptualisation within advanced capitalist societies, that individual behaviour and mindset are the key determinants of economic security. Recent UK state strategy focused on addressing social inequalities, in particular interventions to tackle youth unemployment, are epitomised by one common thread: the problem lies within the individual and the solution should come from the individual.

The workfarist regime embedded in recent welfare reform assumes worklessness is a product of behavioural deficiencies or lack of motivation (Wright et al. 2020), leading some young people who are hemmed in by this framing to internalise this rhetoric. Some of the principles of individualism and meritocracy, inherent with the recent invasion of psychological components into social policies which seek to tackle poverty (Friedli and Stearn, 2015), have been internalised by young people who experience welfare conditionality. The notion that the self is all encompassing and one can, and should, choose to overcome all challenges in life through self-improvement is particularly salient for recent generations of young people (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017).

Not only has the explosion in the psychologising of everyday life coincided with recent generations of young people's transition to adulthood, but the methods of communicating the omnipotent power of projecting or adopting behavioural traits, such as confidence, motivation, and outgoingness (Gill and Orgad, 2017), have intensified with the proliferation of social media and celebrity/influencer culture (Allen and Finn, 2023). Public policy reinforces this trend in encouraging changes in the individual to combat structural problems and espouses the behavioural regulation of marginalised groups as a means to tackle poverty and social inequalities (Jones, Pykett and Whitehead, 2013). This ideology is present in the recent political obsession with social

mobility (Lawler and Payne, 2018), raising aspirations of disadvantaged young people to close the educational attainment gap (Rainford, 2021), and most notably for this thesis: welfare conditionality, designed with coercive psychological practices to motivate and discipline welfare claimants in an attempt to stimulate enhanced labour market outcomes (Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Fletcher and Wright, 2018).

This thesis has drawn on secondary analysis of longitudinal qualitative data, generated as part of the Welfare Conditionality Project, to demonstrate that young people who encounter welfare conditionality are likely to express confidence in realising their future employment aspirations and claim the main barriers to these aspirations come from within. However, material outcomes, such as employment or housing security, associated with adopting the behavioural system remain elusive for the young people in this cohort. Buying into this ideology does not appear to produce positive outcomes for these young people.

These findings harmonise with evidence from Germany (García-Sierra, 2023), where quantitative analysis has shown that teenagers of low SES are more likely to buy into meritocratic ideals and that the young people who endorse these beliefs in hard work and self-improvement were more likely to realise an adulthood plagued by precarious work. Pimlott-Wilson (2017) also argues young people adopt individualised strategies for future security during a period of labour market precarity and widening inter/intragenerational inequalities. The cohort of young people from the Welfare Conditionality project were positive about their futures, with many espousing the positive psychology mindset which is so pertinent in contemporary society (Ehrenreich, 2009 p.5; Gill and Orgad, 2017). There was a tendency among the cohort to frame their future success as something predicated on their own ability to remain positive and adopt the endorsed desirable employability traits.

Moreover, the young tend to internalise the hegemonic contemporary framing of social security as burden on society (Patrick, 2017), that social mobility is possible to all those who believe and adopt the right behaviours, and that structural barriers are less significant to their future aspirations than their motivation or values. Their age and generational perspective increase their proximity to the contemporary normative

conceptualisation of valorised labour market participation and housing tenures as an individualised battleground (Furlong et al. 2017, p.11), where character traits and psychological attributes largely dictate outcomes. There is a sense among many within the cohort that it is noble to align their behaviours and attitudes with the entrepreneurial self, one who is motivated, resilient, and materialistic.

The young people are encouraged to distance their own identity from the stigmatised identity of welfare claimants and thus make sense of the punitive system they experience by 'othering' fellow claimants (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). These findings make the case stronger that the conjuring of welfare myths is designed to subjugate and divide marginalised groups to legitimise stringent welfare practices (MacDonald et al. 2014b). This restrains young people who are on the fringes of the labour and housing markets in the UK from forming collective solidarity, as the deliberate politicised individualisation of social inequalities has invaded the consciousness of some of the most socially excluded groups. This generates friction within these groups, such as young people who rely on state support, wherein self-blame and learned distrust of fellow welfare claimants serves to maintain the social order.

7.3 Structural Barriers Obfuscated from View

This behavioural conceptualisation of future goals gives us insight into how self-help policies and culture plays out in young people's understandings of their own employment transitions and their approaches to securing work in the future. Future aspirations and goals were something that was most salient to the young people in their interviews. This provided the primary avenue for the re-contextualised analysis. This research argues that despite experiencing multiple structural barriers to employment and being repeatedly excluded from secure employment, these young people remain confident that future economic security will materialise if they work hard enough.

As shown in Chapter 4, the cohort remain largely confident in realising their aspirations because they have been encouraged to believe their behaviour and mindset to be all encompassing. At Wave A 52 out of the 56 young people were not in paid work and

despite some movements in and out of work, constancy in the formal labour market remained elusive for the young people throughout the study. Although, there is a sense of empowerment and agency among the young people in terms of their employment futures, there is simultaneously a wearing impact of conditionality over time. This can be characterised most strongly in terms of the housing conditionality experienced by this cohort of young people, as illustrated in Chapter 5.

The vast majority of the young people from the outset were eager to comply and engage with the system. However, over time and with persistent conditionality, many of the young people transformed from willing and motivated claimants to critical and despondent claimants. Some of the intrusive housing conditions restricted homemaking and thus led some of the young people to feel detached from a sense of home and adversely impacted well-being over time. The young people who were fortunate enough to experience the easing of housing conditionality over time could begin curate their space and feel a greater sense of housing security.

Therefore, young people who enter the conditional welfare system are largely eager to comply, impress, and progress. Over time and through continual engagement with intrusive practices they gradually become less motivated and committed to abiding by the conditions. They also become more likely to transition from a subject of conditionality who believes in the ideology behind behavioural regulation of welfare claimants, to a claimant who perceives the disciplining system as arbitrary harassment. This was particularly pertinent among those who experienced housing and employment conditionality simultaneously and those who experienced multiple benefit sanctions.

The persistent conditionality pushed many of the young people from this cohort further away from employment and housing security and left them feeling demotivated and alienated. The wearing impact of welfare conditionality over time is apparent within this cohort of young people as there was a trend of self-reported worsened mental health as the study progressed and they became more critical when reflecting on how the system or individual work coaches treated them in retrospect.

The same can be said of the cohort's experiences of benefit sanctions. When discussing the merits or legitimacy of conditionality in principal and in theory, the majority of the sample suggest some form of sanctions should be in place. They accepted the justification for sanctions as ethical and suggest, in principle, sanctions would have the desired behavioural impact. However, when faced directly with the reality of sanctions, the young people tend to reject their own sanction experience as fair or just, or that it stimulated the desired behavioural nudge. Sanctions were more likely to make the young people angry and feel alienated from the system. Even among those who espoused strong commitment prior to receiving benefit sanction(s). Chapter 6 highlighted sanctions were the catalyst for some young people to disengage from the system completely. There was a sense that sanctions were applied arbitrarily, the justification for sanction was often not transparent and that young people could discover they had been sanctioned long after an incident, rather than being warned at the time.

Benefit sanction(s) experiences often evoked anger among the young people, and the narratives suggest sanctions did not have the desired behavioural effects on those who experienced a sanction. This is where some forms of resistance to the conditional system materialised, anger was used a form of voice to confront the behavioural regulation they experienced rather than passively comply. The punitive components of system appear to have long-term scarring effects and build resentment among cohorts of young people, rather than instil future compliance.

The way these young people make sense of their transitions to the cornerstones of adulthood, as an individual struggle where character is all important, blurs their perception of the systemic inter/intragenerational inequalities they experience and thus, from the perspective of internalised individualism, the reproduction of these inequalities can through the idea of a meritocracy rather than manufactured. These findings suggest the social security system is doing well to encourage young claimants to buy into the ideology that behavioural regulation is required for marginalised low-income groups, such as out-of-work young people. The culture and social generation which this group of young people have grown up in also furthers this belief in the power of individual psychology and self-improvement. However, the cohort largely fails to realise the benefits synonymous with espousing self-improvement discourses, such as

economic security, and when the young people directly encounter the punitive aspects of conditionality, they tend to oppose the measures they ideologically accepted prior.

7.4 Implications

It is potentially comforting to frame young people's challenges in this individualised manner, as the agency is granted to the individual and by following distinct practices a brighter future is perceived to be inevitable. However, it is at least disingenuous to encourage socially excluded young people that the buck stops with them and that they too can achieve the same earnings and status afforded to their more privileged peers, merely by putting in 'effort'. This is not to say that social mobility is a myth. However, instead of holding up rare individual cases of those who 'overcame the odds' and these 'rags to riches' stories which are so pertinent in contemporary culture, policy should seek to develop realistic goals and practical strategies for success in collaboration with young people, rather than emphasising the hollow motivational discourse. Instead of pushing for long-range social mobility for all, ensuring young people can take more control over their own lives, have greater opportunities to realise economic security, are able to plan for a future, and have greater agency in terms of their own life trajectories, should be central to youth-specific social security and labour policies.

The behavioural conceptualisation of work and worklessness has potential long-term scarring effects for these young people and similar cohorts. Recent generations are pressurised to transition to the increasingly elusive traditional cornerstones of adulthood, are repeatedly excluded from valorised and secure employment pathways, and then understand their struggles as an individual character flaw. The detrimental impacts on well-being over time are evident as self-blame could exacerbate mental health issues associated with low-income and worklessness. A system which is intended to raise aspirations and bolster self-esteem in the hope of strengthening employability largely fails to deliver enhanced employment outcomes. Counter-intuitively, behaviourist strategies could also weaken individual employability and motivation to find work overtime, as employment aspirations remain out-of-reach for many, and despondency increases because young people come to understand their psyche to be deficient in some way.

Employment and housing security have been significantly reduced for contemporary generations of young people and the state is blindly hoping that 'everyday entrepreneurship' and the poststent work ethic, combined with positive thinking and a strong belief in a grand future, will somehow transform the lives of disadvantaged young people (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). This rhetoric only serves to reproduce and legitimise social inequalities. Young people, particularly those who encounter intensified welfare conditionality, are conditioned to believe it is intangible barriers, such as 'optimism', 'discipline', and 'desire' which are holding them back from greater economic security, and that these behaviours or mindsets are an individual choice. Conversely, the structural barriers of weakened social protection, employment opportunities, employment security, and affordable housing are perceived as unavoidable, unchallengeable, and unchangeable.

The welfare conditionality these young people experienced may have shaped their strong beliefs in individualisation and self-improvement. Conditionality, among this group, was largely considered neither a positive or a hindrance for the individual, because they were already motivated and '*were doing all the right things'* to realise employment, as instructed per the welfare system. There were some from the cohort who countered this behavioural framing of the reaching stable employment and independent adulthood. Some begrudged the insecure nature of initial engagements with the contemporary labour market, the intergenerational inequalities they faced. The ways in which young people perceive pathways to employment and what they consider important to realising their future aspirations has profound consequences on the choices young people make, and their attitudes and behaviours (García-Sierra, 2023).

This research also highlights the pressure to bypass the youth phase of life among those who claim state support, imposed by the behavioural practices. The young people from this cohort are coerced to behave in ways and exhibit an identity more closely aligned to middle-aged workers than fellow young people who are in tertiary education or employment and can draw upon informal support. They are expected to 'grow up' faster and their freedoms are restricted compared with more affluent youth cohorts. The majority of young people from recent generations transitions to adulthood have been

elongated (Threadgold and Nilan, 2009) and the capacity to be, and remain, a young person is not as heavily scrutinised in the same way as those who rely on state support (Flint, 2019). The material markers of adulthood are out of reach and some of these young people are coerced to substitute this for a make-believe form of adulthood centred around behaviours.

For instance, inviting friends to your home, having parties, and playing music are often synonymous with youth experiences in the UK, but for those living in homeless or social rented accommodation these activities are restricted. The constant observation of the behaviour of young people who claim state support and the harsh punishment apparent *deviant* behaviour carries, such as eviction, inhibit the young people from this study to feel secure and be young. Again, the analysis from this study demonstrates young people begin to internalise this messaging and learn to accept they should have to 'grow up' and 'be mature' if they are to maintain basic support. There was a pressure to act like an adult whilst simultaneously being excluded from the cornerstones of adulthood. The young people from this cohort are tasked with fast-tracked adulthood and are conditioned to understand they should not be granted the same exploratory youth life phase because they are claiming from the state.

7.5 Secondary Analysis of QLR

The innovative methodological approach of secondary analysis of QLR adopted to uncover these findings, provides this research with further novel components. Not only is this study one of the first to specifically explore young people's experiences of welfare conditionality but it has achieved this with a relatively unexplored methodology. Hence, adopting and exploring this methodological approach, tracking progress, making mistakes and breakthroughs, has helped to develop a framework for a more refined method in the future and help to promote the value and application of secondary analysis of QLR.

The rich longitudinal data of the original study provided the ideal access point from which to explore young people's lived experiences over time and enabled insight into how young people respond to life events, setbacks, conditionality, and achievements in

real time and retrospectively. The longitudinal aspect was key in mapping the young people's aspirations and outcomes over time. This analysis moved beyond detailing wholesale changes in the young people's lives, such as moving from unemployment to employment, to dig beneath the surface and illustrate the messy and emotional temporal processes involved in these trajectories (Neale, 2021a). The transitions of this cohort of young people are captured through their own narratives and this research is focused on understanding how they make sense of change, or in many cases, stasis.

Participant aspirations for the upcoming year, was just one within an abundance of unanalysed components from the original study. However, given that future aspirations are particularly important for young people (Skrbis et al. 2014); they are starting out on their journey to adulthood and independence and the future, particularly individual economic stability, is most salient and pressurised for recent generations of young people (Furlong et al. 2017 p.7). Furthermore, given autonomy as a secondary researcher, I could explore any facets of the original study that was salient to my sub sample. Thus, aspirations became a central component of this study, and my first focus for analysis.

My approach and research aims enabled me to move away from the original study and expands its parameters, whilst drawing on a subset of the same data. My distance from the original study offers an advantageous perspective, a clean slate, to re-focus the analytical lens away from; '*how effective is conditionality at changing behaviour among those who claim welfare and services?'* to, '*how do young people who claim welfare envisage their future and pathways to their aspirations?'* Are these young people closer to realising their aspirations over time?

The innovative methodological approach developed in this thesis is another distinct contribution of this research. It demonstrates how secondary analysis can be utilised to illuminate new findings from recent existing data. The novel methodology in this thesis offers techniques to building rapport with participants who can only be accessed through textual data to the secondary researcher. Working only with words on paper, in the form of interview transcripts, I have developed successful strategies for familiarising oneself with the young people, connecting with their personality, and

empathising with their narratives from a distance, which can provide guidance to future research using secondary QLR methodology.

7.6 Why are these findings significant?

7.6.1 For Policy Practitioners

Firstly, although this data is timestamped prior to major events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the relevance and themes explored have only raised in profile since, in terms of policy significance. For instance, a Resolution Foundation report demonstrated a sharp spike in Universal Credit (UC) applications, due to the Covid-19 lockdown, up 692% on average rates over the last two weeks in March 2020 (Brewer and Handscomb, 2020). The report feared an additional 640,000 18–24-year-olds would be jobless by the end of 2020 (Henehan, 2020). Over the course of the pandemic there was a significant generational imbalance in the rates of job losses. The ONS (2021) reported that between February 2020-2021, annual decrease in employee jobs (down 693,000 overall) 63% (437k) were under 25, 25% (174k) were 25-34, whereas 50–64-year-olds saw a net increase of 32,000 jobs.

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown have accelerated this trend in the aftermath of the pandemic. The Resolution Foundation reported one third of 18–24-year-old employees (excluding students) had either lost their jobs or been furloughed compared to one in six ‘prime age’ adults during the first lockdown in the UK (Gustafsson, 2020). Despite the low unemployment rates since the scaling back of COVID-19 social distancing measures, the UK is set for an economic recession to the scale of the 2008 crisis (Murphy and Thwaites, 2023). The trends and the evidence suggest young people will be disproportionately impacted by the impending recession in 2023 (ILO, 2022), which will then further deepen and widen intergenerational inequalities.

Conditionality and benefit sanctions temporarily ceased during the Covid-19 Pandemic policies (Webster, 2023) and there was a £20 UC Covid uplift on all claims. However, monthly UC sanctions were an average of 44,180 in the latest quarter to October 2022,

over two-and-a-half times the average in the last full three months before the pandemic, and as of 6th October 2021 the £20 uplift was withdrawn (Arnold et al. 2021). The Secretary for the Department of Work and Pensions at the time, Thérèse Coffey, suggested the huge number of job vacancies and labour shortages caused by macroeconomic events, such as Brexit and Covid-19, should be filled by those in receipt of UC and the removal of the uplift will encourage claimants into work. Moreover, Jeremy Hunt, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, announced in the latest Budget in Parliament: *"sanctions will be applied more rigorously to those who fail to meet strict work-search requirements or choose not to take up a reasonable job offer"* (UK Government, 2023). This evidence suggests young people's labour market opportunities have become more restricted since the Welfare Conditionality Project (2013-2018), and the state remains committed to punitive behavioural interventions to tackle this. Thus, the findings from this thesis have only heightened in importance, since these young people were interviewed, with regard to the need for policymakers to address youth underemployment, unemployment, and insecurity in contemporary UK society.

7.6.2 For Scholars

The key finding of this thesis, that young people tend to internalise individualised pathways to labour market and housing security but fail to realise economic security, is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the impacts of the psychologisation of everyday life (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015), the proliferation of self-help (Du Plessis, 2021) and the political obsession with social mobility (Lawler and Payne, 2018, p.2), combined with normative framing of poverty of aspiration (Roberts and Atherton, 2011), on contemporary youth. The young people from recent generations have been bombarded with cultural and political doctrine that the self can, and should, overcome structural barriers. The young people from this cohort, who claim conditional state support, have been even more enamoured by the notion that character traits and behaviours are central to labour market success compared with structural factors, such as the rise in insecure labour markets, non-standardised employment, income inequality, and the educational attainment gap.

The system embeds such beliefs in young claimants, to moralise low-income and insecure labour market participation, and to shape the view among young people on the fringes of the formal labour market that their peers who realise valorised employment pathways do so through hard work and determination. With the promise they too can achieve their aspirations by aligning their behaviours with the 'winners' in society. This finding opposes some of the recent evidence within youth studies and welfare conditionality research. International evidence (Parsell et al. 2020; Whelan, 2021), argues welfare claimants claim to be motivated to find work but articulate the barriers which they face in terms of realising full labour market participation. However, many of the young people from this study deflect the structural barriers they face and suggest their future security is both within reach, and contingent on their own values and attitudes.

Yet meaningful employment was scarce among the cohort throughout the timeframe of the study. Those who encountered the most punitive aspects of welfare conditionality, in terms of benefit sanctions and threats of eviction, were demoralised over time. Even those who espoused to be committed to the demands of the system from the outset, were gradually worn down by the daily pressures to uphold constant positive attitudes and displaying the 'right' behaviours, whilst being patronised by the intrusive policy design. Some of the young people who were angry with how they were treated were able to use their agency to disengage from the system. Others, who lacked other forms of income or support, had their agency restricted but still enacted forms of defiance in terms of distantly complying with the conditions attached to their claim. There were some who remained committed to the system and the ideas of individualism and self-help throughout, despite not managing to realise the transitions or milestones they had aspired to.

This indicates some young people who are particularly restricted by structural inequalities who are trying to work out their place in society, display passionate beliefs in the power of self-help, conditioned by contemporary policy and media, to cultivate the new idealised and complicit welfare subject. One which does not complain or look to blame to external factors, but one who largely supports the system and self-blames in the face of labour market failures. One who is motivated to seek insecure

employment as it could provide a platform for future stability, one who perceives their reliance on social security as a burden to society, one who supports the principles of welfare conditionality, despite the pejorative assumptions the policy makes about their identity and strives to abide by the conditions because they believe this will lead to secure employment. The gradual intensification of conditionality and the hardening in beliefs of poverty being a product of attitudes and behaviours rather than social ills, has culminated in this generation of young people who are now manipulated by the system in new ways, in terms of their behaviour and how they think. Instead of being a liberating or empowering development, as advocates of liberal welfare regimes would profess, this new form of governance supresses marginalised young people's ability to think critically and can lead to worsened well-being as they rationalise their frustrated aspirations as an individualised fault.

Secondly, given unemployed young people are at the forefront of policy debates around how to 'fix' worklessness, it is vital to understand how their attitudes toward their future employment and how state support shapes their experiences of, and responses to, paid work. This thesis also contributes to the youth studies literature by exploring the subjective accounts of young people who believe in the power of self-help but are simultaneously excluded form valorised employment pathways, and the waring impacts this can have on motivation and individual well-being. These findings open new avenues for inquiry into how widespread these optimistic visions of individualised pathways to secure employment are among young people who engage with formal employment services. This also highlights how conditional welfare systems not only affect material lives, or the impacts it can have on physical or mental health, but how the ideology embedded in such practices can shape belief systems and the psyche of young claimants.

7.7 Future Research and Policy Recommendations

7.7.1 Research

In terms of research, this thesis has only partially filled a glaring hole in both youth studies and welfare conditionality research centred on understanding the youth

transitions of those who interact with the social security system. Future research should seek to further the holistic account of marginalised youth transitions illustrated throughout this thesis. It is important to gain broader and deeper insight into how young people on the fringes of labour and housing markets transition to adulthood. What are the destinations, how do they feel about the policies they encounter, how do they make sense of their transitions, how do they respond in real time and what are the lasting impacts of insecurity and punitive behavioural regulation? Future projects could seek to engage with adults who experienced intensified conditionality in the past and benefit sanctions during their youth. This research would be fruitful in exploring the long-term effects of youth transitions bound by rising insecurity and increased disciplining of welfare claimants.

It is important for future projects to take a holistic approach to understanding youth transitions rather than focusing exclusively on one component, such as housing, because reaching the traditional cornerstones of adulthood: economic security, homeownership, and family, are interrelated. Isolating these central components and perhaps siloing disciplines (such as housing studies, youth studies, social policy, and labour market studies) would neglect the interconnectivity between each on the journey to reaching these milestones. Longitudinal qualitative research projects in the field of youth studies should also be prioritised. The temporal aspect is fundamental for better understanding of complex dynamic changes, mapping transitions over time, long-term scarring effects, persistent challenges, stasis, how progress is made and understood by young people, and how behaviours and attitudes evolve.

Given young people's status as an increasingly economically and politically excluded group, it is important that more primary research illuminating specifically how the now pervasive insecurity and individualism impact young people as they begin their journey to finding their place in society. There are still knowledge gaps within understanding how young people understand their place in society, how they envisage their own futures, and how they perceive what adulthood means in contemporary society. Future research could seek to illuminate how individualised perceptions of the future and adulthood are constructed by young people, in education, through social media, and through families.

There also needs to be acknowledgment that although younger generations experience deepening intergenerational inequalities, there are widening intragenerational inequalities as well. Research should also endeavour to engage with youth cohorts not on the fringes of the labour and housing markets, but still encounter the trends in precarious work, unaffordable housing, and inability plan for the future. The narratives of 'the missing middle' in youth studies (Roberts and MacDonald, 2013), remain relatively unexplored within recent youth studies research and are important to shed light on the emerging class divisions. Future research should look to investigate how these intragenerational inequalities have altered between generations, in terms of trajectories and attitudes to labour, what it means to be successful, and what current generations aspire to, as well as how they perceive pathways to realising these aspirations.

7.7.2 Policy

Beyond addressing the wider structural inequalities faced by this cohort of young people, there are some policy reforms that could help to improve well-being for those claiming state support whilst out-of-work and make it more likely they transition to a more secure adulthood. Firstly, given the unique generational inequalities faced by young people transitioning to adulthood in contemporary society, tailored support for young people beyond the contemporary standardised out-of-work support is essential. Rather than having restricted access to financial support for young people and disproportionately punishing them, the system should seek to provide augmented unconditional support for young people, both financially and with specific youth training initiatives available. Optional vocational training courses should include a range of options from tech to apprenticeships, with clear progression with associated employers. Receipt of basic support should not impinge on taking up work experience or training, but training should be incentivised through renumeration. A form of positive conditionality would be more welcomed than punitive practices, while basic provision for living should be unconditional and unaffected by claimant behaviour.

Treating young people with dignity from the outset, like adults, will help foster a stronger cohesion between young claimants, state services, and the labour market.

Instead of taking the current approach, of cracking down early and heavily on young claimants to intimidate and coerce them to enter the insecure labour market with limited support, **a** long-term approach to support young workers is required. Their relationship and understanding of work, as well as the structure of the contemporary labour market and the skills required to be desirable, are far removed to that of older workers. Therefore, bespoke training and support for younger claimants should be developed in collaboration with young people. They are the future of the workforce and to instruct them to fix problems individually is ineffective and potentially harmful. Without swift system reforms, young NEET populations will grow.

This research furthers evidence that welfare claimants are motivated to find work without behavioural nudges. The young people from the study when first engaging with the system were eager to find work and for most, getting a job was their main aspiration for the coming year. This aspiration remained consistent for the majority who did not manage to realise secure employment, however for some young people the conditionality they experienced reduced their motivation to reach this goal. The persistent behavioural regulation with punitive measures was wearing down the enthusiasm of some young people. Particularly among those who experienced multiple benefit sanctions. Hence, this thesis suggests that government ministers, policymakers, and civil servants (such as DWP), and local authorities and housing associations, should re-consider their assumption that these behavioural nudges are at all effective for young people.

This research also corroborates with a body of evidence to support the notion that benefit sanctions are ineffective and unethical. However, this research goes further and evidences the long-term scarring effects and the emotional burden sanctions can carry among young people beginning their journey in the formal labour market. Sanctions were experienced widely across this cohort, nearly 50% had experienced at least one sanction. This is a much higher rate than the average sanction rate for this age group even during this period of historically high sanctions rates. When discussing their sanctions, the young people expressed feelings of anger. They were angry with how they had been treated, the system, and their advisor. They were also angry when

discussing their sanctions in retrospect, sometimes more than two years after the event. They held on to this anger and resentment toward the system.

Others felt alienated from the system following a sanction experience. Some decided to completely disengage from the system following a sanction, they considered a specific sanction experience the final straw. This did not result in enhanced labour market outcomes, but only an unpleasant separation from formal support. Sanctions had the ability to undermine any relationship built up between the young person and the system, commitment to the policy, and generate lasting anger among young people toward state services. Sanctions are not only failing to meet their objective of encouraging claimants to abide more closely to the conditions and stimulate augmented job search activity, but they are emotionally scarring some young claimants.

7.8 Personal Reflections

There are many things this research project has taught me. It has opened my eyes to many things about youth and how society perceives young people. There is still an understanding that all young people who want to 'progress' in the conventional sense: get a high paying job, buy a home, and start a family, can do so if they endeavour. Many young people themselves believe this to be true. I do not take a stance where individual agency is removed, and structural barriers dictate all. However, the widening and deepening of intergenerational inequalities is evidenced but overlooked compared with other social inequalities, such as the more pronounced economic disparities between genders and ethnicities. In our asset economy, labour becomes a less effective route to reaching financial independence (Woodman, 2022). Moreover, secure labour market opportunities with scope for career progression are increasingly restricted for recent generations of young people. There is an increasing imbalance of power between younger and older people, both economically and politically.

The ironic thing about the fixation with self-help and individualism, glorifying individual agency and promising self-actualisation for all, is that it represents one of the key contemporary mechanisms for social control and the reproduction of social inequalities. It is the ideology which keeps those at the lower end of the socio-economic

ladder divided, as they accept the conceptualisation of a meritocracy, whilst their chances to realise the economic goals synonymous with this behaviourist, consumerist mantra are being diminished, in part, by the very ideology promoting individual freedom and 'success' for all.

There is still an attitude inherent within our society, and policymaking, that young people require paternalistic management rather than be treated with respect and dignity. Young people who rely on state support should be entrusted to make their own decisions and be given more opportunities to curate a more secure future for themselves. To tackle broader socio-economic inequalities, decision makers must try to untangle privatised forms of welfare, where transfers of wealth within families is the encouraged means of providing economic security for young people. To conclude, young people's lived experiences of, and attitudes toward, welfare conditionality and contemporary precarious labour and housing markets are highly nuanced and fluctuate over time. These experiences must be understood as interconnected and more holistically, in order to develop more effective policies and services for and with young people in the future. Future research should explore more deeply how young people understand, respond to, and rationalise behavioural policy practices.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Participant Information Table

Pseudonym	Lives In	Age (at Wave A)	Main Classification	Number of Interviews	Housing Tenure
Jamie	London	21	Job Seeker	three	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Alia	Bristol	19	Migrant	three	Private tenant
Finlay	Bath	19	Universal Credit	three	Hostel/Social tenant
Jess	Sheffield	25	Lone Parent	three	Social tenant
Oscar	Sheffield	22	ASB	three	Social tenant
Sarah	Glasgow	17	Migrant	three	Social tenant
Callum	Edinburgh	18	Job Seeker	two	Social tenant
Alex	Bath	23	Universal Credit	three	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Daniel	Sheffield	21	Homeless	two	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Aidan	London	22	Job Seeker	three	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Freya	Inverness	23	Universal Credit	two	Social tenant
Tegan	Edinburgh	21	Job Seeker	two	Social tenant
Simon	Peterborough	20	Ex-offender	three	Private tenant

Katie	Manchester	25	FIP	two	Private tenant
Maria	Bath	25	Universal Credit	three	Social tenant
Jack	Bath	20	Universal Credit	two	Social tenant
Liam	Manchester	19	Universal Credit	two	Living in parents' home
Dean	London	25	Ex-offender	three	Social tenant
Erin	Manchester	21	Universal Credit	one	Social tenant
Catriona	Edinburgh	17	Job Seeker	two	Social tenant
Anna	London	23	Job Seeker	three	Social tenant
Carla	Peterborough	23	Job Seeker	three	Private tenant
Sophie	Edinburgh	16	Job Seeker	one	Social tenant
Mia	Edinburgh	19	Job Seeker	one	Social tenant
Azi	Peterborough	19	Job Seeker	three	Private tenant
Craig	London	25	Job Seeker	two	Private tenant
Lisa	Bristol	20	Social Tenant	three	Social tenant
Rose	Bristol	22	Social Tenant	three	Social tenant
Molly	Edinburgh	17	Social Tenant	three	Social tenant
Josh	Warrington	25	Universal Credit	one	Social tenant

Bradley	London	23	Ex-offender	one	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Greg	Manchester	23	Universal Credit	two	Private tenant
Omar	Bristol	20	Migrant	two	Private tenant
Stephen	Glasgow	19	Migrant	two	Social tenant
Leah	Edinburgh	20	Homeless	one	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Steph	Peterborough	24	Lone Parent	two	Social tenant
Fraser	Bristol	22	Homeless	one	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Milly	Sheffield	25	Lone Parent	two	Social tenant
Megan	Bath	23	Universal Credit	three	Social tenant
Neil	Glasgow	23	Disabled Person	two	Social tenant
Beccy	Peterborough	24	Ex-offender	three	Private Tenant
Fiona	London	24	Job Seeker	one	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Eve	London	24	Lone Parent	two	Social tenant
Patrick	Peterborough	23	Ex-offender	one	Social tenant
Alina	Sheffield	25	Lone Parent	two	Social tenant
Ewan	London	20	Job Seeker	two	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Rob	Sheffield	22	Disabled Person	three	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Francis	Sheffield	20	Ex-offender	one	Living in parents' home

Adam	Edinburgh	16	Job Seeker	two	Social tenant
Francesca	Glasgow	21	Migrant	one	Private tenant
Rory	Manchester	20	ASB	one	Living in relatives' home
Gabo	Bristol	24	Ex-offender	one	Hostel/Homeless accommodation
Alice	Sheffield	21	ASB	two	Social tenant
Priya	Edinburgh	17	Job Seeker	two	Social tenant
Mary	Bristol	22	Social Tenant	one	Social tenant

*ASB = history of anti-social behaviour orders

*FIP = Family Intervention Programme

Appendix 2 – Example of Participant Profile

WSU-BR-JM-020 – Female - Lone Parent

Alia's Story

Wave A – 02/04/2015

Alia is a lone parent who moved out of her mother's house, first into a shared house but then to private accommodation after she was made unwelcome in the shared house for being French, about a year ago when she had her first child. She is originally from France and was not entitled to income support because she had not been living in the UK long enough. Alia is 19 years old at first interview. Her pregnancy was difficult for her and she became ill. After having a caesarean section was trying to work through pregnancy and began work roughly two months after giving birth. She was trying to apply for ESA for ages because she says her health is very bad at the moment and she is in pain. She is now receiving ESA.

Alia was claiming JSA and going in to sign on after she had her baby, then found a job in a hotel and worked there for roughly seven months. She had to get a bus for an hour and 20 minutes to work at 6am five days a week while she had a new-born son. Her partner would look after the baby while she was at work. She was helped by a support worker and citizens advice bureau in applying for benefits as she was confused by all the processes, applications and demands. Alia feels her decisions have been made for her, she has no choice anymore. She has used foodbanks to feed her and her son before but doesn't like the lack of choice or healthy options. She is craving choice in multiple aspects of her life. The job search was tough for Alia, she believes the jobcentre require far too many job searches per week. She was afraid to speak up to anyone in authority because she was young and thought if she did anything 'bad' her money might be taken away.

Alia, is worried, confused and scared in her current situation. She is in pain and feels she doesn't have the support she needs to care for herself or her baby. Her partner lives in Cardiff but is currently homeless and not around a lot. She cannot think of the future right now, says Alia. She hopes to be in a two-bedroom property by next year and is happy to work part-time if her health has improved. She thinks lone parents should not be asked to work if they have no health problems. A recurring theme here, that sanctions are okay for others but not for me?

Wave B – 09/05/2016

Alia has been too unwell to work since the last interview, she eventually, with the help of her GP and support worker got an ESA health assessment and has been in the support group for the past six months so she doesn't have to sign on. She had an operation to help the pain in the back and legs around six months ago. It seems like Alia has more

support from her mum now, when her mum isn't working as a nurse, she comes to cook dinners for Alia and her son and helps with childcare sometimes too. At the moment Alia is not ready to look for work but once she finally gets assessed by the NHS and maybe gets the right diagnosis/medication, she feels she will be working in the future and is confident she will find a job. She would love to work in a clothes shop. Being at home all the time does not suit her and before her pregnancy she was always working and studying, and she wants to return to that in the future.

Before she has her ESA health assessment the job centre was asking her "horrible questions", like 'why don't you work? Don't you want to work?'. Alia was upset by this because all she wanted to do was work but felt she was in too much pain to do any of the jobs on offer. The pressure was building, and Alia felt like they did not understand her situation with a small baby at home. Thankfully she doesn't have to go into the jobcentre at the moment but has voluntarily gone in to ask about potential courses she could go on to make sure she is work ready when her health improves. Alia has had complications with trying to get a two-bedroom property from the council. She was given a date she has to be out of her current address, but it is being delayed because she is fighting her case with help of her Shelter support worker and doesn't have anywhere to move into. She has been through the same process before when applying for benefits, where they ask her for her documents then she sends them all, then they say she is not entitled because she is an international. She feels this is crazy because she has been here for 5/6 years and been to school in the UK. She will not consider private accommodation again because any mishap with the benefits, late payment or anything it causes huge problems. She has had experience of this in her current property, when going into work and everything was stopped, rent was being paid late and the landlord kept coming to her flat and insulting her and her son, just after her operation. *Similar thing happened with Jamie where a transition from welfare-to-work resulted in pile up of rent arrears. When asked about how the stressful process of trying to get a new home and more space for her and her son, Alia's response was totally revolved around her son. She said it has been tough for him, he wants a better life for him, he needs more space to play. Her son is the priority, is this a catalyst for positive change for young lone parents or a burden where their own goals are overlooked?

Alia does not think it's fair or even possible to ask a lone parent to work before the child turns 5 and goes to school. There is no one to look after the child so how can those not in a couple or have other informal carers cope? She is always worried her benefits will be stopped in the near future because her experience is that they are looking for ways to take it away from you. Alia's story has been particularly confusing and turbulent up till now, she has been twice in the last year moved from the support group to the work-related group without warning and then moved back after she complained she was too ill to look for work. She also had one month of no benefits when the decision of the ESA assessment was pending, and she did not come into the jobcentre. It is a constant battle of paperwork and proving that she needs support. She has used foodbanks four times in the past year. She says by next year she could be working and in a new house, but she just doesn't know, even the near future is very uncertain for Alia.

Wave C – 07/02/2017

Since last interview Alia moved out of the private flat because the landlord wanted the property back. She did not like this flat because it was too small but was struggling to find a suitable home provided by the council. The landlord and council said Alia had to repay £500 which I assume was a deposit, to the landlord before the council would help her get a new place. Her boyfriend/father of her child gave her the £500 and she began the tedious process of securing tenure in social housing. Around this time, she found out her was three months pregnant with the same dad as her first son. This was a big shock for Alia, and she was moved into shared accommodation, pregnant and with her son. She really was having a bad time here, being racially abused and having morning sickness every day. She mostly slept at her mum's place in the living room because the accommodation she was in was so small and uncomfortable. Once the council got word she wasn't sleeping there, they cancelled her stay in the shared accommodation and she was told she should stay at her mothers. Alia then spoke to her housing advisor and told her that the last place really was not suitable, and she couldn't stay at her mums because other people were staying there, and it was too crowded. Eventually she was given a hostel room with a private toilet and cooker etc. This was much better for Alia and her son.

Soon after this move, at 32 weeks pregnant the doctors told Alia she would have to give birth prematurely. She was in hospital for a month and the baby was moved to Gloucester because of lack of space, and her mum and boyfriend would go and visit the small baby and care for her first born whilst Alia had to stay in hospital in Bristol. After her and her baby were well enough, they moved back to the hostel. Alia spoke to her housing advisor again, who she likes, and said they needed more room now and it was too cold in the hostel for the new-born. Two weeks later the housing advisor told her that in a month, in late January 2017 she would move into a council house with two bedrooms! Alia was delighted with this and she has been living there with her two sons for just three weeks at time of interview. The last year has been tough for Alia emotionally, but she says she has learned to smile and laugh instead of cry all the time now.

Alia's diagnosis was a sickle cell carrier, which is part of the reason she had been so unwell for the past few years. Throughout Alia's pregnancy and moving around places the jobcentre were asking to assess her ESA. She told them she was pregnant and even in the month when she was in hospital, they were trying to arrange an assessment for when she got out. A few weeks prior to this interview she had a health assessment and has been told she is fit for work and her ESA will be stopped from now. Alia and her social worker are trying to sort out an appeal or an income support claim. She has had no money for a week now. Alia is receiving child benefit and child tax credit.

Alia was working as a cleaner for a short time because she was getting so stressed with the jobcentre that she felt it was easier for her to get a job, even though she did not feel well enough to work. It was part of the condition to get a council property that she had to be working, so Alia worked for six months while pregnant. At this time, she was stopped getting ESA and worked part-time with working tax credit. Then closer to the end of her pregnancy Alia had to stop work because she was too sick. She believes her

stress and high blood pressure were the reason her son was born prematurely. Once she stopped work, she got back on ESA easily enough but then they wanted to reassess her. When her ESA was turned down post assessment Alia was really down, she was 5 marks shy of the 15 points needed.

Alia went on a sales training course through the jobcentre which she was quite happy with and found beneficial. She has never been sanctioned but believes that people who miss appointments it is their fault and stopping their money will help them to learn/change. She is supportive of sanctions and compares it to her mother missing two GP appointments and the practice telling her she would now need to go somewhere else. Alia thinks this is her mothers' fault and is fair. When asked about sanctioning lone parents in particular, Alia is less supportive and believes for those with young children they should not have to work if they do not wish to. Again, the idea that sanctioning someone else is okay but not me?

Alia says her time over the past three years on benefits has been very difficult and continues to be a constant battle of toing and froing. She hopes that she will finish up her accounting course at college which she has been doing part-time over the past year whilst working and through pregnancy but has not been able to keep her studies going obviously since giving birth. I am not sure how she does all these things?! She hopes to get onto a business course at Bristol Uni this coming September. She wants to move to London to be with her partner but has to stay in this council house she is in at the moment for a year before they deem her reliable enough, or whatever, to be able to apply for a different property.

Quotes

"It's just waiting like me yesterday. I will think everything's fine just with sent letter like this. I was just going out and then take the postal man just came and give me the letter, open, it was confused. I stay at home. I didn't go out." (Alia, 21, Wave C, Migrant, Black Caribbean, Bristol, 2017)

The feeling of momentary security can be shattered by one letter! Precarious existence.

"I say, 'It's enough. I cannot work anymore because I'm feeling sick. Go to work every single day.' That's why I give birth in 32 weeks, because it's thought that because I was under so much stress, someone sick, got blood pressure, you have to go to work every single day. It's no good." (Alia, 21, Wave C, Migrant, Black Caribbean, Bristol, 2017)

Why is paid work deemed the omnipotent moral agenda, even trumping health of mother and children?

Appendix 3 – Opposition to 'Internalised Individualism'

Structural Framing of Labour Market - "It's literally a hire-and-fire generation now." (Liam, Wave A, 19, Jobseeker, Manchester, 2015)

Although the perception that adopting the 'right' mindset is the key to labour market success was prevalent among this cohort of young people, there were some participants who put forward external factors for their own, and others, lack of employment. These participants also tended to be critical of Jobcentre strategies and the design of contemporary social security. We will now focus our attention on the stories of two young people in detail, both of whom articulated intrinsic motivation to find work but were concerned about the opportunities afforded to them and the ineffective malice of certain Jobcentre practices.

Liam

Liam's journey is one which is fairly distinct from the rest of the sample. Primarily that he was living in his parents' home and was in employment when he left the study. Liam began claiming UC not long before his Wave A interview in 2015 when he was 19. He had come to the end of a temporary work contract and went to the Jobcentre because he was eager to get back into work. Here Liam talks of the sanction he was serving because he failed to prove he had completed 70 hours of job search in two weeks:

"Because I've got to search for a job now 35 hours a week. That could mean cycling into the library and sitting down at computers for five hours a day. I'd love to see my adviser do that. Love to. [Laughs] It's just not going to happen. I don't even think she works in the Jobcentre that much. That's why I've been sanctioned now, because I can't do 70 hours a fortnight." (Liam, 19, Wave A, Jobseeker, White British, Manchester, 2015)

This is quite different to the attitudes of the participants discussed above. Liam clearly feels 35 hours of job search a week is laughable and unrealistic. Again, notice his disparaging tone here when articulating how the sanction is affecting him:

"It's taken away a lifeline, really, because the money that I get, like, I admit, I didn't sign on for the money; I signed on out of hope that she'll pull a piece of paper out of her arse and help get us a job, you know what I mean? But it was a lifeline. It saved us a couple of times, you know what I mean? Sat in the house with nothing, and then I get paid the next day: it revamps the house; it puts the blood flowing through the house again, you know what I mean?"

Liam displays resentment for sanctions and the support he receives. Again, Liam's views on conditionality and mandatory job search are more aligned with empathy for

fellow claimants rather the state, however he does not suggest conditionality should be scrapped:

"It has to be fair somewhere along the line, doesn't it? Like, you should have to prove that you are searching for a job and everything and that, as long as it's within reasonable terms and you're actually able to do it. And the person is able to do it as well, because I've seen people with no chance of ever getting a job, but they have to search for a job and all this, but they've got no chance, you know what I mean? Because they're not physically able to do it."

Liam is supportive of a basic minimum for all:

"There should be a basic amount, yes, but again, if I ran the country, I'd have to go through everyone's personal file and everything […] But yes, there should be a basic amount, no matter who you are and what you've done or anything like that. You should be entitled to something over your head to keep you warm and night and everything, you know what I mean?"

Finally, for Wave A, Liam is asked what his aspirations for the next 12 months are, here is the dialogue with the interviewer:

Interviewer

"Just before we finish I'm going to ask you a few questions about yourself again, and the future, looking forward. What do you hope will happen to you over the next 12 months or so?"

Liam

"I'm hoping to find work and get myself into full-time employment, basically."

Interviewer

"Are you fairly confident of that?"

Liam

"Seriously, if I can get an interview, I know I can get that job, no matter what the interview is for. I'm pretty confident in that. However big-headed it sounds, I know I can get that job. So yes, I'm confident, but it's just getting the interview I'm worried about, that I can't seem to do."

Just like the other participants, Liam is asked what could make meeting his goals for the coming year more likely, to which he replies:

"I'm not sure, to be honest, because I have tried doing stuff. I'm tried going on employability courses and stuff like that, and I just don't know. I just can't seem to get from the computer screen to a person, do you know what I mean? I'm not sure."

This reflection opposes the internalised self-blame from other young people from the sample. Liam feels he has done what he can but does not seem to get anywhere. Liam is then gently pressed by the interviewer to think of anything that may make it easier for him to find full-time work and he responds:

"Availability of jobs: there are hardly any jobs out there, are there? It's not like the olden days when you could see a poster up on the wall saying, 'Help wanted' and that and you could walk in and get a job and be there for 20 years or whatever. It's not like that anymore, is it? It's literally a hire-and-fire generation now. You're hired for 12 weeks and then you're fired, and that's how it is now."

This final excerpt from Liam's Wave A transcript is fairly unique in the context of this study, in the sense the barriers to meeting future employment goals were framed as something external rather something within the control of the individual. Liam's conceptualisation of his own circumstances would represent a framing more aligned with scholarly interpretations of contemporary marginalised youth transitions, during a time of heightened insecurity and hyper conditional social security design.

Wave B

A year on and Liam is employed on a part-time contract at a food store. Here he is talking about his new job and whether he wishes to stay there:

"I'm hoping to stay in this job, but if something else comes along that's maybe better or something, I'll consider it. But for now, I'm happy in this job, yes. There are people that have been there 15 years and never had their job threatened and stuff like that, which is what I want; to get a secure wage at the end of the month and stuff like that." (Liam, 20, Wave B, Jobseeker, Manchester, 2016)

Liam is glad he does not have to rely on the jobcentre for vital income anymore. As a UC claimant he could have continued to interact with the jobcentre and receive a top up to his wages since he was working part-time hours. However, Liam chose not to do this because he felt a sense of empowerment by simply ignoring the jobcentre and not having to bow to their demands:

"No, I stopped interacting with them and all they did was send me a text and a few letters to say that I won't get my payments and I just ripped them up and threw them in the bin. I don't care about payments; as long as I'm not the owner of the Jobcentre anymore, I'm happy. It makes you a lot happier person not to go in and get criticised by someone."

This is interesting because a key component of UC is this idea that if one enters the workplace one can still receive adjusted social security payments to bolster part-time earnings. In this case, Liam chooses not to accept this support, even though it would mean more income for him, because he perceives his ability to turn down state support

as a symbol of self-sufficiency and defiance against a system he despises. Possibly this is a strategy of UC, to try and harass claimants to the point where those on low incomes will decide either the extra income is not worth the hassle or because it gives them a sense of one-upmanship over the system. Liam goes on to describe how the Jobcentre made him feel and the barriers to employment young claimants with limited experience have:

"The Jobcentre puts you down, telling you you're not doing enough, and your job search isn't up to standard, you've not got enough job work. They're giving you all these voluntary jobs to be doing and everything. It makes you feel useless, like you've not done enough with your life, and it makes you feel like you've got to do more. So, you go to all these charity shops and stuff like that. It looks good on a CV, yes. I volunteered in a charity shop and it's a reference, but it's not really experience in a job, is it? It's putting tags on a piece of clothing and putting it on a hanger; it didn't give you any interaction. You couldn't go on a till or anything because if you're a volunteer you weren't allowed to just in case of security things, I'm guessing."

Liam suggests volunteering and work schemes are not always helpful in terms of finding paid employment. He is critical of the approach to claimants and the punishing aspects of conditionality. Here, Liam desires stable employment opportunities, he is doing what he can to bolster his employability, but the system is set up against him. This is quite a different view than those discussed earlier in the chapter. We will now look at one other participant who shared many of the same beliefs as Liam.

Appendix 4 – Data Diary Entry

25/02/21

I have now developed a draft findings chapter which focuses on participant aspirations and the individualised framing of future prospects which was implicit in some participant accounts and explicitly strong within others. After re-coding the last section of each Wave A and B transcripts where participants were asked about their hopes of the next year and how confident they were in achieving their goals, it became clear that more participants were confident in reaching their aspirations and that the barriers to success were perceived as intrinsic. There were a group of participants who suggested that they would secure employment because they believed they would, and positive attitude was key. Only a few participants suggested they needed more support and the odds were stacked against them.

This struck me as troubling given all the literature, I have been consuming on contemporary youth transitions and the many challenges faced by the current generations of young people, particularly for cohorts of young people from low-income backgrounds such as those from this study. These young people have been blinded by the power of individualism and positive thinking and either choose to downplay structural barriers or are not aware of them. Some of the quotes read like those motivational messages that could be pinned up on a noticeboard in the Jobcentre Plus, or any organisation for that matter. This ideology is intrusive, and it appears that some of those who are excluded the most campion these beliefs overtly.

When participants were identified as either individualist or structuralist, quotes were selected on the basis which they aligned most explicitly with either group. Some participants were vague about their aspirations and the barriers they faced. Those who suggested the only barriers they faced were within themselves were focused upon to demonstrate the depth rather than the breadth of responses. It was important for me to communicate the staunch conviction of psychological framing of (un)employment that some of the young people articulated. This is what I observed to be the most significant binding factor between participants given their vastly different experiences.

Out of 36 participants who detailed their aspirations for the coming year at Wave A, here is the breakdown of the responses to the questions of, “how confident are you that you will be able to achieve these goals in the next year?” and “what could help it be more likely that you achieve these goals?” Of the 23 participants who were asked what could help them meet their aspirations for the year, 16 offered insights such as,

my motivation or hard work etc. The other 7 participants suggested things like more support, or job availability:

Confident in Achieving Aspirations	**14**
Less Confident in Achieving Aspirations	**5**
Individual Attributes Most Important	**16**
External Factors Most Important	**7**

Appendix 5 – Sanctions Table Full

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	City of residence	No. times sanctioned Wave A	No. times sanctioned Wave B	Reasons for sanction(s)
Stephen	19	M	Glasgow	2-5 times	n/a	The first time he was sanctioned was because he missed an appointment at the Jobcentre. He can't remember why he was sanctioned the 2nd time.
Fraser	22	M	Bristol	2-5 times	n/a	For losing his job search booklet. Was told ‘you will be sanctioned now’ and his claim was cut by 40%.
Leah	20	F	Edinburgh	Once	n/a	Sanctioned for lack of sick note from doctor when transitioning to from JSA to ESA and missed appointment.
Oscar	22	M	Sheffield	2-5 times	Once	Missed appointments because he was at the hospital for his mental health issues.
Carly	24	F	Peterborough	Once	Never	Sanctioned for being late to appointment and not making enough effort in job interview.
Milly	25	F	Sheffield	Once	Once	Sanctioned for not doing adequate job search even though she had a baby and could not get childcare.

Megan	23	F	Bath	Never	2-5 times	Sanctioned for missing an appointment because of confusion with doctor note when unwell.
Alex	23	M	Bath	Once	Never	Missed an appointment at the Jobcentre because he was in hospital after he had attempted suicide.
Patrick	19	M	Manchester	2-5 times	2-5 times	**Wave A** For not spending 35 hours looking for work and then also for not giving a reason why he wasn't spending enough time looking for work. Another for missing an appointment. **Wave B** Every time he went in the Jobcentre, he would get sanctioned. So, he eventually stopped going. Would get longer and longer sanctions every time he got one. The final one was eight months
Greg	23	M	Manchester	2-5 times	2-5 times	**Wave A** Was on a work trial shift but he did not inform Jobcentre soon enough. Has also been sanctioned

						for not doing enough job searching one day, despite doing 40 hours over the week. Was once sanctioned for turning up late for an appointment. Was also sanctioned when he was accused of filling in his job search log messily - this was based on his poor handwriting. **Wave B** Sanctioned for not having written his CV well enough. Another sanction for not taking his job search with him to appointment because he had come straight from a job interview. Also, for being late to a work programme placement.
Josh	25	M	Warrington	More than 5 tines	n/a	For not doing enough job search. Was sanctioned following a work trial shift- as he and the shop owner disagreed about the dates he worked on a trail for. Jobcentre accepted the dates of the shop owner. When he was on JSA he was

						sanctioned twice for missing appointments.
Neil	23	M	Glasgow	2-5 Times	Never	Missing an appointment. Cannot remember what the 2nd sanction was for.
Bradley	23	M	London	Once	n/a	When he was on JSA he was sanctioned for 6 months for filling his job search incorrectly.
Simon	20	M	Peterborough	2-5 times	Never	Experienced two sanctions for missing appointments.
Dean	25	M	London	2-5 times	Never	**Wave A** Was previously sanctioned for missing appointments even though he did not receive the letters with info about these - he appealed without success. **Wave B** Did not turn up for a training course provided by Jobcentre and his benefits were suspended so he lost his property.
Beccy	24	F	Peterborough	2-5times	Never	Experienced benefit sanctions when her partner missed an appointment as they had a joint claim and so all benefits were suspended.

Catriona	17	F	Edinburgh	Once	Never	Sanctioned for lack of job search. Successful appeal.
Mia	19	F	Edinburgh	Once	n/a	Went on a 10-week hospitality training course. During the course they changed her benefits from JSA to employability fund, but at the end of the course she did not inform the Jobcentre that the course had ended so was sanctioned.
Craig	25	M	London	2-5 times	Never	Thinks he has been sanctioned 3-4 times. Mostly for not filling out his job search properly and once for missing an appointment.
Aidan	22	M	London	Once	Never	Had an injury to his hand and was sent a form for him to return at his next appointment but then was told that it was too late.
Fiona	24	F	London	Once	n/a	When she had a joint claim with her ex-partner they were sanctioned as he had not done his job search. He had not been doing his job searches as he was on a course from 9am - 4pm and they did not have internet at home.

Rory	20	M	London	Once	n/a	For leaving a job voluntarily.
Jamie	21	M	London	2-5 times	Once	**Wave A** Accused of not attending work programme. Second sanction because he missed appointments at the Jobcentre because he was at the hospital with his ex-partner who was pregnant. **Wave B** For being late to work programme placement.
Carla	23	F	Peterborough	2-5 times	Never	For missing appointment due to hospital admission. Cannot remember what the second sanction was for.
Andy	19	M	Peterborough	Once	Never	Got confused over when he had to sign on at the Jobcentre and missed appointment. Appealed successfully.
Eve	24	F	London	Never	2-5 times	Was sanctioned a couple of times for incorrect job searches.
Finlay	18	M	Bath	2-5 times	Once	Was late to appointment because he crashed his bike. Was also sanctioned because he hadn't worked on his CV.

Appendix 6 – Non-Angry Response to Sanction Experience

It is important to include balance in the analysis and provide space for all types of experiences within the data. With the style of presentation selected, in the form of in-depth exploration of a few narratives that speak for a range of similar narratives within the cohort, it is not possible to include the full breadth and depth of experiences. In the benefit sanction chapter for example, there were other young people who were angry and experienced traumatic emotional responses to a sanction who were not included in the discussion. There were also a few young people who experienced a sanction but did express any strong emotion toward the sanction and agreed that the sanction was fair. These narratives were in the minority. Among those who experienced multiple sanctions it was common to accept one or two of the sanctions as justified, and the young person agreed the punishment was just. However, their overall experience of sanctions was negative, and they perceived the application of benefit sanctions to be ineffective in achieving the desired behavioural outcomes.

After analysis, there was only two examples in the data of a young person who was sanctioned, and they did not use primarily negative language or express strong emotions when recounting their experience. At Wave A, Finlay, an 18-year-old UC claimant from Bath, has been sanctioned at least twice. He had mixed feelings about the legitimacy of his sanctions. One sanction he received for missing a Jobcentre Plus appointment, because he had an accident on his bike on his way to the appointment. He appealed this sanction unsuccessfully and was told the accident was not a "reasonable excuse." He went on to discuss another sanction he received for missing another appointment:

Finlay

"Other times was because I've missed a bus, which they just reply, 'should have got there sooner', when I tell my advisor the next time I see them. They've told me I should have probably got the earlier bus, which I say, 'fair dos'." (Finlay, 18, Wave A, UC, White British, Bath, 2015)

Interviewer

"So, do you think that was right to sanction you that time as well?"

Finlay

"I think so, yes. I think that was more my lapse attitude towards going to my meeting."

Throughout Finlay's narrative he remained calm in the face of sanctions. He accepted the level of punishment even though he had experienced long periods with no state support. It is unclear if Finlay had informal support he could rely on, because the benefit sanctions did not appear to have any significant impacts on him. Here he described the impacts of the accumulative sanctions he had experienced by Wave B:

Interviewer

"How have the sanctions impacted on your life, or have they had any sort of longer lasting impact on you?"

Finlay

"Just means I haven't been able to perhaps buy as much food as I would liked to have done, yes." (Finlay, 19, Wave B, UC, White British, Bath, 2016).

Emotional response to benefit sanctions was largley absent from Finlay's narrative. He passively accepted the financial struggle and does not express feelings of anger or despair when recounting his sanction experiences. This is a rare case in the data but one that is important to highlight not only for impartiality but also to give voice to those on the fringes of the cohort, in the sense of their narratives not fitting into the types or themes discussed in the finding's chapters. Throughout the thesis, the decision to focus on depth rather than breadth of youth narratives is well founded. However, it should be explicitly stated the narratives included in the thesis are not cherry picked, they have been selected for strength of emotion but also because they speak to the experiences of

many others within the cohort. There are some narratives in the data however, that challenge the findings within this thesis.

Azi, a Black Nigerian Jobseeker from Peterborough, went beyond Finlay's passive sanction response and offered a positive narrative in relation to his sanction experience. He was sanctioned once near the beginning of his claim because he confused his sign-on dates. Azi believed the sanction was fair and suggests it was a catalyst for behaviour change, as he explains:

"It makes me more active, yes. It makes me - any time for my appointment I'm always punctual. Yes, I will say those two words; made me active and made me punctual as well." (Azi, Wave A, 19, Black Nigerian, Jobseeker, Peterborough, 2014)

He believed, in his experience, the sanction had the desired effect, and he ensured he is always aware of his sign-on dates and had not missed another since. Azi accepted this form of behavioural regulation and reiterated the ideology espoused from the Jobcentre. Research from Fletcher and Redman (2022a) also argued that welfare claimants are likely to accept the punitive design and suggest benefit sanctions are necessary for 'other' claimants. They draw upon Gramsci's (1970) concept of hegemony to understand how service users adopt the values and beliefs inherent within a policy design that considers them amoral, and which has been demonstrated to directly cause them harm, both materially and psychologically (Fletcher and Redman, 2022a). However, responses to sanctions such as Finlay and Azi's were the exception among the young people who had experienced a benefit sanction.

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