

**‘Steering the Ship’: A Thematic Analysis exploring
the psychological underpinnings of the
Undergraduate student experience.**

PhD Thesis

Megan Jones

School of Psychology, University of East Anglia

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2024

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with the current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

Amidst escalating university student mental health concerns (Office for National Statistics, 2022), and the increased auditing of Higher Education performance (Naidoo & Williams, 2015), understanding the student experience persists as a critical research focus. However, existing literature compartmentalises the experience, overlooking the holistic elements cutting across it (Bewick et al, 2010; Thorley, 2017; Worsley et al., 2021a). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 undergraduate students of mixed genders, aged between 18 and 26 ($M = 20.60$, $SD = 1.88$), and 12 university support staff members aged between 24 and 57 ($M = 38.92$, $SD = 11.38$), from 8 and 6 UK universities respectively. Interviews explored student and support staff perceptions of the undergraduate experience to answer, "What are the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate student experience?". Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) eight key psychological underpinnings were constructed, that transcend across the student experience. The metaphor of a ship and its voyage is used to explain the psychological journey of the student. Including, 1) Steering the Ship: Being the Captain, 2) Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance, 3) A Safe Harbour: Having a Secure and Stable Base, 4) We're All on This Ship Together: Being a Crew, 5) Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation, 6) The Mists of Mismatch: "This isn't what I Expected", 7) Growing and Adapting with the Changing Winds, and 8) Adjusting The Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience. The concept of Steering the Ship offers a central organising concept, interinfluencing with other themes, highlighting the importance of students becoming active agents of their student experience. Findings are discussed in relation to student transitions and have relevance for Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Implications are made for Higher Education Institutions, including promoting student-partnership and a compassionate university approach.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate 'take down' action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Contents | 3 |
| List of Tables and Figures | 8 |
| List of Abbreviations | 9 |
| Acknowledgements | 10 |
| Chapter 1. Introduction | 11 |
| 1.1. Introduction to the Thesis..... | 11 |
| 1.2. Statement of Aims and Research Questions | 15 |
| 1.3. Structure of the Thesis | 15 |
| Part I: Literature Review | 18 |
| Chapter 2. The Context of Higher Education | 19 |
| 2.1. Introduction to the chapter..... | 19 |
| 2.2. Contextual Backdrop of Higher Education | 19 |
| 2.2.1. Increase in Students Attending University | 21 |
| 2.2.2. Reasons for Attending University..... | 22 |
| 2.2.3. Transitions To and Through University | 25 |
| 2.2.4. Student Satisfaction | 30 |
| 2.3. Conclusion:..... | 33 |
| Chapter 3. The Student Experience | 35 |
| 3.1. Introduction to the Chapter:..... | 35 |
| 3.2. Student Experience: What we already know..... | 35 |
| 3.2.1. Independent Living and Learning..... | 36 |
| 3.2.2. Social Inclusion and Belonging | 37 |
| 3.2.3. Covid-19 Pandemic..... | 39 |
| 3.2.4. Stress | 40 |
| 3.2.5. Coping, Resilience and Support..... | 42 |
| 3.3. Student Mental Health and Wellbeing | 43 |
| 3.4. Current University Initiatives..... | 47 |
| 3.5. The Importance of Psychological Meaning..... | 48 |
| Part II. Research Methodology | 50 |
| Chapter 4. Methodology | 51 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 4.1. Introduction to the chapter..... | 51 |
| 4.2. Research Aims and Questions | 53 |
| 4.3. Theoretical Positioning | 53 |
| 4.3.1. Ontology | 54 |
| 4.3.2. Epistemology..... | 55 |
| 4.3.2. How this positioning shapes my role as the researcher..... | 58 |
| 4.3.3. Epistemological and Ontological Fit with Reflexive TA | 59 |
| 4.4. Placing myself within the research context | 60 |
| 4.5. Reflexive Account..... | 61 |
| 4.6. Method | 65 |
| 4.6.1. Overview of the Study Approach and Design | 65 |
| 4.6.2. Participants | 69 |
| 4.6.3. Data Collection Process..... | 73 |
| 4.6.4. Ethics application, procedures and thinking..... | 77 |
| 4.6.5. Overview of the approach to analysis | 83 |
| 4.6.6. Student Analysis | 84 |
| 4.6.7 Codebook Development and Application | 89 |
| 4.6.8. Refining, Defining and Naming themes..... | 91 |
| 4.6.9. Writing Up | 91 |
| 4.7. Contextualising the COVID-19 Impact: | 92 |
| Part III: Thematic Outcomes..... | 93 |
| Introduction to the Findings | 94 |
| Chapter 5: Steering and Steadying the Ship | 98 |
| 5.1. Introduction to Chapter:..... | 98 |
| 5.2. Steering the Ship: Being the Captain | 98 |
| 5.3. Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance..... | 107 |
| 5.4. Conclusion:..... | 110 |
| Chapter 6: To be Together, Secure and Stable | 111 |
| 6.1. Introduction to the Chapter:..... | 111 |
| 6.2. A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base..... | 111 |
| 6.3. We're All on this Ship Together: Being a Crew. | 117 |
| 6.3.1. Co-Creation..... | 117 |
| 6.3.2. Cohesion and Unity..... | 121 |
| 6.4. Conclusion..... | 126 |
| Chapter 7: Navigating, Growing, and Adjusting to Challenges | 128 |
| 7.1. Introduction to the Chapter:..... | 128 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 7.2. Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation | 128 |
| 7.2.1. Preparedness | 129 |
| 7.2.2. Self-preservation | 131 |
| 7.2.3. Proactivity..... | 132 |
| 7.3. The Mists of Mismatch: “This isn’t what I expected” | 137 |
| 7.4. Growing and Adapting with the Changing Winds. | 146 |
| 7.5. Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience | 153 |
| 7.6. Conclusion..... | 157 |
| Chapter 8: Theme Interconnections | 159 |
| 8.1. Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance | 159 |
| 8.2. A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base..... | 162 |
| 8.3. We’re All on This Ship Together: Being a Crew..... | 164 |
| 8.4. Navigating the Storms: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation | 168 |
| 8.5. Mists of Mismatch: “This isn’t what I expected” | 169 |
| 8.6. Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds..... | 172 |
| 8.7. Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience | 173 |
| Overall Conclusion | 176 |
| Part IV: Discussion, Implications and Conclusions..... | 178 |
| Chapter 9. Discussion..... | 179 |
| 9.1. Introduction to the Chapter | 179 |
| 9.2. Discussion of the Findings | 180 |
| 9.2.1. Steering the Ship..... | 181 |
| 9.2.2. Steadying the Ship | 184 |
| 9.2.3. A Safe Harbour | 186 |
| 9.2.4. We’re All on This Ship Together | 189 |
| 9.2.5. Navigating the Storm..... | 192 |
| 9.2.6. Mists of Mismatch | 196 |
| 9.2.7. Growing and Adapting to the changing winds..... | 201 |
| 9.2.8. Adjusting the Sails for Me | 204 |
| 9.3. Concluding remarks | 206 |
| Chapter 10: Implications, Quality Assessment and Future Directions | 208 |
| 10.1. Introduction..... | 208 |
| 10.2. Implications for HEIs | 208 |
| 10.2.1. The Compassionate University | 208 |
| 10.2.2. Engaging with Student-Partnership and Empowering Student Voice | 211 |
| 10.2.4. Support Practices and Services | 213 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 10.2.5. Concluding remarks | 220 |
| 10.4. Assessing the Quality of this Research | 221 |
| 10.5. Limitations of the Current Study | 223 |
| 10.6. Avenues for Future Research | 224 |
| 10.7. Conclusion | 228 |
| References | 230 |
| Appendices | 295 |
| Appendix A: Ontology and epistemology break down | 295 |
| Appendix B: Subjective Social Status of Students | 296 |
| Appendix C: Recruitment Materials | 297 |
| Appendix D: Information Sheets | 300 |
| Appendix D1: Student Information Sheet | 300 |
| Appendix D2: Advisor Information Sheet | 304 |
| Appendix E: Qualtrics Forms | 309 |
| E1: Student Interest Form | 309 |
| E2: Student Demographics Form | 311 |
| E3: Advisor Qualtrics Interest and Demographics Form | 317 |
| Appendix F: Consent Form (Student and Advisor) | 321 |
| Appendix G: Interview Schedules | 324 |
| G1: Student Interview Schedule | 324 |
| G2: Advisor Interview Schedule | 325 |
| Appendix H: Debrief Sheets | 329 |
| H1: Student Debrief | 329 |
| H2: Advisor Debrief | 332 |
| Appendix I: Ethical Thinking Reflection examples | 335 |
| Appendix J: Coding Process Examples | 336 |
| Appendix K: Theme Mapping Example | 348 |
| Appendix L: Generating and Developing Themes | 349 |
| L1. Generating Initial Themes | 349 |
| L2: Editing Initial Theme Example | 350 |
| L3: Developing and Reviewing Themes | 351 |
| Appendix M: Codebook development and Application | 354 |
| M1: Codebook Development Process | 354 |
| M2: Codebook representation in Excel | 355 |
| M3: Codebook Application | 357 |
| M4: Codebook and theme refinement in NVivo | 357 |
| M5: Final Codebook Themes | 361 |
| M6: Example Quotes | 363 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix O: Reflexivity and Memo Examples during Analysis | 364 |
| O1: Reflecting on my own experiences, beliefs and position: | 364 |
| O2: Initial coding memos..... | 366 |
| O3: Initial theme memos: | 367 |
| O4: Developing and reviewing theme memos: | 368 |
| Q5: Naming of Theme's Memos | 369 |
| O6: Covid Context Reflection..... | 369 |

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Semantic to latent code development

Figure 2: Application process of the Codebook

Figure 3: The role of Preparedness in proactivity and perseverance

Figure 4: The role of Proactive Self-preservation in Preparedness and Perseverance

Figure 5: The role of Unpreparedness in Proactivity and Perseverance

Figure 6: Diffusion and Displacement of Responsibility to Steady and Steer the Ship

Table 1: A demographic table of student participants

Table 2: A demographic table of advisor participants

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes

List of Abbreviations

BPS British Psychological Society

DFE Department for Education

HE Higher Education

HEI Higher Education Institution(s)

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

IWM Internal Working Model

MH Mental health

NSS National Student Survey

OFS Office For Students

ONS Office for National Statistics

PsyCap Psychological Capital

REF Research Excellence Framework

SDT Self-Determination Theory

TA Thematic Analysis

TEF Teaching Excellence Framework

The 4 P's Preparedness, Proactivity, Preservation and Perseverance

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank everyone who took part in this study and shared their stories with me – your perspectives made this possible.

I'd like to extend my deepest gratitude to my primary supervisor, Dr Laura Biggart, for your endless patience, pragmatism, calmness, and invaluable guidance for what has been an incredible length of time! Also, for encouraging me and bringing understanding to my own student journey. You have been by my side throughout my entire university experience, and I am incredibly privileged to have had such an inspirational and supportive advisor. To my second supervisor, who is just as amazing as the first, Dr Vicki Mcdermott-Thompson – I cannot thank you enough for always believing in me, and for your endless encouragement, patience and advice. You came into this journey at just the right time, and inspired me more than I can say. Your guidance gave me the spirit and confidence to continue when things seemed almost impossible. I would also like to thank Kamena, Neil, Ian, and Christina, who have all supported me with my goals – you have provided me with unwavering inspiration, prior to and throughout my PhD. Together with my supervisors, you have paved the way for who I want to become as an academic and I thank you for giving me the opportunities and support to make this possible.

A huge thanks also goes to the wonderful PGRs past and present, especially those who saw my trials and tribulations across the PhD experience. Lisa, Bea, Helen, Ellen, Rose and Jen, you explored things with me when I had no answers. Always encouraging, and beating the imposter bear with me, without you it would not have been possible. You were always the ones that gave me a kick when I needed it, and never failed to remind me to stop and breathe - despite whether I listened or not! Your support will never go unappreciated. To my closest friends, Jess, Helena, Heather, Anne-Mette, Tony, and my bandmates, you gave me the stability and moments of fun when I needed them the most.

Last but never least, I would like to thank my family, for their unwavering encouragement and support. The retreats to home gave me the respite I needed, and you never fail to ground me back into 'just meg'. You joke that despite saying 'no more!', I am always on to the next challenge - but you give me the strength and courage to try. Ben, you have seen the worst parts of this journey, and to you I thank you for always being my constant. And to 'little meg', you did it girl! Now, you must continue to believe.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Thesis

Higher Education has seen significant transformations since the 1960s Robbins Review (Hillman, 2023), being shaped by societal, technological, political, and economic factors. By 2006, English universities transitioned to fee-paying models, and by 2017 the UK coalition government-imposed tuition fees of up to £9250 on undergraduate courses (Dunnnett et al., 2012; Ghazala, & Simion, 2018). Following a steep marketisation curve, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are competing for student numbers (Tomlinson, 2018), with student applications gradually increasing each year from 2019 to 2022 and showing no signs of slowing down (House of Commons Library, 2024). Furthermore, due to an increase in audit culture, through performance indicators such as the Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks (REF; TEF; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016), and National Student Survey (Office for Students, 2024), universities are similarly competing for higher ratings to better place themselves in attracting funding and students to their institutions (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). Student experience research has therefore increased exponentially to better understand how to improve student experience, for both the benefit of students and universities. Student satisfaction has been positively reported within the National Student Survey (Office for Students, 2023a); however, the removal of the 'neutral' response option means students may be more likely to report positive responses than negative, regardless of any changes occurring within their experience (OFS, 2023b). Consequently, a more holistic understanding of student experience is needed, to fully capture the depth and insight behind the numbers of student experience surveys.

Transitioning to university marks a significant milestone, often experienced as seamless or a challenging adjustment (Winstone & Hulme, 2019). Such transitions can encompass a variety of challenges that lead to feelings of instability, including loss of support networks, financial pressures, and unpreparedness for independent living and learning (Arnett, 2004; Devlin & McKay, 2014; Whyte, 2019). The literature on student transition, however, tends to focus on experience 'gaps' and traditional pathways, overlooking the complexities faced by non-traditional students and the wider range of transitions at university (Gavett & Winstone, 2021). A holistic understanding of the student experience could therefore encompass experiences of a wider range of students and transitional contexts. Furthermore, whilst the student

experience is complex enough already, it is made more complex through the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced universities to transition to online provision, disrupting the 'traditional' university experience (Allen et al., 2022). This unprecedented shift contributed significant impacts upon university student's stress levels and consequently led to mental and physical health decline (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2022). Therefore, the context of COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to examine the university experience more holistically by considering how these changes might have impacted various aspects of student life. Understanding the complexities of student transitions is therefore vital for both students and HEIs, particularly due to the influence of transitional experiences upon levels of student satisfaction, retention, and success (Galve-González et al., 2023; Tinto, 2006; Yorke & Longden, 2004).

University has been shown to contribute positively to student lives offering opportunities for independence, socialisation, and academic and personal growth (Balloo et al., 2022; Christensen & Craft, 2021). It has also been shown that student psychological wellbeing and mental health can be influenced by their university experience. For example, shared experiences support the development of social belonging, with this sense of inclusion offering positive outcomes for student mental health, wellbeing and success (Gravett & Winstone, 2024; Thompson et al., 2021). Conversely then, students can also struggle with the opportunities of university, facing challenges associated with independent living and study (Scanlon et al., 2007; Worsley et al., 2023). Some students even describe their initial experience as one where they are 'just surviving' (Richardson & King et al., 2012). Predominantly, the literature suggests this is due to students feeling unprepared for both their new living and learning contexts (Thompson et al., 2021). However, the way students deal with their challenges and stressors plays a critical role in determining the value, success and learning outcomes of their experiences (Pascoe et al., 2020). Typical support options sought by students include peers, family, and academic staff (McLean et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2009). However, students play a significant role in their coping, with self-belief equipping students with a better ability to manage their university transitions and academic challenges (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Jenó et al., 2018; Meehan & Howells, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When students lack confidence, they can adopt risk related behaviours such as substance use, to manage their stress and anxieties (Evan et al., 2021; Noland et al., 2009; Riordan & Carey, 2019), which contributes to lowered academic motivation, attainment, mental health and wellbeing (El Ansari et al., 2013; Smith, 2019). Universities therefore

play a significant role in encouraging and supporting all students to cope with their challenges effectively (Gill, 2021). To do this however, universities need to understand the student experience from a student's psychological viewpoint. Without understanding *how* students experience university positively and negatively, they will not be able to understand the holistic experience of students and how to foster psychological strengths to cope and succeed.

Due to the growing concerns of student mental health and wellbeing (Akram et al., 2020; HESA, 2023c; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; ONS; 2022), this topic is consistently raised throughout this thesis. Consequently, it is important to define the language related to this topic from the outset such as student wellbeing and mental health, illness, difficulties and problems. This thesis will embrace The Education for Mental Health Toolkit (Hughes et al., 2022) definitions which are developed from the University Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). Specifically, mental health can be understood to include a "full spectrum of experience ranging from good mental health to mental illness" (Hughes et al., 2022, p.5) where good mental health is "a dynamic state of internal equilibrium" (p.5) and encompasses more than just the absence of illness. It includes the ability to appropriately respond to normal negative emotions and situations, and experience regular positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Hughes et al., 2022). Mental illness will refer to conditions and experiences that involve "thoughts, feelings, symptoms and/or behaviours, that causes distress and reduces functioning, impacting negatively on an individual's day to day experience and which may receive, or be eligible to receive, a clinical diagnosis" (Hughes et al., 2022, p.5). Mental health problems or poor mental health encompasses a broader range of emotional and/or psychological experiences that brings distress beyond one's normal experience and ability to manage effectively. This will include both those with mental illness and those who fall below this threshold. Mental health, illness and wellbeing are understood not to be interchangeable, but distinct concepts that are related (Westerhof & Keyes, 2009). Wellbeing is therefore distinguished as a wider framework that includes physical and social wellbeing, and which mental health is a part of (Hughes et al., 2022). Student wellbeing then, is defined in line with this with contextual aspects of the student experience such as academic learning contributing significantly to their wellbeing.

Responsive to the growing concerns over student mental health and wellbeing then, there has been a rising pressure from a variety of stakeholders to address the student mental health crisis, including mental health organisations, student groups,

and HE management (Frawley, 2024; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Universities UK, 2020). The number of HEIs with dedicated mental health and/or wellbeing strategies rose from 52% in 2019 to 66% in 2022 (Department for Education, 2023), with support offerings including workshops, online resources, peer support programmes, financial aid, and academic support (UCAS, 2024a; Universities UK, 2021; University College London, 2021). Research has demonstrated that many aspects of university can contribute to student wellbeing and mental health across the timespan of a degree (Bewick et al., 2010), such as financial, academic, and social pressures (McIntyre et al., 2018; Macaskill, 2013; Scanlon et al., 2007) and the transitional experiences they face (Christie et al., 2013; Winstone & Hulme, 2019; Wintre & Yaffe 2000). Greater emphasis has therefore been placed upon exploring the student experience, to mitigate these concerns, and for the betterment of student engagement and success.

Understanding the psychological experiences of students is crucial for educators and support services to address student wellbeing and success, as psychological strengths like meaningful living and hope are suggested to promote coping, behavioural activation, and improved mental health and wellbeing (Arslan et al., 2022; Crego et al., 2021; Debats et al., 1995; Yıldırım & Arslan 2020). The existing literature, however, offers a segregated understanding of students' psychological experiences by taking a compartmentalised approach (e.g., the impact of finances, transitions, independence, and workload stress on psychological health). Therefore, exploring the psychological underpinnings of student journeys may provide a more holistic view of students' psychological experiences that are missing from the literature. Specifically, experiences can be based on the meanings people attach to them rather than what is explicitly experienced (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

Furthermore, psychological strengths such as resilience and meaningful living are linked to better coping, mental health, wellbeing, and academic success (Arslan et al., 2022; Crego et al., 2021; Tett et al., 2017). Understanding the psychological underpinnings of the student experience may therefore provide avenues for intervention to improve student engagement, mental health, wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Using a qualitative approach and through the implementation of a Reflexive Thematic Analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2022), this research explores the psychological underpinnings of student lives, providing valuable insights into their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in response to the complexities of their experience. The research aims to provide a holistic view of student journeys by

uncovering shared psychological experiences (i.e., their internal experiences) that cut across specific aspects of the student experience seen throughout the literature (e.g., finances transitions, independence, workload stress). It explores the psychology underneath student experiences from the perspectives of undergraduate students and student advisors (i.e., university staff members in a student supporting role such as academic, disability and wellbeing advisors).

1.2. Statement of Aims and Research Questions

The research aims of this study can be summarised as follows:

- To understand and give voice to undergraduate student perspectives of the experiences of students during university.
- To understand and give voice to advisor perspectives of the student experience during university.
- To understand the shared psychological underpinnings that shape the student experience.
- To consider the alignment of perspectives between advisors and undergraduate students regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience.

To address these aims, two research questions were explored:

1. How do students and advisors describe the undergraduate student experience?
2. What are the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate university experience, as expressed by undergraduate students and advisors?
3. Do advisor and student perspectives align regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience?

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts, each comprising of a selection of chapters.

Part I of the thesis encompasses a literature review, comprising of chapters two and three. **Chapter two** considers the contextual backdrop of the HE landscape. It introduces the transformation of HE, student application rates, reasons for attending university, and the context of student transitions and student satisfaction. **Chapter three** introduces aspects of student life that shape the student experience, such as independence, stress, COVID-19, belonging and aspects of coping. It also

discusses the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing difficulties and the concerns this raises for HEIs. Together, these chapters provide the foundation for this study and the rationale for taking the chosen approach of exploring the topic of student experience holistically (i.e., the psychological experiences that underpin the 'whole' or a collection of areas, rather than specific areas such as belonging). The importance of exploring psychological meaning within the topic of student experience is also highlighted.

Part II comprising **Chapter 4**, is an extensive account of the research methodology. It starts by offering my theoretical positioning to this work and placing myself within the context of research. It offers a reflexive account to demonstrate my role in the shaping of the research and its outcomes. It then provides a detailed discussion and evidence process of the method undertaken, comprising of the overarching design, data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations. Explanations are supplemented with directions to the appendices to support the reader's understanding. Finally, it contextualises the COVID-19 impact upon the research outcomes.

Part III comprises Chapters five to eight, offering the analytical interpretations of the eight thematic outcomes. **Chapter five** encompasses the themes of *Steering the Ship: Be the Captain* and *Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance*. **Chapter six** encompasses *A Safe Harbour: Having a Secure and Stable Base*, and *We're All On this Ship Together: Be a Crew*. **Chapter Seven** then encompasses the four remaining thematic outcomes. This includes *Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Preservation and Perseverance*. Along with *The Mists of Mismatch: "This isn't what I Expected"*, *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, and *Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience*. Each chapter offers detailed interpretations of the data that constructs the comprised themes. It also provides a comprehensive telling of the story of the data. **Chapter eight** offers the interconnections and interinfluences of the key themes with the central organising theme of *Steering the Ship*, to further express the meaning and importance of this theme.

Finally, **Part IV** comprises of chapters nine and ten, offering a discussion of the research, its outcomes, and wider implications. **Chapter nine** offers a discussion of each of the thematic outcomes in relation to relevant literature and theory. **Chapter ten** offers the implications of the study in relation to HEI approaches and support practices. It also offers an assessment of quality of this research, along with

discussion of limitations and avenues for future research. Finally, ending on the conclusion of the thesis, and the key take home points of its importance.

Part I: Literature Review

Chapter 2. The Context of Higher Education

2.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter provides context for understanding the student experience within the broader space of Higher Education (HE). It explores the transformation of HE, student motivations for attending university, the parallel context of student transition, and considerations of student satisfaction. It is not provided as a systematic review, but a contextualisation to situate the present study and its focus of student experience. It is provided to support not only the rationale for the present study, but to offer vital context to facilitate a holistic view of the student experience and why understanding the student experience holistically is important. The holistic view is defined in this thesis to be the psychological experiences that underpin the 'whole' or a collection of student experiences rather than a compartmentalised approach of understanding their psychological experiences of separate specific events, areas of experience or concepts (e.g., how a student psychologically experiences belonging, finances, or accommodation independently from other aspects of their experience).

2.2. Contextual Backdrop of Higher Education

Higher Education is often considered the pinnacle of formal education, offering advanced academic and professional training. It offers a diverse set of academic programmes, such as undergraduate and postgraduate courses, within a diverse range of disciplines (HESA, 2023a). Universities are proposed to foster personal and intellectual growth, offering knowledge development and exploration, critical thinking, and research skills. However, it also extends beyond academic areas into extracurricular activities and the development of lifelong skills. HE, however, has undergone significant transformations over time, shaped by societal, technological, political, and economic factors. In the 1960s, HE expansion occurred following the Robbins Review (Hillman, 2023), resulting in a shift towards equity of access. Moving forward to 2006 however, English universities stopped the provision of free education, and almost all students became fee-paying consumers (Ghazala, & Simion, 2018). By 2010, the UK coalition government imposed a tuition fee of a maximum of £9000 on all undergraduate courses, which was further increased to £9250 in 2017 (Dunnett et al., 2012). Despite assertions that the increases would not thwart disadvantaged students and the claim that students would not see fees as an important selection factor to attend university (Shepherd & Stratton, 2010), it

remained a controversial move because of its assumed impact. Dunnett et al. (2012) found that those who were the first generation to consider university were more likely to be impacted by higher fees, than those who had direct or vicarious experience of university through their parents. Other aspects, however, were deemed more important than finances for their selection of going to university, such as course and university reputation. Nevertheless, there have been mixed findings, with disadvantaged groups showing they are more worried about finances and more likely to withdraw compared to their advantaged counterparts (Pollard et al., 2019). Interestingly, UCAS also lists student loans as a 'con' to attending university (UCAS, 2024b).

The increase in fees is argued to have led to a steep marketisation curve of HE, with students and their unions developing a consumer-based relationship with their universities (Brooks et al., 2016; Nixon et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2018). Consequently, students became responsible for evaluating their experience through the National Student Survey (NSS) and to this day are strongly encouraged to complete them for the purposes of published results and league table performances (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). With increasing focus on 'audit culture' and consumerist agendas bringing in performance-based evaluations, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (DBIS, 2016; Molesworth et al., 2010; Naidoo & Williams, 2015), student satisfaction has continued as a focal point of current educational research. In the Browne report, it was stated that "student choice would drive up quality" in HE (Browne, 2010, p. 14), and is particularly pertinent considering marketisation has led to students having more power to trigger quality review (Naidoo & Williams 2015). A focus on value for money has further encouraged consumerist ideologies surrounding HE (Tomlinson, 2018), whereby student attitudes often pertain to needing more from the universities that expand from their original purpose and responsibilities such as a solely academic provider. A problem therefore arises for universities in this consumerist era (Deloitte, 2015) surrounding what students expect from HE and how they meet these expectations. Thus, HEIs are pressured to provide student choice, value-added benefits, and participate in intense competition, investing in promotional and marketing efforts, such as impressive educational buildings, student accommodation and 'aesthetically pleasing' endeavours, all to appeal to and expand student enrolment and retention (Adams & Smith, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018).

2.2.1. Increase in Students Attending University

Despite the concerns around increased tuition fees and their impacts upon disadvantaged groups, specifically for undergraduate students, there has been an increase in applicants and acceptances since the mid-1990s (House of Commons Library, 2022; 2024). Over the past decade though, application numbers saw a decrease in 2012, when tuition fees were increased to £9,000 per year; despite claims that fees were not a key decision factor for attending university (Dunnett et al., 2012; Shepherd & Stratton, 2010). However, there was a bounce back in 2013, where a record number was accepted (House of Commons Library, 2022; 2024), and more recently, the House of Commons Library (2024) reported the number of applicants increased each year from 2019 to 2022. Specifically, in 2020, an increase of 5.1% was observed in home applicants and overseas students compared to the previous year, and the total number of accepted applicants through UCAS was up by 5.4%. Overall, 2,008,525 UK undergraduate students were enrolled to be studying in the academic year 2020-2021 (HESA, 2022a). For 2021, there were 750,000 applicants specifically for full-time study through UCAS. This is an increase from 729,000 in 2020 (House of Commons, 2022). Thus, the data shows a general consistency of increased student applications and entry rates to universities, meaning they are under increasing pressure for resources, and require strategies to manage the larger student populations. One reason for this could be a result of increasingly established widening participation strategies being implemented across the sector, to address inequality of access for underrepresented groups, and to offer equal learning opportunities for everyone (Campbell & McKendrick, 2017). However, another reason for this increase may be due to the increased marketisation of HE and competition to draw in more students (Naidoo & Williams 2015; Nixon et al., 2018).

For 2022 specifically however, applications were down by 1% (around 6,000) and for 2023, application declines continued for full time undergraduate courses, with numbers reaching 757,000, down almost 10,000 on the record level from 2022 (House of Commons Library, 2022; 2024). However, during this time the world had undergone a global health pandemic of COVID-19 (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021), causing disruption to academic communities across the globe (Allen et al, 2023; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Browning et al., 2021). Students encountered extra challenges and adversities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including imminent threats to the health of themselves and

those around them, financial strain, social distancing measures and isolation, and reduced access to necessities such as food (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021); all impacting their general health and wellbeing (Evans et al, 2020; Owens et al., 2022). HEIs were forced to switch to online delivery, bringing disruptions to student learning, which may have impacted on the decreased application rates (Bryson, & Andres, 2020).

Specifically for international students, EU applications declined by 19% in 2022 from 2021, and by 67% for full-time undergraduates since 2020. This trend persisted in 2023, reaching a 35.8% decline, and unlike previous years, home student applications also did not offset this reduction (House of Commons Library, 2024). This decrease was said to reflect the fall in EU applications accepted, and changes in fees and loan eligibility that were consequential of UK's withdrawal from the EU (i.e., Brexit; House of Commons Library, 2022; 2024). However, COVID-19 offers a potential additional reason for this continued reduction.

Overall, the decade long increase in university applications, coupled with the ongoing contextual challenges in HE, emphasises the importance of understanding the pressures faced by institutions. This understanding is also crucial for understanding student experience, as it may further influence students' decisions to apply, stay, or leave university. It is important to situate the student experience within these contexts, as they will inevitably play a role in shaping it, and the holistic nature of the student experience can be better comprehended.

2.2.2. Reasons for Attending University

When deciding whether to go to university, most students turn to the internet for advice. A google search asking, 'why should I go to university', yields 4,750,000,000 results making claims about this decision (Google, February 2024). UCAS (2024) describes university as a catalyst for career enhancement, with the chance to be taught by industry experts, personal growth, friendships, and have a vibrant social life. Student choice and independence are emphasised as benefits to university, suggesting the importance of understanding whether their advertised benefits align with student motivators for attending university. Specifically, evaluating the relevance of the information offered through official channels is important, as students need to be able to critically assess whether university is the most suitable route for them. This is especially important, when this will influence their overall university experience and outcomes (Lobo & Gurney, 2014).

Furthermore, this is crucial when post-16 pathways (i.e., options on completion of GCSE's) predominantly favour A-levels and future university goals, neglecting alternatives such as apprenticeships, traineeships, and part-time work (National Careers Service, n.d). Department for Education (2024; DFE) figures show that only 3.4% and 3.9% of students entered apprenticeships or employment respectively in 2021/2022, a trend unchanged from previous years (DFE, 2021). This partnered with the early focus on UCAS applications during A-levels, directs students towards university pathways at an arguably premature point in their educational journeys, creating an expectation that university is the primary route to success. Students are having to manage the pressure of deciding what direction they will take before they really know what would be best for them or suit their preferences. This is important to consider, when the alignment between student reasons for attending and their experience can affect their performance, attendance itself and overall satisfaction (Lobo & Gurney, 2014).

Advertising the benefits of university often relies on theoretical rationale (Cote & Levine, 1997), lacking direct exploration of student's reasons for attending. Understanding these reasons is crucial as they can affect student experience, academic engagement and learning outcomes. For instance, aligning with Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), students with more internal reasoning are often more academically resourceful, which helps students to cope with stress, (Rosenbaum, 1990), adjust well to university and achieve higher grades (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Kennett, Reed & Stuart, 2013). Comparatively, those with external reasonings (e.g., to please others), struggle more with academic tasks and express lower satisfaction with their experience (Kennett, Reed & Stuart, 2013).

Students consistently exhibit both internal and external motivations for attending university (Bui, 2002; Wang et al, 2009; Henderson-King & Smith, 2006). Kennett, Reed, and Lam (2011) found internal motivations included self-improvement and life goals, while external motivations pertained to family and career. Attendance decisions, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may also be driven by financial support for their families (Phinney et al., 2006; Bui, 2002). Family influence, including the desire for parental recognition, to make them proud, or to follow academic trajectories of their relatives, remains relatively consistent across academic years (Kennet, Reed & Lam, 2011; Wang, et al. 2009). Particularly in response to expectations and pressures from family and friends to get a degree (Cote & Levine, 1997). Such motivations could impact upon student's experience negatively, through stress associated with perfectionism, academic contingent self-

worth, respect and status, and fear of failure (Bui, 2002; Crocker & Park, 2004; Greenberg, 2008).

Still, motivations have changed over generations, with Twenge and Donnelly (2016) finding that generation X (1980s-1990s) and millennials (2000s-2010s) reported more extrinsic motivations (e.g., increased financial potential) compared to more internal motivations noted by baby boomers (1960s-70s). Therefore, there is a cultural and societal backdrop which shapes these motivators which is likely to shape their student experience. Furthermore, there are motivational shifts across a student's degree timeline with first year students placing higher emphasis on proving themselves academically while later year students focus on self-improvement, self-satisfaction, and societal contributions (Kennet, Reed & Lam, 2011). For example, first years focus on proving to others they can attain a degree, gaining respect and doing it for the challenge, suggesting they build their sense of worth from their academic success (Baumeister et al., 2003). Academic contingent self-worth, however, is associated with a susceptibility to burnout and raises concern for student mental health and wellbeing (Fairlamb, 2020; Burwell & Shirk, 2006). Consequently, the evolving nature of motivation adds important context to the shaping of the student experience (Henderson-King & Smith, 2006).

However, some motivators appear to remain constant, as Kennet, Reed, and Lam's (2011) findings support previously highlighted 'careerist-materialist' motivations (Cote & Levine, 1997), where students see university as a route to status, money, and success. Similarly, Balloo et al. (2017) found improved future career prospects to be the most important reason for attending university. Encouragingly, HESA (2023b) reported that among 2020/21 graduates, 82% of respondents were in employment or unpaid work. However, increased competition has led to a downward pressure on wages, and in the UK, 30% of graduates are overeducated for their jobs, while 34% are in posts that are not related to their degree subject (Vecchia et al. 2023). Consequently, if students are concerned with better employability chances and these opportunities are reduced due to increased numbers, student experience could be impacted through heightened peer competition to get the best experience and best grades. Subsequently, understanding student pathways and motivations for attending university, is vital in understanding how student experience can be shaped.

2.2.3. Transitions To and Through University

Once deciding to go to university, students must face the transition to this new phase of their lives, with some taking to this like a “Duck to water” whilst others feel like “A fish out of water” (Winstone & Hulme, 2019; p. 2). The student journey typically involves entering university, navigating changes across and between years, graduating, and entering work or postgraduate study. The literature on student transition, however, has been typically focused on ‘traditional’ pathways and is argued to present a homogenous reflection of this experience (Gavett & Winstone, 2021). For the traditional student (i.e., 18–21-year-olds), it typically reflects a transitional experience from secondary school to HE, paralleling a transition from adolescence to adulthood. However non-traditional students (such as mature students) may have differing transitional experiences in comparison. It is therefore important to stipulate that whilst this literature does discuss the commonly expressed traditional pathway, it is not being presented as the only transitional route, and it is understood that student transition is complex, fluid, and ongoing.

For the ‘traditional’ student group then, the transition to university coincides with their shift from adolescence to adulthood. The shift to adulthood involves physical, cognitive, and social changes as they develop towards independence and maturity (Adams & Berzonsky, 2006). Challenges of identity formation, educational and career choices, autonomy development, and greater responsibility are integral to this transition (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kroger, 2006; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006). Theoretically, the onset and time span of adolescence is debated, with proposals of adulthood onset ranging from eighteen years (Keenan et al., 2016), to 25 years (Arnett, 2000). Theories also discuss whether adulthood development is stage based or continuous and flexible (Syed, 2015; Baltes, 1987; Elder, 1988). Arnett’s (2000) ‘emerging adulthood’ theory however, suggested a new developmental stage of late teens through to the twenties (ages 18–25), closely aligning with much of the traditional university student demographic (i.e., ages 18-21). It has been celebrated and strongly criticized (See Syed, 2015 for an in-depth review), with its emergence argued to be due to social and economic changes such as attending higher education, delaying the adoption of ‘adult roles’ such as marriage, parenthood, or more recent adulthood markers such as home ownership (Arnett, 2000, 2011; Walczak et al., 2023). Consequently, it has become a key interest within educational research.

Arnett (2004) outlines five key features of emerging adulthood, including *instability*, where changes in jobs, relationships and residence are most frequently observed; *possibilities*, which emphasises optimistic options available to them in adulthood; *self-focus*, which relates to the freedoms associated with independence from family, spouses and children; *feeling in-between*, where they do not feel like adolescents, but not quite an adult either; and *identity exploration* whereby individuals are searching for meaning in their lives, relationships and forming their ideologies (Syed, 2015). For university students specifically, such transitional aspects would occur simultaneously to their transition to university; with specific social, academic, and personal developments being faced within the university context (Gill, 2021; Montgomery & Cote, 2006). Interestingly, Arnett's (2004) five aspects of emerging adulthood appear to align with university student transitions. For example, university is argued to provide a space for exploration in identity, relationship, and personal ideology, whereby students feel free to 'become' who they really are, away from their usual demands and constraints of pre-existing social networks (Briggs et al., 2012; Ecclestone et al., 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014; Ganqa & Masha, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021). However, similarly, students can experience instability in their identity in their first-year transition, feeling a loss of previous identities in trying to form their new 'student identity' (Scanlon et al., 2007). Aspects of possibility arise however, with new experiences, wider opportunities for future employment, personal and skills development, and expanding their social networks (Devlin & McKay, 2014); despite critics arguing this is a difficult and challenging time rather than positive (Syed, 2015). Self-focus is seen through students exploring new hobbies, interests and the freedoms that come with independent living and identity development (Ganqa & Masha, 2020; Manzi et al., 2010), followed by the experience of feeling *in between* when students face the challenges and lack of confidence to be independent (Briggs et al., 2012; Christie et al., 2013; Gill, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021). However, much of the student transition involves instability regarding such exploration and changes to their living arrangements, academic environments, and social networks, which require adaptation and the ability to cope with this change (Christie et al., 2013; Wintre & Yaffe 2000).

For many undergraduates, the typical transition to university involves moving away from home (Whyte, 2019). This often entails separation from established support networks comprised of family and friends, necessitating the creation of new support networks (Holdsworth, 2006; Worsley et al., 2021a; 2021b;

Thompson et al., 2021). This is particularly noteworthy for international students who sojourn to a different country for their period of study and return home after completion (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Wawera & McCamley, 2020). Such changes mean familiarity is lost, uncertainty and loneliness develop, and a greater need for compassionate support is fostered (Cage et al., 2021; Worsley et al., 2021a). Students grapple with identity exploration, how they fit into university, financial demands, part time work, and potential barriers to accessing university living, impacting their academic progression and sense of belonging (Callender, 2008; Pokorny et al., 2017; Tett et al., 2017). Thus, it is not uncommon that these struggles can lead to feelings of uncertainty and lack of confidence, and occasionally drop out (Galve-González et al., 2023; Willcoxson et al., 2011). First years are also suggested to be particularly vulnerable to drop out (McInnis, 2001) with a non-continuance rate for 2020/21 showing 5.3% of full-time undergraduate students left HE after their first year (HESA, 2022b). Risk factors for lack of engagement and attrition include financial commitments, part-time work, inadequate preparation for university, and perceived lack of support and understanding from students' support networks (Broadbridge & Swanson, 2005; Crockford et al., 2015; Jenó et al., 2018; Olbrecht et al., 2016; Thomas, 2012). However, the literature discussed offers a segmented understanding of factors influencing student transition and retention and interconnectivities may be at play.

Students' newly found independence can offer practical challenges around independent living and learning (Chen, 2008; Christie et al., 2013; Gill, 2021; Hockings et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2021), whereby unpreparedness for these responsibilities can lead to increased stress and pressure. University and social support systems are vital in inspiring and motivating students to stay in HE (Gill, 2021; 2017; McSweeney, 2014; Merrill, 2015), with various types of support being shown to support adjustment to and through HE towards academic success (Lundberg et al., 2008; Ramsay et al., 2007). For example, students claim feedback quality is consistently important in aiding their transitioning to new learning structures (Gill, 2021; Mulliner & Tucker, 2017). However, whilst some students identify that lecturers and peers are frequent sources of assistance (Walsh et al., 2009), some students have been shown to be reluctant in taking up this support in their first year (Broglia et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2006), due to apprehension and fears of being perceived to be unknowledgeable (Gill, 2017; Thompson, 2008). Consequently, the lack of help-seeking can impact upon

transition and attrition (Tinto, 2006) regardless of whether support is available. Consequently, a more holistic view on student transitions could provide insight into where to implement embedded strategies to facilitate their adjustment.

Accordingly, individual variability exists in how students adapt and cope with the transitional experience of HE and adolescence to adulthood (Winstone & Hulme, 2019). Lerner (1995; as cited in Adams & Berzonsky, 2006) argued that those who take to transitions like a “duck to water” (Winstone & Hulme, 2019; p. 2) are those who experience a greater ‘fit’ with their environments, leading to positive feedback from their contexts and adaptive development (p. 23). It is not clear how much of an impact transitioning to and through university will have on a student before they arrive, or how much of their anxieties and issues are a result of their direct or anticipated experience, or their ability to cope (McSweeney, 2014). It is also true that students can have positive experiences during their transition to and through university, with some being direct reverses of the challenges already mentioned. Perceptions of social support available can also vary (McLean et al., 2022), thus further complicating understanding of adaptive development and whether what HE and peer groups provide is responsible, or aspects of transitioning from adolescent to adulthood more generally such as maturation effects. The role of the student, with their individual nuances, trajectories and efforts is therefore essential in understanding their transitional journeys (Hulme & DeWilde, 2015; O’Donnell et al., 2016; Winstone & Hulme, 2019) and how students and universities shape this transitional development is important for understanding the university experience.

One debated aspect of this issue concerns the insufficient academic preparation for new students transitioning from secondary education. The limited promotion of alternative post-secondary routes (DFE, 2024) prompts discussions around students being accepted into university without achieving the academic standards required for HE, and subsequently facing academic difficulty when other routes may be more suited to them. This is particularly noteworthy when universities may flexibly accept applications to meet student numbers and equitable access targets and financial needs (McCaig, 2015). This is however a controversial debate. Less controversially though, the preparation of students from secondary to higher education is extensively discussed, emphasising the need for better readiness for independent study and living (Leese, 2010; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Money et al., 2020). Some UK universities address this by offering

pre-arrival courses, to foster the necessary skills and knowledge for adapting to HE (Durham University, 2023; University of Essex, n.d.; Knox, 2005).

Accordingly, student transition literature connects with the 'student lifecycle' stages of induction, development and becoming (Gale & Parker, 2014). However, critics suggest this to be a narrow focus on first year transitions over the entire university experience (Brooman & Darwent, 2014) and favour the broader 'lifecycle' stages of access, retention, attainment, and progression (Webb et al, 2017). This includes the likelihood of continuing or withdrawing, the extent students are enabled to fulfil their potential, and progression within their degree to future employment or further study. The transitional aspects of moving to and through university therefore play a major role in students' ability to access, adapt to, and continue with higher education, transition to work after graduation, and simultaneously develop towards adulthood. For example, financial aid has been shown to help students to access and progress through university (Farenga, 2015; Pollard et al., 2019; Sneyers & DeWitte, 2018), however only if the institutions put in place policies to help support their progression (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Thus, transitioning to financial independence and the avenues for financial support play a major role in access and retention. However, the effectiveness of student aid in encouraging participation is debated in the UK, through lack of evidence (Robinson & Salvestrini, 2020).

Nevertheless, in the context of transitioning to university from secondary school, the presence of counsellors with specific knowledge and guidance regarding HE have also been suggested as a valuable resource, offering a mitigation for a lack of social and cultural capital. This is particularly noteworthy for low socio-economic status students who may not have the sources available for information and support (Robinson & Roska, 2016). Thus, counsellors or advisors with this knowledge can offer information early and throughout the process, supporting student levels of preparedness. Similarly, a programme in southeast Scotland found that giving students access to classes at university whilst still in secondary education was found to support the development of confidence, communication skills and independent learning skills, which were considered important for their transitional adaptation (Farhat et al., 2017). Beyond this, positive student-staff interactions and campus engagement enhance persistence intentions (Austen et al., 2021). Strategies enabling this interaction is therefore argued to produce a feeling of being known and belonging to their university and learning communities are important in transitioning across

the university journey, by helping students to feel valued, respected, accepted and cared about (Strayhorn, 2018).

Moving beyond university though, Kerrigan et al (2018) found placement years are strongly associated with better graduate prospects for students, including widening participation groups; thus, improving the transition to life beyond university. However, whilst researchers have consistently found placement years can improve graduate outcomes (Divan et al., 2021; Wilson & Dauncey, 2020), some have argued for a levelling effect on graduate outcomes between widening participation and non-widening participation groups (Wilson & Dauncey, 2020), whilst others find inequity relating to participation rates in work placement years amongst student groups such as gender, age, and disability status (Divan et al., 2021). These complexities reflect broader structural inequalities affecting graduate prospects. Moreover, transitional aspects to the student life cycle also mirror key developmental needs for progression into adulthood. For example, independent learning and communication skills are needed to develop autonomy, adapt to work; a key 'role' of adult life, and build social networks (Adams & Berzonsky, 2006). Consequently, their transitional journeys are complex, and institutions are faced with dual responsibilities and concerns for both educational and personal development among students. Considering the context of HE then, with widening participation bringing wider diversity in expectations of the university experience (Hatt & Baxter, 2003), increased competition between HEIs, and the rise in HEI accountability for student success (Gill, 2021; McCoy & Byrne, 2017), the successful transition to and through HE is important for both for students and for HEI's (Tinto, 2006; Yorke & Longden, 2004). Particularly when student transition influences levels of student satisfaction.

2.2.4. Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is largely measured by the National Student Survey (NSS; Office for Students, 2023a; OFS), which in 2023 collected student ratings in the categories of teaching on my course, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, and student voice. Students have mostly responded positively on the NSS with 84.7% of participating students in England responding positively to questions about the teaching on their course (OFS, 2023a). The same report noted similar findings for academic support and learning resources, whilst assessment and feedback, and student voice saw slightly lower percentages of 78% and 71.9%

respectively. However, whilst student satisfaction remains relatively positive, the removal of the 'neutral' response option in the 2023 NSS means that students may be more likely to opt for the positive response options than negative, regardless of any changes in the student experience (OFS, 2023b). It is therefore important to assess other areas of evidence, to fully understand the scope of student experience and how and in what circumstances students experience their university life positively or negatively. This is especially important considering the continuation rate for full-time first-degree students entering HE in 2020-21 decreased from 91.1% in the previous year, to 88.9% (ONS, 2023). Additionally, evidence indicates young adults aged 20–24 are more likely to report low levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction than any other age group (Thorley, 2017). HE students specifically, report increased levels of depression and anxiety (Evans et al. 2018; Thorley, 2017).

Student satisfaction has been defined in multiple ways in the literature, with similar aspects running through each definition, but no consensus being reached. The key focus in definitions has been subjective evaluations of educational experiences, services, and facilities (Weerasinghe et al., 2017; Elliot & Shin, 2002; Elliot & Healy, 2001), often neglecting personal factors which can impact satisfaction such as preferred learning styles. Consequently, Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) propose a two-dimensional view, considering personal factors (age, gender, employment, preferred learning styles) and institutional factors covering quality aspects (promptness of feedback, clarity in expectations, teaching style and instruction quality). Student satisfaction is therefore understood to be multidimensional, with a web of interconnected experiences influencing it.

Previous research has explored this multidimensional concept of student satisfaction further, with determinants including academic performance, sense of belonging, teaching quality, assessment and feedback, and critical incidents (Agnew et al, 2016; Elliot, 2002; Fielding et al., 2010; Langan et al., 2013). According to Elliot (2002), key determinants included student centredness and instructional effectiveness. Student centredness involved creating a sense of belonging to their schooling environment, reflecting the universities commitment to making students feel important, welcomed, and valued. Instructional effectiveness related to the students need to 'experience intellectual growth, have a faculty who are fair and unbiased, provide a wide variety of courses and are able to provide quality instruction' (p. 277). In the context of belonging to the

university community however, the extent students feel accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their schooling environment is often referred to (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Considering the increase in student numbers then, and the increased pressures to meet these needs, it may not be surprising that research has suggested an increase in lack of belonging, and this being associated with greater negative affect (Twenge, et al. 2021). Lack of belonging predicts greater depression levels compared to other social factors (Dutcher et al., 2022), and is associated with worse self-reported mental health and wellbeing (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Parr et al. 2020). Higher levels of belonging however, have been associated with better academic outcomes (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Consequently, poorer mental health, wellbeing and academic outcomes may further impact student satisfaction rates, and it is not bold to assume that belonging plays a role in understanding how student satisfaction is constructed.

In addition, previous research has suggested that satisfaction of students is significantly influenced by trust (Grossman, 1999). This trust is argued to be built by consistent and equitable treatment, meeting student expectations and student complaints being handled with care and in a timely manner. Elliot and Shin (2002) highlighted that student satisfaction happens when 'perceived performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations' (p. 199). It is largely understood that on attending university, students come with expectations of the university regarding various aspects of their education (Briggs, 2012; 2006). Such expectations include face-to-face contact and one-to-one tutorials that equated to previous school experiences; less independent study time; financial, academic, and social support; and relationships with peers and staff (Money et al., 2017). It is suggestable therefore, that satisfaction with their experience is filtered through how these expectations are met, particularly when these expectations may not be realistic or understood by HEIs, who are not able to respond accordingly (Voss et al., 2007). This is also evident when research suggests that in the event of expectations not being met, students may fail, disengage, or withdraw from their course (Byrne et al., 2012). However, like considerations regarding the reasons for attending university, the cultural backdrop needs to be considered within the context of expectations. There is considerable literature to suggest how students today face a change in cultural norms that filter into their expectations and thus persistence within higher education. For example, some children are arguably less resourceful and

independent because parents are more involved in their children's academic outcomes than ever before (Love & Thomas, 2014) and expect universities to be just as involved as their parents. With this approach, universities therefore face increased demands to satisfy and produce higher levels of student satisfaction.

Elliot and Shin (2002) however, continued to argue that as a continually changing construct, student satisfaction requires clear and effective actions led by student feedback. The discord surrounding this topic, however, lies in whether students can accurately judge the appropriateness of their experience, particularly concerning their academic provisions, and who is responsible for aspects of their experience. The phenomenon of student satisfaction is therefore challenging to define and measure due to its multidimensional nature, leading to models and frameworks being criticised by scholars. Reasons include but are not limited to, the appropriateness of applying consumerist satisfaction models to the university context, ignoring the main functions of a university, disregard for aspects previously shown to impact student satisfaction, and the methods of analysis used (Weerasinghe et al., 2017). Thus, it can be argued that student experience should also be investigated and understood through alternative methods, such as independent academic research, rather than relying on the National Student Survey.

2.3. Conclusion:

The present literature offers the historical, socio-cultural, and economic context of HE with the purpose of situating the student experience within the contexts of which it can be shaped. It explored the facets of increased student attendance and acceptance rates, with a multitude of reasons for this increased attendance, such as: the push for increased student numbers through the marketisation of HE, post-16 and A-level pathways favouring university routes, and individual student motivators such as money, status, and family. Partnered with the parallel context of adolescence to adulthood, this offers how the student experience is situated within multiple contexts and requires a holistic understanding. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the student experience is further emphasised through the generational differences in motivations to attend, and the motivational shifts across academic years, offering a temporal dimension to the student journey. The potential impact of increased competition on employability and the job market also provides an external context influencing the student experience, and together, these factors acknowledge the broader societal and economic factors that help us to understand external

pressures students may face. These varied contexts help to offer some of the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions that shape and influence student journeys and satisfaction, providing a contextual layer to the holistic understanding of student experience. By understanding the HE context, it is argued that HEIs can better understand the psychological experiences of students and what motivates and engages them, identify potential challenges with retention, and help universities to align academic offerings with real-world student needs.

Chapter 3. The Student Experience

3.1. Introduction to the Chapter:

This chapter builds on Chapter 2 by providing a brief review of the student experience, including aspects such as independent living, stress, coping and resilience and the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the compartmentalisation of student experience in current literature, whereby student experience is largely understood through focusing on specific areas such as belonging, academic workload or independence. It also highlights why student experience research has become increasingly popular, the benefits for HEIs in understanding student experience, and the impact student experience can have on previous, existing, and future students. By providing some of what is known about the student experience already, the present study can be further situated within the context of HE and compartmentalised literature, to move towards a more holistic narrative of what may underpin these separate and distinctive experiences and findings.

3.2. Student Experience: What we already know

Going to university is often seen as a new start, with many students moving away from home, seeking the 'university experience', and expecting it to be the best days of their lives (Holton, 2018, Worsley et al., 2021a). It has been demonstrated to be an optimistic and transformative period of life, creating positive life changes and social mobility (Christensen & Craft, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021). Researchers have therefore become increasingly interested in the positive aspects of the student experience, to better understand the prevalence, antecedents and facilitators of positive student mental health, wellbeing, and success. However, the student experience can also pose unexpected challenges, leading some to contemplate staying or dropping out (Bradley, 2017). Concerningly, between 2011 and 2020, a 450% increase in reported mental health difficulties in university students was seen (HESA, 2023c), with the impact of student challenges suggested as an influence for increasingly high proportions of students experiencing poor mental health. Increased workload, difficulties with transition, pressures in their academic, social, and personal lives, and the stress of financial independence, have all been connected to mental health and wellbeing struggles (Dutcher et al, 2022; Pascoe et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021). Some students even experience devastating impacts, with the Office for

National Statistics (2022; ONS) reporting that between 2017 and 2020, 319 students died by suicide. On recognising this impact, there is a growing emphasis on HE policy developments and initiatives like the University Mental Health Charter, to enhance student mental health and wellbeing in the university community (Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Universities UK, 2020; DFE, 2023).

3.2.1. Independent Living and Learning

On transitioning to university, traditional students often experience a shift from their family home and live independently for the first time. While excited about the new opportunities and the keenness for 'freshers' week', students face challenges of managing their finances, maintaining a household, and living with strangers (Broglia et al., 2021; Cage et al., 2021; Gall et al., 2000; Scanlon et al., 2007; Worsley et al., 2023). Accordingly, researchers note the physical move to student accommodation is an adjustment process, with students reporting their accommodation can be lacking in quality and can feel claustrophobic (Christie et al., 2002). However, research also suggests that moving away for university can be a positive experience for many students (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Stallman, 2010; Thompson et al., 2021). Balloo et al. (2021) found that whilst some students struggle with feeling lost and not knowing where 'home' was, they also recognised this as part of their journey to becoming an adult and necessary for the progression of themselves and their lives. They also described the experience as liberating and overdue, suggesting a newfound freedom. Similarly, mature students typically decide to come to university to reshape their lives and often see the value and meaning of their learning more easily than their younger student counterparts (McCune et al., 2010).

Yet, with this freedom comes responsibility and students report struggling with managing their independent lives and responsibilities, leading to stress and anxiety (Lowe & Cook, 2003). For example, students report feeling unprepared for their newfound independence in both their living and learning contexts (Thompson et al., 2021). They also talk of 'micro' experiences associated with adulting such as broken living materials and having to get them fixed, what to do when you forget your shopping list, and the smaller day-to-day aspects of 'adulting' to be central to their transition and development of independence (Gravett & Winstone, 2021). More specifically though, students have reported being unaware of how much domestic responsibility they would have, and an uncertainty about academic standards and new ways of communicating their knowledge (Thompson et al., 2021). For example,

students voice finding the unlearning of what previously worked for them to fit academic expectations challenging (Gravett & Winstone, 2021).

However, some students are keen to move on from their prior learning experiences and relish the agency they have in HE (Gravett & Winstone, 2021), challenging the notion that students desire the continuation of a 'spoon-fed' approach to learning (Hanna et al., 2014). Furthermore, other groups such as mature students are often more established in their independent lives and face challenges related to low academic confidence, and disruptions caused by family, carer, and work commitments (Brine & Waller, 2004; Christensen & Craft, 2021; Steele et al., 2005). This impact on their learning was also reported to be more impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic, where mature students had more responsibilities around home and child management (Homer, 2022). Consequently, as Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018) argue, "transition is a complex, sometimes confusing whirl of emotions, spaces, materialities, people, relationships, histories, affects, responses, demands and expectations" (p.1259). Thus, independent living and learning are experienced in a multitude of ways with student demands, expectations and support strategies shaping how they cope with and adjust to this newfound independence.

3.2.2. Social Inclusion and Belonging

From fitting in, to experiences of bullying, university involves a plethora of social factors that influence and shape the student experience (Tett et al., 2017; Walton & Cohen, 2007). This can include making friends, navigating group projects, participating in extra-curricular activities, and managing various social environments like seminars, accommodation, and events (Cage et al., 2021; McIntyre et al., 2018; Macaskill, 2013; Scanlon et al., 2007; Wilcox et al., 2005). Social factors are suggested to be an integral, positive experience at university, with social belonging and inclusion offering positive outcomes for student mental health, wellbeing, and success (Thompson et al., 2021).

Students' attachment to their university surroundings (Ahn & Davis, 2020) and residing in student accommodation has been shown to foster students' sense of belonging (Worsley et al., 2023; 2021b). The layout and proximity to their peers help facilitate incidental meetings, interpersonal bonds, and consequently improved wellbeing (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2015). Student accommodation therefore plays a vital role in community development (Worsley et al., 2023; Garvey et al., 2018) and social bonding, due to its convenience and helping students to adjust to

university through feelings of companionship (Buote et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2021). This is reflected in research by Gravett and Winstone (2024) where students who commuted to university reported the commute was “long and lonely”, and that they are not sharing the same experience of university as their non-commuter peers (p.1585). Consequently, shared experiences and spaces are important to students’ sense of belonging.

However, whilst social factors can promote a positive experience, challenges in social integration exist (Tett et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2021); particularly for those from working class and low socio-economic backgrounds, whereby they are more likely to encounter discrimination and social exclusion (Reay, 2018; Reay et al., 2010). For first-generation students, it is also suggested that due to having no prior university-attending relatives, they hold the belief they do not possess the social skills necessary to fit in and succeed (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021). Thus, student belonging is also associated with their self-perceived competence and confidence to belong within the field of higher education (Burke et al., 2016), i.e., students must believe they are capable, to feel a sense of belonging to the academic environment they are in. Soria and Stubblefield (2015) found that when students are aware of their strengths, and these are supported by their degree programme, they are more likely to experience belonging and successfully complete their degrees. Developing a ‘capable’ student identity is therefore crucial in fostering a sense of belonging to the academic environment (Meehan & Howells, 2018). Mature students, particularly those in their early 20’s to early 30’s also feel they do not fit into either the younger or the mature student group (Mallman & Lee, 2017). They often feel they do not receive the same level of consideration by university staff when arranging induction and social events, are often unaware of the support available to them, and rely more heavily on family and friends within their established networks for support (Hayman et al., 2024; Heagney & Benson, 2017; Homer, 2022; Mallman & Lee, 2017; Reay, 2002). This could, however, also be due to mature students not placing as much importance on their social experience, and instead being more focused on their academic learning (Hayman et al., 2024). The variety and nuance of issues faced by specific student groups, therefore emphasises the complexity of student experience, and the need for targeted support and consideration for the diverse student body.

3.2.3. Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the university experience. Following declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic in March 2020, the UK began a full nationwide lockdown with non-essential shops, restaurants and venues closed. Universities were forced to switch rapidly to online delivery, exams and graduation ceremonies were cancelled, and international students were forced to return home with little notice (Allen et al., 2022). The pandemic had a significant impact upon university students and led to increased stress levels, and mental and physical health decline (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2022). A cross-sectional study conducted with university students in the UK, Italy, Germany, and Spain during the first wave of COVID-19, found that students were suffering poorer mental health and wellbeing than pre-pandemic levels (Allen et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2022). Specifically, these stressors were amplified for members of minority groups, including those with pre-existing mental and physical health conditions (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Salerno et al., 2020).

The shift to online academic provision during the pandemic significantly impacted student experiences (Bond et al., 2021), leading to challenges in studying effectively, a perceived reduction in teaching quality and support, leading to concerns about value for money (McGivern & Shepherd, 2022). Issues included inadequate working environments such as excessive noise, insufficient resources such as Wi-Fi, and too much screen time. Consequently, student motivation dwindled, and academic performance reduced. However, reactions to this transition were diverse, with some favouring face-to-face and others favouring online as it allowed them to work more flexibly, increasing their level of autonomy (Cranfield et al., 2021). However, it is also reported that preference dictates perceptions of quality, with those who preferred online over face-to-face delivery, reporting significantly more positive experiences about quality of online instruction, compared to those who prefer face-to-face (Ives, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a considerable demonstration of a strong negative impact upon student's life satisfaction, stress levels, mental health and wellbeing, due to the move to online learning (Gomez-Garcia et al., 2022).

Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic were widespread, including several concerning features, such as fear, anxiety, stress, depression, suicidal ideation, loneliness, sleep disorders, and unhelpful coping behaviours such as substance use and binge drinking (Browning et al., 2021; Fancourt et al., 2021; Marelli et al., 2021).

The pandemic also brought major employability concerns, with students not only losing their jobs temporarily or permanently during the pandemic (ONS, 2021), but also having their future job prospects put in question (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Browning et al., 2021). Consequently, current, and future financial impacts contributed to the heightened levels of anxiety experienced. However, it is important to note that whilst this acts as a contextualisation of a specific timespan, it is recognised that global health epidemics can produce psychological issues and major impacts to societies longer-term (The British Academy, 2021). Therefore, it is stipulated that whilst this literature is temporally situated, its effects are relevant for the context of this study and can still be present in the student body today.

3.2.4. Stress

During the university experience, students experience demands both inside and outside of the specific university contexts, including financial, academic, and social pressures to name a few (McIntyre et al., 2018; Macaskill, 2013; Scanlon et al., 2007). This stress has been linked to worsening mental health and wellbeing outcomes for students (Karyotaki et al., 2020), contributing to attrition and poorer academic outcomes (Chapell et al., 2005; Eisenberg et al., 2009; Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). As already discussed in section 2.2.3, the transition to university is presented as an 'acute stressor' of the university experience, due to the initial strain of adjusting to student life (Gall et al., 2000). So much so, that some students report they are 'just surviving' (Richardson & King et al., 2012). Research indicates that psychological distress and poor psychological wellbeing tend to escalate by the midpoint of the first year, showing little improvement by the academic year's end (Conley et al., 2020). Moreover, distress levels do not return to pre-university levels (Bewick et al. 2010), suggesting university life presents enduring stress and challenges, with potential lasting effects.

Specifically, academic stressors include high workloads, assessments, fear of failure and adapting to new learning practices (Beiter et al., 2015; Scanlon et al., 2007; Xie et al., 2021) and can be exacerbated by high expectations from oneself and others, and a lack of coping resources such as money, time, and sleep (Hurst et al., 2013). However, whilst these are reported stressors, coping resources such as sleep can also be detrimentally affected by self-perceived stress (Lee et al., 2013; Wallace et al, 2017). These stressors are also connected to other negative outcomes, such as academic performance and health (Shankar & Park, 2016). Specifically, student debt has been linked to adverse health effects (Adams &

Moore, 2007), while poor sleep quality and quantity is closely related to poorer learning capability and academic performance (Curcio et al., 2006). Furthermore, perfectionism is associated with poorer physical health, especially among those with existing health conditions such as fibromyalgia (Molnar et al., 2012).

Social stressors for university students predominantly involve relationship challenges, encompassing family, romantic, peer, and faculty relationships (Hurst et al., 2013). Students report struggling with a myriad of social matters however, such as making compatible friends, the sociability of their accommodation, feeling included, challenges with their personal tutor, friends withdrawing from university, and personal issues such as coming out, lack of confidence, and bereavement (Cage et al., 2021; Darling et al., 2007; Wilcox et al., 2005). For international students specifically, acculturation (moving to a new country and adopting the customs of their new home) has been demonstrated as a predominant stressor (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The lack of belonging with their peers and university is also shown to impact upon student's psychological stress and academic outcomes; with the reverse effect observed, with a presence of sense of belonging improving persistence, academic outcomes, and psychological wellbeing (Dutcher et al., 2022; Meehan & Howell, 2018; Porter & Swing, 2006; Thomas, 2012; Walpole et al., 2008; Wilcox et al., 2005). This is particularly noteworthy for minority group students (Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Excessive stress in students is also associated with psychological problems including anxiety, panic attacks, and depression (Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2013; Lipson et al., 2022), further impacting on student's quality of life (Ribeiro et al., 2017). However, while there is consensus on the negative impacts of stress (Pascoe & Parker, 2020), there is ongoing debate about the tolerable levels and when stress and anxiety should be considered a concern (Jones et al., 2020). Moreover, stress is also seen to have positive outcomes (Selye, 1975), aligning with the concept of 'Eustress'; a positive psychological response to stress (O'Sullivan, 2011). Essentially, this follows the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), or the more familiarly termed 'stress curve', whereby stress can optimize performance within a 'good stress' range, where a task provides moderate arousal, but becomes detrimental beyond that point (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). This is particularly important considering stress is inherent in educational experiences, and it becomes crucial to understand how students can effectively cope with the stressors of their academic journeys (Holdsworth et al., 2018). These diverse challenges, however, are still segregated and compartmentalised in current literature, and by

understanding the interconnectedness of the various factors impacting students, institutions could address these comprehensively to contribute to a positive and supportive learning environment.

3.2.5. Coping, Resilience and Support

When faced with stressors of the student experience, students inevitably engage in a multitude of coping strategies, including self-control, positive thinking, and seeking social support to cope with their stressors (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). The way students react to challenges, stressors, and risk, play a pivotal role in determining the value and success of their experiences and future learning outcomes (Pascoe et al., 2020). However, universities also have a role to play in encouraging and supporting students with their challenges, and to ensure that all students are supported effectively regardless of background (Gill, 2021; Rhodes et al., 2002). This is particularly important when non-traditional students are often placed as the 'other' in discussions and conceptualisations of the student journey (Read et al., 2010).

Various support avenues including peers, family, and academic staff are key for reducing stress levels (McLean et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2009). Peer support, especially during transitional periods, reduces stress due to shared experiences acting as a barrier between the stressful situation and their negative stressful response (Thomas et al., 2002; Walsh et al., 2009). Collaborative learning also supports mature students juggling their demands, acting as a protective factor against this impact (Homer, 2022). However, in second year, students often face increased academic pressure, with assessments counting towards their final degree, yet feel they have less academic support (Macaskill, 2018). Considering appropriate support helps students gain a sense of mastery over their environment, reducing stress and attrition (McSweeney, 2014; Thomas, 2012), universities therefore have a significant role to play in facilitating this development and academic progression. Furthermore, supportive academic staff are vital in inspiring and motivating students from diverse backgrounds to HE (Merril, 2015). Regular and clear communication, stability of support, and a genuine concern for student challenges are suggested avenues to achieve this (Meehan & Howells, 2018; Thomas, 2012).

Individual persistence and resilience are also suggested as protective factors, with a longitudinal study of non-traditional students in Scotland (Tett et al., 2017) revealing that student's comprehension of academic requirements evolved over time, and in

their later years they reported a better understanding of themselves. Consequently, students who are supported, and can learn and employ constructive coping mechanisms, are more likely to manage and move through stressful situations. Conversely, a lack thereof may lead to poorer academic and social outcomes (Holdsworth et al., 2018; Laidlaw et al., 2016). Additionally, students need belief in their abilities to succeed (Meehan & Howells, 2018; Storia & Stubblefield, 2015), as those who perceive themselves to be more capable are better equipped to navigate university transitions and academic challenges (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Jenó et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Schöne et al., 2015).

However, when students feel instability and lack of confidence, they may resort to self-destructive coping strategies such as alcohol consumption, smoking, and using sleeping pills to manage their stress and anxieties (Evan et al., 2021; Noland et al., 2009; Riordan & Carey, 2019). Whilst these strategies can foster social connectedness through shared activities, they can also exert pressure on others to partake, potentially limiting social bonds if they feel inappropriately pressured (Gill, 2021). Consequently, increased use of coping strategies of this nature are associated with lower levels of academic motivation, attainment, and psychological wellbeing (El Ansari et al., 2013; Smith, 2019).

Overall, students employ diverse coping strategies in response to stressors. Their reactions significantly shape the value and success of their experience and their future outcomes. Social support, a sense of belonging, collaborative learning, and belief in one's abilities are all suggested as protective factors against stress and poor psychological health. Without support, confidence, and constructive coping strategies, students are at risk of harmful and risky behaviours which can impede social bonds, academic motivation and adversely affect wellbeing and success. Consequently, it is important for universities to understand and address the diverse coping strategies students employ as they play a critical role in supporting students to cope. Recognizing these patterns adds to a comprehensive understanding of the student experience and helps universities to foster a supportive environment.

3.3. Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

This literature section explores the concerns relating to student wellbeing and mental health, illnesses, difficulties and problems (Hughes et al., 2022). As a reminder, this thesis embraces The Education for Mental Health Toolkit (Hughes et al., 2022) definitions which are developed from the University Mental Health Charter

(Hughes & Spanner, 2019) and noted in section 1.1. Specifically, mental health is a “full spectrum of experience ranging from good mental health to mental illness” (Hughes et al., 2022, p.5), where good mental health is dynamic and encompasses more than just the absence of illness (Hughes et al., 2022). Mental illness includes “thoughts, feelings, symptoms and/or behaviours, that causes distress and reduces functioning, impacting negatively on an individual’s day to day experience and which may receive, or be eligible to receive, a clinical diagnosis” (Hughes et al., 2022, p.5). Mental health difficulties, problems or poor mental health encompasses a broader range of emotional and/or psychological experiences that brings distress beyond one’s normal experience and ability to manage effectively. This includes both those with mental illness and those who fall below this threshold. Mental health, illness and wellbeing are understood not to be interchangeable, but distinct concepts that are related (Westerhof & Keyes, 2009). Wellbeing is therefore distinguished as a wider framework that includes physical and social wellbeing, and which mental health is a part of (Hughes et al., 2022).

In the 2021-2022 academic year in the UK, 119,480 students reported an existing mental health condition (HESA, 2023c). Furthermore, the impact of mental health and wellbeing concerns on considerations to leave HE is consistently dominant (Neves & Stephenson, 2023). This was intensified in 2021 and 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, where disruption to academic and social structures were seen through online provision, and imposed restrictions on student movement, socialisation and engagement with their academic institutions and peers. These restrictions were shown to have a profound impact upon student motivation, engagement, and wellbeing specifically (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Copeland et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2021), and it was shown that 34% considered leaving due to mental health concerns. This compares to 29% in 2023 where pandemic restrictions had been lifted and education was largely returned to pre-pandemic delivery (UCAS, 2021b). However, student mental health declines have been steadily rising, from 3,840 students reporting a mental health condition in 2011 (0.7% of all UK applicants), to 21,105 in 2020 (3.7% of all UK applicants), marking a 450% increase since 2011. A similar trend is seen in international student declarations, albeit lower than UK students, with 0.2% in 2011, to 0.9% in 2020 (UCAS, 2021b). The COVID-19 pandemic then, merely exacerbated a pre-existing problem, with 18–24-year-olds showing decreased mental health and wellbeing in the first month of lockdown (Pierce et al., 2020), and higher prevalence of ‘probable depression’ (55%) compared to pre-pandemic levels (Owens et al., 2022).

Since The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2003) called for greater understanding of psychological student wellbeing, literature exploring psychological changes and psychological distress during a degree has grown exponentially. Factors associated with university life have been shown consistently to impact students' levels of psychological distress, and mental health and wellbeing outcomes (Bewick, et al, 2010). Consequently, explanations for student mental health and wellbeing declines have been a dominant discussion in the literature. Such explanations include but are not limited to: the widening of student demographics presenting diverse sets of needs and expectations (Bunbury, 2020; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Ibrahim, Kelly & Glazebrook, 2013; Macaskill, 2013; Reiss, 2013; Royal College for Psychiatrists, 2021), increased academic demands, expectations and stress (Pascoe et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2017), financial burden due to fees rising in 2012 and the introduction of higher interest loan systems (Belfeld et al., 2017; Jessop et al., 2005), social factors such as loneliness and belonging (Dutcher et al., 2022; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; McIntyre et al., 2018), student mental health literacy (Gorczyński et al., 2017), increased crisis narratives, and societal changes in the acceptance and encouragement to speak up about mental health and wellbeing attitudes (Foulkes & Andrews, 2023). Contrary to this dominant narrative however, university has also been shown as a protective factor for student wellbeing and mental health with attendance producing better wellbeing outcomes (Balloo et al, 2022). Understanding this is important, as heightened student wellbeing is positively associated with key aspects of success such as attention, cognition, and persistence (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tape et al., 2021). Furthermore, with the increased focus on audit culture and student experience ratings (Naidoo & Williams, 2015), student wellbeing has become a primary concern for universities. Specifically, if students experience positive student wellbeing because of good student experience, they are more likely to experience greater student satisfaction, leading to favourable ratings in student satisfaction surveys. Good scores will then equate to subsequent funding and future student applications.

Research around the student experience and its impacts on mental health and wellbeing have therefore been increasingly sought, as learning and teaching factors may impact either positively or negatively on students (Hughes & Spanner 2019; Pascoe et al., 2020). For instance, examination stress is associated with mental health difficulties including anxiety, depression, and burnout (Jones et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al. 2017; Pascoe et al., 2020), which is often followed by impacts upon academic performance, student retention and

student outcomes (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Duffy et al., 2020; El Ansari, & Stock, 2010; Lipson & Eisenberg, 2017; Reschly et al., 2008). However, university students tend to exhibit anxiety symptoms and experiences, rather than depressive ones (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Bewick et al., 2010; Cooke et al, 2006), with depression rates gradually increasing over the degree and being at their highest during their final year of study. However, in the study by Bewick et al. (2010), the General Population Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (GP-CORE; Sinclair, et al. 2005) was used to indicate levels of psychological distress, with only one item for depression and one item for anxiety, potentially negating the complexity and nuance of anxiety and depression experiences. Nevertheless, consistent research supports these findings, with Akram et al., (2020) finding over a third of students (37.3%) self-reported significant risk of suicidal behaviour, and that this risk of suicidal ideation is greater when students have depressive symptoms, psychotic experiences, and perceived stress. Considering the level of stress experienced as explained in section 3.2.4 then, this places student mental health and wellbeing as a central concern. The Office for National Statistics (ONS; 2022) revealed in their most recent report, that 319 students died by suicide between the end of the 2017 academic year and the end of the academic year 2020. Of these students, 63.3% were males. Although suicide rates were at their lowest for four years in the academic year ending 2020, suicide rates in student populations remain a significant concern. Specifically, there may be additional instances of suicide which are non-identified, and there are links between previous suicidal ideation and future suicidal behaviours (O'Neil, et al. 2018), often occurring within the first twelve months following the onset of ideation (Bostwick, et al. 2016; Nock et al, 2008). This provides greater precedent for adequate identification and assessment of at-risk students when suicidal ideation often co-occurs alongside treatable mental health problems (Cracknell, 2015). With students displaying continued high levels of mental health difficulties each year, and the elevated symptoms associated with suicidal ideation such as insomnia, stress, psychosis, anxiety, and depression (Becker et al, 2018; Eskin et al, 2016; Russell, et al. 2019), it focuses attention to the increased risks posed for HE students.

Together then, student experience is highlighted as a primary concern for universities, particularly when they are implementing strategies to support students, yet rising mental ill health is evident. A more holistic understanding of their experience may therefore benefit in understanding where gaps in support lie

and what strategies are needed to improve student wellbeing, mental health, and mental health difficulties.

3.4. Current University Initiatives

In response to the myriad of challenges presented among this literature, and the persistence of wellbeing issues amongst students, universities are continually exploring steps to improve the support available. Universities commonly implement a variety of initiatives to enhance student experience and wellbeing, including mental health and wellbeing services, workshops, online resources, peer support programmes, accessibility services, financial aid, and academic support (UCAS, 2024a; Universities UK, 2021; University College London, 2021). Specifically, the number of HEIs with dedicated mental health and/or wellbeing strategies rose from 52% in 2019 to 66% in 2022 (DFE, 2023), reflecting a growing awareness and need. This has also been in response to initiatives like University UK's Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities framework (Universities UK, 2020) and the University Mental Health Charter led by Student Minds (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). Among HEIs with existing wellbeing and mental health strategies, 72% adopt a comprehensive approach, including both student and staff mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, for those amid planning their strategy, 77% were including students and staff in this development (DFE, 2023), emphasising collaborative efforts and a whole university approach in improving the mental wellbeing of their communities. However, despite these efforts, mental health difficulties remain a risk for current students (ONS, 2022), posing the question of whether universities are capturing the most important aspects of their challenges within the support available.

Most universities are working towards better mental health and wellbeing for their students; therefore, the present study aims to uncover the shared psychological experiences of students to further inform future avenues for this endeavour. Moreover, due to the complexity of these challenges, support is often compartmentalised into specific areas of experience or symptoms in need of addressing. Consequently, the interconnectivities between different aspects of their experience are rarely fully understood, supported and addressed. It is proposed that by exploring how students experience university more holistically (i.e., the psychological experiences that underpin a number of aspects of the university experience) support could be tailored to wider psychological experiences and filter into, or be applied, to multiple areas of their experience.

3.5. The Importance of Psychological Meaning

As suggested by Thompson (2021), the plethora of literature suggests many opportunities and challenges of university life that have been present for a long time, and a persistence of student mental health and wellbeing difficulties in HE (Thorley, 2017; UCAS, 2021b). This stresses the need to understand the psychological experiences and psychological meanings of those experiences to better understand the wellbeing of students. This specific scope of understanding would allow educators and student support service teams to identify and address potentially overlooked psychological experiences and challenges, that could help to develop targeted support initiatives to enhance student's resilience and coping.

Importantly, psychological strengths like meaningful living, resilience, and hope, are suggested to promote better coping, behavioural activation, mental health and wellbeing (Arslan et al., 2022; Crego et al., 2021; Debats et al., 1995; Yıldırım & Arslan 2020). Positive psychological aspects, such as finding meaning in life, are considered crucial for positive functioning amidst challenges (Abbas, et al, 2022; Park, 2010). Scholars such as Viktor Frankl (1969; 1963) and Klinger (1998) emphasise the innate human need for purpose, due to our biological physiology being wired to facilitate meaningful thought and action. This suggests that a lack of meaning can lead to negative mental and physical outcomes, including poorer mental health and wellbeing (Kleftaras & Psarra, 2012; Mascaro & Rosen, 2006; Steger, 2012). Conversely then, when individuals believe they have a life full of meaning, they experience more positive wellbeing outcomes.

By exploring the psychological underpinnings of student journeys then, we may better understand the holistic culmination of experiences and meanings within student life that shape student experience and drive their academic, social and personal outcomes. Furthermore, focusing in on the psychological perspectives of the university experience may provide new insights essential for developing interventions that promote the positive wellbeing and mental health of students. Relatedly, one's sense of meaning of life has been suggested to influence and be influenced by various mental health indicators that are experienced by students, such as social and physical functioning, belonging, subjective well-being, depression, and anxiety (Kleftaras & Psarra, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013; Mascaro & Rosen 2005; Minkkinen et al. 2020; Zika & Chamberlain 1992). Consequently, a holistic exploration could help in understanding how students perceive and

respond emotionally and psychologically to their challenges and why despite HEI attempts to address student wellbeing, there have been largely no improvements. For example, the persistence of discontent may be due to how students psychologically experience university and the meanings they attach to them (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

It is suggested that this understanding of the student experience should come from asking *how* students experience university, rather than simply *what* they experience. Compared to focusing on elements of university that we already know influence their experience such as stress, accommodation, finances, relationships, and levels of support, we should be interested in what underlies these elements and what key experiences cut across these categorised impacts to produce their reported lived experience. Such a focus is currently missing from current evidence, therefore, using a qualitative approach, this research aims to explore the psychological underpinnings of student lives, to better understand how students perceive and respond to their university experience. The qualitative approach is suggested to provide a window into the meaning constructions of students, surrounding their university experience. Through understanding the psychological underpinnings of the student experience, it is suggested that we can better understand how students are shaping their thoughts, feelings and behaviour surrounding the complex, multiple factors that comprise university life.

Part II. Research Methodology

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents and rationalises the methodological approaches and decisions employed in this study. The study harnessed a qualitative research design, rooted in critical realist and social constructionist philosophies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, gathering perspectives from both students and advisors (i.e., university staff members in a student supporting role such as academic, disability and wellbeing advisors). For the inductive analysis of interview data, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The coding of the student data constructed a Codebook (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to support the analysis of the advisor perspective data. Through this process, themes were augmented and refined to produce the final thematic outcomes.

A qualitative approach was taken as it allows the meanings underneath the university experience to be illustrated from the perspectives of those navigating the student experience. It allows me to ask the unasked questions and add to the conversation around student experience from different perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sofaer, 1999). It contributes to reducing the gap between science and society by providing participants with an avenue for self-expression and acts as a vehicle for disseminating insights to the wider research and academic community (Gergen et al., 2015). It also allows me to focus on the individuals within this specific context, their own conceptualisations, and their salient points of experience, rather than a pre-determined set of ideas to explore. Thus, allowing for a deeper exploration of the university experience, unravelling the meanings, messiness, and complexity of student life (Shaw et al., 2008).

Qualitative research also acknowledges that identical accounts will not develop with each research endeavour (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and due to its open-ended and exploratory nature, it is a flexible approach that allows me to evolve and suit the needs of my participants and the project. It also emphasises that knowledge is meaningful within the specific contexts in which it is produced and originates from those located within it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thus, it enables me to delve into the perspectives of those within the student experience and provides an ongoing exploration of the evolving student experience, helping to 'keep up' with the changing reality of student life. Newfound meanings generated by those in this

context, have the potential to foster innovative theoretical advancements concerning the comprehension of student experience. These insights may also yield practical recommendations for supporting students and enhancing their university experience, rooted in their lived realities. Whilst the study primarily adopts an experiential approach, it also incorporates a critical qualitative stance. As such, language is often analysed to try and understand the ways in which students and advisors construct their realities and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Weedon, 1997), as qualitative research is not simply about discovery but also the production of meaning (Parker, 2004). Thus, a qualitative approach provides a deeper and richer representation of the students lived experiences.

The use of qualitative techniques and methods demands a thorough understanding of qualitative research methods, values, and philosophies (Mays & Pope 2007). Given this, the present chapter explains the procedures and decisions made throughout this research. By providing a thorough account of the process, I aim to foster understanding and support the readers interpretation of the research process. By doing this, I demonstrate the credibility and dependability of this work, and evidence how quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has been embedded throughout the study. Specifically, the credibility of the study relies on the extent to which I provide thorough explanations for both the methods employed and the interpretations of the data. Its dependability refers to the coherence across and justifications for the methodology, methods used, data collected, and subsequent findings. How well these two things are addressed, relates to the transparency and auditability of the research process. The in-depth explanation in this chapter provides evidence and justifications for the decisions made and demonstrates the rigour and quality of this research. A further assessment of its quality is also provided in Section 10.4.

This chapter begins with the research aims and questions, followed by an explanation of my theoretical framework, incorporating my ontological and epistemological perspectives. A reflexive account situating myself within the research context is provided. Following that, the qualitative design and justification for the selected methods are elucidated. Subsequently, a thorough explanation of the participant sample, data collection procedures, and ethical considerations is provided. Finally, the approach to analysis, how the thematic analysis method was implemented, and analysis techniques are detailed.

4.2. Research Aims and Questions

Presented are the overall research aims of this project, and the research questions being asked.

Research aims:

- To understand and give voice to undergraduate student perspectives of the experiences of students during university.
- To understand and give voice to advisor perspectives of the student experience during university.
- To understand the shared psychological underpinnings that shape the student experience.
- To consider the alignment of perspectives between advisors and undergraduate students regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience.

Research questions:

1. How do students and advisors describe the undergraduate student experience?
2. What are the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate university experience, as expressed by undergraduate students and advisors?
3. Do advisor and student perspectives align regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience?

4.3. Theoretical Positioning

As the researcher, I acknowledge that interpretation and meaning is shaped by my “assumptions, psychology, affect, values, politics, and ideals that permeate my take on the world” (Braun & Clarke, 2022; p.199). Some of these may fluctuate, like momentary moods, while others such as my philosophical worldview, remain more consistent. Thus, outlining the philosophical underpinnings is crucial for revealing assumptions guiding my decisions regarding the purpose, design, methods, and interpretations of this research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Devine & Heath 1999; Terry et al., 2017). It also ensures that both the readers and I can appropriately and meaningfully interpret the outcomes (Braun & Clark, 2022; Crotty, 1998; Moon & Blackman, 2014). Specifically, the methods used in this thesis, themselves, are free from ontological and epistemological assumptions (Blaikie, 2000) as Thematic Analysis (TA) can be used within most theoretical frameworks and does not come

with a built-in theoretical approach. This is unlike methods such as discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which would not have provided the necessary flexibility for this work.

In brief, my philosophical stance is rooted in a worldview that sees knowledge as inductive, value-laden, and contextually unique (Moon & Blackman, 2014) where meaning is both understood in semantic and latent expressions yet constructed by our interactions with social experiences. More specifically, ontology refers to what exists in the world about which we can acquire knowledge, and what we believe social reality comprises of. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature, scope, and study of knowledge. It seeks to understand how knowledge is acquired, what constitutes knowledge, and the methods or processes through which individuals come to know and understand the world (Bryman, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Grix, 2019; Punch & Oancea, 2014). I primarily subscribe to the ontological and epistemological positions of relativism and social constructionism respectively but acknowledge contextually situated constructions. I posit that, within the world there are objectively 'real' circumstances through which our experiences, beliefs and sense of reality are activated, confined, and thwarted, therefore hold some assumptions in line with critical realism (Lauizier-Jobin et al., 2022). From this perspective and the belief that to understand human experience we must undertake phenomenological research, I opted for a qualitative research design. The use of a qualitative research design aligns with the epistemological consideration that knowledge is subjective and influenced by my own positionality in this work (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, because I am interested in understanding the experience of university for students, it is imperative to adopt a contextualist perspective in my research. This perspective posits that language can unveil a partial or complete truth regarding the intricacies of this experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Madill et al., 2000). Thus, language as part of the construction of reality, connects the constructionist epistemology of this work to the qualitative research design and use of interview data collection methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burr, 2003).

4.3.1. *Ontology*

Ontology is the study of being, the nature of existence, and what is considered as reality (Creswell, 2007). A realist ontology posits that there is a single, objective reality independent of human experience, and a universal 'truth' that can be observed and measured (Maxwell, 2012). Conversely, relativism contends that

multiple realities exist, and reality is constructed within the human mind (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). According to relativists, decisions are contextually dependent, and shaped by one's cultural background, social norms, emotions, and experience (Evely et al., 2008). Reality is therefore relative to each individual and their experience at any given time or place, which make up unique versions of reality (Guba, 1990a; 1996). For students then, the reality of the university experience is both individual and contextually dependent, shaped by complex processes of emotions, backgrounds, social norms, and experiences. Moreover, whilst undergraduate student realities may relate to individual experiences, they can also be contextually dependent on the university itself. Therefore, there is also argument for a contextual 'truth' within the university experience, such as the university systems which shape student experience. This perspective informed my interest and development of the research question, exploring whether these individually diverse realities that I believe to be held by students, have shared 'underpinnings'; as whilst there are individual realities, when there are contextually dependent aspects to the experience, students may also have shared psychological experiences.

4.3.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is essentially how we create knowledge (Bryman, 2016), and considering my ontological position is a 'middle ground' between realism and relativism, I take an integrative approach, combining moderate social constructionism (Elder-Vass, 2012b) and critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978). Constructivist epistemology posits reality exists in the form of multiple constructions that are individually specific, self-created, and socially and experientially based (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This reality and our knowledge are constructed and importantly, re-constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with other people (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). I therefore believe a contextual 'reality' exists, but our social experiences shape how we understand and interact with it.

Social constructionism argues for independent realities that are socially *constructed* by social actors (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Bryman, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Language is explained as the medium through which knowledge is conveyed and helps to create a shared sense of reality that evolves over time through ongoing social interactions, culture, and discourse (Berger & Luckmann; 1966; Burr, 2015; Elder-Vass, 2012a; Gergen, 2015). New knowledge is therefore said to rely on

background experiences, prior knowledge, and social interactions with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bryman, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Independent realities are created and recreated through language and interaction, and meanings are continuously adapting through newly formed and acquired knowledge. Through the lens of social constructionism, students would therefore likely produce perspectives based upon their patterns of language and behaviour, prior knowledge of university, interactions with university peers, and their cultural background.

I therefore believe that social practices inevitably shape our perception and knowledge of reality, making knowledge a social product inseparable from the individuals who produce it (Braun & Clarke, 2022; 2006; Elder-Vass, 2012b). Students then, will likely have shared narratives surrounding the student experience based upon their shared communication, practices, values, and beliefs. Thus, exploring shared psychological underpinnings of the student experience becomes intriguing, as this can reveal shared realities. In social constructionism, a focus is given to how understandings are constructed within social contexts, as Gergen (1985) explained, "From the constructionist position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by forces of nature, but is the result of active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship" (p. 267). In other words, people engage in the co-creation of knowledge and meaning by actively or passively negotiating shared understandings, often within social groupings. These groupings may form around factors such as ethnicity, nationality, ideology, gender, culture, religion, or any aspect that brings entitativity. This being 'something' that gives them the perception that the people together are a group (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Campbell, 1958; Lickel et al., 2000). As students are a social grouping, sharing the identity of a student, understandings and perspectives of their experiences are likely to be collectively negotiated. Thus, it is logical to suggest that there will be patterns of meaning cross-cutting multiple psychological realities of students, as they will shape their understanding and perspectives of their experiences through interaction. Consequently, this offers the potential to understand the psychological underpinnings of these shared realities.

However, the university context poses 'essentially real' circumstances and social structures that might influence student perspectives, such as the marketisation of HE (Brooks et al., 2016). Here is where constructionism and critical realism meet. As Houston (2010) explains: "For critical realism the world is essentially real; that is, there are real, social structures and yet actors apply their social constructions and their meaning making activity to their experience when confronted by these

structures” (p. 75). Students will therefore apply their constructions and ‘make sense’ of their experience when confronted by such structures. It may therefore delimit my analysis to assume that there is no objective reality regarding the social circumstances in which universities sit and thus bear impact on the student experience.

Critical realism presents a perspective that rejects the notion of an ‘objective’ or ‘certain’ knowledge about the world, advocating for the potential existence of various valid accounts for any given phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). It further argues that there is a ‘material’ dimension to our lives that is separate from discourse (Sims-Shouten et al., 2007) such as enduring economic and social structures, which produce experiences and observed phenomena (Willig, 1999). Student perspectives and experiences then, can be shaped by the objectively ‘real’ circumstances in which universities sit (e.g., physical spaces, student debt), as well as the social practices within and surrounding these contexts (e.g., communication, neoliberalism, educational policies, culture). Embracing a critical realist stance in this work therefore allows me to position student talk within tangible ‘things’ that they must navigate, including known factors affecting student experience such as finances, accommodation, and social support (Boughton et al, 2022; Kapur, 2022; Pitt et al, 2018; Richardson et al, 2012; Worsley et al., 2021a). This approach is ethically significant, as neglecting these contexts when analysing participants’ discourse may fail to fully capture their lived experience (Sims-Shouten et al., 2007). Similarly, regarding student perspectives without acknowledging the contextual ‘realities’ in which they exist might be seen as inappropriate, particularly given the documented impacts of HE contexts on student well-being and mental health (Benson-Eggleton, 2019; Priestly, 2019; Worsley et al., 2020). As Houston (2010) explains, “Even though the causal level of reality may not be open to direct perception, it is nevertheless real because it produces discernible effects.” (p.75).

My position therefore combines ontological realism with epistemological constructivism. I hold that ‘truth’ is out there, as a mind-independent reality separate to student perceptions, theories, and constructions, but that their knowledge is socially produced, and their understanding of the world and ‘reality’ is constructed from their own perspectives and standpoint. Therefore, it is impossible to access truth directly as reality exists only in an ‘imperfectly apprehendable’ way (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), with critical realism giving rise to perspectival and contextual ‘truths’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Maxwell, 2011). The study therefore exemplifies an epistemological perspective of critical realism and moderate social constructionism

(Bhaskar, 1978; Elder-Vass, 2012b) as the objectives are to gather multiple perspectives or 'realities' of the student experience whilst aware and noting 'objective realities' of the context. The aim to explore the patterned meanings that run across these perspectives also ascribes to the critical realist's goal of explaining phenomena and uncovering 'contextual truths'. Whilst this combination may raise concerns for some, regarding the realist-relativist debate (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), a combination of a mild realist ontology alongside a constructionist epistemology has been commonly assumed by qualitative researchers (Jobling, 2014). Crotty (1998) supports this explaining that "we can overcome this debate by assuming the position that 'to say that reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real... constructionism in epistemology is perfectly compatible with a realism in ontology'" (p. 63).

Finally, it is important to understand the flexibility of such approaches and findings. Rohleder and Lyons (2015) explain that:

social constructionists argue that, within our social cultures, nothing remains stable and, consequently, neither can knowledge. It makes considerable sense, therefore, to adopt a constructionist stance towards knowledge generation and to recognise that what we find only holds for here and for now. (p. 20).

Although this research aims to understand whether a shared experience or 'reality' exists underlying multiple independent realities, this is a snapshot in time, and a select group of individuals reporting their experience. The findings therefore hold for here and now, and for this group of individuals, but this knowledge is flexible and open to change. I do not claim to uncover a 'framework' which we can apply to the entire student population, but to uncover experiences that can shed light on new areas of exploration and further research, which may have been previously uncovered or overlooked. Consequently, this research may pave the way for a new, holistic understanding of the student experience through exploring student psychological underpinnings.

4.3.2. How this positioning shapes my role as the researcher

Constructivism assumes that the researcher cannot separate themselves from what they know. The researcher and the researched become linked, as we are shaped by our experiences, and these will transpire in our generated knowledge between researcher and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Pilgrim (2014) articulates that from a critical realist viewpoint, the researcher is part of the world they want to

understand and is unable to stand outside the social reality being observed. I therefore place myself within the process of knowledge production, and reflect on my position as the researcher, a 'knowing person' of the topic, a psychologist, and a student with my own experiences in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

4.3.3. Epistemological and Ontological Fit with Reflexive TA

While critical realism favours both qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehend how the world works (Lauzier-Jobin, et al., 2022), constructionism represents 'Big Q' qualitative values (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Kidder & Fine, 1987). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that TA can be conducted from different epistemological and ontological standpoints as it can be applied flexibly without a-priori theoretical assumptions (Willig, 2001). When taking a critical realist position to TA, the data does not provide a direct reflection of reality, but a 'mediated reflection' of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022), where the subject's perception of their reality is shaped by and embedded within their language, culture, and social contexts (Willig, 2013). Here is where critical realism and social constructionism cross over, as social constructionism offers the assumption that "reality is socially constructed, and it is what participants perceive it to be" (Creswell & Miller, 2000; p. 125), as well as the nature of meaning being situated or contextual (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For critical realism, TA also aims to provide an interpretation that speaks to lived realities whilst 'speaking to situated realities' (Braun & Clarke, 2022; p. 171). So, it can be understood that for objective constraints such as financial burden, university has a social and cultural context which shapes and constrains student's perspectives of their experience of this objectively 'real' factor. They are therefore likely to make sense of their experience in relation to how they negotiate and manage these perspectives and contextual factors as they view the university through a unique lens (Brookfield, 2002). Thus, "participants bring you a located, interpreted reality (the data), which you then interpret via TA" (Braun & Clarke, 2022., P.171).

Specifically, constructionism aligns with the 'Big Q' approach of qualitative research, where the process tends to be interpretative, flexible, and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al, 2017). Accordingly, TA aligns with this epistemology as "an approach embedded within and reflecting the values and sensibility of a qualitative paradigm" (p. 9). Through this interpretative approach, Carla Willig (2008) also explains that we "go beyond what presents itself, to reveal dimensions of a phenomenon which are concealed or hidden, whilst at the same time taking care not to impose meaning upon the phenomenon" (p. 9). Therefore, the interpretative

approach of TA lends itself to the aim of uncovering underlying psychological experiences. Similarly, the use of searching for patterns of meaning with TA supports this interpretative work through a systematic process. Together the epistemology and chosen method work together to answer the research questions and provide coherence across the methodology and methods, illustrating dependability in this work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.4. Placing myself within the research context

It is critical to engage in the monitoring and understanding of my role in the research; something typically referred to as *reflexivity* (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017; Finlay, 2002b; Walsh, 2003). This involves systematically attending to the process of knowledge construction, my role as a co-constructor (Malterud, 2001) and making this explicit to myself and the reader (Gentles et al. 2014). Reflexivity supports my ability to communicate complex aspects and ethical decisions made in generating and analysing real-world data (Finlay, 2002a). Serving as a heuristic function, it aids in meaning discovery, through internal exploration, informing methodological, procedural, and analytical decisions on a deeper level (Moustakas, 1990). Subsequently, reflexivity is the tool through which I can examine the influence of my 'self' in the production of process, analysis, and outcomes. This is important as reflexivity is centred around the value of subjectivity, and because meaning is actively constructed and co-constructed with participants, through the research process (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Varpio et al., 2021).

Aligning with my epistemological and ontological positioning in this work, social constructionist approaches emphasise the *relationship* between researcher and participant, with no neatly defined roles. Instead, they act to co-produce situated knowledge, through shared experiences, cultural environment, and interaction (Daly, 2007). This co-production highlights the importance of reflexivity regarding my relationships with participants, in understanding how my data is socially produced through my interviews. Ellis and Berger (2003) highlight this key role of the interview process, explaining that they:

become less a conduit of information from informants to researchers that represents how things are, and more a sea swell of meaning-making in which researchers connect their own experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up the conversations about how we live and cope (p.161).

The outcomes are produced through the instrument of myself, during co-creation of interview data and the interpretative process of analysis. My engagement with reflexivity offers transparency and detail about how I approached and conducted this work. This reflexive practice aligns with my social constructionist positioning and the essence of *Reflexive* Thematic Analysis, which encourages recursive engagement with the data and the role of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I therefore reflect upon my thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and positions throughout the analysis (Appendix O), explicating these in my reflexive account (Section 4.5), to offer readers an understanding of my prior knowledge, experience, and worldviews that shape my role in this research.

Reflexivity is often employed to scrutinize the researcher's role and subjectivities, aiming to mitigate 'bias' which separates them from understanding an objective reality (Neubauer et al., 2019). However, I do not subscribe to objectivity principles, and view reflexivity as inherent. In qualitative work, the self is embedded within interpretative processes and meaning construction: "One's self can't be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussion and written accounts of the research process. But it is an omission, a failure to discuss something which has been present in the research itself" (Stanley & Wise, 1983; p. 262). I therefore use reflexivity, not to bolster objectivity, but to acknowledge the unavoidable presence of myself in the research. Taking a constructionist standpoint, the aim is not to achieve precise or unbiased depictions (Rees et al. 2020), as such outcomes are both unattainable and undesirable. Rather, reflexivity in this context, appreciates and acknowledges subjectivity, explaining my relationship to the research. It serves as a mechanism to recognize the importance of interconnected personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual factors shaping the research process. This reflexive transparency therefore contributes to the confirmability and transferability of this study (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Malterud, 2001).

4.5. Reflexive Account

Embracing the role of the researcher is crucial in offering transparency and rigour to the research I conduct. It is important therefore, to identify and consider my own beliefs, feelings and what I expect to discover, to be able to self-reflect and acknowledge my active role in the research process. Similarly, this contributes to my ideas of what counts as meaningful knowledge, as I believe in the Big Q assumption that human beings' subjective understanding is a resource and what makes experiences worth knowing about. This is contrary to the opposing view seen

in more objective fields of research, or in 'small q' approaches to qualitative work, where subjectivity is seen as a detriment (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I believe, that as we live in a social world, human sense-making shouldn't be removed from the complex world we are situated in. As the researcher, it is important that I reflect upon my position to the topic, as I am part of this complex world, with my own experiences, understandings, beliefs, and values. I am 'active' in this process and in partnership, the participants and I shape what is meaningful.

My most obvious and potentially influential positions to this topic are that of being a current university student and a psychologist. As a postgraduate student, my previous undergraduate experiences, growth, transition, and social relationships shape my perspective on this topic. As a psychologist I have pre-existing knowledge of education, cognitive processes, emotion and behaviour to name a few. My dual perspectives may therefore impact the attention I give to certain topics and shape how I understand and interpret data. Particularly, I found that talk of impacts that cut across undergraduate and postgraduate levels of education elicited more probes and deeper insight about what was being said. For example, when students talk about mental health and wellbeing struggles. I have my own experience of this and feel this is something I have developed conversation around throughout my life therefore I feel comfortable and easily able to explore these topics further.

Furthermore, my knowledge of mental health through my own learning and work history means this is an area I feel I understand and possess transferable skills. My experiences as a student, psychologist, and skills learnt as a mental health worker, therefore shape the way I contemplate what is being said and make sense of what is going on in my data throughout the process of interviews and analysis. I empathise, reminisce, wonder about, feel jealous of, and admire the students I speak to and often find I am emotionally engaged with their stories (Appendix O). I recognised how hard it is to quieten your essential nature of being from such a process and conversations, and ultimately feel that such a desire would be ill-fitting to what I am trying to achieve.

A core part of who I am is someone with a high level of empathy, who exercises an attitude of 'putting yourself in someone else's shoes'. Hence, in this process, I often felt a desire to get under one's experience, and find out how they *really* are, or how they *really* experienced something. I not only understand this to contribute to why I thought of my research question, but it also created curiosity for certain topics during interviews, and further exploration into what felt important and meaningful for the participants. This often meant that I left interviews feeling a sense of true

discovery and depth into one's experience and perspectives. For example, during an interview, a student spoke about their experience of drugs and how this is experienced at university. I felt a strong inclination to delve deeper into this topic, as it seemed to significantly shape their overall university experience. As the conversation naturally gravitated towards this area, and the student was engaging more with this topic than others, it led me to ask more follow up questions than other areas of the interview. Consequently, I gathered comprehensive data on the drug-related aspects of their experience, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their overall journey. To park such a key aspect of their journey, would have felt dismissive of that individual's story. Thus, both my nature and awareness of the student, enabled me to delve into un-expected and nuanced areas.

My role as an academic tutor to undergraduate students also shaped my responses to certain experiences, particularly within academic contexts. Drawing on my teaching experience, I could empathise with students' struggles around their teaching sessions, further informing my follow up questions. However, I also found I would agree and disagree with perspectives of their learning based on my own beliefs and experiences. This position therefore encouraged follow up questions, not only because it is important for the research question, but it also provides insight for my own teaching development. Here, I can see how my own position and interest in teaching quality, influenced my approach to knowledge generation around this topic. Additionally, my academic teaching style is centred around supporting and caring for students and this often filters through into empathy for their struggles. Thus, discussion often centred more around understanding where further support is needed.

My position as a psychologist is also undoubtedly a factor in how I approached my research. Specifically, I have pre-existing psychological knowledge and insights that will have influenced my interpretations of data and patterns of meaning. For example, one of my themes was centred around agency and autonomy, both psychological concepts relating to the well-known 'Self Determination Theory' (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). That is not to say that I intentionally considered theory when initially reading my data; in fact, I did not do this at all. However, when patterns were made around independence and students fearing taking an active role in their experiences, it is likely that the immediate thought of agency was due to my psychological knowledge. Similarly, a 'secure base' was considered in relation to data around safety and security, which is a psychological idea from attachment theory, of which my supervisor is also well versed in. It would be foolish therefore to

consider my work as theoretically agnostic because my insights and psychological focus of my coding means that I will naturally consider psychological theory, compared to someone from a non-psychological background. So, it was important to consider alternative readings of my data at every point I had an idea about theory. This is something I felt strongly about due to my inductive focus, consequently I discussed these ideas with my supervisors and peers when I felt I could have been directing my analysis. It was also important to consider that this might change, through continued coding and interpretative thinking. Therefore, I only labelled themes with psychological terms once I was confident in their applicability. Otherwise, they were noted as memos to refer back to at a later date.

I also reflected quite heavily on what was happening in my personal life at the time of analysis, as elements of my data were resonating with me due to my own experiences. During the analysis stages I experienced a lot of unrest, stress, and anxiety in my personal relationships, which made me reflect on the data in a different way. I became more aware of patterns in feeling vulnerable and emotionally unsafe, and a focus on safety and security was enhanced by my own greater sense of awareness around safety. I felt the importance of this for students, where they are in an environment where they want to feel secure and are faced with numerous things that make them feel otherwise. I then considered how I feel as a current student, the anxieties students reported, and what 'anxiety' means for me. This partnered with my consideration of the purpose of anxiety (i.e., an alert system to danger) led me to see more patterns across the data where students were feeling threat and fear as an underlying mechanism for their experiences. My own personal experiences therefore helped me to see and think about underlying feelings within the data.

Overall, reflexivity played a crucial role in shaping my approach to the data throughout my research. As a current postgraduate, with prior undergraduate experiences, my reflective process involved constant contemplation of my own student journey, growth, and social relationships. This self-awareness influenced my engagement with the participants and their salient topics, by allowing me to establish a connection in areas that resonated with my own experience. Reflecting on my own experiences allowed me to foster a comfortable environment for exploring sensitive topics when they arose and manage these conversations by empathising, reminiscing, and emotionally engaging with the stories students shared. This emotional connection propelled me to delve deeper and prompted my curiosity and genuine desire to understand their perspectives. My reflections

therefore allowed me to commit to capturing the essence of each participant's story. Reflection throughout the study has assisted me in establishing connections with participants, exploring nuanced areas, and understanding the multifaceted nature of their experiences. It has also contributed to the richness of the data collected and the depth of insights gained, showcasing the integral role of reflection in shaping my approach to the research process.

4.6. Method

4.6.1. Overview of the Study Approach and Design

This research adopts an overall phenomenological and Big Q (Kidder & Fine, 1987; Neubauer et al., 2019) approach to qualitative research, with an experiential and critical orientation. This orientation focuses on how students experience the university journey based on what they think, feel, and do. Research into student experience typically centres around commonly known impacts such as accommodation, finances, and social networks, but often fails to uncover how these areas may be interlinked psychologically. Therefore, since phenomenological studies seek to study areas where the meaning of participant's experiences is not well understood (Donalek, 2004), this approach is well suited to uncovering the underlying psychological experiences that cut across already known areas of the student experience, offering fresh insights into unexplored territory.

For Big Q approaches, there is a focus on experiential concepts, where words reflect underlying experiences, thoughts, feelings, and motivations, which is underpinned by the theoretical and epistemological assumption that language reflects reality (Terry et al., 2017). This study therefore uses semi-structured interviews to examine the lived experiences of undergraduate students, through the perspectives of students and advisors (i.e., university staff members in a student supporting role such as academic, disability and wellbeing advisors). Advisor perspectives are included as they possess a broad understanding of diverse student backgrounds and are in a position that offers great insight into the unique experiences of individual students. They are well placed to recognise common difficulties, and as an open and supportive communication channel, they facilitate a trusting environment that offers a plethora of valuable and potentially less guarded perspectives from students than what would potentially be voiced to a researcher. Their perspectives also allow the consideration of whether they align with student perspectives or offer an alternative perspective to the student experience.

Further following a Big Q approach, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to inductively analyse the student and advisor interview data. This approach was chosen because through its flexible and self-reflective approach to coding and interpretation of data, it makes an in depth understanding of lived experiences and participant accounts from a psychological perspective possible. The student analysis was conducted first, forming an inductively generated thematic structure which took the form of an analytical codebook, which aided the subsequent analysis of advisor data. The development of the codebook was data driven, constructed by the interpretative, flexible, and experientially focused coding of the student perspective data. It was then applied and further developed through the reflexive analysis of advisor data, being applied with an open interpretation in mind. This approach was taken to allow for the exploration of the research aim of whether advisor perspectives mirrored student perspectives. The codebook was therefore not used for 'coding reliability' purposes as typically seen in more positivist approaches to TA (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest et al., 2012; Joffe, 2012), but for aiding the analysis of a large dataset in time pressured circumstances and to address a specific research aim.

This approach aligns with the adopted Big Q values of theoretical independence and flexibility, involving natural and unforced coding and theme developments (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Langdrige, 2004). However, this data-driven use of codebooks seems to be less common than theory driven codebooks (Boyatzis, 1998), and even less so in partnership with RTA. Nevertheless, in this instance, it was deemed appropriate to address the specific research aim of exploring whether advisor and student perspectives align. Specifically, it allowed for greater awareness and insights into the 'similarities' between both sets of data, and whether nuanced knowledge and understanding was provided from the advisor data. Furthermore, Grix (2019) argues, whilst decisions may be made based on ontological and epistemological assumptions and the type of project being undertaken, it is important that the method chosen should be guided by your research questions. Without the use of a codebook, and had the student and advisor been analysed together from the outset, it would therefore not be possible to explore this aim.

4.6.1.1. Reflexive TA

Reflexive TA is an accessible, theoretically flexible, and interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis, involving six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022;

2012). The role of thematic analysis is to facilitate a systematic analysis of patterns of meaning, or themes, within a given dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2022). Consequently, it offered suitability in answering the research question exploring the shared psychological underpinnings of the students experience and was deemed 'fit for purpose'. Its theoretical flexibility also has a particular advantage of allowing for flexibility in my ontological and epistemological positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and being free from methodological stipulations such as how to sample or collect data provides the necessary flexibility for exploratory work. It also highlights the active role of the researcher in knowledge production, and it is considered to reflect the researcher's interpretative analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022), thus, aligning with my constructionist positioning.

Reflexive TA also encourages an inductive approach to data analysis, a flexible approach to coding, and the opportunity for both semantic and latent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; 2020). It was essential that the data was inductively coded to ensure themes were grounded in participant's perspectives. The ability to explore both surface and underlying meanings also helped to develop themes that represented the underpinnings of student experiences to directly answer the research question. Furthermore, its flexibility allowed me to adapt to the needs of the project as it unfolded, and its accessibility meant the method suited the purpose of producing research for public consumption and knowledge generation.

While other methods could have been used to uncover the depth of students' experiences, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), IPA focuses on particular moments or significant events, such as the transition to living away from home when entering higher education (Smith et al., 2022). It also focuses on the divergence and convergence within themes of common experience. For example, how a homogenous group such as those with autism experience the transition compared to another homogenous group. It therefore focuses on unique individual or a unique group of individuals' experience, rather than patterns that apply to a larger group (Smith et al., 2022). Consequently, IPA is more appropriate for smaller samples where you can zoom in on individual experience more deeply, compared to a larger and more diverse sample group such as university students. For the purposes of this research TA was therefore deemed more appropriate as it allowed for patterns across a diverse and large group (i.e., students) to be explored. Furthermore, due to the focus on direct individual experience within IPA, this would have been an inappropriate method for the exploration of advisor perspectives,

when they are not being asked about a direct experience, but their perspectives of students' experiences.

4.6.1.2. Codebook TA: Template Analysis

For the analysis of advisor data, it is important to acknowledge that I use what could be understood as a variant of codebook approaches to TA called 'template analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Template analysis is adaptable to various epistemologies, and suitable for constructionist and contextually focused work when language is looked at in a broad manner and not the sole basis for theme development (Brooks, et al. 2015). Given my constructionist and critical realist positioning, contextual aspects are acknowledged, and language is only part of my theme development strategy. Therefore, template analysis is deemed suitable. Whilst codebook approaches are more common in positivist focused research, highlighting conceptions of coding reliability and objectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022), it is not used in this way for this research. Instead, it is used in line with the Big Q approach (Kidder & Fine, 1987) and developed and applied inductively, as a tool to answer a specific research question. There is no focus on achieving coding reliability and I reject the assumptions associated with positivist coding reliability approaches. I do not assume that qualitative coding should be accurate and objective, that researcher subjectivity is flawed, that the influence of the researcher should be removed to achieve a better analysis, or that the findings exist in the data ready to be found (Terry et al., 2017). Rather, coding is an organic and flexible process, the researcher's insights are central and valuable to the process, and thorough engagement with the data is required.

The use of codebooks in TA is often seen as a 'medium q' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) that is halfway between a coding reliability and reflexive approach to TA. It involves using a predetermined coding template or 'codebook' based on literature or initial data analysis and tries to balance flexibility and structure when applying to further data (Brooks et al., 2015; King & Brooks, 2017). To adopt such flexibility, those employing codebook approaches often implement the interpretive nature of data coding and waive positivistic notions of coding reliability (Braun et al., 2019). I therefore created codes and themes through an inductive and reflexive coding approach to the student data, which formulated a codebook to be applied and reshaped through the analysis of the advisor data. The structure, however, comes from defining codes and themes with detailed descriptions and restrictions on what can be included within a code. I therefore defined the boundaries of the

codes and themes before applying it in the advisor analysis. However, the theme boundaries, codes and constructs themselves were always open to change as the analytical process remained flexible and adaptable. The codes and themes that made up the codebook were open to review and refinement through the new meanings being constructed from the data. The codebook then, offered the ability to take an inductive focus and remain reflexive, whilst assisting the analysis of a large data set and the exploration of whether advisors brought alternative perspectives. Nevertheless, its use required care in its application, through consistent reflexive practice.

4.6.2. Participants

Sample size is a vastly debated topic in qualitative research; however, Terry et al. (2017) provides some recommendations based on the scale of student projects. For those conducting a PhD project, they suggest 30+ interviews if TA data is making up the whole PhD project. As Braun and Clarke are the seminal creators of my chosen approach, I therefore aimed for this recommendation. Demographic information was collected and provided for all participants, as it helps to provide a contextual backdrop which could shape their perspectives of the university experience.

A final sample of 15 undergraduate students inclusive of 4 males and 11 females, aged between 18 and 26 ($M = 20.60$, $SD = 1.88$) were recruited. There was a mix of first, second, third, fourth and placement year students, 14 of which were of home status and 7 were first generation students. Ethnicities reported were White ($N = 10$) and Asian or Asian/British ($N = 5$). Of the 15 students, 40% reported having a disability ($N = 6$) including learning difficulties and/or a longstanding psychological or mental health condition. Students also self-reported their subjective social status and a breakdown of how students self-rated can be seen in Appendix B. Students belonged to a variety of academic disciplines of applied, physical, natural, environmental and social sciences, mathematics, business, healthcare, and humanities. A breakdown of each participant's key demographic information can be seen in table 1.

Table 1.

A table to show the key demographics for each student participant

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Year of Study | First generation | Disability |
|------------------|------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Carly | 19 | F | White | 1 | Yes | None |
| Kiera | 20 | F | White | 3 | No | Psychological |
| Ashleigh | 21 | F | White | 3 | No | Psychological |
| Timothy | 21 | M | White | 4 (placement) | No | Learning |
| Charlotte | 20 | F | White | 2 | No | Learning and Psychological |
| Julia | 18 | F | White | 1 | Yes | None |
| Eric | 20 | M | Asian/Asian British | 2 | Yes | None |
| Zhara | 21 | F | Asian/Asian British | 4 | Yes | None |
| Chloe | 20 | F | White | 2 | No | None |
| Alastair | 26 | M | Asian/Asian British | 3 | Yes | None |
| Ella | 19 | F | White | 1 | No | Psychological |
| Marcus | 22 | M | Asian/Asian British | 3 | No | None |
| Emma | 22 | F | White | 3 | Yes | Learning and psychological |
| Kelly | 21 | F | White | 3 | Yes | None |
| Meera | 19 | F | Asian/Asian British | 2 | No | None |

For advisors, a sample of 3 males and 9 females (N = 12), aged between 24 and 57 (M = 38.9, SD = 11.38) were recruited. Roles covered included student wellbeing and support advisors, support service managers, academic staff, and a study abroad co-ordinator. The full sample was of White ethnicity and 83.3% of the sample (N = 10) had been in their current role for a year or longer. Advisor and student participant samples included individuals from pre and post 1992

universities. A demographic break down for each advisor participant can be seen in table 2.

Table 2.

A table to show the key demographics for each advisor participant.

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title |
|------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Alice | 36 | F | White | Wellbeing Adviser (Mental Health) |
| Jamie | 53 | M | White | Embedded Wellbeing Adviser |
| Helen | 25 | F | White | Wellbeing Adviser (Mental Health) |
| Martha | 30 | F | White | Wellbeing Adviser |
| Beatrice | 33 | F | White | Senior Lecturer |
| Heidi | 50 | F | White | Study Abroad Co-Ordinator |
| David | 47 | M | White | Manager of Wellbeing Services |
| Isabelle | 24 | F | White | Student Wellbeing Adviser |
| Layla | 36 | F | White | Senior Student Wellbeing Adviser |
| Christian | 47 | M | White | Wellbeing Adviser |
| Josephine | 57 | F | White | Executive Support Officer |
| Evelyn | 29 | F | White | Mental Health Adviser |

I recruited advisors because it helps to get a fuller picture of the student experience not just from students but those they interact with. Specifically, advisors may have more unfiltered communication from students compared to a researcher. Advisor perspectives therefore hold a broader and potentially more in depth understanding of diverse student backgrounds that could provide greater insight into the unique

experiences of individual students. Advisors therefore provide otherwise potentially inaccessible information that contributes to the holistic understanding of the student experience. The inclusion of advisors also allows for the consideration of whether their perspectives align with students', which could have implications for support practices.

4.6.2.1. Recruitment Process

The recruitment process originally set out to recruit both undergraduate students and advisors through email and physical poster advertisements, however, due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I solely employed online recruitment methods. Student recruitment employed volunteer and snowball sampling (i.e., students being asked to forward to anyone they thought might be interested in taking part), with no inclusion criteria apart from being a current university student and over the age of 18. Advisors were purposively sampled to recruit any staff member in a student supporting role (inclusive of academic and wellbeing support). Staff groups such as administrative support were not excluded from recruitment, however the recruitment strategy included targeted emails to most frequently seen members of staff such as academic staff and student support services. Due to the language used within the recruitment advert however (Appendix C2), other members of staff such as administrative staff may not have been certain that they would be encompassed within this bracket of "student support staff" or "student advisor". Consequently, there could have been an inadvertent focus on traditional support roles such as wellbeing advisors within student support services.

To begin recruitment, I emailed all UK universities listed in the Wikipedia list of universities (Wikipedia, n.d), to request permission and/or support in recruiting their students and advisors. Emails were sent to general enquiries, support services, or Pro-Vice Chancellors where available on the university websites, inviting them to support my recruitment (Appendix C1). Most contacts were reluctant to engage in recruitment support due to increased e-mail traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic. For those willing to support recruitment, I was directed to social media platforms and given permission by Pro Vice Chancellors, group administrators or support management teams, to post recruitment adverts through social media groups specific to their university. For example, welcome page groups for the academic years running between 2018-2022, or LinkedIn pages connected to student support organisations. Advertisements were also posted more generally into Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Appendix C2), asking people to express their

interest in taking part via an online Qualtrics survey (Appendix E). Advertisements were also targeted at harder to reach student group pages such as international student Facebook groups, to attempt to recruit a diverse student sample. Those who expressed interest on the Qualtrics survey were also required to complete a demographic survey (Appendix E2; E3). On completion, participants were automatically directed to a separate form where they were asked to input their email. Those who did not meet the inclusion criteria or did not indicate their interest in taking part were timed out of the survey and no demographic data or email address was collected. The emails that were provided, were contacted with the information sheet and consent form to read, sign, and return to me via email. For both groups, snowball sampling was also employed, through asking participants at the end of their interview to share the study and my contact information with anyone they thought would be interested in taking part. For any participants recruited through snowball sampling, on receipt of their email, I shared the same information sheet, Qualtrics survey and consent form as those recruited through advertisements. For all participants that responded and returned their consent form, they were then contacted to arrange an interview time convenient for them. Once recruitment and interviews were completed, I withdrew my 'membership' to social media groups. After the study was complete, all demographic data and correspondence from students and advisors were deleted.

4.6.3. Data Collection Process

4.6.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection in this study, as it offers the opportunity to collect rich and complex data on the chosen topic, allowing for deep and nuanced insights. While focus groups were considered as an alternative method of data collection, I felt that this would detract from individual experiences and students in particular may not be as open in a group setting. Therefore, interviews were chosen to be more appropriate for the aims of the research as they provide the participants with an opportunity to explore specific topics in their own terms and discuss matters individually significant to them (Choak, 2012). Interviews were originally planned to be face to face within the participants' institution, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I adapted to online interviews, conducting 27 interviews in total. Questions for both the student and advisor interview schedules were open-ended to encourage reflection and reporting of most salient experiences. This allowed for evaluating subjective viewpoints and

gathering in-depth accounts of people's experiences (Flick, 2009). This approach was taken to also help capture the holistic perspectives the research aimed to uncover, with the reasoning that open questions avoided specific directions of talk to be elicited. For example, asking the question "What makes your time at university positive/negative?" compared to "Tell me what is positive about your academic experience" means responses can be directed by their individual experiences and can be spoken about in relation to any contexts that are relevant to that question. Prompts such as "can you tell me a little more about that" and "why do you think that is?" were occasionally used to evoke hidden meanings and encourage greater description of what they think is 'happening' within the experiences they describe. This was in aim of gathering details that would help in understanding the 'underlying' psychological phenomena at play. Thematic Analysis (TA) is also a flexible approach, suitable for analysis of a wide variety of data types, including interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), thus this approach was deemed appropriate.

4.6.3.2. Pilot Interviews

Data collection started with student and an advisor pilot studies, involving the first individual of each group to sign up via Qualtrics. They were used to inform the appropriateness of the interview schedules. In the student pilot, I found that whilst I employed open questions, some wordings implied an indirect negative or positive focus. For example, "What has effected your experience most whilst being at university", seemed to mean 'negatively' to the student, perhaps due to the use of the word 'effected'. Therefore, I added two questions following this, of "What has gone well?" and "What did you enjoy". This allowed for a wider scope of discussion around positive and negative experiences. Similarly, the question of "Please explain what hinders your experience at university" assumed the existence of such hindrances, which felt too 'directed' and less student driven. Its meaning was also unclear, as the student reported that they had previously explained what had affected their experience negatively. Consequently, this question was removed, and the final student interview schedule consisted of fourteen semi-structured questions (Appendix G1). Upon reflection, whilst some questions could have been more openly phrased, the use of positive and negative directions helped to capture all aspects of the student experience. This helped to prevent the human tendency to focus on negatives, allowing for the capture of diverse aspects of the experience.

Due to the online nature of the interview, I initially struggled to maintain focus compared to previous face to face experiences. This prompted me to adapt and

familiarise myself with MS Teams and online interviewing practices, as I felt this was due to unfamiliarity with conducting interviews online. I also felt less 'connection' with my participants than expected, due to differing camera angles and concerns of appearing attentive. To mitigate this, I used visual cues such as nodding, smiling, and verbal feedback such as noises of agreement. As I was unaware of what participant's surroundings were, I also checked that they were comfortable, and they had what they needed around them to ensure their comfort (e.g., a drink). I mirrored this in my own space, so that my participants may feel able to do this themselves. Throughout my interviews, I became more comfortable and confident in conducting them online, and I found that engaging in casual conversation at the start helped build rapport and fostered more open dialogue. Recognizing this, I incorporated more informal talk into subsequent interviews, enhancing rapport in the online setting. For example, I started with a general conversation about how their day was going, how their weekend had been, or a general conversation about something in their surroundings that I could see such as an instrument or painting.

Upon piloting the advisor interview schedule, like the student pilot, some questions were misunderstood, whilst some were deemed irrelevant for different roles. This prompted adjustments to ensure relevance across diverse roles before continuing with my research. For example, the question "Tell me what you observe in terms of the demographics of students accessing support from your university services/you/academic tutors" aimed to explore how different students experience university. However, the participant was an academic advisor, and understood this question to mean 'what variety of students do you see'. However, whilst this was not my intention for the question it did provide contextual understanding of their role and what direct experience they had with different types of students. As a result, I decided to keep the question for contextual understanding, and added the question of "Tell me what you observe in terms of the struggles across different demographics of students". This was important to include for both clarity of what was being asked, and wider reflections, as 'observing' may come from many aspects of their role that are not solely based upon their direct provision of support. The final interview schedule consisted of twelve semi-structured questions (Appendix G2).

Reflecting further, in combination with the first interview of a wellbeing advisor, I perceived a distance between the advisor and myself as a 'student'. Their manner conveyed a position of being the knowledgeable party, advocating for their role and services during the interview. This was mirrored throughout the post pilot interviews.

Advisors also spoke of their own perspectives which were not always clearly connected to student examples. On reflection, I therefore wondered how much of their perspectives were built from experiences within their role, or their own cultural, historical, and social backdrops. This is unclear and hard to determine from the interviews apart from when they relate something to a specific example from their personal experience, but it encouraged me to be contextually aware of the interview and advisor data. Prior to the interviews, I thought I would receive more student focused experiential data, but as the interview proceeded, I realised how much of their own opinions and attitudes towards students and their 'generation' was a part of their perspectives. To me, reflecting on this at the end of my research, has only made findings more interesting, as despite this, there is still an alignment between the datasets that built the underlying themes.

4.6.3.3. Procedure of Interviews

Following the pilot studies, interviews were organised via email as participants signed up. Interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), and audio and video recorded via its inbuilt recording functionality. Recordings were downloaded and converted into mp3 audio format using Camtasia, a video editing software, and stored in a password protected folder, on a password protected computer, separate to consent forms and any identifying information.

For student interviews, the interview schedule explored positive and negative aspects of experience, what would make their experience better, desired support, and reflections on their role as undergraduates (e.g., what would you do differently, if anything; (Appendix G1). On average, the interviews lasted 61 minutes (Min = 37 minutes, Max = 124 minutes). On completion, participants received a £10 amazon voucher as remuneration, and offered the opportunity to receive the findings of the study once the study was complete. Students were reimbursed both to encourage recruitment during the challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to be in accordance with the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). This states that incentives should be proportionate to the extent of burden of participation, and a £10 voucher was deemed an appropriate remuneration for their time. The code of ethics also states that incentives should be the same for all participants, therefore all students that took part were given the same remuneration, regardless of the length of their interviews.

Advisor interview schedules mirrored student interviews, exploring what contributes positively and negatively to the university experience, common issues, needed support, and suggestions for improvement (Appendix G2). On average, interviews lasted 56 minutes (Min = 49 minutes, Max = 54 minutes). Advisors were not given remuneration for participating, as their contribution was deemed important for the contribution to research and human wellbeing; an appropriate justification outlined by the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). As this group included student support staff, and they were willing to participate based on the shared enthusiasm and drive to improve student wellbeing and experience, students were therefore prioritised for the allocation of funds and remuneration.

4.6.4. Ethics application, procedures and thinking.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the UEA Psychology Ethics Committee on 12th March 2021 (Ethical Approval code: 2020-0148-001978). Ethical thinking and decisions were necessary across various stages of the study, from designing, to analysis, and reporting. Ethical thinking is a concept driven by Tolich and Tumilty (2020), emphasising how integral ethical considerations are throughout the research process. They explain that procedural ethics have limited efficacy for qualitative research due to its changeable nature, and what is needed is “agile and responsive ethics praxis” (p. 16). I.e., ethical thinking and decisions that occur throughout the process and in response to changes during the entire research process. Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight that ethical thinking involves considering from whom, where and how we collect data, and indicated that “the British Psychological Society 2009 human ethics code highlighted that ethical thinking “*is not optional*” (p.28). Therefore, I embraced ethical thinking throughout this research, reflecting throughout (Appendix I), and offered the expected procedural considerations one would expect in qualitative research.

The common procedural ethics exercised related to anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, my potential impact on the participants, and protection of the researcher. Specifically, all participants gave informed consent to take part in the study, with knowledge that their data would be transcribed, analysed, and reported collectively in this thesis (Appendix F). Participants were also informed that direct quotes may be used from their transcripts and that their data would be used in potential research papers published from this thesis, but that they would never be identified personally. Participants were offered the opportunity to withdraw at any

point during the interview, and that they could remove their data up to 14 days after interview completion, but after this time, it would not be possible to do so (Appendix D1; D2). Participants created an individual participant identification code to keep their data anonymous and for the purpose of removal of data within the 14-day withdrawal period.

Anonymity of participants was a primary concern; thus, pseudonyms were given in replacement of participant names and any names mentioned. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, all identifying information, including locations, company names, and university names, were redacted from the transcript. Due to universities requesting anonymity, these are also not included in this thesis and university-based demographics are split into pre and post 1992 universities. Participant demographics and interview data were also kept in separate password protected folders on a password protected computer. After the study was complete, all data was deleted.

Audio files of the interviews were transcribed by a professional third-party transcription service. They were required to sign a confidentiality agreement to retain the anonymity and protection of those taking part and I am confident the conditions of the confidentiality agreement were met by the service. Additionally, the risk to the participant remains low as files were edited to remove initial introductions, with only some mentioning their own name in first name formats later in their interviews. Recordings of the interviews were saved into password protected folders and deleted after transcription and analysis was complete.

Whilst care was taken to ensure no obviously sensitive questions were asked in the interview schedule, I anticipated participants may voluntarily discuss sensitive or personal information. I therefore prepared phrases to navigate such topics, to ensure ethically sensitive responses. Examples of these include: "do you mind if I ask you a question about X? remember you do not have to answer if you don't want to" and "that sounds really difficult, are you happy to continue discussing this topic or would you like to move on?". This was deemed crucial, because it is always possible that a participant may need me to take action to protect them from emotional upset (Varpio & McCarthy, 2018). This could involve anything from interrupting the interview, diverting to something less emotionally demanding, or signposting them to appropriate assistance. Thus, my pre-prepared phrases equipped me to respond to the sensitivities and risk of psychological harm if presented. Nevertheless, despite having pre-prepared phrases, my natural

inclination to support participants led to using similar expressions organically. However, balancing the need to guide conversations away from distressing topics while respecting participants' reflections emphasised the importance of being attuned to signs of discomfort. As a final protective strategy, a verbal and written debrief was provided at the end of the interview (Appendix H1; H2), providing the opportunity to raise any issues, and contact information for support services in the event of any concerns.

My potential impact as the researcher was also considered in my ethical thinking. As a postgraduate student who has their own student experience, this could have shaped how my participants responded to me. Holding the insider positionality of a current student (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), this may have evoked a level of trust towards me among student participants, through a sense of likeness with themselves and potent 'kinship' with those also interested in supporting fellow students. Through this, student participants may have experienced more rapport than they would have done with a staff positioned researcher within a university, providing a greater sense of safety in the interview. However, this could have also had potential negative impacts on rapport and depth of meaning, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) posit, "It is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully" (p. 58). Furthermore, if students have ever experienced negative communications with other 'insiders', they may also refrain from full disclosure. I was therefore mindful of portraying myself as a 'peer' and noted my past experiences only when relevant to help portray my empathy. Otherwise, I held a position as a researcher by not oversharing. This approach was taken to encourage a respectful and supportive environment with the intention of cultivating trust, communication, and cooperation.

When conducting online interviews, there is a nuance in how ethical principles are applied, as we cannot 'carelessly' assume that the ways in which we apply them in face-to-face interviews, directly transfer to online spaces (Engward et al., 2022). Thus, I considered how the online space can produce connection or separation between the interviewer and interviewee. It is possible that being in their own environment could have facilitated discussions due to heightened levels of comfort by being in their own space. However, physical distance may impact researcher's sensitivity towards participants, as engaging in active listening can be more difficult in online discussions, and the process of 'ending' the interview can bring an abruptness when the 'end call' button is pressed. Consequently, I indicated to

participants that their responses were interesting and reflected what they said back to them, to demonstrate my attentiveness and encourage rapport. Towards the end of the interview, I verbalised I only had a couple of questions left to ask, to reduce the 'abruptness' of the end of an online interview, giving participants the chance to prepare for the closing. I also ended the interview on a positively framed question, to encourage a positive mindset on leaving the interview space. I also allowed time for participants to share additional thoughts, contributing to a gradual winding down of the interview in their own time. Once the interview stopped, I indicated that I was about to stop the recording but continued a conversation and thanked them for their responses. After stopping the recording, I provided a verbal debrief, expressed gratitude for their participation, and assured them of continued support via email for any questions or concerns. This provided a smooth transition to the end of the interview and gave participants a chance to 'wind down' after potentially sensitive discussions, before being left in their own space to process the interview.

As the interviews were conducted online, online safety was also considered. To ensure privacy, I conducted the interviews in a private space so participants could not be heard, and if anyone was present in my surroundings, i.e., my home, I wore earphones. Participants were also instructed to be in a private space where they could talk freely and without interruption. This is particularly important, as visible information about their surroundings is determined by the participant, and the wider context in which they are situated remains concealed (Engward et al., 2022). Furthermore, considering the potential for sensitive discussion, the presence of others may influence disclosure and hold unknown risks to the participant. To reduce further risk, MS Teams was also connected to a private network at the University of East Anglia, therefore only I could gain access to my account where interviews were conducted and downloaded. When interviews were entered into the online calendar, they were also marked as 'private', reducing the risk of identifiable information being accessed by anyone outside of the research team. On the completion of the interview, the meeting was deleted from the calendar. Much of these considerations were new to me as a researcher and highlights the additional layers of ethical thinking that is required for conducting interviews online. This provided an opportunity not only for the development of my interviewing skills but also my knowledge of ethical considerations. It also provided me with knowledge of how to best protect myself and my participants in an unfamiliar research context. For example, I created a list of emergency phone numbers including police, mental health charities and helplines before the interviews took place, in case they were

needed. I also collated contact details of the support services at each university that the participants belonged to, in case I needed to contact them for immediate support. Having this to hand and provided in the debrief, made me feel more confident in protecting my participants, as I felt more prepared to respond to difficult situations and protect them from a distance.

Considerations of protecting myself as the researcher typically related to potential disclosures that could impact me emotionally. To mitigate this, I implemented a 'wind down' process after completing an interview, allowing me space to digest, reflect and rest from the discussions. This typically consisted of a cup of a tea, some fresh air, and a snack. This gave me time to process the interview and make note of any reflections post interview in my reflexive diary. My reflexive diary was a strategic tool for engaging in ethical thinking, as I was able to note any thoughts, reflections, and concerns throughout the process (Appendix I).

Another aspect of my ethical thinking considered my responsibility to minimise harm within the process of data collection and the process of interpreting and representing the voices of those participating in the study (i.e., representational ethics; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This involved not shaping the data to tell *my* story, or a story I want to tell, and being mindful of misrepresenting the stories of my participants. I was committed to avoiding glossing over complexities in the data for ease, convenience, or simplicity of analysis, as this is described by Braun and Clarke (2022), as "the 'ugly stepsister' in the fairy-tale Cinderella, trying to force her foot into the glass slipper" (p. 202). I therefore reflected on this throughout the interviewing, coding, analysis and write up of this research (Appendix I; O). This allowed me to consider fully, whether I was directing my analysis towards things I wanted to emphasise, rather than what seemed pertinent to the participants. I was mindful of my own experiences and how they could have been shaping my reading and coding of the data, often noting the multiple ways I could have interpreted a particular 'chunk' of data. I would also revisit original data to ensure my coding depicted as close as possible, the meaning of what was being said. This comprehensive and systematic checking, meant that I remained grounded in my data, acknowledging the lived experiences of my participants and their stories, rather than my own narrative. This process ensures the confirmability of my work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where the findings and interpretations reflected the views of the participants and were not directed by my own agenda. Furthermore, in discussions with my supervisors, I maintained awareness of their perspectives on my data, being mindful of potential influence from their views on students and the

university context. I made deliberate choices to consider their comments critically rather than automatically incorporating them into my analysis. This approach further supported my attendance to grounding my analysis in the perspectives of my participants.

There is also the ethical challenge of telling the story of the data in a way which resonates with my participants. Whilst I can try to describe the experiences in a way that remains representative of individual perspectives, it is not guaranteed that I will tell an overall story about student experience that *everyone* will agree with. The story reflects patterned meanings based upon a variety of perspectives and a range of data, therefore, the themes and story presented, will be both familiar and unfamiliar to participants at different points (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As I am tasked with taking the analysis further than what is simply said within the interview, to broader more conceptual understandings of what is 'going on' (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Chamberlain, 2011; Willig, 2017), I am interpreting and making sense of the data in terms of their perspectives but also the knowledge I bring to the process. Whilst I keep as close to the data and lived experiences of the individuals as possible throughout the analysis, there may be overarching concepts that do not explicitly 'fit' with every individual's overall experience and as such I remain mindful of how this is communicated in Part III (Thematic Outcomes).

I was mindful and considerate of how I represent my themes and talk about students and their experiences; with the additional consideration of the implications this could have in wider society. I felt that it was important to consider how my representation of their experiences may go against or encourage a socially just society (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I must take care in my research, to not reinforce existing negative stereotypes associated with the student population and universities being careful not to attribute blame or ignite the 'snowflake generation' critiques of the participant group included in this study (Oxford Learner Dictionary, 2022; Webster & Rivers, 2019). For example, when students are voicing offence or things being difficult to manage, it was important to recognise these as very real experiences, rather than assuming an underlying 'laziness' or predisposition to become 'easily offended' that is circulated among the media and societal discourse (De Witte, 2022; Nicholson, 2016). This was particularly noteworthy for the theme of 'Steering the Ship' which signified the willingness or not of students to take charge of their experience, and their ability to self-govern. The data needed to be framed in a way that did not unjustifiably encourage the 'laziness' discourse applied to this generation. Such a presentation of findings would delimit the purpose of the

research to widen understanding of student experience and would not remain foregrounded in their perspectives, thus reducing the credibility of this work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, care was taken to explain where their perspectives come from and why it is important to understand.

4.6.5. Overview of the approach to analysis

In brief, the analysis encompassed datasets from two groups of participants: students and advisors. The method of analysis followed the stages of Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This includes Familiarising yourself with the Data, Coding, Generating initial themes, Developing and reviewing themes, Refining, defining, and naming themes, and Writing up. This systematic process enabled the organisation of a rich and descriptive dataset and allowed for patterns of meaning to be constructed from the data to produce thematic outcomes. The student interview data was analysed first, whereby the codes and themes constructed formulated a codebook (i.e., coding template). This codebook was flexibly applied to the advisor dataset, with themes, their boundaries and respective codes being open to review, change, and refinement through any newly constructed meanings from the advisor data. Specifically, new ideas from the advisor data could shape new codes and themes, or re-shape existing codes and themes. The advisor analysis therefore became a further process of developing and reviewing themes, and refining, defining and naming themes, contributing to the finalisation process of the overall thematic outcomes of this research. Both the student and advisor data shaped the final thematic outcomes. This process will be further explained from section 4.6.6 to 4.6.9.

An inductive approach was taken for the overall approach to analysis, due to this research being experientially based and experiential work lending itself to this type of analysis. Furthermore, my theoretical stance encompasses a constructionist epistemology (see section 4.3), meaning the analysis should be guided by the data, not literature or existing theory. Consequently, this epistemological positioning further supports the decision to develop a template or codebook from an initial analysis of student perspectives, when a 'codebook' can be based on initial data analysis and flexibly applied to further data (Brooks et al., 2015; King & Brooks, 2017). It is also important to specify, that whilst codebooks are often applied in a positivist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2022), Braun and Clarke (2012) stipulate that whilst there is often a combination of both inductive and deductive coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2019; 2020; Byrne, 2021), one approach tends to

dominate over the other (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and indicates the overall orientation towards meaning driven or theory driven analysis. Consequently, in this research, an inductive orientation was upheld; namely due to taking a data driven approach to both the initial student analysis, codebook development and its flexible use for the advisor analysis. Specifically, it does not incorporate theoretically driven coding and involved a constant reviewing of the data and its meanings to remain flexible and open to re-shaping codes and themes.

The overall inductive approach involved both semantic and latent analysis, whereby latent analysis produces insightful subtext surrounding participant statements and the experiences that underlie their explicit responses. Thus, this approach is aligned with the aim of this research to uncover the *underlying* psychological phenomena of the student experience. Semantic analysis, however, involves coding surface level meanings, and was deemed appropriate for understanding the explicit contexts in which the underlying phenomena occur, aligning with the critical realist aspect of this work (Terry et al., 2017). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used to assist the analysis process of both student and advisor data, and a research journal was kept to both record and reflect on the process and practice of my research (Appendix O). This was in attempt to maintain robust qualitative practice and establish quality (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in the form of dependability, as the process can be evidenced and understood as transparent and logical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through providing transparent and auditable evidence of the research process.

4.6.6. Student Analysis

On retrieval of the interview transcriptions from the transcription service, I listened to the interview files and simultaneously reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy, inputting any inaudible data marked by the service and correcting any errors. Through this process, I began the first phase of Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of Reflexive TA: Familiarising yourself with the data.

4.6.6.1. Familiarising yourself with the Data

After checking transcripts for errors and inputting inaudible sections, familiarisation continued by reading and re-reading the data transcripts. This process gave me a sense of 'knowing' the dataset and involved creating memos to capture initial thoughts and interesting observations (Appendix O2). Following Braun et al.'s (2016) guidance, I engaged reflexively with this process, by considering participants

underlying assumptions and worldviews, and any implications the account might have. Memos noted throughout this process were useful to consider in the next phase of analysis, coding.

4.6.6.2. Coding

This section explains the systematic process of semantic and latent coding that was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998) and is broken down in Appendix J1. Latent coding was used because it can “capture implicit meaning, such as ideas, meanings, concepts, assumptions, which are not explicitly stated” (Terry et al., 2017; p. 23); whereas semantic coding only offers explicit meanings and surface level interpretation of the data. Semantic coding was used to note the contexts in which the data sat, and highlight how, and in what contexts the underlying psychological phenomena were being experienced. Latent coding, however, fits with the inductive and constructionist approach, as it allows for focus upon *how* students experience university, not just what they experience. Thus, this goes beyond the expressed meaning and highlights the underlying patterns and stories in the data (Terry et al., 2017).

Firstly, I generated semantic coding, quickly tagging words and phrases with labels to represent the explicit meanings of the data. This process was conducted quickly with as little ‘reasoning’ thought processes as possible (Appendix J2). To keep my coding relevant to my research questions, I displayed this alongside my data. Memos were made during this process, where I recorded any thoughts, feelings or interpretations that came to mind (Appendix O2). Whilst the focus was on semantic meaning, it was sometimes difficult to ignore latent interpretations, therefore any ‘latent’ coding ideas coming to mind were also noted. Memos made throughout the first coding phase also supported my continued familiarisation with the data.

After the initial tagging process, I then conducted a second round of coding, where the initial codes were revised with reasoning thought and/or developed to represent more interpretative meanings (Appendix J3). To remain close to the data, I utilised direct phrasings or words used by the participants where possible. Initial codes were then developed and expanded through several rounds of coding, and the latent focus of analysis was embedded by regularly asking myself ‘what is the underlying meaning of the data being coded or the code itself?’. During this process I revisited the memos made from the familiarisation and tagging process to support moving beyond the explicit meaning within initial codes. However, whilst previous memos

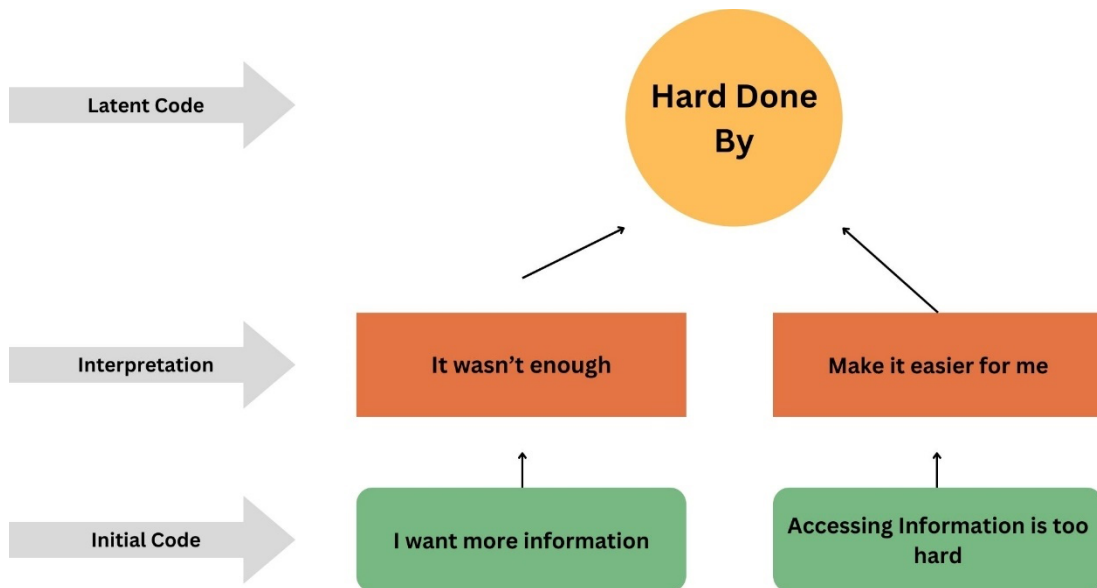
were considered, they did not delimit the scope of coding, as I remained open to new meanings being constructed through my latent questioning. Clear patterns of meaning across the data were labelled with the same initial codes or were combined to produce more 'focused' codes to support the management of a large dataset.

Next, I discussed the initial coding with my supervisory team and discussed 'underlying' experiences I felt were being expressed (Appendix J4), to gain confidence in my coding and act as a way of processing my understanding and familiarisation with the data and review my process of analysis. This was also considered important for quality assurance and confirmability of my analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), such as whether my findings and interpretations were linked to the data. This was done at several stages throughout coding, to grant time for debriefing and to help me explore how my thoughts and ideas were evolving as I engaged more deeply with the data. I then continued my coding process but switched to entering the codes into NVivo (Appendix J5a), as I was aware I was struggling to manage the large amount of physical data. Specifically, I felt that I could be losing sight of connections across the dataset because I was struggling to make changes and adapt reflexively to newly constructed meanings. NVivo therefore offered the opportunity to review, edit and move codes more easily across the dataset.

It was expected that during the next phase of generating themes, latent codes would continue to be developed through analysing patterns of meaning across semantic codes that did not have a latent meaning at this stage. On entering codes into NVivo, they were also entered into the map function, to support the process of grouping similar meanings and creating further focused codes (Appendix J5b); this tool allowed me to 'see' patterns of meaning more clearly than in the code list. Any changes made within the map were also reflected in the list of codes (Appendix J5c). At any point during the NVivo process, codes could also change to better reflect the latent meaning of the original data, and/or be re-organised (Appendix J5d). An example of a semantic to latent organisation, is evidenced in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Semantic to latent code development.



For example, where it felt like multiple things were ‘happening’ or being experienced, more than one code was created (Example 3 in Appendix J3). However, throughout this process it was important to remain close to the original data, thus I continuously checked the original data and its context to certify confidence in the understanding of meaning. I also used semantic codes as a springboard for ideas when I was unsure of the underlying meaning of the data (Example 5 in Appendix J3). On switching to the use of NVivo, my memos and reflections were made within the memo function rather than my physical reflexive diary (Appendix O). Notes were also entered into the coding map to support my thinking (Appendix J5d). The next stage of generating themes therefore started during this process of checking and refining codes, where continued patterns of meaning were formed.

4.6.6.3. Generating initial themes.

To generate initial themes, focused codes were collated in the mapping function of NVivo (Appendix K) based on shared meanings and assigned an overarching label that represented this shared meaning. Use of the map meant individual codes and groupings could be moved freely and edited easily to mirror developing thoughts and patterns. This was therefore not a linear process but occurred through the

continual revisiting and re-development of coding, often involving checking back to the data when codes were unclear, and refining labels for clarity.

This process also involved reviewing patterns among the more semantic levels of data, or a combination of semantic and latent codes. For example, I had an initial theme of 'conditions of learning' which represented student experiences of learning. However, this was overly semantic and contextual, and attention to the underlying psychological experiences was missing (Appendix L1). Consequently, I asked myself, 'what is going on psychologically?' to review my coding and break the contextual theme down into its psychological elements. These could be combined with other initial themes and/or collated with other focused codes to create new latent ideas (Appendix L2). When I felt confident in the grouping of codes, I organised codes in the list to reflect the same organisation seen in the mapping (Appendix K). This made themes easier to review and develop.

4.6.6.4. Developing and Reviewing themes

Developing and reviewing themes involved reflecting on the initial theme organisations, considering whether the data was organised around a single analytical concept, the distinctiveness, interconnectivities, and boundaries of themes, and whether they tell a coherent story of the data that addresses the research question (Braun et al., 2016). To assess whether the themes had distinct central concepts, I reviewed the codes and revisited the original data, ensuring that the meanings represented the overarching concept. I adjusted code names where relevant and moved any that seemed more fitting for alternative themes. Iteratively moving between themes, coding, and the original data was crucial to grounding the themes in the initial dataset and building confidence in the constructed patterns of meaning. This process contributed to the overall confirmability of the analysis by reinforcing the links between data, codes, and themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

When considering whether the central concepts of my themes were distinct, I considered whether there were relationships, interconnections, or boundaries between them. For example, using the example of 'autonomy and agency', it became clear that this concept was connected to other themes such as 'making choices' and 'power to create change'. This subsequently developed into the overarching theme around the concept of 'Steering the Ship', where students express how they engage with being active agents in their student journeys (Appendix L3). Continuing with the example of 'Steering the Ship', I began to see

the ways in which student's sense of autonomy and agency, and their ability to self-govern, was influencing or being influenced by other themes, thus this was created as a central organising concept of the entire dataset.

The boundaries of themes were established by assessing whether they told a story that encompasses experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the analytical concept they represent, standalone from the other themes. For example, 'Expectations of the university experience' did not represent the same meaning as 'Steering the Ship'. Whilst it is near-impossible to have themes that are devoid of interconnections however, it was important to establish where those interconnections and boundaries are, to tell a coherent and compelling story of the data, which would address my research questions (Braun et al., 2016), but also for the development of the codebook to be applied to the advisor data. At this point, it was therefore important to consider how the themes were named by checking back to the codes of the themes to ensure the label assigned to the theme represented the central psychological concept. These theme organisations were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet, to represent the codebook (Appendix M).

4.6.7 Codebook Development and Application

The thematic outcomes of the inductive student analysis represented in the excel file and NVivo, formulated a codebook (i.e., coding template) to use for the analysis of the advisor data. The previous analytical stages of the student data therefore make up the development of the codebook. An excel spreadsheet was used to document the codebook, including definitions of each theme, and examples of focused codes, to guide its application to advisor data (Appendix M2). This method was adopted to address the aim of exploring whether there were shared perspectives of the student experience, between students and advisors. Specifically, it allowed for potential new themes to be created through any perspectives that misaligned or diverged from students', demonstrating whether their perspectives were aligned.

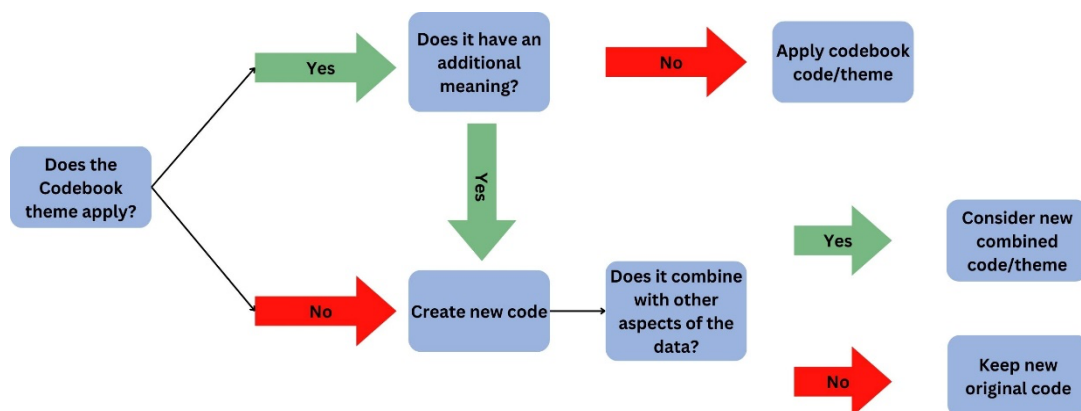
I started the advisor analysis however, by returning to the initial stages of Braun and Clarke's RTA (2022), beginning with familiarising myself with the advisor data, reading and re-reading the transcripts. This was to ensure I retained an inductive focus to this analytical stage. It helped to see whether there were any obvious differences in the data compared to the student analysis constructed codebook, before applying it to a small subset of advisor transcripts. On familiarising with the

data, it was deemed that there were no explicitly obvious differences between the two datasets.

Following this, I took a small subset of advisor transcripts (N = 3) to analyse with the use of the codebook. Similar to the student data analysis process, advisor data was coded line by line or by chunks of meaning (Appendix M3). Codes reflected theme, sub-theme or focused code labels that already existed within the codebook where appropriate. An inductive focus was retained by asking myself whether an alternative meaning made more 'sense' in relation to the data. If this was the case, a new code was created rather than applying an existing theme or focused code. This systematic process is demonstrated in figure 2.

Figure 2:

Application process of the Codebook



After analysing the subset of advisor data, I discussed with my supervisors how the codebook was working. Specifically, we discussed whether the codes were reflecting advisor meanings, in order to gain confidence in its development and applicability. It was assessed that the advisor data shared meanings with the existing themes, with no obvious divergences or contradictions. The codebook was therefore deemed appropriate to apply to the full dataset. One thing to note however, is that whilst the themes did not change, some new codes were created for the advisor data when I felt it helped my understanding to do so. These were then organised into the existing themes, sub-themes or codes of which they shared meaning. This was done purposefully to ensure I engaged with the data thoroughly and reflexively. The approach demonstrated in figure 2 was therefore taken

throughout the rest of the advisor analysis to continue this reflexive and thorough engagement.

The excel codebook and NVivo map were adapted to reflect any new codes, ideas, and renaming of themes (Appendix M4). Thus, the process of advisor analysis and codebook application formed part of Braun and Clarke's (2022) phase of Refining, Defining, and Naming the finalised themes of the overall research (Appendix M5). Quotations were also added into the excel spreadsheet to demonstrate examples of where advisor data was being applied to the existing codebook (Appendix M6). This process also answered the research question of whether the advisor perspectives aligned with student perspectives, as no divergent themes were constructed from their data. Specifically, as no new themes were created, it was deemed their perspectives aligned.

4.6.8. Refining, Defining and Naming themes

When finalizing my themes, I considered whether together, they told a coherent and compelling story of the data that addressed my research question (Braun et al., 2016). To determine clarity of my themes, I reviewed their content and labels, considering whether the label 'evoked' their story without needing to read them. The central organising theme of 'Steering the Ship' supported the names of other themes and make sense of the overall story of my data, as I was able to connect the theme contents to the metaphor of the ship and its journey. For example, for the theme of 'A stable and secure base' I used a metaphorical harbour to give a real sense of the stability students need. A metaphorical harbour would provide safety, protection, and a stable environment to a ship during storms, and you can get a sense of what this metaphorical 'harbour' would look like for a student. The use of ship related metaphors in labelling my themes allowed me to not only reduce volumes of data into meaningful categories, but also enabled me to clearly represent the complexities in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) through the application of a known and accessible phenomena of which a lay person will already understand (Moss et al., 2003 as cited in Carpenter, 2008). The final stage of analysis then came through the writing of this thesis.

4.6.9. Writing Up

On writing about my themes, I continued to see where the boundaries and interconnections of my themes were, and how to explain the story of my data. It also helped me to identify where labels were confusing or misrepresentative of the key

aspects of data, therefore small adjustments were made to theme names to provide more clarity. For instance, 'Steering the Ship' became 'Steering the Ship: Being the Captain', to evoke more of a sense of what is going on in the context of the student. The addition of 'being the captain' presents the reader with an understanding already, of the aspect of responsibility involved with steering and what this might entail. Particularly, this allowed me to emphasize some features over others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), giving me the ability to highlight the key element of the theme itself. The use of overarching metaphors has also been argued to explain relationships more clearly among concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, the use of metaphors allowed me to give a structure to the data and it supported my telling of the story (Carpenter, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994) also suggested that metaphors should not be developed too soon during analysis as it may result in projecting metaphors onto the data or manipulating the data to fit the metaphors.

4.7. Contextualising the COVID-19 Impact:

This research was conducted mid-way through the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, the themes constructed are not specific to a COVID-19 impact, and instead represent experiences that were already present prior to this event. Advisor David, states *"I think some of what they're experiencing, they would have experienced pre-COVID in terms of adjusting, transitions, finding their feet, and dealing with workload. But I think that COVID has magnified it"*. Therefore, whilst COVID-19 comes up as a fundamental topic of concern and impact upon student experience, the COVID-19 pandemic seemingly heightening already existing experiences (See Appendix O6 for a covid reflection).

Part III: Thematic Outcomes

Introduction to the Findings

The study aimed to understand and give voice to undergraduate student and advisor perspectives of the undergraduate student experience. Part III presents the thematic outcomes of the research after following Braun and Clarke's (2022; 2006) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The themes represent the psychological underpinnings that shape the undergraduate student experience, from the perspectives of students and advisors. These are outlined as follows:

- **Chapter 5: Steering and Steadying the Ship**
 - ❖ Theme 1: Steering the Ship: Being the Captain
 - ❖ Theme 2: Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance
- **Chapter 6: To be Together, Secure and Stable**
 - ❖ Theme 3: A Safe Harbour: Having a Secure and Stable Base
 - ❖ Theme 4: We're in this Ship Together: Being a Crew
- **Chapter 7: Navigating, Growing, and Adjusting to Challenges**
 - ❖ Theme 5: Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Preservation and Perseverance
 - ❖ Theme 6: The Mists of Mismatch: "This isn't what I Expected"
 - ❖ Theme 7: Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds
 - ❖ Theme 8: Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience

Whilst organised into chapters, the chapter titles do not represent themes themselves but due to their depth and length, they are organised in this way for ease of reading. The thematic structure of each theme is presented in Table 3, and each theme is independently delineated. While the themes are distinct, *Steering the Ship* also serves as a central organising theme of the entire thematic structure, which is facilitated and thwarted by other key themes. Additionally, it shapes the experience of the other themes in return. Consequently, the key inter-influences between the themes are detailed in Chapter 8. This section offers key interinfluences between themes to show how the psychological underpinnings are not just experienced as standalone concepts; but can shape how others are constructed and experienced. However, not all interconnections can be explained in this thesis due to their complexity, therefore greater attention has been given to identifying the key inter-influences with *Steering the Ship*. Thus, future directions are discussed in Chapter 10, for how a greater understanding of their interconnectivities could be achieved. Throughout the analysis, students will be referred to by their

pseudonym (e.g., Charlotte), and advisors will be indicated using “Advisor” followed by their pseudonym, (e.g., Advisor David).

Table 3

Themes and their sub-themes

| Theme | Sub-Themes |
|--|---|
| Steering the Ship: Being the Captain | Having agency and being agentic Having autonomy Self-empowerment Choice |
| Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance | Emotion Regulation Establishing Balance Maintaining a Balance |
| A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base | A Secure Base It's about how you feel Safety and Security The University Habitat A 'Web' of Support |
| We're All In This Ship Together: Being a Crew | The 'people' are an Anchor Co-creation of community Cohesion and Unity |
| Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation | Preparedness Self-Preservation Proactivity Perseverance |
| The Mists of Mismatch: “This isn't what I Expected” | A victim of 'less than' Who is responsible? Managing expectations Doing what my parents want Mismatch of expectations and reality Quid pro quo Setting the bar for myself What is normal for social groups What 'uni' is Expected resilience and to 'just do it' |

| | |
|---|--|
| Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds | Embracing change and adaptation Growth through challenges Learning from others Self-discovery and personal growth Sense of direction Sense of progress Adjusting to transitions in personal, academic and social spheres Takes time to adjust |
| Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience | Doing what you enjoy Doing what's comfortable Does it suit 'me', the person I am Matches my strengths and abilities One size doesn't fit all Personality of communication What 'works' for the student |

To answer the research question of whether student and advisor perspectives aligned, it is important to highlight that there was reasonable synergy across the data. Whilst some minimal contrasts lie within themes, such as where responsibilities lie for the student and university, such contrasts did not conflict in terms of the psychological underpinning they represent. It was therefore deemed that because there were not sufficient novel codes to produce additional thematic outcomes, student and advisor perspectives of the student experience aligned.

The metaphor of a Ship and its journey is used to represent the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate experience. Specifically, the student experience mirrors aspects of a ship's journey. For example, students must *Steer the Ship* (i.e., themselves) towards their goals, maintain their ship, (i.e., their health and wellbeing), and work alongside a crew (i.e., a support network) that supports them in reaching their destination. How prepared students feel to navigate their journey, and the tactics they use to cope, are important for *Navigating the Storms* (i.e., difficulties and challenges) of university life. Such challenges include unmet expectations, where they sail into *A Mist of Mismatch* between reality and what they expect. Consequently, students often desire for the university to *Adjust the Sails for Me*. However, students must learn to become the captain through their ability to *Adapt and Grow with the Changing Winds*, as they experience multiple challenges

and transitional periods. The Challenges of being a 'captain' of their ship then are often easier to manage and navigate, when students feel *Steady*; a feeling established through emotion regulation, have a work-life balance, feel *All On this Ship Together*, and have a *Safe Harbour*. Only then, can students actively *Steer their Ship* through their academic and personal journeys.

Chapter 5: Steering and Steadying the Ship

5.1. Introduction to Chapter:

This chapter introduces Theme 1: *Steering the Ship* and Theme 2: *Steadying the Ship*. *Steering the Ship* represents self-government and empowerment, with students grappling with becoming active players in their experience. Students desire to alleviate some burdens and return to familiar support structures. However, they also seek autonomy and control, signifying the need for the ability and capability to *Steer their Ship*. The theme is also offered as a central organising theme of the overall analysis which is explored in Chapter 8.

Steadying the Ship focuses on the need and process of establishing balance and equilibrium; through support, emotion management and establishing a work-life balance. Students require emotional and practical balance to prevent a metaphorical capsizing of their ship. This theme primarily intersects with *Steering the Ship*, whereby a student's sense of stability or instability can encourage or thwart their ability to take control of their journey. This interconnection is explored in Chapter 8.

5.2. Steering the Ship: Being the Captain

Imagine the student experience as a ship's journey and the captain is the student. *Steering the Ship* is about self-government, empowerment, and students actively steering their experience like a captain would steer their ship. Students are faced with realising it is "*probably time to sort of take control of this now that I'm a legal adult and kind of in my own space*" (Kiera), where like a 'legal' adult, they now hold responsibility. It is about being at the helm, and they are the helmsperson. Students are required, often with little experience, to navigate their journey independently, transitioning from reliance on authority figures like parents or teachers to becoming the captains of their journeys:

You go to school, you get given something, you have to do it and, you know, you hand it back in. Whereas at university it's meant to be more kind of adult/adult, you've got more responsibility and you need to find a way to kind of hold that and be responsible for yourself which I think is quite difficult when you're young and inexperienced (Advisor David).

The theme embodies transitioning from dependence to independence and assuming accountability over personal journeys. Essentially, students are *“learning how to be a student and how to live in this completely different environment which is higher pressure and less support overall”* (Advisor Martha). Interestingly, students want independence and control in the form of having the freedom to choose: *“I found it quite good in that I could have more choice over what I wanted to do”* (Emma). Freedom of choice can be in how they study, what they study or how they are supported. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened this desire for choice, due to this being out of their control, where *“I wish we weren’t in COVID, but obviously, I can’t control that”* (Ashleigh) and *“I can’t just get rid of that can I?”* (Marcus). *Steering the Ship* therefore emphasises students’ sense of autonomy and agency, where they either desire or displace responsibility, ownership, and control of their experience.

Students experience a double-edged sword where *“I love the independence and then equally there’s days where I’m like I just don’t want to be independent”* (Ella). This grapple with motivation to *be the captain*, was seen in commonly known challenges of independence. For example, financial management, relationship management, and the ability to self-govern and manage independent life skills. There was a sense among students that *“it’s all up to you, basically”* (Julia), where understanding travel systems, getting up for lectures, managing time and daily responsibilities, and taking responsibility for their academic life was now their responsibility. Students suddenly realised that *“to some level, you’ve got to stand on your own two feet”* (Timothy) and manage this newfound level of responsibility. This suggests that before this point, students felt it had been up to someone else. Accordingly, students consistently focused on family members carrying or removing the burden for them, *“obviously it’s much easier being with family, just to help out... as I don’t have to have the responsibility”* (Alastair). This was often compared to the increased responsibility of living away from home, *“I was the one taking care of the flat... so I had to manage all that myself, the maintenance, the cleaning, the cooking”* (Alastair). The idea of *“having”* to do this suggests that they are burdened with this responsibility, have no alternative, and it is placed upon them rather than being adopted willingly. Alastair’s narrative disregards the active choice to attend university and live away from home, thus highlighting how students may overlook their agency in decision-making, perpetuating a narrative of burden. Together, these comments suggest a desire to return to an ideal of someone else *Steering their Ship*.

Students portray burden in terms of the effort needed for agentic behaviour, where “every day, thinking of what I’m going to cook is just so draining” (Meera). Ella further explains that “having the independence of going to the shops and buying your food and stuff, it’s great but it’s also a chore”, suggesting that whilst choice is nice, with that freedom, comes the burden of responsibility. Consequently, feelings of burden are problematic for students’ willingness to *Steer the Ship*, as they desire to avoid the burden of agency. Students want support “where it takes the burden away from me” (Charlotte), particularly when things feel unmanageable or difficult. A student’s will and motivation to *Steer their Ship* can therefore be displaced due to their prior reliance on others. In the context of mental health and wellbeing for example, “They don’t realise they need to do it. They think that someone else will, or they will come and see a mental health professional and we fix it, and we’ll sort it. And we’ll wave a magic wand” (Advisor Alice). Therefore, students appear to attempt to assign others as the captain rather than themselves. This displacement of responsibility seems to occur through a lack of belief in themselves and their capacity to govern their own experience. This could be explained by their difficulty or lack of willingness to transition to becoming an independent adult, where they feel that they don’t yet have the knowledge or the skills to know what to do. This can be seen from the comparisons to parental support during the COVID-19 pandemic, where Meera voiced “When you have your parents around, your family around, everything feels like it’s been taken care of”. This suggests they do not feel capable of “taking care of things” and there is a relief when someone takes this responsibility from them.

It is important to consider then, how students engage with *Steering the Ship* when faced with personal challenges. As a student with dyslexia, PTSD, OCD and autism, Charlotte explains that it would be “massive” for her if she was able to:

have like a consistent person who just checks up... once a semester and like ‘is everything going ok, do you need help with anything, is everything going smoothly, are your reasonable adjustments being implemented?’... people that are helping me to kind of navigate all of those things.

The use of “massive” suggests the importance of this support, because an it is all on me mindset may further exacerbate pre-existing challenges related to their disabilities and prevent a “smooth” sailing journey. Whilst their comments could also suggest wanting to displace responsibility onto others, the use of “helping me to navigate” suggests this is more about diffusion of responsibility. Specifically,

students with pre-existing conditions may need support in managing their ability to act and overcome their challenges. It could, however, also mirror the collective struggle of transition, as it could relate to the shift from a potential dependence on pre-existing support systems to a new support system. However, *“help me kind of navigate”* highlights that students may not necessarily desire someone to do it for them, but to help them understand, guide them, and support their autonomy and agency. It is a desire to *Steer* but needing the support to do so.

Emma also supports this when discussing the need to *“navigate the complicated systems”*, suggesting how students are trying to *steer* their way through unknown terrain and struggle to act autonomously through a lack of surety of how to proceed. Referring to the *Steering the Ship* metaphor then, navigating is an important part of whether a ship’s journey is a success. Much like a captain needing to navigate their ship in the right direction, students are needing to find the right path for completing tasks. They *“suddenly realise “oh my goodness me, I’ve got to make all these decisions myself”* (Advisor Jamie) and occasionally need someone else to guide them towards the right path. Their support systems become their coastguards and lighthouses guiding the way. To navigate their journeys, students therefore need to learn how to use the tools available to them (e.g., support systems, time management skills, knowledge of the HE system), and which to use when. However, it seems that students need a compass or map to orientate their journey and take the next step. A knowing person to refer to can therefore make this go more smoothly:

it’s like executive dysfunction... [support staff] just help by saying, well, we’ll find out exactly what form you need to fill in and then I’ll send you the link to the exact webpage and then you just need to fill in a few boxes. It really makes it easier for me (Emma).

Emma is not requesting that someone complete the form for them but is asking for support in acting themselves. Students therefore still desire to act and *Steer their Ship* when diffusing responsibility.

Students also express a desire for agency and autonomy by advocating for control over their learning. Marcus states, *“I’d rather do it my own way and learn it myself”*, and compared to a lecture Charlotte would *“prefer to teach myself something as opposed to someone talk at me”*. The freedom to make study choices that align with their needs, preferences, and values therefore supports student autonomy. Emma notes *“I was really excited going into second year because it meant I could then*

learn new things about stuff I was really interested in and got to choose". Therefore, when students feel *"I can do it in my own time"* (Charlotte) and choose what they learn, they can have a positive rather than stressful experience. For example, Zhara explained:

If I'm at a lecture theatre I want to get down every single word and I get stressed out if I don't type every word, word for word, what the professor's saying. Whereas if I'm at home I can just type it out, I can pause it at my own speed, I can rewind it.

The way they study is therefore one method in which students take control of their academic demands and wellbeing. This helps their capability to study but also to manage their everyday struggles, because:

If I'm having a bit of a bad day, I can just go it's fine, I'm not travelling anywhere, I can just sit in my room and just take a break, and just watch my lecture and do my work. (Ella)

However, it's unrealistic to expect they can go through life only engaging in ways they find motivating or preferable. Doing things that do not initially match their preference, can help them to develop essential skills such as problem-solving and adaptability, which are crucial for navigating an evolving world and preparing for future careers. Future careers are likely to require them to have a diverse skill set and work in ways that are not always under their control. Therefore, in the pursuit of student choice there is a risk that giving too much freedom will lead to future beneficial skills being overlooked and underdeveloped. Students therefore also need the support, confidence, or willingness to tackle things they find challenging, to help them *Steer their Ship* beyond university.

Nevertheless, students also desire freedom of choice in their independent living, where they can do their own thing. Contrasting with previously evidenced desires to diffuse and displace responsibility, students report enjoying their independence where they can dictate their own lives. It is *"even little things, like I get to have freedom to go to Aldi and pick what I want to eat for the week, and I've never done that before. It's your parents that you rely on"* (Ella). This is particularly interesting because Ella previously described food shopping as a *"chore"*. However, when compared to parental reliance this independence is described as a newfound freedom and liberation even though it requires effort. Students can also take advantage of this liberation, pushing this as far as they can go; because it was *"my first time moving out from home so I went a little bit crazy"* (Zhara). This suggests

that students experience a transition from restriction to freedom. *“a little bit crazy”* indicates that they may indulge in behaviours or activities that they would not normally engage in due to their newfound liberty or lack of constraints. Choice is therefore the fundamental difference between their university and pre-university experience:

coz the house that I came from, there were a lot of rules, and I just didn't have any freedom. So, it's nice, even just pathetic things, like thinking, oh, I can go to Tesco's right now, it's nice knowing that I can do that, just feeling independent, and being able to do whatever I wanna do (Ashleigh).

The description of going to the supermarket whenever they want as a *“pathetic”* thing or choosing what they want to eat as *“little things”*, also suggests that whilst this seems like a small freedom, the ability is enormously freeing. They can do what they want to do, have their own space, and create their own way of living: *“I just like having my own space and independence, and I can cook the meals I want, and if I want to watch a movie at 9pm, I can”* (Ashleigh). Together, the data therefore suggests that having the opportunity to make their own choices and to *Steer their Ship* is liberating yet brings a burden. However, the importance lies within feeling like I want to, and *“the sense of I can”* (Advisor Evelyn).

This idea of *“I can”* may help explain the contradictions between desiring control and diffusing or displacing responsibility. Namely, when students believe in their ability to take responsibility, they may feel empowered to assert control over their experience: *“I found my feet because I had to learn to be independent, I think”* (Chloe). Therefore, those who find this liberating may be those who feel capable of independent living. Those who are struggling to adapt however, may be more likely to diffuse those responsibilities and displace them onto people such as family because they are seen to have the skills and knowledge to deal with the problem; *“I want to go home and have my mum and dad be the parents”* (Ella). So, when students perceive others as more competent than themselves, they will place the role of the captain on them. However, if they feel confident and competent in their own abilities, they are willing to assume the captaincy role themselves. Advisors stress this need for confidence by claiming students need to know:

It's manageable, and we can support them and it's very gentle, simple, very much being encouraging and tell them it's OK, these are the things you can do, and you will be swell. You're just struggling because it's a transition, it's difficult to be here. (Advisor Martha).

It's about supporting them to feel that "*I can*" and being "*there to support them and point them in the right direction*" (Advisor Heidi). Again, support becomes a lighthouse, or a coastguard guiding the captain to *Steer their Ship*.

Specific to the COVID-19 pandemic context, the restrictions placed upon students further emphasised their desires for autonomy and agency. Their capacity to make their own choices and act on them was limited through external restrictions, such as being unable to socialise with anyone outside of their household, only being allowed outside for an hour a day, and restrictions on non-essential travel. Students felt trapped when "*the flights closed down, and then there was no chance for me to go back [home]*" (Meera), and through binding contracts of accommodation where "*I've spent the last, I want to say nearly four months trying to get out of my contract*" (Julia). Julia was also expected to continue paying accommodation fees if she left, "*you need to give over your keys but if you give over your keys, you don't have the room, you need to get all your stuff out, and you still have to pay for it*" (Julia). The ability to act according to their desires and preferences was therefore thwarted by the constraints of their accommodation contracts, leading to a minimised sense of control. This presents a power dynamic between students and the educational system and a perception of higher power and injustice. Particularly, there is presented risk in pursuing their needs and desires because there is no guarantee of financial relief. As these policies were not created with global pandemics in mind, students feel tightly controlled by the standardised system. It does not cater to their circumstances and the unique needs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of opportunity to *Steer the Ship* in this context therefore heightened feelings of lack of control.

One way students exhibit *Steering their Ship* is therefore through their decision-making. How students make their choices is therefore important to consider. Their discourse demonstrates how choices are directed by internal or external motivators. Internal being within the person, (e.g., a feeling or desire), and external being something structural or socially driven (e.g., COVID-19 restrictions). However, some choices are directed by something both internal and external, such as moral dilemmas, where students may be struggling to make choices based upon friction between what is socially acceptable and what they internally desire. For example, during the COVID pandemic, students broke the rules of socialising with other households and justified this by explaining "*everyone was doing it, it was just everyone was having kind of small get togethers, but then the larger one's people tried to stay away from*" (Julia). They justify these choices by saying this is

“understandable because you want to be the uni student” (Julia), and that they mitigated the risks by testing themselves with lateral flow tests, which indicated whether they were infected with COVID-19 or not. This portrays a psychological defence mechanism, whereby they minimise the risk of their actions, and excuse their behaviour to protect their self-image or avoid feelings of guilt and shame: *“it felt wrong to have a social kind of party... and if you admitted that you went out it was just, oh, you’re, you know, doing that..”* (Julia). So, by testing themselves, they feel they avoid responsibility to others, and it creates a justification for their actions that helps them to feel less accountable for their behaviour. It is a way of convincing themselves and others that their actions were not as harmful or inappropriate as they might appear. The COVID-19 pandemic therefore raised a key developmental aspect of adulthood, which is moral responsibility. Students were faced with situations where they had to make decisions based upon collective responsibility, to protect not only themselves but others in their community. They were also faced with following public health guidelines, even if inconvenient and uncomfortable, which became a moral imperative in an environment where they may be living with many other students. This meant students had to choose between making sacrifices for the greater good or meeting their pre-existing expectations and desires of university life, signified by wanting to *“be the uni student”*. They were battling with *Steering the Ship* and making decisions, where they no longer had the expected freedom of first year to do what they wanted.

Continuing this idea of moral responsibility, students often talk of their needs and wanting the power to create change. Namely, they report the university as *“this thing in power not really wanting to help you”* (Julia) and consequently want their voices to be heard. Without negating their sense of being unsupported, this suggests a potentially ill-informed perspective of how universities are organised because *“this thing in power”* is a complex structure that is not as black and white as they perceive. Emma supports this as she appears more aware of the routes to make change, where *“I bring those ideas to the university and say, well, a lot of people have said this thing... I’ll bring it up as an issue and then try and get things worked on and make things better”*. Thus, some students hold more knowledge about how to address student issues and are experienced navigators of the metaphorical waterways that lead to change. Emma also presents a wealth of opinions, rather than one solitary voice, where *“a lot of people”* have represented the issue. Emma states, *“it’s nice when people are actually taking it further than me talking about it all the time and then going into a void”*, suggesting individual voices may *“go into a*

void", with their voices going in but nothing coming back out. However, by focusing on many opinions the chance for change is greater. To address issues then, students may benefit from collective action, and a better understanding of higher education systems and the avenues for change. This may encourage cooperation between students and the university, mutual understanding, and realistic solutions. However, it is crucial to understand the significance of students feeling supported and heard, in driving them to *Steer their Ship*, communicate their needs and advocate for change.

In summary, the theme of *Steering the Ship* represents the student experience as a journey where students transition from relying on authority figures to becoming the captains of their own lives. It explains how students experience a double-edged sword of independence, where their desired freedom comes at a cost of responsibility. They simultaneously desire and avoid the role of the *Captain*, with their perceived ability of "*I can*" shaping their engagement with this role. When faced with overwhelm and uncertainty, students displace and diffuse their responsibility in favour of who they perceive to be more capable, to relieve their burden or guide their way. However, students also express a desire for autonomy in their academic and personal lives, advocating for the freedom to make choices and create their own paths. They have the drive to advocate for themselves and challenge the perceived resistant support, facilitating their capability to regain control of their ship and journey. However, there is a need for students to better understand how to address issues collectively and advocate for change within the educational system, to further this endeavour and support the continuation of their agentic behaviour. Students also desire autonomy and agency alongside the need for guidance. There is a delicate balance between the desire for autonomy, agentic action, and the need for external support, echoing a constant navigation that is required to maintain a steady course. Significantly though, the captaincy role is adopted when students perceive that they can harness their autonomy, navigate challenges, and advocate for change. However, whilst *Steering the Ship* is a crucial rite of passage in the seas of higher education, there is still a need for the university to support them in this by providing the role of a coastguard or lighthouse. Their quest towards captaincy is therefore weaved through the narrative of interinfluences with other key themes explained in Chapter 8.

5.3. Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance

Steadying the Ship illustrates that students require emotion regulation skills and need to establish a sense of balance. Their ship can be rocked by unpredictability, and their emotions can be influenced by the ups and downs of student life. Hence, across each of the themes, *“there’s all that kind of wellbeing stuff that’s important and useful, as well around being able to keep a good routine and keep a good balance”* (Advisor Layla). Establishing a balance is therefore the foundation of this theme, which is crucial in preventing their ship from capsizing on their journey.

It is consistently voiced that *“there can be that feeling of trying to balance everything, trying to manage everything”* (Advisor Layla), where students feel overwhelmed by the pressures of independent living and study and have to find ways to level out the strain and achieve an emotional equilibrium. Students feel that there is too much to do, having *“all of the deadlines in the same week”* (Zhara), and fitting extensive content into assignments where *“we were stressing about how we were going to fit [the content] into a smaller report”* (Timothy). This reflects common challenges such as condensing information and time management, which creates this experience of squeezing and pressure. This pressure can also lead to difficult decisions *“where I just haven’t submitted a formative, because at the time I just haven’t been able to have the capacity to”* (Emma). This idea of *“capacity”* suggests a limitation in their ability to manage overwhelm, and thus prioritization becomes crucial for balancing their academic demands and balancing their overall wellbeing. However, this comes at the cost of beneficial academic tasks and suggests a work-life balance is not managed. Students try to achieve a work-life balance, but *“because they’re expected to work so hard, when they’re not working, they’re partying really hard”* (Advisor David). Therefore, students engage in intense partying as a form of release from the pressures felt. However, *“whilst they need to feel like they’ve got some kind of life beyond the academic aspect”* (Advisor David) and *“have always kind of really needed that opportunity to let off steam, because it’s hard being in academia”* (Advisor Isabelle), this also requires balance. Zhara explains that *“it was good while it lasted. But it wasn’t very sustainable going out every single day. It was fun, but not sustainable”*. The use of *“fun, but not sustainable”* suggests that this coping mechanism, while initially enjoyable, may not be conducive to long-term wellbeing or a sustainable work-life balance. Similarly, some students to go *“too far down the extreme, and if they weren’t in front of their laptop doing studies, they’re in front of their laptop gaming... we go ‘Ok, yeah we*

just need to rebalance this a little bit" (Advisor Christian). This suggests that whilst students can do too much of the fun things, they can also burn their candle at both ends. Thus, students face a dual challenge of balancing academic demands with the need for recreational activities to maintain holistic wellbeing.

This work-life balance is also difficult to achieve when *"trying to work jobs alongside their degree and not having the time really to devote to either"* (Advisor Helen). This struggle can stem from various factors, including the transition to independent learning where students have not yet got the skills to study efficiently, or have *"the financial pressure"* (Advisor Layla) to be able to live independently. Students therefore take on employment for a variety of reasons, but this can intensify the competition for their limited time and energy. Consequently, they may experience feelings of stress, exhaustion and lowered mental health and wellbeing, particularly when they are *"struggling to manage the balance with everything they have to do, but particularly trying to manage [their] studies, while dealing with severe and often fluctuating mental health issues"* (Advisor Layla). The more layers needing to be 'balanced' then, the more they struggle to accomplish it. Achieving a work-life balance under these circumstances is therefore complex and exhausting.

Emotional regulation is therefore suggested to be essential. Like the hull of a ship, its structural integrity helps the ship to withstand the force of waves and prevent it from capsizing. Emotion regulation then, is like having a sturdy hull. It helps students to withstand the impact of difficult emotions and experiences of university life. Ashleigh reflects on the intensity of emotions in a challenging moment where *"I think it's easier when you look back, coz obviously you don't have all the emotions of the time"*. This suggests that emotions can be all encompassing, and when you don't have the blinding nature of emotions, students could potentially deal with challenges more easily. Emotion regulation could therefore benefit students in moments of challenge, particularly when Advisor Alice observes that *"the level of self-harm I think is significantly higher over the course of the time I've been here"* and that *"commonly, students are really struggling with suicidal thoughts"* (Advisor Layla). Part of *Steadying the Ship*, is therefore about being able to discuss their feelings with someone who can help them to *"rationalise – tell me how you're feeling"* (Ella) and when:

I've sat here all weekend and thought that I've done something wrong. She'll go OK, well what makes you think that, and I'm like, I don't know. She says, well then, it's not you. And you do need someone to tell you that sometimes. Just to

go – your thoughts are a little bit silly sometimes. So that has helped so much.
(Ella)

Support to challenge their assumptions and offer perspective therefore helps students to rationalize their feelings, offers validation, and helps them to achieve emotion regulation. Advisor Alice also argues that students are not *“able to regulate the emotion or thinking the emotion is a sign of mental illness, when actually there’s a feeling they’ve got, and they need to express that feeling or manage that in some way”*. Interpersonal communication, therefore, is key in the process of *Steadying the Ship* as sharing their feelings and seeking guidance from friends, family, or professionals, can provide valuable insights and strategies for managing emotions effectively and redirecting their routes towards balance. Hence, advisors carry out a crucial role in facilitating this balancing act, by making students more aware of their unhelpful thoughts and behaviours; *“We go, “OK, yeah we just need to rebalance this a little bit”* (Advisor Christian), where *“You know, you’re going to party, you’re going to eat junk food, but it’s about doing it in moderation and balance”* (Advisor David). Support systems therefore play a crucial role in student reflection and supporting students to re-balance and manage their experience as *“they needed something to help them think about their needs, to make sense of themselves, feel that they could get some support and allow themselves to move forward in some way”* (Advisor David).

Overall, then, the theme of *Steadying the Ship* encapsulates the pivotal role of emotional regulation and a work-life balance in a student’s university journey. It highlights key barriers in establishing balance, such as financial pressures, competing demands, and the need for release from academic pressures. Study, work, and social needs therefore compete for the resources and demands of the student, often leading them to feel stressed and overwhelmed. The need for emotional regulation then becomes evident, particularly in the face of intense emotional storms, with students needing help from their support networks to *Steady the Ship*. Specifically, advisors act as navigational guides, highlighting the importance of interpersonal communication in the process of maintaining balance. Ultimately then, this theme highlights the role of emotions in restricting and facilitating student abilities to transition to and through university, and manage the pressures they face. Support networks therefore offer an important ‘lighthouse’ function, whereby students can avoid hitting icebergs of emotional overwhelm, through gentle guidance and reflection.

5.4. Conclusion:

In conclusion, *Steering the Ship* highlights the interplay between autonomy and responsibility that students navigate as they transition into adulthood. Students grapple with the dual-edged sword of independence, where their desires for freedom come at a cost of responsibility. The theme reveals how students negotiate their roles as captains, often oscillating between embracing autonomy and seeking external guidance in times of uncertainty. The extent students feel “*I can*” therefore shapes whether they adopt the captaincy role. *Steadying the Ship* however, emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and work-life balance. It highlights supportive networks and interpersonal communication in helping students maintain stability amidst the tumultuous seas of academic and personal pressures and continue on their journeys without capsizing. Collectively then, students are faced with the reality that with freedom comes responsibility, and through their journey they are trying to learn how to be the captain, whilst confronting the challenge of maintaining a sense of stability. The themes also produce a compelling narrative of perceived competency as a fundamental influence in students’ quest for captaincy, and that for students to steer, they need to feel steady. The specific interinfluences of *Steering the Ship* with *Steadying the Ship* and other themes will therefore be discussed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6: To be Together, Secure and Stable

6.1. Introduction to the Chapter:

This chapter presents the themes of *A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base*, and *We're All on this Ship Together: Being a crew*. *A Safe Harbour* epitomises their desire for a stable and reliable support network, reminiscent of their family, but also a feeling of internal security, such as students feeling they can be themselves. With a safety net in place, students feel stable and empowered to explore new opportunities and overcome difficulties. *We're All on This Ship Together* then emphasises the need to belong to a crew (i.e., peers and the university) and the importance of that crew co-creating a community and working together to build a sense of cohesion and unity. These two themes also present an interinfluencing connection, where together, students' *Safe Harbour* and feeling like they are *On the Ship Together*, is what creates this feeling of security, stability, and promotes the adoption of their Captaincy role. This interinfluence will be explained in Chapter 8.

6.2. A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base

A harbour is a secure and protected place for ships to dock, and provide refuge from storms, rough waters, and navigational challenges. For students then, *A Safe Harbour* represents the feeling of being supported, at ease, and protected from the uncertainties and difficulties of their world. It includes having a collection of support avenues of which are secure, and a general feeling of being safe and secure, with an emphasis being placed on their experience being about how they *feel*. For example, it isn't just about having a support network, but *feeling* that the network is always there to catch them if they fall. It is about students "*knowing that I've got people in my corner*" (Kiera) as they set off on their maiden voyage and when they come into challenges.

When students are thrown into a new set of environments and circumstances, and their previous *Safe Harbour* (e.g., support network) is removed or changed, it is reasonable that students want to establish a new *Safe Harbour* at university that mimics those they have lost or not previously had:

They need to feel safe. They need to establish a good support network around them personally. So, they've come from a home where hopefully parents are

supportive, family or whatever. We need to get that set up so hopefully when they first move into halls or whatever they get friendships going. (Advisor Josephine)

The stability they have lost is therefore a stability they need to re-gain. However, it is important to have *“a support network around you in terms of friends and ideally family, but that’s not always possible for some people so it’s just thinking about having really good supportive people in your life who you can turn to”* (Advisor Layla). For those without previous *Safe Harbours* then, it is about building a support network they haven’t previously had.

Contextually, the *Safe Harbour* includes a web of support which builds a safety net around the student:

Its thinking about them having quite a good secure base in a way, in terms of support they can access if they need it, both within the university, all those different types of support that we’ve talked about, depending on what they need. (Advisor Layla)

It includes friends, family, university support systems, and resources such as finances, with each having a role to play. For instance, each part of the ‘web’ serves a purpose for the student, where *“I’d talk to them about certain things and not about others”* (Chloe) and are chosen based on how fitting their knowledge and experience is to their need; *“my parents help me with it a bit... knowing more about how that kind of bit of the world works”* (Emma). Advisor Martha supports this, *“I know students tell me, ‘I have friends, I have family I talk to them, not about this”*. Together, this suggests a purposeful selection of who they share what with. This could be explained by safety and security regarding who they feel is safe to share the issue with, who will provide a solution, and thus provide protection from the challenge. Providing that this web of support is actualised and meets the needs of the individual then, the web provides avenues for resolving a myriad of challenges, thus, creating *A Safe Harbour* to rely on.

However, students can experience the opposite of this, where there is *“in theory, everyone tells me that I can get support, but when I actually try to, it’s not really feeling like it’s there”* (Advisor Evelyn). This suggests a phantom support, where they are led to believe that support is accessible, but the support feels intangible. Much like people talk of feeling the presence of a phantom, students need to *feel* the presence of support, *“they need to be able to feel that there is a whole support network around them... it’s about how you feel”* (Advisor Jamie). This emphasizes

the emotional aspect of *A Safe Harbour*, highlighting the importance of students feeling supported rather than just having resources available. It is more than just resources and actions; but something that students can emotionally connect with, which provides emotional security.

Consequently, in this context of emotional security, when students experience an absence of resolution, are told they are outside the remit of the service or do not get what they need at the time, it becomes understandable that students feel rejected and abandoned:

If we've reached out to you for support, that sometimes takes a lot for some students. So, it can be a setback if you don't receive a response when you've actively gone out of your way to pursue something. So, not getting a response is kind of disheartening. (Zhara)

The use of “*reaching out*” suggests they are making themselves vulnerable and this is not considered when they do not receive a response.

“*disheartening*” then demonstrates being let down, which is particularly felt when they have been brave enough to ask for help. Advisor Evelyn supports this, where “*not getting a response at all... I think that's where it's really damaging for them*” (Advisor Evelyn). Students therefore need some reassurance, to know that “*from the student services side... we are there for them, we're not going to drop them even if we say actually these things that you're dealing with, we're not the service to support you*” (Advisor Martha). Thus, emotional safety comes from trust in those who are supporting them and the stability that they provide.

Students also emphasise this stability comes from their peers, often deeming them more important than parents, “*My parents used to phone me once every three weeks... they thought I was just a happy person that was at university... the only person that knew I was losing my marbles was my best friend and my housemate*” (Charlotte). Friends are therefore a foundation for support when they are “*a good person that you can fall on if you need to*” (Charlotte). Their dependable nature suggests friends provide an emotional anchor. Partnered with friends being likened to romantic partners “*if I was gay, I would be gay for her. It's that deeply ridden that I can't see my life without her*” (Charlotte), students form a profound level of emotional attachment, and reliance on peer support. Similarly, new flatmates are likened to a new baby coming into the family “*we were having fun with that idea thinking is it a boy, is it a girl? We would have preferred a boy, I sound like I've had*

a baby or something" (Julia), suggesting students create a pseudo-family at university. They form family-like bonds that represent a deep emotional connectedness, and much like a family would provide a foundation and stability, the pseudo-family mirrors this function. Thus, peers play a vital role in creating a 'secure base' that is a strong support network in the absence or in addition to students' families.

The university, however, is similarly described, as *"there's still that parent-child dynamic isn't there"* (Advisor Christian). Students perceive the university as a parental guide, where *"they're the adults to me, you know, I don't feel like an adult yet"* (Julia). This idea of not *feeling* like an adult suggests that students perceive themselves to be inexperienced and that they lack competency. This lack of self-belief suggests a lack of internal security and could explain why they rely on the 'secure base' of their pseudo-family. Considering this, it is unsurprising that they also express a desire to be looked after and cared for by the university. Like how children seek guidance and support from their parents, Ella notes *"it's nice to hear it from your peers sometimes, [but] when you're getting that from an adult it almost feels a bit like a parent saying it"*. This suggests support means more coming from an adult. This could stem from their transition to adulthood, where students are adapting to greater independence and responsibility while still needing validation and encouragement from an authority figure to build their sense of internal security and confidence.

Normalising student experiences is also suggested to build student's internal sense of security. Advisors suggest that building trust and stability within themselves, softening their fears of failure and building their confidence *"is something that students are lacking, just knowing that it's okay"* (Advisor Martha). The use of *"knowing it's okay"* suggests emotional safety and peace, and a general sense that they are not at risk. It does not imply that a person needs to be exceptionally happy, but that students need to reach a state of acceptance and contentment with their experience, despite its imperfections; *"resilience isn't a thing we should focus on, we should really start looking at the fact that failure is OK and make students feel OK about failure"* (Advisor Layla). Together then, the advisors suggest the *"need to normalise that it's OK to struggle"* (Advisor Martha) and *"that it's OK to feel"* (Advisor David). This is important for many contexts including their academic learning, where there needs to be a shift from *"I don't like getting things wrong"* (Eric); to an exploratory style of learning. There is an uncertainty associated with independent thinking, that students struggle with. They experience a fear of disappointing others

such as parents when they fail; so much so that *“I know a student who didn’t tell their parents that they failed a year because they were so worried about the repercussions... and they repeated the year, and the parents didn’t know”* (Advisor Martha). Reassurance that their perceived failures are “ok”, is therefore important for students to feel less afraid of judgement and understand that mistakes are an integral part of learning; *“I made many mistakes. As you all do, but that’s the time to make mistakes”* (Chloe). Taking a development-focused mindset, embracing self-compassion and an *“It’s okay to fail”* (Advisor Layla) mentality, therefore creates an internal sense of safety, allowing them to approach challenges with a more self-supportive and nurturing mindset. Advisor Helen suggests *“I think that underlies all of it really, because if they felt good enough they wouldn’t be trying to prove anything to themselves or to anyone else”*, therefore through acceptance there is less *“I have to prove myself, I have to be X Y Z”* (Advisor Helen), and there is less risk of students feeling overwhelmed and like *“I can’t do this, I’m going to drop out”* (Ashleigh). The *Safe Harbour* is therefore not exclusively their web of support, but also their sense of safety within themselves, which allows them to cope with difficulty across both personal and academic contexts.

For personal contexts, safety and security relate to their sense of self, and whether they feel like *“you can actually be yourself and people will accept you for who you are”* (Zhara). Students note feeling exposed, *“I was very very conscious, what do they think of me?”* (Chloe), which was rooted in fears of judgement towards who they are as a person. Meera explains *“I will slowly ease them into the full experience that is me”*, suggesting a gradual exposure gives a sense of control over how safe they feel. They desire to reach a point of comfort and security with their peers, where their authentic selves are accepted, *“I don’t have to pretend or mask anything. I’ll just sit there and be like, [expression], and she’ll be like [mirrored expression]”* (Charlotte). When they are accepted, they can freely express aspects of themselves that they might otherwise hide out of fear. Consequently, they feel trust with others and with oneself.

Trust is also connected consistently to their experience of mental health difficulties, and *“no one wants to go I’ve got mental health issues, or internally address the fact it’s real”* (Ella). Not wanting to acknowledge it therefore suggests they fear the reality of their experience, and not just how others will respond. Specifically, there is an internal lack of acceptance of their own authentic emotions. The avoidance of exposing it to others, however, is put down to the stigma, *“they don’t want to be like oh yeah, I really need help and seem like they’re trying to get attention or even to be*

dismissed” (Ella). Fear of rejection is triggered by this type of exposure because there is a belief, *“that does affect what’s viewed of you. As much as it shouldn’t, but it does”* (Charlotte). Students therefore avoid putting themselves in situations where they may face unacceptance, *“I would never go up to my friend and be like hi, I’m feeling really anxious today... whereas if they said god, you seem a bit anxious today are you ok? Then you’re like oh, yeah I am”* (Ella). Actively exposing themselves is therefore avoided, and instead, students only feel safe to expose this information when others create the space for them to do so. Similarly, with formal support services:

you’re asking for permission aren’t you – you’re trying to validate and justify yourself. I think having somewhere they can come to and just go “blah, blah blah blah, I just needed to get all that shit out” ... I think has been really helpful.
(Advisor Christian)

This suggests that if others carve out a space for open dialogue, students feel more comfortable sharing their feelings without feeling overly exposed. However, it can also be due to their support delivery that students can feel exposed; *“Some students can feel like they’ve opened something up that then it can’t go anywhere, and it can’t go into the level of emotional depth that they need it to”* (Advisor Layla). Specifically, this can be due to *“the support they need isn’t accessible to them”* (Advisor Layla) and when students can face situations where their therapy is inconveniently scheduled, *“In first year I had it at like 12 o’ clock on a Friday, and then I’ve had to go to a lecture afterwards and just kind of sit there with my thoughts”* (Kiera). The use of *“sit there with my thoughts”* emphasises the vulnerability students feel when left to grapple with their emotions in an inappropriate environment or without accessible support.

Overall, *A Safe Harbour* represents more than just a network of support. It embodies a sense of emotional safety, acceptance, and stability within themselves as well as with others. Nevertheless, each component of the support network serves a specific role, with students drawing on different parts as needed. This can be for validation, normalisation, and acceptance, which help to reduce their anxieties, accept their failures, and foster confidence. Trust, both in oneself and in others, is also key in promoting a sense of security, and it encourages students to seek help when needed and share their experiences without fear of judgement or rejection. Creating spaces for open dialogue and accessible mental health and wellbeing support therefore contributes to students' sense of security and wellbeing within

their university environment. Additionally, acceptance of themselves is crucial in alleviating their feelings of vulnerability. The establishment of a reliable support network, coupled with a mindset of acceptance, empowers students to face challenges, transition toward independence and achieve emotional stability. Consequently, a *Safe Harbour* serves as a foundational element that contributes to students' ability to *Steady and Steer their Ship* which will be discussed in Chapter 8. Security and safety therefore run through various aspects of their experience and offer an important psychological foundation for students' wellbeing and success.

6.3. We're All on this Ship Together: Being a Crew.

Like a captain needs their crew, a student needs their community. A ship's crew serves as a metaphor for a collaborative team that embodies cohesion, unity and coordinated efforts to navigate challenges and achieve their goals. For students, this emphasises the co-creation of a civil, harmonious, and supportive university culture, by students and the university. It emphasises students and the university working together to overcome obstacles and "*just feeling like they're not on their own with it*" (Advisor Layla). It is about students finding their people, who share the same goals, values, and experiences, to ensure they feel supported and connected. Support and cooperation from both peer and university contexts are essential for the progress and wellbeing of the student, but emphasis is placed upon the university working in tandem with students to provide opportunities for social connection. The people become their metaphorical anchor, where the people and their community are what makes their experience.

6.3.1. Co-Creation

Co-creation involves students and the university actively working together to build a supportive community and foster social connections. Students describe a shared responsibility for students and the university to facilitate social interaction. They want "*for the university to try and make more effort... try to provide more opportunities for socialisation*" (Alistair) and suggest the university have a functional role of organising events and ensuring proximity to their peers. This is especially crucial when students sometimes alienate themselves and others where "*Everyone kept themselves to themselves*" (Timothy). By providing opportunities for socialising and ensuring proximity among peers, universities can enhance cohesion and unity among students, because "*my close friends and my housemates, are people I met through my course*" (Emma). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the

importance of proximity, because when distanced friendship closeness reduced, *“there’s one person I used to talk to quite a lot at university... I think we were kind of close as well. After everything moved online, we just kind of became quite distant, actually”* (Alastair). Lack of proximity can therefore hinder bonding and reduce social behaviours and connectedness. For example, when flatmate schedules do not align, opportunities for shared social time are limited:

everybody was on different schedules, and we never got the opportunity to be able to sit down as a flat and socialise, have a meal together or have drinks or just talk or anything... we never really got that bonding opportunity. (Timothy)

Similar schedules therefore create alignment with their peers, and without opportunities for shared social time there is *“an aspect of loneliness to the flat”* (Timothy) through lack of bonding. *“loneliness”* highlights the importance of proximity and shared schedules in building friendships and improving a sense of belonging, which contributes to student’s feelings of being in a crew. Advisor David also highlights this regarding their locality:

I mean [location] is not a massive city, and in some respects, it feels a bit like a village because it’s quite small in some respects... students report that they feel quite connected, it allows them to feel connected to where they are.

Shared routines, spaces, and being in proximity therefore help students to feel in tune with each other and their environment and feel part of something together.

When this is not possible, students feel that opportunities to socialise such as societies and events are crucial for building connections, *“If your flat life isn’t so good and certainly if you’re not getting on with your course so well, then the societies are really important because it’s your only other opportunity to socialise and enjoy yourself, really.”* (Timothy). Hence, students *“wish that the uni would support us more in trying to meet people”* (Ella) through organised events and activities that can build this connectivity, particularly within their academic schools:

we got to speak to people who were in the higher years, and people from some of the different societies, and find out about course reps and stuff, and just that was like a real sense of community coz you know, you were just talking with the lecturers and other years. (Ashleigh)

Being able to talk to others within their school is therefore a highly valued and beneficial way of feeling part of a crew and is important if students do not engage in extracurricular activities such as societies. Moreover, social interaction was

expressed as an important factor for feeling part of a crew, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating this need; *“what hit me the most is just generally not being able to see course friends every day and hang out and go to the library together or have lunch together”* (Timothy). Shared activities in person therefore build students’ sense of being *On this Ship Together*, and Advisor Martha states, *“we do have more and more people saying just, “I need to talk to someone, just sit with someone”*. The use of *“just sitting”* expresses the dire need for contact and that the mere presence of others brings relief.

It is unsurprising then that students voice the desire for the university to actively encourage increased social contact. However, students also voiced that they would have liked to have tried harder themselves to connect and talk to other people, and *“go along, to look up a couple of societies and stuff, even if I didn’t feel like they were ‘my people’, just interacting with others probably would have helped a bit, just done more things”* (Ashleigh). Nonetheless, students can struggle to create those opportunities for themselves; *“it’s been hard to make new friends”* (Zhara). Consequently, as there are *“a lot of feelings of isolation, being quite lonely, not knowing how to kind of connect with other students”* (Advisor Isabelle), the university should facilitate them to cross those bridges. This was particularly noted for those who are shy, where *“I think a lot of people who aren’t extroverts probably would appreciate that”* (Ashleigh), suggesting some students require more support with this than others. Being a crew therefore includes the university facilitating students to connect.

Co-creation also involves addressing social issues where students actively create divisions among themselves. This often happens when individual boundaries are crossed, resulting in strained relationships. For example, conflict in political and racial opinions can create discomfort and prompt students to remove themselves from situations such as their accommodation. When such conflicts escalate, students seek support from the university hoping for a collaborative resolution:

we recorded twice with the university that there’s this particular student who does not get along with any of us... he would just say kind of... racist stuff and... it just made you feel uncomfortable... with that whole process I didn’t feel like it really got sorted out... they’ll just keep on saying, oh, you know, he’s a first year student. (Julia)

When they experience perspectives that go against their own individual values then, their sense of cohesion with their peers is disrupted. Moreover, when they report

issues to the university and see no effective resolution, this leads to ongoing discomfort and the perception that their concerns are not taken seriously by the university. Being a crew is therefore suggested to be about having their issues regarded as just as important to the university as it is to them.

However, it also indicates the role of the student as active, rather than passive, in that they *do things* that create connection or division. Students talk about active divisions regarding bullying, alienating others, and impenetrable social cliques. For example, some students faced their flatmates “*banning me from parts of the house*” (Ashleigh), whilst others “*have friends that have experienced racism*” (Charlotte). Being ostracised from social groups, and active divisions, therefore prevent students from feeling connected and makes them feel “*really miserable*” (Ashleigh). Students therefore need social facilitation from others and the university, to bridge with those who may be in the same boat, or to meet others who may have already made friendships, because “*when people have made solid friend groups, you’re a bit screwed*” (Ashleigh). The presence of social cliques creates a sense that they are impenetrable and hinders students from connecting socially. This is highlighted by those who have developed connections where “*We formed a smaller group, and that was amazing*” (Meera). The term “*formed a smaller group*” suggests the active decision to restrict access to their group, however, this simultaneously highlights the potential lack of insight into what this closer group development means for others outside of this group. Students therefore need to be aware of those who are isolated and create opportunities themselves for those outside of their group, to experience the same “*ups*” as them. Similarly, students can do their own thing and freely reject social opportunities with their flatmates, “*She kind of just did her own thing and we didn’t really see her at all*” (Zhara), because they have found a connection elsewhere or don’t want to socialise. Their peers however, can find this hard to navigate when they are seeking connection with those who actively disengage:

I think the difficulty is that, to some level, everybody’s got their own, everybody’s got a different person, haven’t they? And you can’t, if you’re somebody who’s quite introverted, I guess, you can’t force them to go out and be quite extroverted. (Timothy)

Co-creation therefore also comes from students recognising their own role in finding their people and supporting others to do the same. The idea of not being able to force something suggests connecting with others is something that individuals need to be willing to do. Thus co-creation involves the

willingness to try and find their crew, but also give others the opportunity to find theirs too. Herein lies the benefit of similarity for formulating cohesion and unity with others.

6.3.2. Cohesion and Unity

To feel “*in that boat together*” (Zhara), is also where students feel that they are connected and similar to both peers and staff. For example, Meera “*just wanted to meet someone who was [nationality]*” like her and stated, “*knowing there’s other Christians in the flat, was really good for me*” (Meera). Similarity provides a sense of unity and comradery which Zhara explains through comparing her friends at school to those at university:

They were from a different background to myself. So, they were kind of – their dads were directors, that kind of stuff. Whereas I was more from a working-class background so, they weren’t really my people, they were nice don’t get me wrong, but I didn’t really want to actively hang out with these people... when it came to university there’s so many different people. You can actually find people who are on the same wavelength as yourself.

The idea of them being “*nice*” but not desiring to be around them, implies a desire for authentic relationships and connections, and the use of “*these people*” suggests that they were separate to her, rather than a group she felt aligned with, i.e., “*my people*”. This could suggest true connections are built on shared values and understanding, mirrored in the use of “*wavelength*”. Thus, coming to university enables students to find kindred spirits that share their backgrounds and perspectives, and that similarity is what drives feeling unified. Combined with students wanting to be “*me and you in the same boat here*” (Advisor Christian), this suggests students are seeking out “*[their] people*” and this is what formulates their crew. This, however, could be deemed quite idealistic, in that part of university is to live, study and work with different people and by finding “*[their] people*”, they may be losing something in the experience of personal growth. It does however suggest there is value in connections with those who understand and resonate with their experiences, viewpoints, and values, which plays a role in determining one's sense of belonging and affinity with certain groups. It's about “*we’re all nurses... so we’ve got that in common*” (Ella), and:

everyone’s going through the same thing, and everyone’s looking for someone to talk to, someone to support them, someone to share recipes with [laughs]. And

that really helped, knowing that everyone's going through more or less the same thing. (Meera).

It is helpful to have shared experiences and shared points of identity because you “*know that you're not alone*” (Meera). Therefore, shared experiences, feelings and needs unify them with their peers, lowers isolation and provides a sense of support. Interestingly though, despite this benefit, students do not always share their experiences with their peers. Thus, some do not gain this perspective and understanding, increasing their isolation:

it's weird because actually they're all talking about it coz, they're all coming to us to talk about it but they're not talking to each other about it. So actually, they've all got this idea that nobody else is struggling the way that they are, and actually I think if everybody sat down in a room together and said I feel this way and then the other person would go oh, me too and me too, I think that's what some of them are missing, the idea that actually they're not the only one in the world to feel like this. (Advisor Helen)

Sharing their experiences is therefore suggested to build unity and feel that they are all on the same ship, travelling the same journey. If they do not find these similarities, students feel that “*I never really found where I fitted in*” (Ashleigh) and that they are alone in their journey. Advisor Layla highlighted that these students typically feel isolated and “*It will be those people who don't fit that mainstream who will need our support more*”. This suggests that those who do not experience unity and connection will often seek connection through support services.

Students also feel there is a requirement to fit in, “*there's just this need to fit in and not be the oddball, the weirdo, the attention seeker*” (Meera). The use of “*oddball*” and “*weirdo*” suggests that students feel being anything different to the perceived norm places them at risk of judgement from their peers. The use of “*need*” also suggests the cruciality of fitting in where individuality is not seen as positive, and unity is essential. Therefore, a desire to be united and judged positively can lead to students behaving in ways that retain this sense of unity, even at the cost of what they might prefer or what feels synonymous with their individuality or experience. This seems particularly important with their housemates, where “*this need to fit in and just be one with the whole flat, or whoever you're living with, is so strong, that you don't want to do anything that pulls you out of that*” (Meera). The use of “*being at one*” further supports the importance of feeling like *We're All on this Ship Together*, and to do anything that jeopardises this is a significant risk. The risk of losing

connection is deemed a great concern and keeping people close is important for retaining their belonging to a group, *“I just kept those people sort of close, and became a part of that group”* (Meera). Students therefore hold on intensely to the connections they make, through a fear of being left stranded. It is like being thrown a life buoy when floating out at sea and grabbing and holding it as tightly as possible so that it does not float away. Here, we can see that students’ sense of unity is a fundamental method of creating their supportive network.

If similarity is needed to create their crew, then, it is unsurprising that students also seek this within formal support. For example, *“sometimes students say, “Can I speak to someone who is also black?”* (Advisor Martha). Having representative staffing in support services is important, as it allows for students to feel connected. A lack of diversity or seeing someone like them can reinforce feelings of not belonging, and *“it was always there that feeling that we’re not actually that well represented”* (Advisor Alice). However, even if students ask for this similarity, sometimes this is unavailable within the appropriate support route for that individual, *“because she’s a student life advisor not a wellbeing advisor, not a therapist, it’s not always appropriate”* (Advisor Martha). However, some are *“happy to do that”* (Advisor Martha), and meet with students more suited to alternative services, because there is potential for the student to refuse support due to feeling uncomfortable speaking to someone that feels different to them. The connection and unity students have with staff therefore supports students to feel capable of asking for help.

Students also express people are an anchor, whereby people are what ‘make’ university and give their day purpose. Thus, it is unsurprising that a student’s perception of the connection between themselves and staff is important in feeling part of a crew:

they sometimes feel we don’t – or they have an expectation that we wouldn’t care about them, and we do. I think when they realise that you can see that they’ve got a warm bubbly feeling and they feel part of the crew. (Advisor Beatrice)

The idea of *“caring”* about them and the perception they are not cared for, suggests that students desire to feel that they matter to staff. Ella says:

if I just got a one-off call just checking in, I’d be like gosh, thanks for checking just to see if I’m OK... it makes you feel happier... you feel a bit of relief that people actually do care about how I’m feeling.

This “care” makes them feel valued and important and brings them closer to the university. Advisor Josephine recounts an instance where a student had gone off the radar for support services and *“I knocked on the door and he opened the door and he just burst into tears, and he said, “I am so happy that people care for me”*. Whilst Josephine voiced this isn’t typical practice for advisors, a student’s sense of mattering can come from being known and understood by others, and caring enough to notice their behavioural patterns and know when they need help. Advisor Beatrice further supports this by stating *“to have a good experience you need to feel like someone cares, that they’ve noticed that you’re there... actually having academics that give a shit about their life outside their studies as well, or have the time to”*.

Together, this highlights the role of empathy, understanding, and proactive support in being *On this Ship Together*, and addressing students' emotional needs and ensuring their wellbeing. Students want to feel that they have a relationship with their academic staff, and they are not just there to teach them. The use of *“give a shit about their life”* suggests this connection is also holistically driven; getting to know them and caring about them as a person within their life context. Being part of a crew then, is about knowing and caring about those around you. If students feel they matter to staff and the university, they feel more unified in tackling their problems, rather than being a lone sailor on a dingy, in the middle of the storm. They feel they are working with others and supported by others in their journey across the vast ocean that is the university experience.

Students also want to feel they are part of a civil society. Part of this civility is the need for the community to be respectful, approachable, nice, and supportive, where *“you can literally go up to anyone”* (Julia). By being open and approachable, students also feel safe enough to *“take the risk”* (Alastair) to find friends. A civil society can therefore promote cohesion and unity across their ship and the creation of a crew. A civil society also involves supporting one another, *“I was looking out for them, and we were just trying to be there for each other because we knew any bad blood in the flat sort of ruins the peace for everyone”* (Meera). Reciprocal support is therefore suggested to prevent divisive atmospheres that break the sense of cohesion. The use of *“we knew”* and *“for everyone”* suggests that consideration of other feelings is crucial, and there is a responsibility for everyone to collectively create a positive atmosphere. This is linked to co-creation, as people must work together to create cohesion and unity. In terms of the ship metaphor then, just as a

ship requires a coordinated effort from its crew, a civil society involves students and the university working together for the betterment of their community.

Similarly, students spoke of co-living respectfully and doing their duty to the flat. Keeping things clean and taking responsibility for the shared space, however, was a consideration deemed unfamiliar, *“they didn’t realise that for instance, they had to clean their dishes and put them away. They can’t just leave them on the side for someone else to wash up, like your parents can do.”* (Charlotte). Students therefore voiced the need for respectful flat activities, not putting their peers at risk through activities such as dealing drugs, and informing their flatmates of activities before they happen, *“If they invited friends over, we’d tell each other, you know”* (Julia). Respect was therefore centred around consideration of others and their feelings, which was also emphasised in the context of student difficulties such as mental health, wellbeing, and specific learning difficulties. Charlotte voiced that *“respect should be there on the baseline level, even if you don’t like someone. And it’s not like that”*. However, she was not referring solely to peers but also to academic staff:

Like, respect is something that you shouldn’t have to earn... it is such a big thing and universities are supposed to be of a higher education esteem. These people are educated. They should be better at it than what they are, in my personal opinion.

This suggests a perception of universities as prestigious institutions that should set an example for society. It emphasises that individuals within such institutions should demonstrate greater awareness, empathy, and respect in their interactions. This partnered with the general desire for a civil society offers a call for greater accountability and a cultural shift within educational settings to prioritize respect, understanding, and inclusivity. It highlights the idea that education extends beyond academic knowledge and should encompass the development of values and attitudes that contribute to a more respectful and unified society. The civil society is therefore represented as a set of standards by which the ship and crew should operate, to evoke a supportive environment where they are *On this Ship Together*.

We’re on this Ship Together then, means students need to feel that the university and the students are a part of the same crew. The theme emphasises active collaboration between students and the university in building a flourishing community, and students express a shared responsibility between peers and the university to promote a positive environment. Highlighted, is the importance of planned events, proximity, and facilitated social interactions in creating opportunities

for connection. The need for cohesion and unity through similarity, collaboration, and respect is also highlighted. Students want to find kindred spirits and emphasise the importance of shared experiences, values, and backgrounds in forming a supportive crew. The fear of being alone and the desire to fit in drives students to hold on tightly to their connections, however, they also need to feel that their peers are putting in the same effort as them. Importantly, rather than the student journey being a solo pursuit, it is supported by a civil society, whereby people act respectfully, supportively, and inclusively. Respect, approachability, and mutual support form the foundation of this civil society, reinforcing the idea that everyone plays a role in co-creating a positive environment. The metaphorical ship therefore becomes a symbol of collective effort, where individuals and the university work together harmoniously to address challenges, create community, and ensure the wellbeing of students.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter describes the impact of creating and maintaining *A Safe Harbour* for university students who grapple with feelings of exposure and insecurity. The metaphorical safe harbour is a multifaceted network of support systems, comprising friends, family, university staff and resources, that work collectively to provide stability and emotional security. The disruptive nature of transitioning to university and losing established networks encourages the emphasis of establishing new, stable connections. Rooted in anxiety, students desire a *Safe Harbour* where they can take refuge, find comfort, and have their experiences and feelings validated, whilst promoting the normalisation of their experiences. Central to the *Safe Harbour*, is the role of acceptance in creating emotional stability. Acceptance however is not only of academic failures but also of mental health and wellbeing challenges. Ultimately though, safety and security were presented as playing a vital role in students' wellbeing and success in their academic and personal journeys.

Next, *We're all on this Ship Together* advocates for a shared responsibility between students and the university in building a thriving community. Students express the importance of planned events, social interactions, shared experiences and values in creating the feeling of being in a 'Crew'. The Ship therefore becomes a symbol of collective efforts from students and the university, in *Steering the Ship* together to reach a shared destination; that is the wellbeing and success of the entire

community. This collaborative approach is grounded in respect, approachability, mutual support, and reinforces the idea that everyone plays a vital role in creating a positive environment. The fear of isolation and the drive to fit in, highlight the importance of social connections, and students are demonstrated to play a crucially active role in ensuring everyone has the chance of belonging.

It is also important to note that the beginning of this chapter explained that these themes can be shaped and shape in return, the central organising theme of *Steering the Ship*. Specifically, students appear to be empowered by both and feel confident enough to take the helm. This interconnection will therefore be further explored in Chapter 8.

Chapter 7: Navigating, Growing, and Adjusting to Challenges

7.1. Introduction to the Chapter:

This chapter introduces the themes of *Navigating the Storm*, *The Mists of Mismatch*, *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, and *Adjusting the Sails for Me*. *Navigating the Storm* highlights the concept of the 4 P's (preparedness, proactivity, perseverance and preservation) that encourage or represent strategies to cope with challenges. *Mists of Mismatch* offers the role of unmet expectations, where students feel the journey they are on is not what they signed up for. This mismatch also reflects the disparity between university and student expectations of responsibility. *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds* offers the resilience and adaptability students gain through their transitional journeys and emphasises the role of self-discovery and embracing change in being able to become autonomous and agentic individuals. Lastly, *Adjusting the Sails for Me* offers the need for flexibility, and the personalisation of academic and personal support. Collectively they present challenges students face in trying to *Steer their Ship* and are concepts that can thwart or support students' agentic development. Their individual interconnections with the theme of *Steering the Ship*, will be further explored in Chapter 8.

7.2. Navigating the Storm: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation

Like most journeys present challenges to be overcome, students encounter obstacles that require navigation and resolution. *Navigating the Storm* is about students navigating university complexities and how they do this. As "a lot of them haven't been prepared for that" (Advisor Helen), students seek a sense of preparedness for this new and independent voyage. Students aspire to have their academic vessel fully equipped with the necessary resources, a clear understanding of their destination, and a clear route to reach it. This destination can be in the form of academic, personal, or future goals, and big life questions such as "What am I going to do with my life?" (Advisor Beatrice). They desire to be well-informed throughout their university experience and the sense of knowing and preparedness makes them feel capable in their current and future lives. The desire to be 'in the know' is driven by the notion that if they can comprehend what is required, they will

be able to navigate their challenges and succeed. It is expressed that to confront unexpected challenges and address their problems, they must cultivate a sense of preparedness and be proactive to preserve themselves and persevere.

7.2.1. Preparedness

Preparedness is emphasised as a crucial tool for coping with university life and its challenges. It involves having the knowledge and skills to cope effectively, and feeling that I know; therefore, I can cope. For example, in the context of transitioning from school to HE, *“there’s something about having foundation years which just teach people how to self-study... which teach people skills to *be* kind of self-regulating learners so that they’ve got an idea before they get here of what it would be like”* (Advisor Helen). This indicates that knowledge and skill preparation equip students to better manage adjustments and manage their studies. Students portray wanting to be informed about course expectations, how to succeed academically and where to seek support. Students portray a lack of prior knowledge as a source of not coping, particularly surrounding their academic study, *“you do feel a bit uncertain over a lot of things”* (Ashleigh) and as *“I’ve kind of gained more support and knowledge generally, it’s kind of eased off”* (Kiera). Knowledge is therefore suggested to mitigate their discomfort:

For A level, I did those two subjects and I think I was very lucky to do that and to not have a completely new subject thrown at me, because if I did, I think I would have dropped out. (Julia)

Students like to feel prepared through having some familiarity, experience and knowledge to cope with their academic journeys. Julia further comments that *“without the knowledge of what I’ve previously done, I would have completely failed and flopped”*, suggesting this as a hypothetical capsizing in the circumstance of inexperience, where she feels unequipped to deal with the oncoming wave (i.e., difficulty). Preparedness therefore suggests that knowledge and skills help students to *feel* able to cope and persevere, *“you’re not as stressed, because you know what you’re doing”* (Kelly). Students therefore want to pre-empt and prepare for the academic or personal storm that is coming, to avoid a potential capsizing.

Preparedness also entailed knowledge of themselves to ensure self-preservation. Emma notes: *“I’m fairly experienced with being someone that has a mental illness, I guess... I’m kind of not in a situation where I’m not self-aware or anything like that so I know exactly what I need most of the time”*, suggesting this self-knowledge

enables them to help themselves. Students can therefore use their self-knowledge to make proactive decisions about how to best manage their challenges, *“from an emotional sense, like knowing when to stop and like process my emotions, like I do a lot of writing and stuff like that”* (Emma). Proactive actions can include taking breaks and leaving university, allowing them to recharge and come back to their academic responsibilities with renewed energy and focus; *“I stayed with [my family] for six months, got my crap together and then went back to uni and I’m much better. I’m happier now”* (Charlotte).

Figure 3

The role of Preparedness in Proactivity and Perseverance



Similarly, just as a skilled captain anticipates changes in the weather and adjusts the ship's course accordingly, self-awareness can help students to predict potential emotional storms, *“I think I’m quite sensitive and notice when little things that might fly under the radar for other people... are kind of quite significant”* (Emma). Thus, knowledge about oneself their life and *“how that affects me now”* (Kiera) can help students to feel more prepared to manage the emotional waves before they escalate to a *storm*. Specifically, students can pre-empt potential problems and *“try and find support that you’re comfortable with as soon as possible”* (Ashleigh) so they feel prepared to cope with challenges and persevere with their studies. It is important therefore, for students to anticipate challenges and make informed decisions, because if they do not seek support early, *“suddenly that breaking point is much worse than it would have been if we were supporting them since their first year”* (Advisor Martha). Preparedness therefore helps students to preserve their emotional wellbeing and persevere with their studies.

However, focusing on knowledge to cope with challenges ignores the value of learning through challenges and the benefits of coping strategies such as *“trying to focus on the positives”* (Ashleigh). Within their metaphorical storm, it is impossible to know and predict everything that will happen in its duration. Furthermore, students struggle to accept that sometimes they will be at the will of their experience, and

they cannot avoid unexpected challenges. Therefore, a crucial skill for students to develop is learning to live with this uncertainty and accepting that you can only plan and prepare so much. To cope with uncertainty and challenges then, students also try to self-preserve.

7.2.2. Self-preservation

Self-preservation involves choosing behaviours or activities that bring relief from pressure and strain. For example, *“they need to be able to not think about their work sometimes and be able to just socialise, relax, have fun”* (Advisor Layla). However, students self-preserve through both engaged and disengaged coping methods. Engaged methods are often tactical and well considered, whilst disengaged are more reactive and prolonged resulting in further strain. For example, students may take tactical breaks to reduce their stress and facilitate continuing with their studies. Conversely though, Ella says:

I wish that I'd gone home because if I take my dog for a two hour walk through the woods it just feels like I can breathe again. I put my music in, and I can chill, and not stress about anything.

The use of *“breathe again”* and *“not stress about anything”* suggests the need for recharging from the tensions of their demands, however the use of *“wishing”* and that *“I wish as well that I took like more me time, because sometimes I would sit back and go oh, I haven't done anything for myself today”* (Ella), suggests students do not always know when to take the tactical breaks, and the demands can feel more commanding. It is vital then, for students to recognise when they need it and that *“the time away to unwind and give your brain a break to remember all the other things that are not university is really really important”* (Advisor Martha). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified this as they *“have always needed that opportunity to let off steam, because it's hard being in academia, and I feel like now they don't have [the opportunities to socialise], they just work all the time”* (Advisor Isabelle). Continued academic strain is expressed here as damaging, however students also need to avoid getting carried away with letting off steam where *“they just get caught up in the whole party life and making new friends and then they get a bit behind and then its ok, my god, I've lost a whole term”* (Advisor Josephine). A complete disconnection from their university requirements is however quite common, where *“a coping strategy that quite a lot of students kind of fall back on, is just ignoring it and just kind of completely disengaging with the university”* (Advisor Isabelle). Such disengaged strategies, whilst potentially beneficial short term, pose

longer term issues where *“it’s going to be really difficult for some students who have just been ignoring all their academic responsibilities”* (Advisor Isabelle). Students can therefore disengage to preserve their energy and protect themselves from the strain they are experiencing, but like a captain of a ship, students need to recognise when they are headed in the wrong direction and be willing to adjust their behaviours and choices to promote sustainable and beneficial habits of self-preservation. However, when students are not aware of their needs and what works for them, their adopted preservation tactics can risk their wellbeing rather than improve it, particularly if engaged with long term.

7.2.3. Proactivity

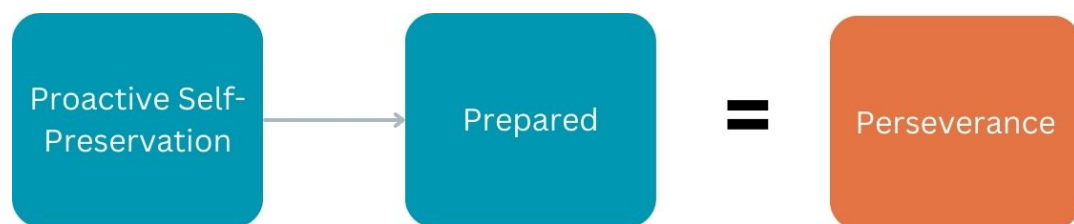
Proactivity links closely with the previously explained self-preservation concept, in that it entails engaged self-preservation strategies. These can include advocating for themselves, building a positive mindset, and embracing a healthy body for a healthy mind. It exemplifies actively doing something to protect themselves or their mental health and wellbeing, rather than passively avoiding. For example, Ashleigh voices *“trying to focus on the positives... because I think it’s so easy to feel dissatisfied and annoyed if we focus on the bad things”* (Ashleigh). Positive framings are conscious attempts to protect themselves from negativity and its impact, by trying to *“embrace challenges as well”* (Alastair). By embracing the challenges and trying to put a positive spin on things, students are taking the approach that *“It’s not the best, but you have got to make the most of it.”* (Marcus). The idea of embracing challenges and making the most of things suggests students are trying to actively minimise the harm of negative challenges. Similarly, Advisor Christian argues *“it’s that mindset thing – and recognising this is how you need to look at these things in order to be able to achieve what you want to achieve”*. Together they support the benefit of building an understanding that whilst challenges will come, being proactive, will allow them to navigate and cope with their metaphorical storms.

Similarly, students find value in difficult situations and maintain hope for positive outcomes. For example, *“challenges help us grow”* (Alastair), and *“it’s difficult, but you get through it”* (Ashleigh). This hope is particularly important when students are struggling underneath it all, as Ashleigh admits *“I think I try and just say positive things... but sort of deep down, I’m like ‘Nah, it was pretty shit’*. Being positive, *“just laughing about [their challenges]”* (Julia) with peers, positive mindsets and proactivity also serve as protective factors against disengagement and unhelpful behaviours such as substance use; where *“it was easy to just sit in my room and*

zone out and live my life" (Charlotte). By engaging in proactive self-preservation strategies then, students feel more able and prepared to navigate their challenges, which helps them to persevere with their studies. For example, if students take breaks they feel *"I am able to now focus on things because I had that break"* (Charlotte).

Figure 4

The role of Proactive Self-preservation in Preparedness and Perseverance



Proactivity then, means not waiting for problems to arise but rather actively seeking solutions and taking preventive measures. Like a captain and crew would keep a close eye on weather patterns, navigational hazards, and any signs of threat, students need to take proactive action to protect their ship from sinking. This is particularly prevalent for their mental health and wellbeing and is consistently raised by advisors; *"they're not coming to us at the point where they're just starting to struggle, or they're thinking about these things, it's when it's really got to kind of crisis point."* (Advisor Evelyn). This idea of a *"crisis point"* is interesting to consider because the avoidance of asking for help up until this point, suggests that students may lack the personal insight of their needs or hold fears associated with asking for help:

There's nothing more disheartening than seeing someone who's in their third year... something has finally cracked on their dissertation and they're speaking to their advisor, and you think goodness me, if we'd got in there two years ago... your experience of getting through this, you know, you've just done two and half years with keeping this to yourself. (Advisor Jamie)

There are students leaving help seeking too late, and there is a need for students to act quicker, and recognise that they can and should ask for help when they need it. The inaction, however, may be due to the perception that *"you can only go here when you get to a certain point, when actually it should be available whenever"*

(Kiera), and students are trying to gauge when it is okay to ask for help based on previous experiences:

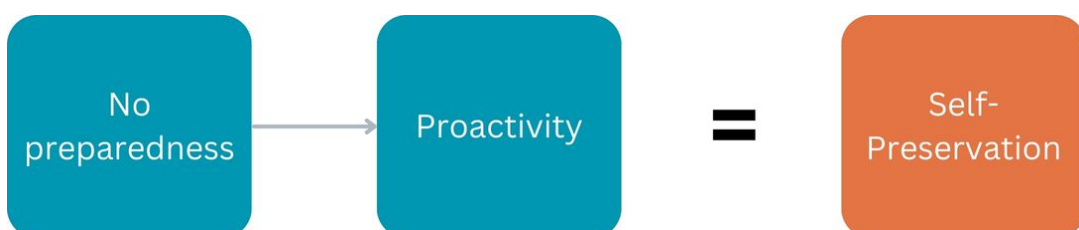
at school you're not really allowed to say anything, but if I'm not happy or if I'm struggling with something, I need to be proactive and reach out for it, so I wish that I'd maybe done that a bit more. (Ella)

This suggests that they do not necessarily hold this knowledge and understanding in the moments they really need help, and that transitionally, students are not used to being able to ask for the help they need. Thus, knowledge and proactivity go hand in hand when navigating emotional challenges. Kiera, however, notes that *"if you are confused about something, you are allowed to ask for help"*, suggesting this is not the case for every student, and that every circumstance may hold a different belief. There is a need, therefore, to ensure all students are aware they can actively seek help for whatever issue they are having. Once they are aware, they can then develop strategies to be proactive for not only their mental health and wellbeing, but their academic work too; *"it's like learning how to go OK, well I'm feeling stressed, and that's fine. What do I do to make myself less stressed? I've started reading, what else have I done?"* (Ella).

Furthermore, in contexts where students feel unprepared, proactivity can be a self-preservation tactic. For example, being proactive by seeking help, asking questions seizing the day, taking advantage of the present moment, or getting involved with opportunities available to them (both socially and academically) can help them to avoid negative consequences.

Figure 5

The role of Unpreparedness in Proactivity and Perseverance



However, it can be a case that students are not ready to be proactive; *"it's like, 'well there is the solution, why aren't they doing it? What's wrong?'. It's – sometimes people are not ready"* (Advisor Martha) and *"it's just how ready they are to accept*

support” (Advisor Martha). Being proactive therefore only works when students are ready to seek and accept help. Advisors therefore talk of the need for preventative measures in student support:

I think lots of support services are – they react, they provide reactive support. So, they offer support when you’re struggling, when you’re ill, when you’re unwell, when you can’t cope, rather than thinking about how do we offer you something, so you don’t have to get to that position? (Advisor David)

There is a balance to strike then between providing preventative support and relying on the proactivity of the student to gain access to preventative support. This is particularly important when *“there’s lots of students who will never talk to you unless you reach out to them first”* (Advisor Martha). So, whilst support becomes preventative if the student is ready to proactively seek that support, there are some instances where students are unable to seek this out, and proactivity of the student services instead, is required. Therefore, proactivity and prevention are complex in the context of student support, and one approach does not fit for all students.

Nevertheless, proactivity in getting involved with opportunities available to them is suggested by students as a good strategy for coping; *“my advice for students would be to get involved with as much as you possibly can”* (Zhara). Students report that when you don’t, *“I think a lot of people look back and regret not doing it”* (Emma); especially when *“it goes so much quicker than you expect it to”* (Kiera). Thus, making the most of it was echoed through the data, with its function offering a wellbeing boost; *“gross and cliché but that did save me”* (Charlotte). To suggest this is *“gross and cliché”* suggests a hesitancy and scepticism towards the conventional aspects of student involvement, however, *“saving me”* conveys the transformative power of active engagement in university life as their emotional state before being proactive is suggested to be poorer. The opportunity to be part of the community played a crucial role in positively influencing Charlotte's wellbeing, thus, proactivity is re-emphasised to support self-preservation and perseverance. Ashleigh confirmed this by stating *“although it might seem like the easiest and safest option is just hide in your room... it’s not really gonna lead to anything positive”*. Therefore, to have a positive experience, students should engage socially, get involved, and seize their opportunities, because this engagement builds social support networks, a key resource for coping:

if I had the confidence, I’d have tried to just strike up a few more conversations, and sit next to other people in the first few weeks, coz that’s obviously when

everyone's talking to each other. So, I think after that, when people have made solid friend groups, you're a bit screwed. (Ashleigh)

By not getting involved, students can therefore miss the boat, and potentially end up isolated. However, students need to feel confidence to take proactive action.

When making decisions to engage or act proactively, students also consider “*what's the point?*” (Zhara). With “*the point*” being the value of their proactivity and resources, such as effort, money, and time. Specifically, students evaluate the value of their investment in terms of what they receive in return. This typically occurs in moments of doubt across a student's journey, which revolve around facing challenges or a disconnect between their expectations and reality. Students question their direction and whether the planned routes and tasks needed to tackle their storms, are worth it or not in terms of their value and purpose. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Advisor Evelyn noted students felt online learning was:

less interactive, like, 'it's just a lecture, I'm being spoken at, and there's not much chance for asking questions or getting involved', and then a lot of them maybe feeling like 'well, I won't even go, I'll just watch it later' and it gets more and more isolated.

Whilst she states, “*this is COVID specific, to an extent*”, the use of “*not much chance for asking questions or getting involved*” suggests the possibility of gaining something in return is what motivates students to put in the effort. Furthermore, it suggests purpose is what drives whether something feels worth it or not. Advisor Josephine supports this idea by explaining how students tend to switch off “*because I think I'm not going to need that, so you don't listen*”. This sense of purpose is closely related to their future directions, and whether they feel that it will benefit them in reaching their destinations. For example,

whilst all my friends had got two or three offers by the time of December, I didn't even have one placement offer when it came to March. I was beginning to think you know what, what's the point, I should go and do a study abroad year or something else. (Zhara)

Connecting with proactivity and preservation then, questioning whether something is worth it, shapes how students decide whether to take proactive action, and consequently persevere through their challenges towards their goals.

Overall, preparedness, proactivity, and self-preservation (The 4 P's) explain how students exhibit their perseverance through personal and academic challenges. Much like captains of a ship, students fear the unknown and strive for a sense of control through knowledge and preparedness. Whether it is understanding course expectations, or anticipating challenges, feeling prepared becomes a vital compass for guiding students through their voyage and navigating their uncertainties. Proactivity is also argued to propel them on their academic and personal journeys, as a means of self-preservation and a catalyst for perseverance. Students who navigate their academic journeys with a proactive approach are suggested to be better equipped to face challenges head-on and adjust their course to avoid potential pitfalls. The connection between purpose, value, and proactivity, illustrates how students decide whether to persevere with existing challenges. Self-preservation strategies, however, offer strategic manoeuvres for students to protect themselves amidst the tempest of student life. Taking breaks, engaging in activities, and developing a positive mindset, are suggested as proactive forms of self-care. The narrative also expresses the need for a delicate balance between work and play. Without preparedness, and engaged self-preservation strategies, students are suggested to be at risk of engaging with unhelpful and potentially damaging behaviours. In essence, the narrative emphasises that by fostering these aspects, students can better navigate challenges, persevere through difficulties, and ultimately chart a course towards a fulfilling academic journey when they can see the value of their efforts.

7.3. The Mists of Mismatch: “This isn’t what I expected”

The *Mists of Mismatch* is about the meeting and disparity of expectations. Predominantly, it is “a mismatch of expectations, so expecting something and it being something different.” (Advisor Beatrice). Students grapple with the disconnect between their anticipated experience and reality, the pressure of expectations, and their expectations of the university's responsibilities. Imagine then, the student setting out on their maiden voyage (i.e., the student experience) feeling confident on the route they are taking and what this journey is going to entail. However, as the journey unfolds, a metaphorical mist sets in, obscuring and distorting their sense of direction. This is equivalent to when “that expectation clash really hits in first year about this is what I thought, and this is what it is and it’s not what I thought” (Advisor Beatrice). The mismatch between what students expect and the reality of their experience can leave them feeling disorientated, confused, and frustrated. The

discrepancies between their expectations and reality also dampen their enthusiasm, making it difficult to maintain motivation across their university journey. Whilst *Mists of Mismatch* could be argued to be an issue of preparedness, as described in *Navigating the Storms*, it is distinctive in that it focuses on the meeting and disparity of expectations. Students also voice a hard-done-by attitude, and it becomes less about *Navigating the Storm*, and more about expressing their feelings towards the experience they received and how they should be receiving more.

Contextually, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated student desires for the ideal experience where there is *“generally that sense that something’s been taken off me, my experience isn’t as I thought it would be. Being denied something”* (Advisor David). Ella notes *“a lot of people I know deferred their years. Didn’t want to go because they didn’t want that, that wasn’t the uni experience that we were expecting”*. Student expectations included *“Everyone says university is the best three years of your life”* (Marcus), and whilst some had this belief met, others did not, leading to *“a jadedness with the third years of I had a really poor experience, or I didn’t get the experience”* (Alice). The use of *“the experience”* suggests how students view things holistically, and that when one aspect of their experience is impacted, it has the potential to produce feelings of *“jadedness”* more generally. It may also suggest the impact of prolonged unmet expectations. However, this disjoint between their expectations and reality was also voiced in a pre-covid context, with Chloe commenting *“when I look back on it, I was very naive, just like everyone”*. Students therefore commonly hold an ill-informed belief about university, regardless of COVID-19, where the reality is more complicated and challenging than expected; *“I think a lot of them just don’t realise what they’re letting themselves in for then they get here, and they go ooh, this isn’t what I thought”* (Advisor Helen).

Student expectations are diverse, however, many emphasise the social and experiential aspects over the academic pursuit:

people always say, oh we go to the uni for the fun. Like the experience not the degree. Whereas I think this year [during the COVID-19 pandemic] really tested people to see if they were actually going for the fun or for the degree. (Carly)

The COVID-19 pandemic therefore posed a unique circumstance where students knew before arriving that their expectations were unlikely to be wholly met. Being *“tested”* suggests that much like mist encourages people to slow down, reassess, and move forward with caution, COVID-19 forced students to consider the purpose and value of university more heavily. However, despite these evaluations, students

still felt disappointed with their experience, potentially due to irremovable desires and expectations of university life.

Students often express a sub-par experience, of *“that’s as much as I get”* (Charlotte) and what they receive was not what they signed up to, *“I was just expecting a lot more, I think, in general, like a whole different kind of life to it and aspects that I didn’t really get”* (Julia). The use of *“more”* suggests anticipation of a richer and more fulfilling university experience, and *“in general”* and *“a whole different life”* suggests this expectation is multifaceted and holistic. For example, their expectations encompassed academic, social, and personal dimensions of university life. For the social experience, students report that first year is *“my year to kind of enjoy, live a little”* (Meera) and *“I’m not going to get my freshers back”* (Advisor Evelyn); it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and something they feel entitled to. Students also voice expectations about their academic experience:

I kind of expected, going into it... that we’d have lectures on how to structure the dissertation, how to write a discussion section or how to do a progress report, how to do a presentation, and that there would be more skills-based teaching (Emma)

This could signify their lack of preparedness for HE (as seen in *Navigating the Storms*) and the transition to independent learning (as seen in *Steering the Ship*), as they desire and anticipate an easy first year, and place responsibility onto others. However, these expectations collectively suggest, that there is a preconceived vision, that university provides something transformative and enriching, as well as a supportive, educational, and social experience.

When students experience a mismatch in their expectations then, students often voice consumerist attitudes of quid pro quo (i.e., I have paid for this in exchange of services); *“One student said we’re paying this much money, you serve us”* (Chloe). This suggests students feel entitled to ask for things they need, due to the amount they pay for their tuition, and a certain standard should be provided due to their financial input; *“I’d taken it into my own hands because I forget I’m paying for this. I’m entitled to give feedback and ask for what I want”* (Ella). Consumerist ideologies therefore shape how they feel they should be treated. This is particularly prevalent during COVID-19 regarding student support, *“You’re getting paid £9,250 a year. You can check in with your students especially during corona [the COVID-19 pandemic] and see how they’re doing”* (Ella). This belief was also voiced regarding their academic learning where there was:

a lot of frustration and anger and disappointment – and I'm sure this would still be there pre-COVID, but “I feel like for the amount of money I'm paying there's really not much contact time. I can speak to other kinds of students on the course, but actually they're not sure either, and I really want more face-to-face time with the actual academics, and personal tutors”. (Advisor Evelyn)

However, this suggests its existence both before and during the pandemic, highlighting that students commonly have expectations about what their money is paying for, and where the university should be spending it. Students therefore use their monetary cost, to judge the meeting of their expectations, and the overall value of their experience.

However, some circumstances of being entitled are more genuine than others. For instance, when *“you get told that you're entitled to reasonable adjustment... that's on your [record], but the actual application of the reasonable adjustment doesn't necessarily happen”* (Charlotte), students understandably feel their rights and entitlements are stripped from them. Similarly, these feelings materialise when compared to what others have, *“everybody else that was offered one has got one and I don't. Even people who got diagnosed after me or got the DSA after me, have got one, but I don't”* (Charlotte). This highlights the need for equitable support, particularly when *“under the Equality Act of 2010 we are legally entitled to have reasonable adjustments to access education”* (Charlotte). Consequently, for some students, there is concrete knowledge about the university's legal obligations and what they are entitled to, which justifies their entitlement beliefs. However, when speaking experientially, it is not clear if their expectations are reasonable. For instance, Alastair says *“the personal tutors are there to help students, and I felt like I'm not being helped”*, which is dictated by perception and feeling and arguably harder to justify. Nevertheless, perceptions and needs can be unfulfilled, leaving students feeling *“a little bit let down, and probably dampened the experience a little bit”* (Ashleigh). Being *“let down”* suggests they feel betrayed, disappointed, and dissatisfied when what they anticipated did not come to fruition. In the metaphor of the mist then, when students feel that the support they expected is not there, this can lead to the clouding of their experience.

Students, however, are not the only ones with expectations. Students face expectations that are placed upon them by others and experience the pressure of trying to meet them. Typically, this entailed meeting the expectations of others, such as family, friends, university, and support staff, to achieve their goals. Students

strive to align their actions and decisions with what others anticipate from them, and what they expect from themselves. For example, due to monetary input from family, there is pressure to succeed, particularly for international students, whilst *“being at university due to familial pressure can happen across demographics... I think I’ve come across that more with Southeast Asian students, students from China in particular”* (Advisor Layla). This is said to be *“because financially they’ve got more to lose... they’ve got more invested in themselves in terms of being able to come to the UK, so there’s a lot of pressure related to performance”* (Advisor David). They are also *“quite aware of the fact that their parents or themselves have spent a lot of money to be here and they need to perform well”* (Advisor Isabelle). Being *“quite aware”* suggests the enormity of this pressure. Like the consumerist attitudes of students toward the university’s performance then, there are consumerist ideologies between parents and students.

A similar pressure is experienced when students *“are told you have to do well, you have to be a doctor, you have to be an engineer and don’t you dare be coming home if you don’t get a really good degree, really good grades”* (Advisor Martha) and students worry that *“I can’t mess up because my mum and dad are paying for this and then I’ll be disowned”* (Advisor Helen). Being disowned suggests the consequence of an unmet expectation and the enormity of the pressure to succeed. This could be due to cultural attitudes, for example, it brings them *“Shame. ‘by acknowledging that I’m struggling’... students will often say my parents will be ashamed of me, or you know, ‘I can’t talk to my parents about this because they think I should just continue’. It’s fear of failure.”* (Advisor Jamie). Such fear is bound in culture and family ideas of prestige, *“Because the expectation is, you’ve come here to this prestigious university and you get your degree and you’re better, our family will be better”* (Advisor Jamie). Students therefore have the pressure of having responsibility for themselves, but also their entire family. Students also feel compelled to pursue specific degrees based on parental expectations. They experience a mismatch between their own educational desires and parental expectations of what degrees to take, where they *“wanted to change courses and have the parental pressure of, “No, you won’t get a good job with that degree. You need this degree”* (Advisor Josephine). The student is therefore expected to attend the university and course their parents desire, uphold their cultural values, and hold responsibility not just for themselves, but for the success of their entire family. For international students, this could then also bear greater consequences for mental health and wellbeing, as this pressure can lead to:

a lot of perfectionism... this thing of I haven't got time to think about myself I need to be working all the time, the work is the priority, it's kind of seen as almost to think about mental health would be a distraction from the work (Advisor Helen).

However, it is important to consider international student perspectives and experiences. It may be that the advisors voice aspects of international students' experiences, that they would not want to try and change due to their cultural beliefs. Therefore, by encouraging them away from those expectations, students may feel forced to adhere to what advisors think is 'correct' and may create a further mismatch between their own culture and beliefs. This is particularly important to note when international students in this study did not speak of this experience themselves.

Consequently, for support services *"there is that concern that certain students aren't necessarily going to come to us, potentially because of different cultural understandings around wellbeing"* (Advisor Layla). Work takes top priority, often at the expense of considering one's mental health and wellbeing, and *"they're the ones that are more likely to keep pushing themselves even when it looks like it's a bad idea to"* (Advisor Jamie). Whilst this appears to be particularly prevalent *"in Chinese students"* (Advisor Helen), perfectionist ideals also extend to other student groups. For example students:

Push themselves, push themselves, push themselves like, "It doesn't matter that I didn't do anything in Semester one I will manage to do that in Semester two as well as Semester two work even though I'm really unwell, and even though it's incredibly difficult for anybody who is well. (Advisor Martha)

Ashleigh also says for second year she *"just felt, you're not gonna do well unless you read everything"*. This pursuit of perfection can therefore drive students to push themselves beyond their limits to meet impossibly high standards, which may be connected to their perceived perceptions of the university expecting them to cope and be resilient.

Students are motivated by their achievements, particularly when they achieve grades they didn't expect, *"I've been getting firsts for stuff, which is really, really surprising"* (Timothy). However, internal pressure can develop when students form perfectionist ideals around their academic work, where Ashleigh *"just spent so much of the time panicked that getting one really bad grade would just ruin everything"*. Timothy says *"I wasn't like a high-flying academic at school. So, it's been good and*

surprising to have actually got good grades at university because that's not something I expected given my academic prowess at school" (Timothy). Being "high flying" suggests an expectation that to do well you need to be a previously high achieving student, a rhetoric likely to add to academic pressure. Yet, advisors have voiced that those who were highfliers struggled more than they expected, compared to those who were less confident and able previously:

you get a lot of other students who have worked their socks off to get to uni and to me they are the ones who will achieve better because they've already got their work ethic... I do sometimes find the ones who have got the better grades don't necessarily find it the easiest because it's been a bit too easy for them in the past... A little bit too much complacency for those with the best grades, I think. It can catch up with them. (Advisor Josephine)

Thus, mismatches between students' beliefs in their abilities and what it takes to succeed at university are common, whether they are previously high performers or not, which can shape how much pressure they place upon themselves and evaluate their experience.

It may be, however, that those with low self-belief try and avoid a match between reality and belief by believing they will do poorly and overworking. This works as a defence mechanism to protect themselves from disappointment and failure, as when students prove themselves wrong, they feel a boost from the unmet expectation of their belief with their success. However, because the desire to succeed is embedded within HE, students still feel disappointed when they perceive they are unsuccessful. Advisor Helen comments on this:

I feel like there has been this cultural shift, towards kind of self-improvement almost and people are more focused on, not just kind of how can I be OK but how can I be better, it almost plays into that perfectionism thing of well I could be better, I could.

Therefore, students are continuously striving for better and placing pressure on themselves to exceed expectations.

Mismatched expectations also stem from the culture around adulthood where students face the challenge of adapting to new academic learning while encountering unrealistic expectations about *Navigating* the complexities of adult life:

I think we kind of get thrown into the adult world with the expectation of right, well you're an adult now, get on with it" and expect them to navigate

this new world alone and it's expected that we are able to cope and navigate it ourselves, and the adult world of course, another lie to children, the adult world makes sense, you know, and it doesn't – it's barmy, it's bonkers – which causes a lot of distress. (Advisor Christian)

The use of “*thrown into the adult world*” suggests that society expects a quick and seamless adjustment to adult responsibilities, with this being mirrored in the university context. University staff impose their own experiences onto current students, where “*I think a lot of times people just think that young people are complaining about nothing and they're kind of like we did it back in our day so it's fine, kind of thing*” (Kiera), However, like seasoned captains, parents and university staff can share their experiences and insights, offering guidance for a journey that they may have previously experienced, yet they often do not realise that the landscape of that journey has changed. Consequently, “*we can end up sort of imposing our own notions in a way that just doesn't map onto other students' experiences*” (Advisor Layla). There is a mismatch, therefore, between what the academic staff view and expect of the student experience, and the reality of that experience for students. Advisor Christian's comment that the adult world “*makes sense*” followed by it is “*barmy*” and “*bonkers*”, therefore presents a discrepancy between the expectations students will have of adulthood, and the reality of a chaotic and unpredictable adult world.

There are also mismatched expectations in how social groups should function, with pressures to behave, be and act a certain way, “*when I eventually told them about these things, they said I never expected that from you*” (Chloe). If they do not behave as their social group expects, they can experience isolation and judgement of character. For example, students get labelled an outsider when they no longer partake in activities expected of them, “*They would go out at 2 am in the morning into the woods and smoke. But I would either be doing work, or I'd go to sleep. But I was the boring one. Because I'm no longer fun*” (Charlotte). Zhara mirrors this when she got called “*the grandma*”. Additionally, people get identified by their activities and how they align with peer expectations of who you are. For example, Charlotte explained:

I had brightly coloured hair, I was electric blue hair, so people would say to me things like, I miss blue haired Charlotte, because that's how I was referred to. Because if you looked at me, I was bright blue hair, you could spot me anywhere. It made sense, but that's now associated with drugs.

Appearance therefore gets partnered with behaviour to create expected characterisations. *“missing blue haired Charlotte”* then suggests a preferred version, and that the current version of Charlotte does not match their expectations.

Another key mismatch observed, was the disconnection between staff and student expectations of their roles. Students think *“this is your job”* (Julia), while *“the staff are like, oh, we’re surprised that you expected that”* (Emma). Particularly, this related to student perceptions of staff members having broader roles, encompassing academic, student wellbeing and life concerns. Advisor Martha explains:

there’s a big question about academic advisors’ pastoral role because some of them very much see themselves as, “I am here for academic queries,” and that’s it and you say anything about life, and they just say no this is not what I do. It’s technically part of the job role but a lot of them again, because of how things have been historically just don’t see it that way.

Advisors therefore hold a similar perception to students, highlighting the need for better communication between staff and students regarding their roles. This also illuminates that the traditional demarcation between academic and non-academic responsibilities, might not adequately cater to the comprehensive support that students expect and require. Students typically feel that for staff, *“they’re supposed to be there to support you and make the transition quite easy”* (Alastair) and *“you need to just approach your lecturer, and they should help you, because that’s their job”* (Alastair). However, there is often a disparity between what they expect is *“their job”* and what they receive, which leads to dissatisfaction. Specifically, expectations of their own and others’ responsibilities are misaligned with the university expectations of the student to be self-directed and self-coping.

Advisors suggest that one way this can be addressed, is through the management of student expectations. They imply that advisors are responsible for guiding students towards having reasonable and achievable demands which *match* the genuine capabilities of the university to meet them. For example, advisors need to manage student expectations in their expectations of support:

a lot of the time we do get students, they really want some counselling and therapy and that’s where we have to be really clear with them that we can’t do that. This is what we can do and then these are the people who can try to help with what you’re looking for. (Advisor Layla)

This is because students often place unrealistic expectations onto services, and *“you can’t meet everybody’s needs, it’s impossible... we’d be delivering five million different things every day. But I think meeting that need means – it hits the point; it hits the mark”* (Advisor David), rather than meeting the exact demands the student asks for. It is therefore about educating students about being realistic in their demands and understanding the limitations of their ideals. For example, whilst students expect and desire specific mental health support, Ashleigh notes she does *“understand that the uni mental health services are stretched, and also probably not necessarily equipped to deal with more complicated things, I guess”* (Ashleigh). However, *“i guess”* suggests a discontent with this explanation. However, Emma states *“I didn’t expect them to be like mental health workers”*, offering recognition of the support limitations. She continues *“I don’t blame them for it because it’s not their fault that they’re in a situation where they’re not equipped to deal with those things”* (Emma). However, not all students have the same level of contextual awareness, and ability to empathise with the contexts of their services. Such a perspective requires a more comprehensive understanding of not only the university but also the external factors that might constrain its ability to execute what they desire and expect.

Overall, *The Mists of Mismatch* illustrates the widespread impact of unmet expectations on the student experience, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It symbolises the disorienting nature of encountering stark contrasts between envisioned paths and reality. Students express a sense of entitlement and disappointment when their expectations of university life remain unfulfilled. External pressures, particularly from family expectations, reveal tensions of conforming to external obligations. The pervasive pressure to achieve perfection leads to internal conflicts and fear of failure, showcasing that a more realistic approach to academic expectations is needed. The theme also highlights the challenges of transitioning to adulthood, through the expectation to seamlessly adjust to adult responsibilities, despite the chaotic reality of the adult world. The disconnect between staff and student expectations of roles highlights the need for better clarity and communication of their responsibilities.

7.4. Growing and Adapting with the Changing Winds.

The student experience is a continuous process of adapting to change and growth. This theme therefore emphasises the changes and transitions of the university

experience, where *“everything is changing”* (Meera), and *“how they deal with change”* (Advisor Josephine). Students must adapt to changing support networks, independence, academic shifts, and changes within themselves. By embracing change and learning from their experiences, they become remodelled versions of themselves. The theme also focuses on student desires for progress and direction, signifying the need for academic and personal growth.

Academically, students speak about academic jumps, where *“the academic content just gets more challenging”* (Timothy). For example, *“you go from first year, from quite laid back and then boom, you go to second year and it’s just like, wow, where’s all this work coming from”*. The term *“boom”* suggests a suddenness of impact on transitioning into second year and that the workload was manageable in first year. Charlotte offers a potential explanation for this, where:

you know the second year gets harder than the first year and then the third gets harder than the second year, but you never actually properly realise it... until you are there and sitting it, you’re like oh my gosh.

Despite being aware of the progressive pattern of difficulty then, the extent of the challenge may only be adapted to when they are immersed in the experience. The recurring cycle of academic leaps therefore requires students to continuously refine their adaptation strategies to meet evolving demands. Consequently, students frequently find their work to be *“harder than expected”* (Marcus), prompting them to reassess their skillsets and efforts; *“I probably didn’t fit in enough hours, if I did fit in more hours, it would be easier”* (Marcus). Zhara supports this with *“now that it’s final year, I’ve realised that, you know, come on, get your head down”* (Zhara). However, students can internalise the struggle of adapting to the increased difficulty to mean personal inadequacy, *“they think that’s a mental health difficulty and I’m like you do lose motivation in second year, it’s not a honeymoon period anymore”* (Advisor Helen). It is suggested that students need to be more open to challenges and accept the process of adjustment and growth, as the *“honeymoon period”* suggests a disillusionment with what is required to grow their knowledge base. Likewise, Eric claims when *“you’ve just arrived, you’re a bit of a clean canvas, you shouldn’t really have many preconceptions, or at least be open to them being changed”* (Eric).

For the change from teacher-led to independent learning then, students bring academic preconceptions and a rigidity to change:

Students will say ‘God this is totally different to doing A-levels.’ You know, A-levels I was taught, now you want me to teach myself, you know? So, part of our

role is helping students kind of get used to that. Get used to this new way of being. (Advisor Jamie)

Thus, students need to become accustomed to the shift in their learner role, and what it means to be and grow as a student. Advisor Josephine supports this by noting:

Part two comes as a bit of a shock for them because it steps up a little bit and they haven't actually used their first year to fully understand university. They're still treating it a bit like school. And that happens quite a lot.

To adjust then, students may need to understand what role each year has in their overall student journey, and the role the university has at different levels of their degree. They also need to understand what they are capable of doing independently which can help them to adjust; *“you could notice that there was a change in the style of working and how you have to work and adapt yourself to the new content”* (Charlotte).

A similar adaptation was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic when universities were forced to adapt to online delivery; *“I think some students have definitely adapted but I think quite a few students have just struggled to adapt to a new way of living”* (Advisor Isabelle). Students report mixed experiences of the move to online learning. Some adjusted well, due to the changes being minimal, *“the modules I was doing last year, when it came to everyone going home because of COVID, they were all coursework based so I could carry on as it was”* (Kiera). However, others felt it was *“a different kind of world... it just feels so much more formal, and just feels really different”* (Alastair). Comparing the two experiences, uncertainty seems to shape how students experience the change, with students feeling more comfortable with change when they experience familiarity with it. Alastair however, voices *“a different kind of world”* where there is no familiarity in this change. Lack of consistency is therefore suggested to be disruptive and hard to adjust to:

*When the pandemic hit, that made things a lot harder because suddenly I had to move back home, and it felt very weird because suddenly... I wasn't in lectures with my friends, and everything was online, and I was just sort of stuck in my room sort of just writing up essays and... *sigh*... yeah. (Timothy)*

The sigh clearly expresses their despondence about this experience, and *“it felt very weird”* suggests a dissonance between their independence and returning home. The

use of *“that made things a lot harder”* suggests this was a challenging adjustment, with *“stuck”* connecting to how this made students feel less autonomous.

Similarly, when students move away from home, they undergo social transformations and adjustments. Shifts in friend circles and family networks create a sense of change and sometimes loss. However, this type of change also occurs across the university journey, often requiring acceptance and understanding, *“I understand that you move – I’ve gained and lost friends. You move on. You have different parts of your life, that’s fine, I understand that.”* (Chloe). However, whilst *“I understand that”* suggests that change must be accepted, there are some that find acceptance hard to implement:

they've gone from being very popular having loads of friends having loads of connections to going to a place where they haven't got any of those things and actually, for some of them I think it's a massive shock to the system. (Advisor Helen)

Therefore, by removing what is familiar, students can feel unanchored and set adrift, as they no longer understand their place within the new social system. This shift can provoke fear and intimidation in students, *“It was scary... it was quite nerve-wracking, and maybe intimidating at the start, just because it’s a new experience”* (Alastair). The use of *“scary”* and *“intimidating”*, suggests newness brings discomfort, however, *“at the start”* indicates their ability to progress and adapt to these changes. Most students however, voiced that *“It did take me a while to find my feet”* (Chloe), therefore, this process of adaptation and adjusting to change is not always *“I managed to settle in, I think, quite easily, quite quickly”* (Timothy) but, a more prolonged process where they *“feel like the first month of university is so overwhelming”* (Meera) and *“just kind of settling in and finding my feet in first year was the biggest challenge that I’ve had”* (Emma). Students therefore need to take their time to adjust and figure out how to navigate and adapt to the change, because *“by, sort of, Christmastime, I think I was very settled, and enjoying it”* (Ashleigh) and *“it was mainly just time”* (Emma) that allowed this adaptation. However, the differing experiences of Chloe and Timothy, compared to Emma and Meera, suggest the adjustment process is not uniform for all students. Therefore, this variability in adjustment timelines highlights the individual nature of transitioning across the university journey.

This variability is suggested to depend upon students' ability to embrace change, including academic, social, and personal change. Embracing change was seen for friendship groups, *"I guess we wanted to diversify a bit more, not just stick together, who we already know from home, we need to branch out as well"* (Zhara).

Branching out suggests expanding their horizons, changing up their social circles and a need to *"be very open-minded and willing to learn about people"* (Carly). For personal change, students embraced change when they behaved in ways that prevented making progress: *"I'm trying to change it, but it's a hard thing to do"* (Charlotte). By accepting the need for change, and embracing this need, students become more open-minded and experience growth.

However, it is also suggested that the university needs to exhibit openness to adapt and change, to further support student growth. Specifically, *"as time goes on, we realise that some things aren't right, or some things could be done better or more efficiently, maybe. And I think a lot of it is a lack of will to change"* (Kiera).

Furthermore, Advisor Layla questions:

have we got into this habit really that is a legacy of old-fashioned ideas about academia and actually do we need to revisit that? Do we need to be constantly examining students or can we approach this in a different way?

Together, they suggest there is a potential for change and whilst universities may be resistant to change, this may be born from old ideas of education rather than moving with modern academia. Advisor Martha explains that *"I think some of it is to do with the culture that they grew up in and studied in, because there's so much that's changed within universities"*. Therefore, uncertainty of change based upon previous experiences can stunt the future growth of HE and its students. This can be problematic when *"actually we're learning that a lot of stuff wasn't very healthy and isn't very healthy"* (Kiera). Kiera further explains that:

we've been pushing for so long for like recorded lectures and online teaching and stuff, and everyone's just said we can't do it. And now we can it's kind of like, OK, what else can we do if we really need to?

Thus, there is a perceived unwillingness to change within HE, when change only occurs if it is forced. However, it is recognised that *"it's a big paradigm shift, it's not done overnight"* (Advisor Martha) and just like students' individual adjustments, this would also take time. Nevertheless, it has been *"interesting, over the last year... seeing how many changes can be made when they need to be"* (Kiera). There is something to learn, therefore, from unpredictable changes, in identifying where

adaptations could be made to improve or better the experience of students. Just like a ship sailing from point to point on its journey, learning something new from each destination they dock at on the way; students and the university learn by exposing themselves to new experiences and diverse perspectives.

Equally, students adapt and grow by understanding themselves and when they *“know what I’m like”* (Chloe). They express that it is important to *“Find out what you like. Find out what you don’t necessarily like”* (Zhara). Their ability to self-reflect is key in their ability to navigate changes in their experience, because they often *“needed something to help them think about their needs, to make sense of themselves, feel that they could get some support and allow themselves to kind of move forward in some way”* (Advisor David). Thus, to ensure the progress and growth of students, they need to know and understand themselves. Students mirror this and the desire for opportunities to grow personally, where they want to:

talk about my life and some of the things that have happened in it, and how that affects me now and how I can learn to sort of adapt to it or learn from it, and that kind of thing. (Kiera)

They want to adapt to who they really are, and grow into the people they want to be, *“they’re in that mindset we talked about, self-development, self-focus, self-improvement, and they like this idea that they’ll talk to somebody, and it will be about them and they can like, I don’t know, find out more about themselves”* (Advisor Helen). This idea of improvement and development, therefore, demonstrates students are focused on progress. This can also relate to future-orientated goals, recognition and achievements, and development of skills and knowledge so they feel that *“uni has actually prepared me for the world of work”* (Zhara). Timothy says it would be useful if his degree had:

incorporated some of those platforms they use in the industry and make them part of the assignments, or part of the learning, just so students feel as if they’ve got a blend of academic and non-academic stuff which they can take with them, so they feel as if when they leave after their three years, that they’re in their best possible position to apply for a graduate role.

Real-world applications in learning therefore help students to adapt to graduate life. They don’t want to read the book on how to sail, but they want to learn to sail whilst on the ship. They see their university experience as stepping stones to their desired destination, and *“everything has become, sort of, steps to my ultimate goal”* (Meera). Their motivation therefore comes from feelings of progress on their future,

where they strive to *“get a good grade on this because if you get a good grade, you can get a good degree and work for the company that you want or build something that you want”* (Meera).

Growth is also reflected in relation to making mistakes and learning from their actions. They report no desire to change mistakes or avoid difficult experiences, because it made them who they are, *“I wouldn’t actually change a lot because it builds you in certain areas to grow as a person”* (Charlotte). Difficult experiences are therefore transformative for students, that teach them something of value. Despite Charlotte having a life-threatening experience with drugs, she says *“It’s going to sound stupid, but I wouldn’t change the fact that I’d done the drugs and almost died”*, and even though *“[I] ruined half of my nose from sniffing it coz I’m an idiot... I wouldn’t change it because it has actually made me focus on different things”*. This implies adversity can be a catalyst for adaptation and growth, as it suggests a shift in priorities and values. This is also expressed as more valuable than an easy ride, as the risk is deemed worth the lesson. The acknowledgement of personal responsibility, *“coz I’m an idiot”*, adds a layer of self-awareness to the narrative, further suggesting that learning is derived from the experience and the ownership of their behaviour.

Similarly, even though she would have liked it to be different, Emma valued the difficulties she faced with friends, because *“I definitely have a healthier way of approaching friendships and stuff now from that... it has taught me quite a lot about how I approach things now”*. Therefore, there is a cost-benefit analysis of having a bad experience, with students placing significant value on the transformative outcomes. Consequently, seeing them not as a setback, but a catalyst for development, can encourage students to see value and purpose in their experience; *“I think I actually needed to go through that to learn something, a bit about me and just kind of almost move forward”* (Chloe). To go through something is to develop as a person, and *“I feel like people need to fuck up to get through life”* (Charlotte). To *“fuck up”* therefore means that *“the message is stronger because I’ve learnt it myself and I’ll learn from that”* (Chloe). Consequently, this suggests students need to experience mistakes to be able to truly adapt and grow.

Overall, the theme evidences the student experience as a transformative journey. It highlights changes and transitions throughout university life, within academic, social, and personal spheres. Academically, students experience shifts in workload and intensity, often feeling challenged in adapting to higher expectations. Despite being

aware of these changes, however, the recurring cycle of academic leaps demands continuous refinement of their adaptation strategies. Socially, students transform friend circles and support networks, sometimes leading to feelings of being unanchored or intimidated. However, despite initial fears associated with these changes, growth is argued to occur over time. Much like a captain needing to learn from past voyages, learning from experience is emphasised. Growth is voiced to come from making mistakes, and the transformative potential of difficult experiences is valued. Difficult experiences are perceived as more valuable than an easy journey, with the importance of embracing change to achieve growth also being demonstrated. It is also suggested that whilst students seek personal and academic progress towards their future desires, the capacity and willingness of the university to adapt and evolve alongside them further shapes the growth of its students.

7.5. Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience

For students to further adapt, cope and engage with the student journey, students and advisors voice a desire for a tailored experience. This involves shifting towards prioritising students' unique needs, which allows them to navigate their journey in the ways that best suit them. Students are said to *"need something a bit more personal"* (Advisor David) in their interactions with academic and personal support where students' distinct challenges and circumstances across the university context are addressed. Advisor Heidi comments *"it's about the students and I think tailoring things for different students is really important"* because students have different needs, and one size does not fit all. A student-centric approach acknowledges that a standardised approach might not suffice for everyone, and that more flexibility is needed in the delivery of support and structures of university. Timothy comments *"it would be good to have a one-to-one session with tutors, or something explained... in a way that sort of suits you"* (Timothy), highlighting the need for tailoring so individuals feel that their unique situations are recognised and accommodated. However, Chloe's *"teaching style is very much group work and a lot of interaction"* whereas *"some have said, 'it suits me, it suits me to stay at home'"* (Advisor Layla). Students therefore have a lot of preferences universities are pressured to cover, and *"this search for kind of a magic cure all... it's not possible to do something that's going to make absolutely everybody happy"* (Advisor Layla). This idea of a *"cure all"* suggests that there is a desire for every student to have a perfect world where they experience no difficulty. However, the use of the word *"magic"* indicates that whilst

this desired level of personal tailoring would have a transformative effect on their experience, it also defies logic and feasibility.

Nonetheless, there are educational structures that are genuinely not suitable for certain students. Advisor Layla evidences a particular issue “*where the pace and intensity of the course just isn’t suitable for some*”, such as those with long-term health conditions:

It’s quite difficult where there’s a rigidity around it has to be full-time study. I think that just doesn’t work, especially for people with kind of chronic conditions that flare up and fluctuate, they just need longer to complete a degree. (Advisor Layla)

The use of “*rigidity*” suggests some flexibility in how degrees are structured is needed to improve inclusivity, prevent hindering learning experiences, and support students in their degree completion. However, “*rigidity*” also suggests that when confronted with the diverse and evolving needs of students, the university, like an iceberg at sea, is formidable and unyielding. Flexibility is also particularly interesting to consider as Advisor Layla previously voiced in *Mists of Mismatch*, that there is a need for managing student expectations due to the wider structural barriers of HE. This contradiction suggests that there is a higher importance placed upon flexible university structures in the event of student equality, inclusivity, and diversity barriers. For example, flexibility is highly emphasised when advocating that for some, it “*just isn’t feasible, it’s not going to happen*” (Advisor Layla). Accessibility of educational activities for diverse student groups is therefore in need of addressing. Advisor Layla suggests that “*where possible, it would be good if someone could engage with mentoring and devise strategies to be able to manage that, but for some students, it’s not possible on the grounds of their disability*”. It is therefore important to construct support programmes that can be as flexible as possible, to cater for different student groups and needs.

From Layla’s account, it can be surmised that there is a huge need for greater inclusivity, so that “*there’s less of a feeling that people are having to stuff themselves into a shape that doesn’t fit them*” (Advisor Layla). This idea of “*stuffing them into a shape*” suggests an unsuitable expectation being placed on the student, and it gives the sense of students experiencing force and manipulation into a mould that fits this expectation. The word “*stuffing*” implies that there is not much wiggle room for individuality. Support services like advisors are therefore trying to fill the gap of this flexibility by taking the approach of “*never underestimating how much of*

an impact a problem is going to have on a student. What might not faze me could be completely fazing for another student” (Advisor Jamie). There is a need to understand what is relative to the individual student and listen to what they feel they need. Students reported, *“I felt like they constantly kind of had an idea in their head of what I wanted and didn’t actually listen to what I was asking”* (Emma). Therefore, when students take the initiative to advocate for themselves and ask for support, students want their support staff to take their ideas and experience into account. This is opposed to simply doing what they think the student needs; *“stop telling me that and do something that I’m kind of saying would help”* (Emma).

It is interesting to consider that students voice knowing what they need and how their support could be tailored; particularly when advisors believe students do not always have this knowledge. This could be explained by students feeling their support has not been helpful, however, Advisor Heidi reflects that *“if they keep coming back asking questions, OK, right, we need to reformulate this”*. The use of *“reformulating”* suggests the need for iterative improvement, and that support plans should continuously evolve based on student feedback. In summary, the advisor data highlights the need for a more adaptable, personalized, and student-centred approach to academic activities and support. It calls attention to the limitations of rigid structures and emphasises the importance of creating an inclusive environment that values diverse learning paces and individual needs. Advisors therefore play a crucial role in understanding and responding to these diverse needs, by iteratively improving their support to be responsive to the ongoing and changing needs of the students.

Interestingly, from the student perspective, the idea of tailoring appears more preferential than needs based. Students talk about what suits them in terms of how they understand their content and how they feel they learn best. How they learn best included listening, working individually, the type of environment they are in, and concerning online or in-person delivery, *“I work best online. I prefer to go in, but I work best online because I prefer to teach myself something as opposed to someone talk at me”* (Charlotte). However, how something was communicated in a comprehensible way was consistently commented on. For example, *“it was useful for my experience because I understood it, because it was pitched in the way that I understand and is right to me”* (Timothy). As seen from advisor perspectives, however, what is *“right”* for one student may not suit another student. Herein lies the problem with personalised approaches, and why the *“magic cure all”* (Advisor Layla), is unattainable. The lack of insight on this from students, however,

exacerbates their desired ideals of this tailored approach and thus brings further disappointment when their preferences are not actualised. Students therefore take it upon themselves to do what's preferable, and make it easier on themselves, *"if you've got any doubts about a module or you feel I'm really going to struggle with this, then go for something else. Go with what you're comfortable with"* (Timothy). This strategy allows students to navigate their academic journey with greater ease and confidence, by creating stability through self-tailoring. Typically, this approach is centred around playing to their strengths, whereby it reduces effort and is experienced positively; *"we also get graded on module participation which I love, because I talk, and I'm willing to talk, but I'm also willing to listen and bounce off other people's ideas"* (Chloe). This is interesting as they express positivity and willingness for things that come easy, *"I can look forward to what I'm doing and know that it's kind of my strongest suit"* (Kiera). When students feel they can tailor things to what they are confident in therefore, they are more likely to have a positive experience. However, if students feel that they are not going to perform well, and it does not match their strengths, they are less likely to engage in the activity:

It kind of meant then, when I knew that was coming, I was much less motivated to go to it or to do the work for it, or I just assumed that I wouldn't do well on it, and it wasn't really a priority. (Kiera)

Motivation is therefore dictated by how successful students feel they will be, which is felt by playing to their strengths. What is *"right"* for them, according to students, therefore appears to be made up of what is comfortable, easy, and plays to their strengths. Students therefore tailor their experience towards what is preferable rather than what they *need*.

Together then, students and advisors express a desire for a more tailored approach to the student journey, recognising that one size does not fit all. This involves prioritising students' unique needs and circumstances and acknowledging the limitations of standardised approaches. Rigid educational structures can hinder inclusivity and student success, highlighting the need for greater adaptability. Advisors therefore advocate for flexibility in support structures, particularly for students with diverse challenges and circumstances, to further encourage active engagement. Advisors play a crucial role in understanding and responding to diverse student needs, and continuous improvement and responsiveness to student feedback is emphasised to support this understanding. From the student perspective, tailoring their experience to suit their strengths is preferable,

contributing to a positive academic journey. However, this emphasis on preference over need may lead to missed opportunities for growth and development. Overall, there is a call for a more personalised and adaptable approach to support student engagement, success, and wellbeing, throughout their university journey. However, lack of student understanding of the wider HE context exacerbates ideals of personalised tailoring.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, four themes were delineated; *Navigating the storm: The 4 P's*, *The Mists of Mismatch: "This isn't what I expected"*, *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, and *Adjusting the sails for me: A Tailored Experience*. The theme of *Navigating the Storms* presents how students deal with challenges, highlighting the importance of preparedness, proactivity, and self-preservation in persevering with the student journey. Fear of the unknown is expressed to drive students' desires for knowledge, readiness, and control, with preparedness being presented as a crucial compass in guiding students through their uncertainties. Seeking support, understanding expectations, and anticipating challenges, are all suggested to prepare students for what is to come. Proactivity is presented as a catalyst for academic and personal growth and a self-preservation strategy. Self-preservation however can take both protective and proactive forms, with a positive mindset being particularly important for better navigation through challenges.

The *Mists of Mismatch* symbolises the impact of unmet expectations and the pressure of expectations upon them. It provides a complex backdrop to student expectations, encompassing personal, academic, social, and cultural ideals. Unmet expectations often led to feelings of entitlement and disappointment, both pre and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mismatches were therefore sometimes voiced to encourage students to advocate for their perceived rights. The disconnection between staff and student expectations, however, reveals the necessity for better communication and alignment regarding their roles. The theme also extends to potentially unrealistic expectations placed on the student, with familial pressure adding to the challenge of academic and personal autonomy. Nevertheless, unmet expectations present an opportunity for growth and development of the skills needed to transition to an independent adult (i.e., be the captain).

Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds presented the evolving nature of the student experience and the need to experience this and adaptability, through the

university journey. It specifically notes that what is crucial for their adaptation includes taking proactive approaches to change. These include embracing change, learning from mistakes, and drawing lessons from experiences. Students voice that growth from challenges is more valuable than an easy journey. The idea that students need to adapt, however, is also mirrored for universities; suggesting a willingness to evolve is important for the facilitation of student growth.

Adjusting the Sails for Me introduces the crucial concept of flexibility within academic and personal support practices. The theme calls for a shift from impersonal to personal approaches, as a route to increase motivation and confidence. However, whilst students desire a fully tailored approach, a lack of understanding of the wider university capabilities exacerbate ideals of personalised tailoring. More knowledge around these structures is therefore needed to align personal ideals with the broader university context. Nevertheless, the theme advocates for an inclusive environment that values diverse learning paces and individual needs. It recognises the limitations of the currently rigid structures and emphasises the importance of recognising student diversity. Without university responsiveness, student autonomy is therefore thwarted, and their confidence to *Steer their Ship* is diminished.

Chapter 8: Theme Interconnections

Through chapters five to seven, the eight individual themes have been individually delineated. Each theme has been explained, evidenced and explored concerning their central concepts, however, it is important to next explicate the interinfluencing nature of the themes to further express their meaning and importance.

In Chapter 5, *Steering the Ship* posited students grapple with becoming active players in their student experience. The theme explores self-government, empowerment, and the desire to alleviate burden and return to familiar support structures. However, students also seek autonomy and control, signifying the need for opportunities and the self-perceived competency to *Steer their Ship*. The theme signifies the importance of “*I can*” in becoming and being agentic students. *Steering the Ship* noted that agentic behaviour can be encouraged and thwarted through the opportunities and choices available to students to take agentic action, as well as the support provided being facilitative of agentic development. Specifically, students require support that helps them to act with agency rather than expecting them to do this without guidance.

Collectively, the themes produce a compelling narrative of perceived competency as a fundamental influence in students’ quest for captaincy and *Steering their Ship*. Specifically, students need to feel they are competent to *steer*. Furthermore, the themes outlined can both support and thwart the development and engagement of agentic behaviour and self-perceived competency. This chapter therefore details these connections by providing a brief overview of the individual themes followed by their interinfluence with the central organising theme of *Steering the Ship*. Where several themes are interconnecting to inter-influence with *Steering the Ship*, these will be detailed where relevant.

8.1. Steadying the Ship: Establishing Balance

Steadying the Ship focused on the need for balance and equilibrium; through support, emotion management and establishing a work-life balance. Students require an emotional and practical balance to prevent a metaphorical capsizing of their ship, emphasising the importance of emotional regulation and work-life balance. Collectively though, the themes of *Steadying* and *Steering the Ship* explain the journey from dependence to independence, emphasising the importance of

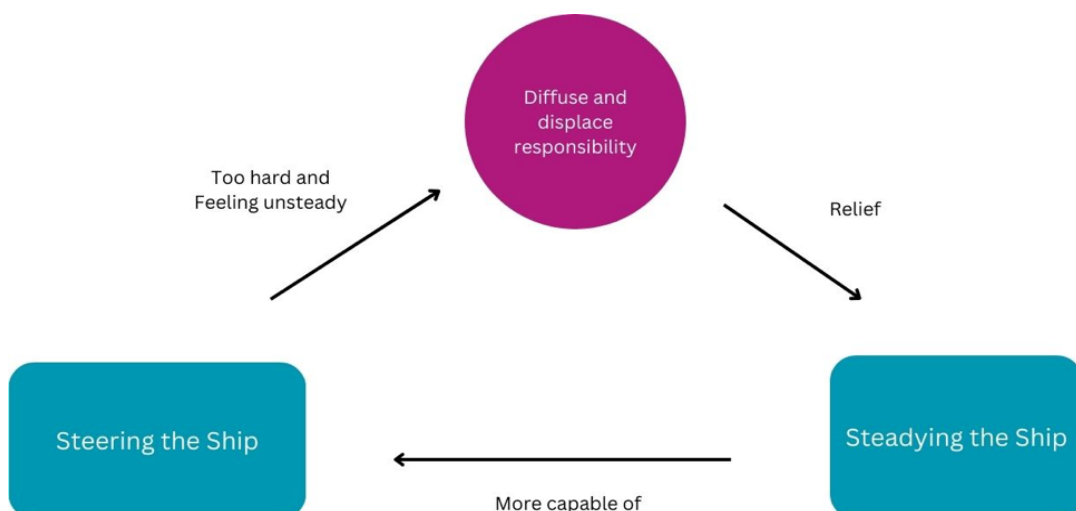
achieving balance for students to take charge of their student journeys. They represent the idea that to *steer* students need to be *steady*. For example, within *Steering the Ship*, it is suggested that students typically desire to displace tasks onto others when they feel *unsteady* through uncertainty and inexperience:

They want somebody to tell them what to do, they want something quite structured, some students actually don't like the kind of independent learning element of it... I think a lot of it is just about the self-directedness of it a lot of people struggle with. (Advisor Heidi)

The idea that students want structure and to be told what to do suggests there is uncertainty and a lack of feeling steady due to their inexperience, and thus they desire someone else to take over the responsibility which stabilises their experience. For example, on moving back home during the COVID-19 pandemic, Meera was able to abdicate the level of responsibility she held as “*here, my mum handles that*” (Meera). Thus, by returning to a previously familiar unburdened lifestyle, she *Steadies her Ship* by displacing some of the burdens felt from her inexperience in holding this level of responsibility and demand. The connection between the themes of *Steering the Ship* and *Steadying the Ship* is represented in Figure 6.

Figure 6:

Diffusion and Displacement of Responsibility to Steady and Steer the Ship



Note. This diagram shows an example of how diffusion and displacement occur, and how this is perceived to stabilise their experience and help them to steer.

Further evidence for this comes from *Steering the Ship* which suggests students require a knowing person to guide them. Specifically, a knowing person provides a steadying function that facilitates students to take individual action. This is important to note, as without support, particularly in the face of additional challenges, students can reach a point of limitation; *“when I’m struggling and then to deal with struggling you have to go through like loads of admin stuff, it makes it a lot, lot, worse for me”* (Emma). Therefore, students may diffuse responsibility due to individual thresholds for overwhelm being reached, to *Steady their Ship* and consequently continue *Steering their Ship* on their journey; *“they don’t necessarily always need you to kind of, yeah, hold their hand through it. They just want somebody to tell them what to do to feel better”* (Advisor Isabelle). Their ability to *Steady their Ship* then, is potentially what determines their ability to *Steer their Ship*, rather than an unwillingness to be agentic. Similarly, in the context of non-disabled students, whilst daily living tasks may not be as severe of a burden compared to the context of disabled student challenges, it may be that non-disabled students feel similarly overwhelmed, as such tasks add to their general sense of pressure. Their desire to place responsibility onto others is therefore their attempt in trying to *“keep up, on top of everything”* (Alastair). Together, both groups of students may be attempting to *Steady their Ship* so they can *Steer*, by either diffusing or displacing responsibility onto others. This can be particularly entwined with their transition to greater independence, where freedom comes at a cost of more responsibility.

Continuing with the idea that for students to steer they need to feel steady; *Steadying the Ship* illustrates that students require emotional regulation skills and need to establish a sense of balance to be the captain of their student journey. Loss of emotional control can compromise a student’s autonomy and ability to *Steer the Ship*, as whilst *“you kind of don’t want to take a sense of autonomy”* (Advisor Isabelle), *“you’re having to then think, are we going to have to just suspend?”* (Advisor Layla), because their risk is too high. Consequently, emotion regulation support helps students to steady their feelings and retain their autonomy, as *“I feel like the techniques the counsellor told me were quite good, I did feel more in control of things. I felt like I became better at handling everything”* (Alastair). This applies to a variety of emotional circumstances, where providing the student with emotion regulation tools, can help them to avoid getting to a breaking point:

a week of collected stress that you've not dealt with, and one tiny trivial thing, that's it. Sets you off completely... All the big things that are at the bottom and then that one tiny little thing you just go you know what, that's it. (Ella)

Students may therefore experience an unsettling and overwhelming experience that hinders their ability, perceived or actual, to act and *steer*. The prevalence of emotional dysregulation suggests this further, with emotion regulation strategies being suggested to support students in *Navigating the Storms* of university life, and their personal tsunamis (e.g., overwhelming feelings that pose a risk to their safety). This is particularly important when Advisor Alice comments that “*more emotional distress and emotional dysregulation*” leads to increased impulsivity, where “*The number of kind of impulsive sort of overdoses is more*” (Advisor Alice). Thus, students need to feel emotionally steady to *Steer their Ship*, but more importantly to be safe. The theme talks of interpersonal communication playing a key role in steadying their emotions. Sharing their feelings and others providing guidance helps them to manage their thoughts and feelings. Consequently, this encourages students to continue *Steering their Ship*, as “*we do have some students who are very motivated, they just want answers to some questions. They just want to figure out, “OK give me a plan, what do I do, and I’ll do it, just tell me*” (Advisor Martha). Again, this highlights how students do not necessarily need someone to do the steadying for them, but they do not feel competent in knowing what decisions and actions they need to take. Thus, students need guidance that will help them to *Steady their Ship* and facilitate them to act with agency.

8.2. A Safe Harbour: Having a secure and stable base

This theme epitomised feelings of insecurity and exposure. It voiced student desires and needs for a secure and reliable support network that acts as a safety net and is reminiscent of their family. The metaphorical safe harbour is a multifaceted network of support systems, comprising friends, family, university staff and resources, that provide a sense of safety and security. However, the safety net is also made up of an internal sense of security, made up of feeling confident, that they can be themselves, and the role of acceptance in creating emotional security. With such a social and internal safety net in place, students feel empowered to explore new opportunities and overcome difficulties. Rooted in anxiety, students desire a *Safe Harbour* where they can take refuge, find comfort, and have their experiences and

feelings validated. Safety and security were presented as playing a vital role in student's overall wellbeing and success in their academic and personal journeys.

The *Safe Harbour* connects to the central organising concept of *Steering the Ship*, as students do not feel capable (i.e. secure) of taking the lead because "*I don't feel like an adult yet*" (Julia). Not *feeling* like an adult suggests that students perceive themselves to be inexperienced and that they lack competency. A *Safe Harbour* noted that when students lacked confidence or self-belief in their abilities, students portrayed feelings of needing validation, encouragement and guidance from an authority figure. For example, students cast a parental figure on the university and retain the child position, where "*I don't think they realise like how, especially my year, how kiddie we were, like how still children we were because we didn't get the process*" (Julia). The use of "*kiddie*" portrays them to be vulnerable and in need of protection, and "*we didn't get the process*" places them as incapable or in need of guidance. Their perception appears rooted in the idea that the university represents a higher authority that guides and nurtures them during their educational journey. However, when advisor Josephine voiced how "*I had to learn to not be mummy to them all*", this suggested that within support systems there is a balance to strike between adopting the family role and fostering their independence. Therefore, the parental guidance students seek, and the desire for "*holding their hand through the teaching and supporting them*" (Advisor Beatrice), is carefully balanced with providing students with the opportunities to venture out from their *Safe Harbour*, experiment with their independence, and develop their confidence. Their support network, therefore, serves as a crucial facilitator in developing their sense of internal security during this transitional period and promoting the development and experimentation with their independence and abilities. Trust in their support network was also highlighted to promote a sense of security, as it encourages students to seek help when needed and share their experiences without fear of judgement or rejection. Consequently, A *Safe Harbour* can both encourage and thwart students' independence and ability to *Steer their Ship*.

For students to develop and experiment with their independence, the theme voiced the role of confidence and acceptance. Specifically, the theme suggests taking a development-focused mindset, embracing self-compassion and an "*It's okay to fail*" (Advisor Layla) mentality encourages students to approach challenges with a sense of safety. Advisor Helen noted that through acceptance there are fewer "*I have to prove myself, I have to be X Y Z*" (Advisor Helen) mentalities, and there is less risk of students feeling overwhelmed and like "*I can't do this, I'm going to drop out*"

(Ashleigh). Consequently, the role of acceptance supports students in tackling challenges without fear, and without reducing their self-perceived competency to the point of withdrawing from university. Acceptance therefore connects to *Steering the Ship*, whereby adopting an acceptance mindset promotes perseverance in their studies. There is also potential development of their self-perceived competency once their challenges are managed, as students experience that they have 'survived' the challenge without consequence and have instead learnt from the experience.

8.3. We're All on This Ship Together: Being a Crew

This theme emphasised the need to belong to a crew (i.e., peers and the university) and the importance of working together to create a community, a sense of cohesion, and unity. It emphasised active collaboration between students and the university and shared responsibility in building a thriving community. This collaborative approach is grounded in respect, approachability, and mutual support, and reinforces the idea that everyone plays a vital role in creating a positive environment. Planned events, social interactions, and a sense of belonging through shared experiences and values were voiced to create the feeling of being in a 'Crew'. The Ship therefore becomes a symbol of collective efforts from students and the university, to reach a shared destination; that is the wellbeing and success of the entire community.

Regarding the theme's connection with *Steering the Ship*, students can sometimes need the university to take the lead, "*I just feel like maybe if we were forced to get more involved in the first week or two, we'd have found each other*" (Ashleigh). To be "*forced*" suggests a diffusion of responsibility when things get difficult, however, the desire to connect demonstrates that they want to be able to act, yet experience barriers to this. It is in these circumstances, that the university is suggested to take the helm and *steer* students towards situations where connection is hard to avoid and inhibits students from actively creating division by self-isolation. Furthermore, students voice empowerment through events encouraging them to socialise, and that school events are essential; especially when other social aspects like flat life are lacking. Furthermore, Ashleigh noted she wished she had tried to make more effort to socialise of her own accord:

I think I'd have tried – and also probably would try and go along to look up a couple of societies and stuff, just even if I didn't feel like they were 'my people',

just interacting with others probably would have helped a bit, just done more things. (Ashleigh)

Hence, expressing difficulty in *Steering* their socialisation. Together, this suggests that providing opportunities to socialise, and the university recognising this need (i.e. being on the same ship as the student) supports them in becoming more agentic in their social lives. Similarly, the civil society concept presented in the theme mirrors this, whereby if the community gives the impression that “*you can literally go up to anyone*” (Julia), by being open and approachable, students feel safe enough to “*take the risk*” (Alastair) to socialise and seek friends. Consequently, being *On this Ship Together* can help students *Steer their Ship* in the context of socialisation.

However, there is also a side to the themes interinfluence with *Steering the Ship* that puts the onus on students. The theme and Ashleigh’s comment above note the idea of making an effort, whereby the student is active and does things to create their connection or division with others. For example, Timothy argued, “*if we had made more of an effort to have meals together*” they would have had more bonding in their flat. Additionally, students spoke of active divisions regarding bullying, alienating others, and impenetrable social cliques. Ashleigh noted her peers were “*banning me from parts of the house*” (Ashleigh), whilst others “*have experienced racism*” (Charlotte). Student actions are therefore highlighted as central to creating a crew not only for themselves but also how others’ sense of being in a crew is created and felt. Hence, how students engage with their agency and autonomy to include or exclude others is also crucial in creating a student’s sense of being *On this Ship Together*. *Steering the Ship* then, is not only influenced by being *On this Ship Together*, but also, being *On this Ship Together* is influenced by how students *Steer their Ship* and choose to act. This can be further supported through the concepts of cohesion and unity, as Meera’s comments that for those she felt were not like her, she noted “*I didn’t really want to actively hang out with these people...*”. This indicates that feelings of similarity can further dictate how students actively behave towards their peers and promote or hinder the development of being *On this Ship Together*.

Unity was proposed as an important aspect of *We’re all on this Ship Together*, of which similarity was crucial. Therefore, a desire to be judged positively to feel united was emphasised. The connection between unity and *Steering the Ship* can be seen from the desire for unity leading students to behave in ways that protected their

sense of unity over and above what they might prefer or what feels synonymous with their individuality. Meera suggested that students would rather behave in a way that does not pose a risk of being isolated, *“this need to fit in and just be one with the whole flat, or whoever you’re living with, is so strong, that you don’t want to do anything that pulls you out of that”* (Meera). Consequently, the importance of *We’re all on this Ship Together* can drive students to abandon the autonomy they have to be authentic, and instead seek out unity based on edited versions of themselves.

Furthermore, the theme further indicates that when students feel they are *On their Ship Together* through this feeling of similarity, students could experience empowerment to tackle their difficulties and the confidence to actively foster greater connection with their peers. Many students were described as avoiding taking action to speak with their peers about their difficulties and instead only speaking to advisors. Advisor Helen notes that *“they’re all coming to us to talk about it but they’re not talking to each other about it”* and yet *“if everybody sat down in a room together and said I feel this way and then the other person would go oh, me too and me too”* that they would feel more able to actively seek support from their peers as they understand they are not alone. Meera confirms this by saying *“everyone’s going through the same thing, and everyone’s looking for someone to talk to, someone to support them... And that really helped, knowing that everyone’s going through more or less the same thing”*. Consequently, *Steering the Ship* towards going to peers for support can be encouraged through feeling that their peers are sharing their experiences, yet there is a dilemma of needing to *Steer the Ship* first, to find this out. Here, it is important then to consider that universities could promote these discussions between students to support them in taking these actions. This is especially important considering the benefits suggested by organised events and activities highlighted at the beginning of this section.

Trust also connects *A Safe Harbour*, *We’re on this Ship Together*, and *Steering the Ship*, whereby *“It is important to know who your real mates are”* (Marcus). Meera explains that *“every time there’s been an issue, I have gone to the first person I trust”*, suggesting knowing who they can trust determines how they decide to act and reach out for support. Trust in others therefore dictates how students *Steer their Ship* in moments of need. To trust they will be accepted by others means they are more likely to ask for help, take risks, share ideas, and engage in opportunities, *“You can just pick up anything and just shove it and go do it, and it’s nice and you don’t have to be a certain type of person”* (Charlotte). Contrastingly, when the response to their disclosure or engagement is rejected or dismissed, they feel

unsafe to do so again; “the look on [my advisors] face was enough to put me off ever speaking to him about anything ever again, coz he clearly was not comfortable with any kind of conversation about mental health” (Emma). Ashleigh supports this further when commenting on her advisor, where “he kind of gave off this vibe of like, ‘I don’t really want to deal with this, and deal with you’, so I was just like, maybe not”. When people do not judge and are accepting and understanding of their struggles, students therefore feel that they are *On the Ship* with them, and they are safe to ask for help and consequently feel that they have the support around them that enables them to tackle their challenges. Similarly, when their issues such as with peers or accommodation were noted to be ignored in the theme of *We’re All on This Ship Together*, this further supports the idea from *Steering the Ship* where students feel they are faced with the “void” of voicing their concerns and the university as a “power” above them, unwilling to help. Co-creation then is also about the university and the students unifying to address issues that are affecting the collective ship (i.e. *Steering the Ship* together).

Connecting to *A Safe Harbour* then, when Ashleigh describes her experiences of bullying, this rejection meant she did not feel safe to be an active student, due to being ostracised. Specifically, she “didn’t feel safe going to lectures or seminars”, and that “in some ways, COVID has been quite helpful, that it is all online”. Ashleigh did not have to face the individuals causing her to feel unsafe. The idea that she felt “I don’t want to have to face this” and the avoidance opportunity given by the COVID-19 pandemic teaching environment being online, suggests that when students do not feel that they are *On this Ship Together*, and others are not co-creating a safe space for them to be in, students do not experience emotional safety and are less likely to take agentic action to be active students.

Overall, then, when students feel they are *On this Ship Together*, students appear to feel safe and confident enough to take the helm and *Steer the Ship*. Similarly, when students feel confident to *Steer their Ship*, they can create more opportunities for feeling that they are *On this Ship Together*. Importantly though, the concern of *Being a Crew* can overwhelm student agency and autonomy and encourage inauthentic and detrimental actions.

8.4. Navigating the Storms: Preparedness, Proactivity, Perseverance and Preservation

Navigating the Storms highlighted the importance of preparedness, proactivity, and self-preservation for student perseverance. Students fear the unknown and desire a sense of preparedness for their personal and academic journeys, particularly through knowledge and experience. Proactivity was presented as a facilitator of growth in academic and personal matters, yet students are suggested to adopt avoidance strategies to self-preserve when facing challenges. Nevertheless, some adopt proactive self-preservation strategies such as building a positive mindset, which is described to be facilitative in navigating through challenges. Students also decide whether to persevere with their challenges by evaluating the purpose, and value of what is required. The interconnections between 'The 4 P's' however, emphasise the complex nature of students' psychological experiences. The interconnection with *Steering the Ship*, however, surrounds how students *Steer their Ships to Navigate the Storms* they face.

Predominantly, the connections with *Steering the Ship* centre around preparedness and proactivity. Specifically, when students feel prepared (i.e. feel they have the skills and knowledge to proceed), students are better able to take proactive action and *steer* through challenges and toward their goals. However, it can also be that when students are brave enough to take proactive action they can feel and become more prepared, giving them further confidence to *steer*. However, it is also important to note that the inter-influence between *Navigating the Storms* and *Steering the Ship* also appears to be shaped through the development of the *Safe Harbour*, particularly their internal sense of security. For example, preparedness shows students' eagerness to avoid potential failures and feel secure in their abilities to achieve, "*you're not as stressed, because you know what you're doing*" (Kelly). The preoccupation with 'knowing' in order to cope, however, ignores the value of learning through challenges which is emphasised in *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*.

As *Navigating the Storms* highlights then, proactivity is key for *Steering the Ship*, as it is described to benefit students in their growth. It can be likened to being at sea, meeting unexpected and unavoidable waves, and the need to approach them head-on. In the event you take the wave or challenge at an angle or try to avoid it, you then risk capsizing. This is particularly important when preparation is not possible,

and students fail to recognise that some things cannot be fully prepared for and must instead be lived through. Proactivity is therefore also used as a way to protect themselves and persevere on their student journeys:

I was just like, I can either be miserable about it, or I can just get on with it. I have tried to make the most of it. It's definitely not been the third year I wanted, but I always feel like, in some ways, there have been benefits to it. (Ashleigh)

By “*just getting on with it*” Ashleigh highlights the understanding that sometimes students will face situations they cannot control, and by building a positive mindset they can persevere, and still have a valuable experience. Proactivity is therefore a way of *Steering* their journeys towards growth and perseverance.

8.5. Mists of Mismatch: “This isn’t what I expected”

This theme highlighted the impact of students’ unmet expectations and the pressure of expectations upon them. The theme highlights how there is an expectation for students to be able to *Steer their Ship* immediately on entering university where they “*kind of get thrown into the adult world with the expectation of right, well you’re an adult now, get on with it*”...” (Advisor Christian). It also notes pressures to be a certain type of person in social groups and the pressure of perfectionism from both them and their families. Both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, feelings of entitlement and disappointment were also portrayed due to unmet expectations. These feelings however were also described to shape student agency for self-advocacy and opportunities for growth and development of skills needed to be an independent adult. Nevertheless, the theme extends to potential personal autonomy and agency damage when unrealistic expectations are placed on the student, particularly by family.

Regarding unmet expectations, one of the main mismatches experienced related to the newly active role of students and the expectations on them to self-direct (i.e. *Steer the Ship*). Within *Navigating the Storms*, students expressed complaints about the challenge of their newly active role, mentioning their expectation of more guidance in their academic learning. Advisor Jamie supports this with:

Students will say ‘God this is totally different to doing A-levels.’ You know, A-levels I was taught, now you want me to teach myself, you know? So, part of our

role is helping students kind of get used to that. Get used to this new way of being.

The use of “*now you want me to teach myself*” suggests they experience a *Mismatch* of expectations and reality around university learning, whereby they expect the same approach as their previously experienced teacher-led learning. Thus, there is dissatisfaction with this change and suggests, that *Steering the Ship* poses a challenge due to mismatched expectations. This also extended to their quid pro quo approach to university, and their consumerist attitudes, where students felt they were not getting what they paid for. Students portrayed a sense of entitlement therefore, to act, and ask for things they need and want due to the amount they pay for their tuition, “*I’d taken it into my own hands because I forget I’m paying for this. I’m entitled to give feedback and ask for what I want*” (Ella). This idea of taking things “*into their own hands*” highlights the connection to *Steering the Ship*, as it suggests taking a strong active role. Quid pro quo mindsets therefore drive students to *Steer their Ship* towards having their expectations met. Hence, acting with agency (i.e. *Steering the Ship*) seems to be driven in one way, by a process of their mismatched expectations and consumerist attitudes leading to advocacy for their needs and desires.

Similarly, Charlotte spoke of being entitled to reasonable adjustments and them not actualising in her support. In such circumstances, students understandably feel their rights and entitlements are taken from them. Consequently, this can promote agentic action to advocate for their needs. Charlotte highlighted that “*we are legally entitled to have reasonable adjustments to access education*” and thus students voice they are entitled to ask for what they want and need.

Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was raised to “*test*” students regarding their motivations and decisions to attend due to knowing beforehand that their expectations were unlikely to be met fully. In this context, students were portrayed to consider the purpose and value of university more heavily than they might have pre-covid, meaning their choices to attend may have been arguably more agentic. Consequently, unpredictable external contexts can force students to be more agentic in their decisions and choices. However, alternatively, these decisions could have felt less autonomous if they felt they needed to go to university, but they lacked the freedom to govern their experience in line with their expectations. Mismatches in expectations can therefore drive how agentic and autonomous student decisions are and feel. Relatedly, the theme noted the role of moral

responsibility, whereby social expectations of the university experience were not being met, leading to moral juggling with their decisions (e.g. whether to rule break or not). The *Mists of Mismatch* between reality and their expectations can therefore guide how students *Steer the Ship*, particularly when external restraints work against their internal needs, desires, and expectations.

Similarly, other external forces such as familial pressures and their previous experiences of their own success were shown to act upon students' ability to *Steer their Ship*. For example, international students were voiced to experience high levels of parental demand and expectations regarding the degrees they take and how well they perform. The weight of parental pressure and expectations may reflect the significance of parental influence in guiding student decisions during the transition to independence (i.e. *Steering the Ship*). However, students can also grapple with the expectations and desires of their parents, as they adjust to a more independent lifestyle. Parental expectations can dictate how students might *Steer their Ship* and consequently remove their sense of agency and autonomy, because "*they've just done it coz it's what they felt they were meant to do*" (Advisor Helen). It is unsurprising, therefore, that students may desire control over their learning (*Steering the Ship*), to regain some of their autonomy and agency in these circumstances.

With parental pressures, student actions may be based on desires to satisfy their parents' expectations rather than their individual goals. Feeling that they must do what is expected of them, diminishes their freedom of choice, which causes them to "*feel like they've got to do it for one reason or another and then it's just a really hard slog*" (Advisor Layla). Consequently, external pressures, particularly from family expectations, reveal tensions between personal autonomy (i.e. *Steering the Ship*) and conforming to external obligations. This can even be seen when there is an imagined or expected absoluteness to the pressure:

you'll get a student's a "well, I kind of did it because mum and dad thought it would be a good idea." And it's about, you know, more often than not they speak to their parents and the parents are fine about it. (Advisor Jamie)

Therefore, student agency and autonomy (i.e., *Steering the Ship*) can be heavily dictated by their perceived and actual expectations of parental pressures and expectations. Advisor Josephine's surprise at the extent of this parental pressure, "*I see that more than I ever expected to*", also indicates that even seasoned advisors may underestimate the pervasive nature of these expectations. Consequently, the

awareness and support of staff is important in encouraging students to *Steer their Ship* and break through the mismatch, particularly within the international student community. It is important to consider though, that encouraging everyone to *Steer their Ship* may alienate international student perspectives and experiences where they may not feel comfortable removing this aspect of their culture. Therefore, giving them the autonomy to adopt or challenge these perspectives is important.

Overall, *Mists of Mismatch* highlights that when deciding to attend university, unexpected external forces could shape how autonomous and agentic decisions to attend are and feel. Mismatched expectations of the university experience can encourage students to advocate for their needs and desires. Expectations from parents can dictate student decisions and reduce their ability and perception of their ability to make their own choices (i.e., *Steer the Ship*).

8.6. Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds

This theme highlighted the evolving nature of the student experience and the need to experience this and adapt through the university journey. It noted the importance of proactive approaches to change, in student's adaptation to, across and beyond university life. Through embracing change, learning from mistakes, and drawing lessons from experiences, students are suggested to experience growth. Specifically, it is voiced that growth from challenges is more valuable than an easy journey. The idea of adaptation is, however, also noted for universities; suggesting a willingness to evolve is important for the facilitation of student growth. The main way in which this theme demonstrates a link to *Steering the Ship* though, is that students experience a *Changing Wind*, where they enter university and experience a newfound independence they must adapt to and will experience growth from. From *Steering the Ship*, the key idea of responsibility has been portrayed in *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, as a crucial part of transitioning from adolescence to independent adult as they journey through university. Coping with this responsibility, however, depends on their ability to balance their demands with their resources which is particularly tricky at certain points of their transition, where demands increase, resources may be lost, (e.g., family support network) or new resources are needed (e.g., new support network).

To explain, in transitioning to an independent adult, students lack prior experience in *Steering their Ship* which poses a lack of knowledge resources. However, it is posited that students need to take an active role (i.e. Be the captain) to experience

growth, “*I think they have to do it themselves. That’s the key. There’s not a magic formula*” (Advisor Heidi). The theme suggests that to do this, students should embrace change, learn from their mistakes and draw lessons from their experiences and consequently, this will lead to growth.

However, students’ abilities to *Steer the Ship* and whether they experience growth through challenges are also dictated by how *Steady their Ship* feels. In Section 8.1 it was explained that when students do not feel they are capable, or things feel overwhelming, they may adopt displacement tactics to reduce their struggle. Therefore, in this circumstance, students do not experience growth through adapting to and through that challenge. Consequently, this process can reduce their chance of growth until they feel capable to *steer*. Capability, however, is suggested to be developed through their sense of preparedness (seen in *Navigating the Storms*). Specifically, uncertainty seems to shape how students experience change, with students feeling more comfortable with change when they experience familiarity with it. For example, academically, students suggest academic jumps to be a challenging change. However, the intensity of this seems to be experienced due to a lack of knowing what to expect. Aspects of *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds* are therefore likely to feel overwhelming until students gain the knowledge and skills (i.e., resources) to cope. It would be much like the captain of a ship needing to manage the ship’s crew, fuel, navigation, and maintenance, without the knowledge and experience to do so. However, as established within *Navigating the Storms*, preparedness is not always possible. If students therefore do not have the book on how to sail, they need to learn to sail whilst on the ship. Herein lies the role of the active student, whereby through embracing change, learning from mistakes, and drawing lessons from experiences, students are then able to *steer* their journeys through adaptability and growth.

8.7. Adjusting the Sails for Me: A Tailored Experience

This final theme introduced the need for flexibility within academic and personal support practices. The theme calls for personal approaches to increase student motivation, confidence and success. However, there is also an argument for greater understanding among students, of university capabilities to provide personalised tailoring. Nevertheless, the theme advocates for an inclusive environment that values diverse learning paces and individual needs within their support structures. Without responsiveness to student needs and diversity, it is argued here to thwart

student autonomy, and their ability to *Steer their Ship* towards success. However, conversely, there are circumstances where students experience a lack of tailoring and act to self-tailor towards success. This approach, however, may hinder the opportunity for student growth.

Regarding responsiveness to student need, Advisor Jamie noted that support staff should not underestimate the impact problems can have on students, due to one thing that might “faze” one student, may not faze another. Subsequently, he argued listening to what the students feel they need is crucial. Emma further noted that she “felt like they constantly kind of had an idea in their head of what I wanted and didn’t actually listen to what I was asking” (Emma). Therefore, similar to mismatched expectations, assumptions of student needs can lead students to act to advocate for their needs, “stop telling me that and do something that I’m kind of saying would help” (Emma). Student action is therefore seen across this theme and *Mists of Mismatch* to be in response to things that feel unjustified or unfair. Lack of Adjusting the Sails then, can lead to *Steering the Ship* behaviours, while *Steering the Ship* behaviours can help to create *A Tailored Experience*. This is important to note, as this could be an important way for universities to learn and adapt themselves, to produce more inclusive strategies and systems of support. This is particularly interesting considering that students voice knowing what they need when advisors note that students do not always have this knowledge, as it suggests that the reverse is also true but not always recognised.

Likewise, the theme suggests there are educational structures that are indisputably unsuitable for certain students, such as those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. For example, “the pace and intensity of the course” and “rigidity around it has to be full-time study” (Advisor Layla) are unsuitable for those with conditions that flare and fluctuate, because they need longer to complete their degree. Flexibility in how degrees are structured is needed to improve inclusivity and support students to *Steer* their learning in a way that works for them. Interestingly though, students noted that they take it upon themselves (i.e. *Steer the Ship*) to act in ways that will make their lives easier, “if you’ve got any doubts... I’m really going to struggle with this... Go with what you’re comfortable with” (Timothy). Thus, when students feel that their experience is not tailored or adjusted to their strengths or needs, this can urge them to self-tailor to what is perceived as the easiest option. However, because this approach is centred on playing to their strengths, they are potentially less likely to experience growth, which could be facilitated through tailoring support in a way that supports students through their challenges.

Overall, then, students' ability and choice to *Steer the Ship* can be shaped by the level of tailoring they receive. A lack of tailoring can both take away the opportunity for disabled students to experience autonomous and agentic learning, hindering their opportunities for success, and simultaneously promote agentic action to self-tailor in other students who feel they need to play to their strengths. This raises a complexity with tailored practices because in some circumstances tailoring is deemed necessary (e.g. for disabled students), and when it isn't present, students will self-tailor to the potential detriment of their developmental progress. Taking a development focus to tailoring may therefore be an appropriate response from universities, to promote less 'tailoring' to what is easy, and to instead provide support that is tailored to student's developmental progress needs.

Overall Conclusion

Together, the eight themes collectively highlight core psychological underpinnings of the university experience with each characterising the complex nature of the psychological experience of student life. *Steering the Ship*, however, is demonstrated as a central organising concept of the entire analysis, which inter-influences with each psychological underpinning of the student experience. These interconnections highlight the central role of student autonomy, agency and choice in how students experience university and develop as individuals.

Chapter 5: Steering and Steadying the Ship presents the idea that to steer, students need to be steady. *Steering the Ship* epitomises student engagement and avoidance in being responsible and self-governing, and the journey from dependent to independent. To be able to *Steer* students are explained to need the perceived competence to take the helm of their ship, which is established through the *Steadying of their Ship*. The theme of *Steadying the Ship* therefore focuses on emotional regulation and a work-life balance, highlighting the challenges in balancing study, work, and social needs. It emphasises the importance of support networks and proactive management strategies in protecting students from emotional tsunamis. However, the emphasis on emotional regulation and the establishment of a work-life balance reflects the need for individuals to navigate their behaviours and emotions independently.

Chapter 6: A Safe Harbour and We're all on This Ship Together shows the idea that together, students feel secure and steady. The *Safe Harbour* centres around the creation and maintenance of a support network that represents a pseudo-family. It is a place of refuge, comfort, and stability, allowing students to seek solace, gather strength, and prepare to *Steer their Ship* through their challenges. The theme stresses the need for acceptance and the role it plays in reducing student anxieties, further illustrating the importance of emotional security and how students can *Steady their Ship*. The need for emotional security and a sense of refuge mirrors the challenges students face in transitioning through university life. Thus, *We're all on this Ship Together* combines with this to emphasise the importance of collaboration and belonging between students and the university. It highlights the significance of co-constructing community and mirrors the broader transitional shift to adulthood, where individuals become active contributors to their communities. It presents the metaphorical ship, as a symbol of collective effort, with the sense of community and safety building their confidence to *Be the Captain*.

Chapter 7: Navigating, Growing, and Adjusting to Challenges unfolds three themes that represent how students manage the challenge of their quest to captaincy. The theme of *Navigating the Storms* introduces the concept of the 4 P's in promoting and coping with increased autonomy. In both academic and personal domains, preparedness is presented as a fuel for confidence and subsequent proactivity. Proactivity is highlighted as a protective strategy for overall wellbeing and a facilitator for academic and personal growth. Self-preservation, however, also has its place, with students needing to know when to take a break. Thus 'The 4 P's' interinfluence how students *Steady* themselves and *Steer* through their challenges. Further influencing this process of their engagement with 'The 4 P's', *The Mists of Mismatch* explores the impact of unmet expectations. It reveals the disappointment felt when encountering contrasts between envisioned paths and reality, and the impact on subsequent action. The theme extends to the influence of family and societal pressures, thwarting student autonomy and agency. However, the theme also emphasises the importance of managing student expectations, for a more reasonable approach to university support and the dual necessity of becoming the captain. Subsequently, *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds* portrays the undergraduate experience as a transformative journey, emphasising the student as an active agent in their personal development. It presents the importance of resilience, adaptation, and self-discovery in encouraging student growth, thus highlighting *Steering their Ship* as a facilitator of their progress. Despite the need for students to *Be the Captain*, however, *Adjusting the Sails for Me* encourages flexibility in academic and personal support. It advocates for a student-centred approach that addresses individualised needs and student's preferences to align things to their strengths. This approach helps students to *Steady their Ship* and feel subsequently supported in *Steering*. The theme also emphasises the role of advisors in understanding and responding to student evolvments. However, a wider picture of university capabilities is also needed from students, to understand what level of personal tailoring is possible to implement.

Collectively then, the eight themes illuminate the complexity of how a student's psychological journey is interinfluenced by the themes described. However, the central concept of the psychological journey, is how they engage with, perceive, and act on their autonomy and agency, to *Steer their Ship* and *Be the Captain* of their experience.

Part IV: Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1. Introduction to the Chapter

This thesis set out to explore the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate university experience, from both student and advisor perspectives. The research addresses the following aims:

- To understand and give voice to undergraduate student perspectives of the experiences of students during university.
- To understand and give voice to advisor perspectives of the student experience during university.
- To understand the shared psychological underpinnings that shape the student experience.
- To consider the alignment of perspectives between advisors and undergraduate students regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience.

These aims were encompassed in the research questions of:

1. How do students and advisors describe the undergraduate student experience?
2. What are the psychological underpinnings of the undergraduate university experience, as expressed by undergraduate students and advisors?
3. Do advisor and student perspectives align regarding the psychological underpinnings that shape the overall student experience?

The eight themes: Steering the Ship, Steadying the Ship, A Safe Harbour, We're all in this Ship Together, Navigating the Storms, Mists of Mismatch, Growing and Adapting to the changing winds, and Adjusting the Sails for Me, individually represent the psychological underpinnings of the student experience. Steering the Ship however, represents as a central psychological underpinning of the student experience, with the interconnections and interinfluences of other themes with this concept further explicating *how* student agency and autonomy are encouraged, thwarted and engaged with throughout the student journey. Student and advisor perspectives were also shown to represent the same psychological underpinnings and were deemed to align.

This chapter situates the eight individual themes within the wider literature, explaining their meaning further and how they relate to and contribute to the field.

This thesis aimed to explore the current and lived experiences, capturing the daily realities faced by undergraduate students, rather than to devise a universal framework applicable to the whole student body. The findings, while specific to the study's context, have wider applicability and highlight directions for additional research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings enriched our understanding of the holistic nature of the university experience, whereby multiple aspects of the university experience hold shared psychological experiences by students (i.e., psychological underpinnings). This chapter therefore discusses the literature connected to these psychological underpinnings which can be shared with students, academics, and researchers to enhance educational pathways, as well as aid knowledge development among students and how they can subsequently act to improve or cope with their student journeys. This chapter signals implications for the shared duties of students and HEIs, a compassionate approach in universities, promotes student-partnership models, and suggests areas of focus for support strategies. A critical review of the quality and future directions of this work will also be provided.

9.2. Discussion of the Findings

The themes present a metaphor of a ship and its captain to symbolise the psychological journey of undergraduate students during their transition to and through university. The metaphor offers the ability to emphasise key features, explain relationships more clearly among concepts and support my telling of the story (Carpenter, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The themes demonstrate a dilemma of independence, where students both struggle and desire to be agentic (i.e., *Steer the Ship*). *Steadying the Ship* evokes the need for balance and emotion regulation, for students to feel stability during their evolving student journeys. *A Safe Harbour* epitomises the necessity of establishing a secure foundation, which facilitates agentic action. It achieves this through the *Steadying of their Ship*, both emotionally and academically. *We're All On this Ship Together* shows collective action facilitates students' confidence to take the helm. This is particularly important when students face challenges and must *Navigate the Storms* of difficulty. To have support means students feel prepared to tackle their challenges. *Navigating the Storm* suggests preparedness encourages student proactivity. Proactivity is suggested as the paramount approach to cope with challenges and persevere. Self-preservation demonstrated protective coping methods, while collectively 'The 4 P's' shape student perseverance. *Mists of*

Mismatch suggests unmet expectations unbalances students in their journey, further impacting upon how they engage in agentic action. *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds* therefore demonstrates that expectations need to be managed, and that *Steering* is key for dealing with change. Lastly, *Adjusting the Sails for Me* highlights the importance of personalized support, for students to *Navigate the Storms* and *Be the Captain*. However, whilst students voice the desire for individualised approaches, this is more reasonable for students with diverse needs. Overall, students need to become the captain of their journey, to grow, adapt and succeed. However, facilitative support in their agentic development is consistently emphasised.

Theoretically, these findings relate to the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, derived from Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017), which includes autonomy, competency, and relatedness. The themes represent how student autonomy is encouraged and thwarted, how they gain or lose feelings of competency, and the role of relatedness through connection and belonging. Themes are discussed in relation to these concepts, along with other relevant theory and literature, strengthening the interpretations of the data.

9.2.1. Steering the Ship

Steering the Ship symbolises the dilemma of independence, where students both struggle and desire to be agentic. It highlights the crucial role of autonomy and agency in supporting students personal and academic development. It evidences well understood challenges of independence such as financial and relationship management, balancing the demands of academia and personal life, and the management of daily life skills (Pitt et al., 2018; Smith & Hopkins, 2005; Worsley et al., 2021a). However, students experience a double-edged sword of desiring to be in control of their lives and struggling with this control. Autonomy is a psychological need within positive and social psychology which “represents a sense of volition, or the feeling of doing something by one’s own decision or initiative” (Ryan & Sapp, 2007, p.90). To satisfy individual needs for autonomy, contexts need to “facilitate the development and satiation of the need for autonomy by offering choice and opportunity for self-direction” (Legault, 2018, p.2). In this study, students experienced satiation of their need for autonomy through their sense of freedom to choose what they learn, and how they engage with their learning. However, choices are often made within contexts of constraint, such as HE policies and structures. Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) helps to further

understand this satiation, as it proposes individuals have three core basic psychological needs including autonomy, relatedness, and competency. Learners become more motivated when educators support their needs for these components (Audet et al., 2023; Beatson et al., 2020; Kaplan, 2018), explaining how autonomy in their learning is connected to student's motivation to study. Research also suggests that increased autonomy and agency correlates with improved subjective wellbeing, motivation, academic engagement, and performance (Reeve, 2002; Jang et al., 2010), which is further supported by lack of autonomy leading to lower wellbeing, depression and drop out (Jeno et al., 2018; Jiang & Tanaka, 2021). Thus, students succeed when provided with autonomous opportunities, as it allows them to be agentic and act in line with their preferences and goals. Hence explaining student desires to control what, how, and where they studied, to facilitate their ability to complete academic tasks. However, considering UK universities are situated within an individualistic culture, it is important to recognise that whilst autonomy and agency are emphasised, this could be due to a dominating normative culture (Greenfield et al., 2003). In individualistic cultures autonomy tends to be prioritised, whereas collectivist cultures may emphasise relatedness (Helwig, 2006). Therefore, students from diverse cultures may find the emphasis on autonomy a negative rather than positive impact on their experience. However, while cultural contexts may influence how autonomy is manifested, autonomy within SDT is seen as universal and independent of cultural norms (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, retaining the relevance of *Steering the Ship* as an underlying psychological concept of the student journey.

Accordingly, students struggle with the burden of responsibility, associated with the increased autonomy and agency demanded of HE. Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) could explain this, as autonomy is related to competence. Competence typically refers to an individual's need to effectively deal with the environment and represents the ability to perform and control outcomes. Therefore, it is unsurprising students perceived responsibility as burdensome when the ability to control all outcomes is unlikely. In this study, students also feel conflict between their perceived competence and motivation to act on their autonomy. Hence, lack of student self-efficacy (the belief in their ability to perform and succeed; Bandura, 1997) may explain their diffusion and displacement of responsibility onto others (e.g., family, academic, and support staff). Consequently, students may yearn for pre-university support structures, due to viewing these structures as more competent and capable of assuming the captaincy role. Low levels of student self-

efficacy, therefore, overpower their autonomy. Literature has suggested that such a mediating role exists, finding a positive relationship between basic psychological needs and self-efficacy (Diseth et al., 2012; Macakova & Wood, 2022). Thus, supporting the argument that by meeting students' psychological needs, students may feel confident to *Steer the Ship*. There is a danger, however, in assuming that students must already be 'competent' to steer, as this overlooks the importance of developing through the university journey. Macakova and Wood (2022) discovered that university students must exert some level of control over their experiences to fulfil their basic psychological needs. Thus, highlighting the interinfluence of *Steering the Ship* and self-assessed competency.

Research indicates that autonomy and relatedness are more important than competency for academic achievement (Diseth et al., 2012; Macakova & Wood, 2022; Trenshaw et al. 2016). However, this study argues through *Steering the Ship* and *A Safe Harbour*, that competency is equally crucial in fostering student's motivation to learn. This becomes particularly pertinent when student perceptions of autonomy remain unchanged despite engaging with increased independent activities over the length of their course (Henri et al., 2018). It suggests that opportunities for autonomy are not the core facilitative factor to becoming agentic students. If student perceptions of competency remain continually low, in both academic and personal spheres; then students may always feel a discrepancy and conflict between their perceived ability and their motivation to *Steer*. Consequently, this could explain why this study suggests a similar trend in student's personal lives; where they desire responsibilities to be managed by their support networks. The culture of individual freedom and responsibility therefore creates increasing demands for competence, which may contribute to poor student mental health and wellbeing through feelings of inadequacy, particularly when comparing themselves to others (Humphrey & Bliuc, 2022).

For students living with disability, support in managing their daily lives is typically more intensive than their non-disabled counterparts (Wagner et al., 2005). The necessity of this support therefore creates a conflict with their desire to be agentic. Disabled students express that they do not necessarily request for someone to do things for them but want support in developing their autonomy and gaining some control over their experience. Supporting this, research shows that disabled students voice advantages from receiving assistance in decision-making, developing study skills, and addressing uncertainties while working towards academic objectives (Van Hees et al., 2015). Thus, reinforcing the importance of

facilitating students to become agentic individuals. Advantages of autonomy support include improvements in academic self-efficacy, psychological need satisfaction, subjective well-being, and progress on academic goals (Audet et al., 2023; Boney et al., 2019; Okada, 2023). Specifically, by feeling heard and supported, students feel motivated to persist in their goals despite their challenges (Audet et al., 2023). Hence, this literature supports the present data suggesting autonomy is important for students to *Steer their Ship* towards their academic and personal goals; because when need satisfactions are overlooked or prevented, students demonstrate avoidant behaviours such as displacement of responsibility (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Another element of *Steering the Ship* entailed the development of moral responsibility; notably observed in student decisions to adhere to or violate COVID-19 restrictions. Moral responsibility is discussed in adolescent development literature; defined as the internal sense of obligation to make ethical choices (Blasi, 1983; Schipper & Koglin, 2021). COVID-19 presented a context where students were tried regarding their ethical choices. Primarily, relating to the desire for social activity and its conflict with imposed restrictions. Research proposes that moral emotions are triggered in situations where the security of one's family and friends is at risk (Gibbs, 2019; Hoffman, 2000). This helps explain the frustration felt by peers when witnessing rule-breaking behaviours; as these actions are perceived to jeopardise not only themselves, but also their housemates and families. Furthermore, moral emotions are also produced when a sense of obligation or responsibility towards others is evoked (Gibbs, 2019). Thus, helping to understand the heightened emotional reactions among those who adhered to COVID-19 rules. However, this also mirrors when students spoke of pressures to engage in risky drug use. With the risk to self and their friends being reasons for no longer partaking. Together, the literature and data suggest that moral responsibility is vital to shaping student decisions.

9.2.2. Steadying the Ship

Steadying the Ship illustrated the importance of balance, to support students in *Steering the Ship*. It was voiced that students sometimes need guidance to re-establish a work life balance when things become overwhelming. Literature supports the need for a work-life balance (Mills & Knight, 2020; Picton, 2020; Sprung & Rogers, 2021), to improve well-being and overall quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Thus, students need help when they work hard and play hard to better cope with their demands. This is unsurprising considering they are still

learning to manage their transition to independence. Particularly when students try to 'let off steam' through partying, substance use and ignoring their workloads, posing risks to their health and academic performance (Callendar, 2008; Sprung & Rogers, 2021; White & Hingson, 2013). Similar challenges are observed in the workplace, where increased demands come with an increased difficulty in 'switching off' between work and home life (Wendsche et al., 2021). However, research suggests this is a common way for students to relieve stress and escape their demands (Rice, & Van Arsdale, 2010). Thus, this could explain the negative wellbeing outcomes of students when they are not able to *Steady their Ship*, and further highlights the need for more effective 'recovery' from student's competing demands. Especially through less risky strategies such as managing the expectations of their capacity to perform and being flexible in their work-life patterns (Kossek, & Lautsch, 2007; Sonnentag, 2018).

People who are unable to experience a work-life balance, see deteriorations in their work and non-work-related outcomes (Allen et al., 2000; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Research has found that the basic psychological needs theory is associated with work-life balance (Fotiadis et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). When people feel unable to 'manage' both their work and social lives, their self-efficacy may reduce (Macakova & Wood, 2022), leading to their competency need potentially being unmet. Particularly when they do not have enough time in their work and social domains, to satisfy their personal needs and goals (Gropel & Kuhl, 2009). Thus, when students are unable to achieve a work-life balance, they are less likely to feel fulfilled in their various life roles. In the present study, students spoke of working when their friends were socialising, and how they would experience the fear of missing out (Fomo). Thus, it may be that students feel that their need for autonomy and relatedness are unmet because they do not have the time and resources to socialise, or the opportunity to prioritise this. Accordingly, research has found that without a work-life balance, people can feel socially isolated (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Thus, the data within *We're all in this Ship Together*, which suggests facilitative support for socially connecting, offers opportunities for HE to support this work-life balance; further facilitating the meeting of student needs of relatedness, competency, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017).

In this study, students also struggle to emotionally regulate during challenges, influencing how they respond to stress. Thus, students need support with meeting situational demands, through developing their ability to control which emotions they have and when, and how they express them (Gross, 1998; Gross & Thompson,

2007). Presently, students reflected on the impact of emotions in the moment, with advisors highlighting emotional dysregulation increases students' psychological risk. The ability to regulate emotions can impact positively and negatively upon mental health and wellbeing (Gresham & Gullone, 2012), with emotional regulation increasing resilience and reduction of stress specifically within undergraduate students (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). This supports the present findings that emotion regulation fosters wellness and persistence with their studies, and reflections from students that emotion regulation strategies help them to *Navigate the Storms*. Lack of regulation can lead to reduced problem-focused strategies, increasing negative emotionality (de la Fuente et al., 2020). Thus, students voice in *Navigating the Storms*, how a positive mindset can facilitate coping with stress. Accordingly, a meta-analysis of 48 studies found that cognitive re-appraisal, where you re-shape a negative perception to a more positive one, is correlated with improved mental health and wellbeing (Hu et al., 2014). Thus, this with other proactive strategies such as seeking support, helps students to find stability.

9.2.3. A Safe Harbour

A Safe Harbour illustrates the necessity of establishing safety and security, to become active agents. *The Safe Harbour* achieves this through the *Steadying of their Ship*, both emotionally and academically. Students seek to create a safety net around them, in the form of a pseudo family. They liken their bonds with friends to those with family, while discussing their function as an emotional anchor. This provides them with a sense of relatedness, and reliable and constant support (Ryan & Deci, 2017). They trust that this safety net will always be there to 'fall back on' and it is important to *feel* that it is there. *A Safe Harbour* therefore represents a place, situation, or sense of support where students *feel* protected. This resonates with the Emotional Support and Perceived Social Support concepts within the Social Support Theory (Cohen & Willis, 1985). The emotional support concept could explain why emotional safety is voiced, as students need expressions of care, empathy, and understanding within their support networks. The presence of supportive peers, faculty, and staff creates an environment where students can share their concerns, seek solace, and receive emotional reinforcement. Such emotional support within the *Safe Harbour* helps mitigate the stressors associated with their academic challenges and personal transitions. This aligns with relatedness from the basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), as students are trying to forge new and stable relationships as a support system during the transition to adulthood

(Wilcox et al., 2005). The psychological benefit of a supportive environment is the reduction of student anxieties, emphasised by the role of acceptance and emotional security (Brook & Willoughby, 2015; Russell et al., 2011; Topham et al., 2014). It is suggested in this study that this could help students to build their sense of academic and social competency. Particularly when there is a constant judgement process such as within their academic assessments (Tai et al., 2018). Furthermore, *A Safe Harbour* highlights the need for *feeling* like they have a constant and stable support system, which embodies a sense of security and trust. This perceived social support, according to Social Support Theory, is a crucial factor in buffering against stressors and promoting overall well-being (Cohen & Willis, 1985; McLean et al., 202; Tomas et al., 2020). It may not be surprising then, that students try to create a trusting and supportive community, considering their demand pressures, and the mental health and wellbeing challenges voiced within the literature and this study (Bewick et al., 2010; Broglia et al, 2021).

The Safe Harbour is primarily sought in the form of a pseudo family. Rooted in attachment theory, the Secure Base could help explain this phenomenon (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory concentrates on the nature of emotional bonds and relationships between individuals, particularly in early childhood. The Secure Base, however, extends this to the broader context of human development, emphasising the role of supportive relationships throughout the lifespan. It suggests that security in relationships occurs when those significant others are consistent, reliable, sensitive to our needs, and offer a 'safe haven' to return to when life is stressful (Bowlby, 1969). Thus, students may be seeking the 'safe haven' they previously experienced prior to university. As students speak of their support network being there to catch them if they fall, it is therefore logical to consider that the *Safe Harbour* provides a secure base for students, from which they feel more confident to explore their university environment. The theory posits that there is a crucial role for secure attachment in fostering exploration and learning (Bowlby, 1969). When individuals feel emotionally secure, they are more likely to engage in curiosity, learning, and the pursuit of personal and developmental goals. Thus, it supports that students feel more confident to face their experience when they *feel* that there is a network to fall back on. As their emotional security fosters a sense of autonomy and competency (Ryan & Deci, 2017) to explore new experiences, take risks, and face challenges, as they trust there is a reliable source of support to return to if things go wrong. *A Safe Harbour* becomes a consistent and comforting presence that aids in the transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from adolescence to adulthood, and

their transition from a passive to an independent learner. This is further supported by Hazan's (1990, as cited in Fleming, 2008, p. 44) research, which demonstrates that adults establish a 'safe haven' within their relationships, serving as a retreat during challenging times and forming a secure base for exploring the world. People are said to construct close relationships that reflect their attachment style and internal working models they have developed through childhood relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It may therefore be that the *Safe Harbour* signifies students trying to recreate their ideas of a secure base, in which to retreat to when things get difficult and recreate the feelings of protection, they have within their usual support networks.

Being confident and thus emotionally safe within themselves was also a key aspect of this theme. This confidence related to their social and academic competence, and their perceptions of whether others would judge or accept them. Students are bound to experience differing degrees of self-efficacy and beliefs of competence in their academic and social lives (Beatson et al., 2018). However, confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy have been shown to positively impact upon intellectual growth and academic achievement (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Richardson et al., 2012; Talsma et al., 2018). Self-efficacy often links to a 'productive mindset' and is suggested to support student's ability to cope with life's circumstances, master self-management, and develop a sense of belonging within their learning environment (Beatson et al., 2020; Bandura et al., 2003; Freire et al., 2020; Schönfeld et al., 2019). Therefore, in partner with the basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) self-efficacy could explain why emotional security is expressed in the present study regarding their academic and social abilities. To feel secure in their academic and personal ability is the meeting of their needs of competency and relatedness.

Together then, the intertwining of attachment, social support, and basic psychological needs theory provides an understanding of why students actively seek and value *A Safe Harbour* in their university experience. This secure base offers a reliable and constant support system, offering emotional safety and refuge. Further facilitating students to navigate academic challenges and personal transitions by encouraging feelings of autonomy, relatedness, and competency. Furthermore, students desire emotional security in their academic and social abilities, further indicating the importance of feeling competent within the university environment.

9.2.4. *We're All on This Ship Together*

Within the theme of *We're in this Ship Together*, data represents the desire for a civil society, where people work collaboratively, respect one another and exercise supportiveness. A civil society has been defined by VanDyck (2017; as cited in Cooper, 2018), to “*foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders*” (p.1). This supports the present findings, where students want to feel like their peers and university support them to connect with others and collectively work towards their goals. The transformative power of collaborative efforts and mutual support in HE is emphasised, with a focal point being university and peer efforts in facilitating social connectedness. For instance, when students speak of wanting schedule symmetry with their peers, Thomas (2012) suggests that regular contact provides stability, which is essential in establishing belonging. Thus, connecting to the basic psychological need of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017), a civil society that works together can achieve a connected university.

The need for relatedness mirrors research by Worsley et al. (2021a) which showed students do not want to be “another face in the crowd” (p. 6). *We're all on this Ship Together* reflects a growing emphasis in academia on the importance of community building and shared experiences among students and with their university (Chester et al. 2019; Wilcox et al, 2005). This is particularly important as McIntyre et al. (2018) found loneliness to be the strongest predictor of mental distress. Thus, the authors propose that universities should play a role in organising smaller social events and study groups to facilitate peer connection. This is also identified in the present study through the desire to find ‘kindred spirits’, and the need for group memberships. This collective effort, however, was also consistently emphasised through co-creation between peers themselves. For instance, being active in the process of making friends, creating opportunities with each other to socialise, and the desire for equal efforts on both sides to do this. As co-creation relates to the role of both students and the university, Chester et al. (2019) adds important insight here. They suggest social capital to be important in the student journey, claiming “the explicit development of trust, reciprocity, information sharing and cooperation in student and staff networks can improve learning experiences and enhance belonging” (p. 11). Social capital is a person's access to valuable resources through their social relationships, such as information, advice, and support, which enables them to attain their personal goals (Brouwer et al., 2016; Coleman, 1990). Thus, in the present study, students appear to be experiencing and/or striving to attain social

capital through co-creation and community building. Brouwer et al. (2016) also found that peer capital such as collaboration and peer support, and faculty capital such as mentor support, contributed positively to academic success. Thus, it is not only important for the context of belongingness but also academic thriving (Field & Morgan-Klein, 2012; Harding & Thompson, 2011).

Interestingly, the theme poses the power of collective action in creating change and moving towards shared goals. Research has shown that the typical routes adopted for securing the student voice, such as debates between students, universities, and unions, can perpetuate the 'us' vs 'them' positioning voiced in the present data (Chapman et al., 2013). Hence there has been increasing dialogue of students as active partners in HE (Cook-Sather, 2012; Felten et al., 2019; Maxwell-Stuart et al., 2018), with suggestions of students being seen as co-researchers, producers, participants, partners and changemakers within the HE context (Healy et al., 2014). This approach helps to fully understand the views and experiences of students and triangulate this with expert knowledge; whereby interventions and strategies can be more targeted, relevant, and effective to student's actual need (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). Similarly, it has been noted there is a false sense of student action and involvement within 'student representation' compared to that of student-partnership, as student representation is often bound by institutional policies and practices (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). This is demonstrated in the present data when students feel their voices get lost in a 'void', when trying to advocate for change through discussions with academic staff or staff-student liaison committees. This may impact on student relatedness, as individuals need to feel others are responsive and sensitive to their feelings, needs, and boundaries, and reciprocate this consideration (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, it may also be that changes are made, but these take time or there is a lack of communication back to the students. Martens et al., (2019) found that whilst students may feel respected by staff, there is a desire to be informed of actions taken based on their suggestions. Therefore, it is suggested that students need this information to be seen as equal partners. However, this approach is also argued to be 'troublesome', given the norms of defined and separate responsibilities for faculty and student roles (Maxwell-Stuart et al., 2018). Yet, when embraced, student-faculty partnership has been shown to promote greater inclusivity, engagement, motivation, belonging, assessment performance, peer relationships and staff-student relationships, sense of identity, and student wellbeing (Baik et al., 2018; Hill et al., 2021; Cook-Sather et al., 2018; 2014).

Considering the basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) then, this connects with autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Namely, students will feel more autonomy and competent to create change, when their voices are heard, actively responded to, and communicated back to them. Similarly, it will bring stronger feelings of relatedness as they are forming a mutually supportive relationship with their university. Empirical studies have shown that successful student–staff partnerships occur when there is reciprocal respect, students feel they are able to influence decision-making, have a sense of autonomy, a shared commitment, and have a sense of ownership/responsibility (Healey et al., 2014; Martens et al., 2019). Hence, this supports the present data, whereby a civil society, and collaborative community is important for student autonomy and agency. Thus, *We're all on this Ship Together* reflects the qualities of this practice and strategies for student partnership are suggested in Chapter 10.

To build further on the need for connection, students also voiced the need for similarity across the individuals of their community. This mirrors literature suggesting the need for similarity and likeness when forming friendships and social networks (Worsley et al., 2021a). Wilcox et al. (2005) highlights that 'compatible' friends are important for establishing belonging and finding their place within a new environment, while Dost and Smith (2023) posit belonging is a multidimensional concept that contains inter-relational aspects of a student's social world. However, the main pillars that constitute this concept are suggested to be social capital, group fit and cohesion, social exclusion, and on and off faculty and campus connections. Group fit, and cohesion were consistently voiced through the present data, with students speaking of finding 'my people' and the importance of belonging to a tight-knit group. It was also voiced in the present study that to *feel* like they belong within their social context is vital for adjusting to and enjoying their experience (Walton & Brady, 2017). Thus, the findings mirror research suggesting belonging and togetherness are key for transitional periods (Walton & Cohen, 2007), such as the transition to university and adulthood, and for improving positive wellbeing (Dutcher et al., 2022; Jose et al., 2012).

These collective findings highlight the significance of collective experiences in shaping the student journey. When students seek peer similarity, feel part of a supportive and respectful community, and emphasise the importance of staff-student partnerships, they highlight the importance of collective cohesion in enhancing the student experience. Thus, *We're All on this Ship Together* epitomises the need for relatedness and how this is formed for students. If there is reciprocal

care between peers, university, and themselves, students experience several positive outcomes in their personal and academic journeys. Tinto's (2006; 1975) work on social and academic integration further emphasises the importance of this concept, as it encourages belonging, support systems and institutional commitment in improving student persistence and retention. He argues that students are more likely to persist when they feel integrated into the academic and social aspects of their university lives. Thus, *We're all on this Ship Together* is a key underlying aspect of the student experience that if cultivated, benefits students academically, socially, and personally.

9.2.5. Navigating the Storm

Navigating the Storms highlights the importance of preparedness in fostering student proactivity; a key strategy identified for coping with challenges and difficulties. Self-preservation is shown to involve protective coping techniques, while collectively, 'The 4 P's' contribute to student perseverance. Primarily, the theme emphasises the ways in which students will engage with or avoid autonomous action to navigate through their challenges. Thomas (2012) has argued that lack of preparedness for independent study is one of the common causes for student drop out, with Worsley et al (2021a) championing the need to improve the preparatory nature of secondary schools for university transition. Thus, narratives in this study demonstrate the importance of feeling prepared in determining how well students *Steer their Ship* and *Grow and Adapt to the Changing Winds*. Without this preparedness, it holds the risk, that some students will metaphorically abandon ship.

In the data, there was a desire to feel prepared to tackle whatever comes. Accordingly, despite the lack of control and knowledge of what that change involves, capability to navigate it depends on one's resources (Sen, 1985). This is particularly poignant when students arguably enter university under-prepared in not knowing what to expect (Lowe & Cook, 2003). This could explain why in the present study, students feel that they need to 'know' in order to cope. When faced with a new transition period then, students might benefit from a transitional 'map' that can guide them through the unfamiliarity (McMillan, 2013; Spalding, 2003). Such a map, however, is hard to develop when the variability in student destinations and needs are so vast. Nevertheless, the idea that knowing means coping is consistently produced, with students desiring to know themselves, and wanting 'knowing' staff. This knowing was in relation to a myriad of issues, such as understanding their

problems, academic requirements, and how they should approach certain tasks. Connecting to the basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2017) knowing brings preparedness, and a sense of feeling competent to succeed. Specifically, if students feel they know what to do or what is to come, they feel competent in coping with the challenge. Furthermore, if they feel that staff know and understand them, they perceive them to be competent in supporting them with their problem. Thus, in both scenarios, students feel they are more likely to cope. This is particularly important considering academic staff have reported feeling confident in being able to recognise signs of poor mental health and wellbeing, while their actual ability to perceive these difficulties has been shown to be inaccurate (Brockelman & Scheyett, 2015; Macaskill, 2013). However, whilst *knowing* is presented in the current study as a mechanism for improved responses to student difficulty, it has been shown that despite awareness, staff can still show low inclination to intervene (Spear et al., 2020). Therefore, it is also important that students *know* where to get support and how to use alternative resources. It is voiced that students need and desire the necessary resources to reach their destinations throughout and beyond their student journey. Thus, resource preparedness plays a fundamental part in students feeling competent to succeed. Such resources included access to support, technological resources, and high-quality teaching staff. However, universities offer a plethora of resources to students, with many students still reporting they are unaware of what is available to them, what is a mental health issue, and when to seek help (Broglia et al., 2021). It may be then, that students need to learn *how* to use the tools available to them (e.g., support systems, time management skills, knowledge of the HE system), which can help them to navigate their journeys and encourage a proactive approach. Hence, the concept of 'knowing' is important for both staff and students in being able to pre-empt or proactively respond to mental health and wellbeing difficulties. But also, to facilitate students' sense of competency, in achieving their academic tasks.

Accordingly, students also voiced wanting to feel prepared to complete their assessments through knowing what to do, and being told what is expected. However, this disregards the process of learning, whereby periods of 'unknowing' are inevitable. Lizzio & Wilson (2013) showed that through teaching students to set goals and monitor their learning engagement, students self-efficacy and sense of competence improves. Thus, proposing it is not simply about being told what to do, but students being able to reflect on their own academic challenges, successes, and engagement with study practices. This illuminates student reports that they wished

they had been more engaged in their studies and made more effort. This is a perennial issue among the student body, which will unlikely be resolved. It seems that going through the experience of non-engagement, and the consequence of a lesson learned, students then practice self-monitoring and reflection. This aligns with Kolb's Learning Cycle (1984) where he argues "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). It suggests students have the experience, reflect on it after, and learn from this to implement in future. Kolb also believed that it is not possible to perform both thinking and feeling at the same time. Thus, students may get caught up in the feelings arising from their tasks and may explain why they struggle to engage in reflection during the process of study.

Consequently, proactivity is also suggested as a protective factor against stressors and difficulties. Proactive strategies like seeking support early and a positive mindset were ways in which students dealt with stress, mental health difficulties, and wellbeing challenges. It has been previously demonstrated that people who are able to anticipate potential stress and perceive it as opportunities to learn and grow, are better able to regulate their stress and persevere through those challenges (Greenglass, 2002). By students adopting a positive mindset then, they demonstrate the ability to combat negative outcomes and continue their student journeys. For instance, Ickeson et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of hopeful beliefs in coping with loneliness for students with learning difficulties. Hope influenced the relationship between learning difficulties, self-efficacy, and proactive coping with loneliness. This demonstrates further, the importance of positive psychological framings in supporting students to *Steer the Ship* through difficulty and challenge.

Proactively seeking early support, and early interventions, are also suggested to prevent early drop out in student transitions to HE, while increasing academic achievement, and improving psychological wellbeing (Gordanier et al., 2019; Brooman & Darwent, 2013). This supports the data suggesting the role of proactivity in safeguarding overall well-being, where 'seizing the day' and taking advantage of the opportunities available led to enhanced socialisation, belonging, and mood. By taking proactive approaches to get involved, student relatedness was therefore fostered (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Similarly, proactivity in learning is described as a way of managing academic storms, and previous research has shown that proactivity in learning reaps positive academic performance and outcomes (Tymon & Batistic, 2016). However, students have been shown to only engage in proactive independent learning, when they feel confident enough to do so (Geertshuis et al.,

2014). This supports the present findings suggesting students' perceived sense of competency impacts their ability to be autonomous and proactive.

Regarding self-preservation, taking breaks and being able to balance their lives provided students with respite. However, other strategies were more passive including ignoring their academic responsibilities and spending more time socialising than studying. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualisation of coping with stress provides insight into these behaviours. They propose that coping strategies serve two functions: addressing the problem directly and managing the individual's emotional response to the stressor. The coping strategy adopted depends on how the person appraises the stressful event. A general distinction is often made between engaged and disengaged strategies. Avoidance is a disengaged strategy aimed at controlling or modifying their 'response' to the stressor. By avoiding their academic responsibilities, however, students often reported this made the anxiety of that demand worse. Thus, disengaged strategies only bring temporary emotional relief. In contrast, engaged strategies such as advocating for themselves, building a positive mindset, and embracing a healthy lifestyle, offered proactive and long-term solutions to their problem. This is particularly important to consider when engaged compared to avoidant strategies are more effective in reducing stress in adolescents (Compas et al., 2001), and greater use of avoidant coping is correlated with lower well-being and greater distress (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009). Similar findings were also found for university students during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas engaged coping reduced levels of stress (Shuster et al., 2023).

Interestingly, students also question 'is it worth it' regarding the challenges they face. Typically, this questioning referred to their money and/or time. This implied a consumerist ideology of value for money, and 'bang for your buck', of which is seen consistently across previous literature (Jones et al., 2020; Molesworth et al., 2009; Temple et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2018). Tomlinson (2017) found that in a study of 68 university students from 7 UK institutions, that just below 25% of students had consumerist attitudes, whilst 25% resisted. Nevertheless, most students indicated some ideas of 'value for money' and expectations based on efficiency and quality of teaching. This supports student reflections on the quality of their teaching during COVID-19, and the switch to online learning, bringing attitudes of deserving more in delivery. Higher fee-paying students have also been shown to be more likely to question whether their degree is value for money (Jones et al., 2020). This attitude is concerning however, when consumerist views have been associated with lower

academic performance in university students (Bunce et al., 2017). However, Tomlinson (2017) found that students also recognise their own role in creating a worthwhile experience, as they were aware of their own responsibility for actively engaging. Furthering the importance of proactivity in navigating challenges and having a positive experience.

Collectively 'The 4 P's' align with the concept of 'psychological capital' (PsyCap; which refers to an individual's positive personal resources for managing difficult situations. PsyCap encompasses four key characteristics: resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2014; 2012; 2010). In this study, hope and optimism are associated with the positive mindset discussed in self-preservation and proactivity. Resilience is presented in the concept of perseverance, and self-efficacy is the overarching goal pursued through all of the 'The 4 P's'. A meta-analysis conducted in the workplace (Avey et al., 2011) demonstrated psychological capital had positive associations with psychological well-being ($r = 0.40$), and job performance ($r = 0.26$). Consequently, the same concept could be applied to the university context, and PsyCap interventions could improve student levels of perseverance, proactivity, and perseverance through the facilitation of increased hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2014; 2010). Previous research has linked PsyCap to academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2018; Ortega-Maldonado and Salanova, 2018), with Luthans et al., (2012) finding PsyCap was associated with improved academic outcomes among business students. This crossed with workplace research demonstrating positive associations with engagement and negative associations with burnout (Loghman et al., 2022), suggests PsyCap interventions could improve 'The 4 P's' and develop student abilities to *Navigate the Storms*. However, as research on *how* PsyCap improves academic performance is limited, the present study and the concept of the 'The 4 P's' offers avenues for further exploration in this area. Nevertheless, it may be that overall, the themes contribute to PsyCap, as research has also found that aspects such as student relationships and relatedness, ante cede students PsyCap (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). Specifically, those who perceive high-quality relationships are more likely to report higher levels of academic PsyCap.

9.2.6. *Mists of Mismatch*

The *Mists of Mismatch* primarily emphasised unmet expectations. Namely, the disjoint between students' pre-conceived ideas of university and the lived reality. It

mirrored a key turning point in transition, moving away from the protection of their previous support networks. Mismatches were experienced in contexts of academic and personal support provisions, responsibilities within learning, and the disjoint between university and student expectations. It expressed the common idea that university is expected to be “the best three years of your life”, with some experiencing this reality, while others did not. Previous research mirrors this mismatch (Smith & Hopkins, 2005) with Worsley et al. (2021a) finding students expect the “best years of their life” (p. 4), with the reality leading to comparative disappointment. Similarly, Rowley et al. (2008) found mismatches between expectations and academic experience lead to disengagement and increased risks of underperforming. This supports the present study narratives echoing feeling hard done by, while further evidencing the constancy of this experience and the impacts of mismatched expectations. Specifically, students voiced their experience as not being what they signed up for, followed by the perception and belief that they should be receiving “more”. These narratives appear to hold consumerist ideologies, where they questioned if their experience was worth their money, and whether they are getting what they paid for. This is commonly seen across the literature (Bates & Kaye, 2014; Neves & Hillman, 2018; Rolfe, 2002; Tomlinson, 2017; 2018) and is said to reflect the effects of neoliberalism and marketisation of HE (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Richards, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). Thus, this could explain why their expectations of the university experience and the university are somewhat demanding. Holding a ‘consumer’ mentality, higher fee-paying students are more likely to doubt whether their degree is value for money (Jones et al., 2020), leading to demanding more services and support in exchange for their money. Hence, the marketisation of education is argued to shape student beliefs, values, and perceptions of their experience, underlying their level of satisfaction, as it creates feelings of entitlement (Jones, 2020; 2010; Neves & Hillman, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017). The Theory of Met Expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973) suggests that when there is congruence between one’s expectations and their lived experience, they will experience greater adjustment and satisfaction with new environments. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the present narratives suggest students feel more satisfied when they have good access to resources and support (Maxwell-Stuart et al., 2018). However, it has also been found that students can simultaneously report positively about their experience at university, whilst assessing it as poor value for money (Jones et al., 2020). Thus, this could explain the narratives in the present study, where they feel that they should be provided with “more”, whilst also reporting positively about their overall experience. It is also

important for students to be able to communicate what “more” entails, as without the specifics, universities will not be able to respond and support students in creating a ‘match’.

Consistent with prior research, *The Mists of Mismatch* connects student expectations and satisfaction (Khan & Hemsley-Brown, 2021) and aligns with the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm proposed by Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006). Disconfirmation occurs when there are discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance. Thus, when students' expectations are exceeded, they tend to report higher satisfaction levels. Conversely, if their experiences fall short of expectations, satisfaction decreases. The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a poignant example, whereby students reported significant dissatisfaction due to the contrast of their lived experience and their expectations of university life. The switch to online learning and inaccessibility of lecturers was suggested as lower value for money. The concept of value for money in relation to teaching quality has been debated within the literature, with some arguing that value for money is not an indicator of teaching quality (Jones et al., 2020). However, this is sometimes used as a metric for this assessment (Higher Education and Research Bill, 2017; Johnson, 2017; OFS, 2018), and the present findings suggest that whilst contextually dependent, the link between value for money and teaching quality is present.

The expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm has limitations, as noted by Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006), who found that the timing of students' reflections on their expectations and experiences affects their evaluations. They discovered inconsistencies between students' pre-course expectations and their perceptions of those expectations when reflecting on them later. Thus, the accuracy of their actual level of disconfirmation may be flawed, as students' memories of their expectations may be biased by their feelings at the point in time they are asked to recall. It is possible then, that being interviewed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, may have impacted the reports of student expectations, and further negatively impacted whether they perceived them to have been met. On entering university, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that students would assume their university experience would be entirely the same as their expectations, due to the restrictions in place at the time including limited social contact. However, post-covid and after their experience has been 'lived through', it is likely that this experience has exacerbated what they wished they had, rather than what they expected, thus shaping their expectation narratives and the mismatch presented in the data.

Alternatively, the beliefs and expectations students have of university could be explained through Bowlby's internal working model (IWM; Bowlby, 1973). This model proposes that individuals develop cognitive frameworks based on past experiences, shaping their expectations of how to respond to situations and anticipate others' reactions. Students may therefore voice expectations of the university based on their IWM of what the university experience *is*. Based upon previous perspectives and experiences from family, friends, schools, universities themselves, and the public narratives held about what the university experience looks like and entails. Their *Safe Harbour* also filters into this IWM as the university is suggested as a pseudo parent. Students therefore expect a level of care, support, and guidance that typically comes from their parental or previously established 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1973). This being the case, when their IWM is challenged by their newly formed support networks, this will inevitably produce these feelings of neglect and dissatisfaction. Thus, the narratives of being hard done by regarding their level of support, could be based upon their prior experiences and subsequent internally generated models of care.

Considering the narratives of perfectionism and self-placed pressure, students and advisors describe expectations students place on themselves to perform. Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; 2000) proposes that people have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, in *Mists of Mismatch*, when students have high levels of expectations of themselves to perform, they are striving to rebalance the mismatch between their expectations and performance and establish a self-perceived level of competency. Typically, this was exhibited by students through striving to the point of overworking. SDT would posit that when individuals feel that their actions align with the basic psychological needs, they are more likely to have intrinsic motivation, where we strive to complete a task because it is interesting and enjoyable. Consequently, students may feel that to enjoy their learning, they must reach a high standard. They may be striving and pushing themselves to reach a point where they can experience competency and subsequent enjoyment. However, this can be a vicious cycle, because as the famous saying suggests, "The more you know, the more you realise you don't know". Thus, students will continue the cycle of trying to reach perfectionism as they will never reach a point of being wholly 'knowing'. However, external pressures or unrealistic expectations may undermine intrinsic motivation, and instead lead students to compete tasks based on an external reward, such as degree mark or parental approval, which may lead to feelings of pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This

is particularly relevant for the present study, as a mismatch between a student's expectation and the reality of their academic performance is voiced to lead to a loss of morale, a reduced sense of self-efficacy, and could self-perpetuate reduced academic progress (Bennett, Kapoor, Rajinder, & Maynard, 2015). Thus, it may be that external reward such as degree marks conflict with their need for intrinsic satisfaction through competency. However, it has also been argued that experiencing the imbalances of the university experience may not be something to protect against, but a fundamental part of the process of *Adapting and Growing* (Winstone & Hulme, 2019; Christie, et al. 2016). Considering student narratives present the need for greater perceived competency to encourage their ability to *Steer their Ship*, this becomes an important insight. Students may need to recognise the value in feeling 'incompetent' to motivate them to engage with activities that help them to move towards 'competent'. Understanding their mismatch and reshaping their expectations is therefore suggested to be beneficial. This would promote 'constructive friction' (Vermunt & Verloop, 1999), where learning and thinking skills are developed, and misconceptions and hindered learning potential are avoided.

External pressures, however, were also said to create a mismatch, particularly between student desires and parental pressures. Data suggested the pressure of parental expectations created tensions for individual autonomy. Specifically, although not exclusively, international students are said to feel pressured to do what their parents and family expect them to do, rather than what they themselves would like to do. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the perspectives of international students are important in understanding the extent of this mismatch within this demographic. Previous research has suggested that autonomy is conceptualised differently for different cultures, with Chinese students feeling autonomous and experiencing more positive wellbeing outcomes, when decisions were made, inclusive of their parents (Rudy et al., 2007). Thus, this might suggest that the mismatch is reduced, compared to what the advisors perceive.

Nonetheless, Self Determination Theory would differentiate between self-endorsed functioning and pressured/controlled functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and it is arguable that in the context of the present data, pressured/controlled functioning is emphasised. This pressured and controlled function could then lead to the perfectionist tendencies observed, followed by increased burnout, and reduced academic achievement if balance is not established (Randall et al., 2015; Rice, 2006). Thus, being able to establish ways in which to foster autonomy and balance

their needs with external pressures, is arguably needed to alleviate the impact of mismatch between parental expectation and internal desire.

In summary, the *Mists of Mismatch* connect with existing academic literature by contributing insights into the psychological implications of unmet expectations of HE. It underlines the mismatches students face as they navigate away from familiar support networks towards the uncertainties of university life, including academic support, learning responsibilities, and their general expectations of the university experience. Their disillusionment is often rooted in consumerist ideologies, argued to be perpetuated by the marketization of education. Yet external pressures are also presented to create a mismatch with student desires. Thus, creating avenues for students to articulate their expectations and needs while being guided to develop their understanding of the university experience, is suggested to be crucial in mitigating the impact of mismatches on student well-being and academic success. It aligns with broader discussions on student well-being and satisfaction, by demonstrating again, the need to improve self-perceptions of competency to encourage autonomy. Students would then be able to navigate better, through the mists caused by unmet expectations, towards a positive university experience.

9.2.7. *Growing and Adapting to the changing winds*

In the present study, the themes collectively demonstrate how students transition to and across the university experience. These narratives tie closely with the literature on “role transitions” such as starting or finishing education (Arnett, 2001. P. 134), becoming an independent adult, and a self-directed student (Worsley, et al. 2021a). Specifically, the data exemplifies a transition from a passive student to an active independent student, with narratives suggesting their academic jumps, development of independent learning skills, and moving away from home are key transitional points in their journey that create challenge. *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, however, specifically represents the transformative nature of these challenges and the university journey, illustrating the evolving nature of students’ adaptability to change (Gale & Parker, 2014). Researchers have explored the diversity in transitioning to and through university (Winstone & Hulme, 2019), and the role of challenges and how they are perceived, for successful transition (Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Volstad et al., 2020). Collectively they propose the idea that becoming an independent student and ultimately, an adult, involves learning *through* experience. The present findings suggest something similar, with embracing change as a route to adapting. Accordingly, Volstad et al., (2020) found

that from student perspectives, personal challenges were important aspects of flourishing. Particularly when engaging in challenges with a mindset of opportunity and possibility and allowing themselves to be vulnerable.

However, the variability in adaptability and how and when students experience growth, suggests that an in depth understanding of transitional processes, from student perspectives within the university context, is needed (Winstone & Hulme, 2019). This is particularly noteworthy when you consider the theme of *Steering the Ship*, as students contrastingly report that they desire control, but at other times they do not. They also voiced not feeling like an adult, and that the university is the adult. Further suggesting that their adaptation to independence is an ongoing process. This also aligns with the concept suggested by Arnett (2004) of 'feeling in between' during emerging adulthood, where adolescents experience not feeling like an adolescent, but not yet an adult. Previous research has further demonstrated that when asked if they feel they have reached adulthood, both adolescents and emerging adults (late teens to late twenties) ambiguously answer with "in some respects yes, but in some respects no" (Arnett, 2001, p. 142). This therefore raises the question of how adulthood is perceived to HE students, when they similarly voice not being adult yet, and not having the skills necessary to be agentic. Furthermore, research has shown that elements of diversity, such as gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status, can heighten stress during transitional periods (Michalski et al., 2017; Murphy & Roofchad, 2003; Trainor et al., 2017). Together with the present findings, this suggests that there are differing criterion that marks a successful student transition. This may explain why some students may report feeling like an adult whilst others may not. Thus, in line with previous research, it would be pertinent to explore a more student-centred approach to understanding transitional experiences to and through university (Gale & Parker, 2014; Hulme & DeWilde, 2015; Winstone & Hulme, 2019).

However, literature has previously suggested that across young people, adolescents and towards mid-adulthood, the most important and regarded aspect of transition was individualism (Arnett, 1997; 1998; 2001). Specifically, this has related to accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and financial independence (Arnett, 2001). Thus, this idea is mirrored by the centrality of *Steering their Ship* in driving adaptation to change and growth within the present study, offering a sense of consistency in the role of autonomy and agency in transitioning to an independent adult. However, previous studies have also found that young people perceive their transition to an adult to be "long and gradual" (Arnett, 2001,

p.134). Extending through adolescence and a much longer period of “emerging adulthood” which runs through the late teens to the late twenties (Arnett, 1997; 1998; 2000; 2001). This could explain why students experience challenge in adapting to the independence of university living and style of learning, and why students feel that they are still a child. For example, it suggests that university students are continually developing through the transition to adulthood and adds weight to the comments of Advisor Christian, where he suggests students are “thrown” into the adult world with the expectation to be a fully functioning adult. His argument of this expectation being unrealistic is therefore supported by this prolonged sense of transition towards adulthood, of which, they would only be halfway in this journey at the time of entering university (assuming they are of the typical undergraduate student age of 18-21). This expectation and culture around adulthood is also said by Advisor David to be unrealistic as adulthood is “barmy” and “bonkers”. Thus, it may not be surprising that students are distressed and struggling with the demands of the changes in their life. Students then, may well be having ‘adult’ expectations placed on them too early, on transitioning from school to university, with little or no blueprint to cope with the sudden change in demands.

However, students in the present study reported adjusting to these challenges and demands, only when they are immersed in the experience. Thus, even if they know that the transition is coming, preparedness is not always possible. Previous literature supports this idea, whereby Tinto (1988) suggests transitions to be a ‘rite of passage’ by which transitional challenges should be experienced and ‘lived through’. Briggs et al. (2012) also found that it is difficult to truly imagine what university is like, until it is lived. For students, then an important part of their journey is to experience transition, to develop necessary skills and knowledge for the future. This mirrors work by Winstone and Hulme (2019) who found that students learnt from previous transitions to help with future transitions. Despite transitions being initially challenging, things become easier over time; thus, perseverance is key. The present data supports this, through aspects of *Navigating the Storm*, where examples of growth were derived from making mistakes and learning from their experiences. This ‘lived through’ experience therefore suggests changes and transitions are what students need to experience academic and personal growth.

This theme therefore bears relevance on policies and practices for education, as educational transitions literature is typically embedded within them. By understanding what students deem as a transitional period and adulthood, and the ways in which they experience adaptation; offers scope to develop practices that

support this development and their ability to navigate their challenges. A balance between support and 'living through' the transitional challenges, is evidently needed. However, being able to understand individual trajectories may help practitioners in HE to develop better practices for supporting student engagement and success. Furthermore, recommendations to support such transitions are made in Chapter 10.

9.2.8. *Adjusting the Sails for Me*

Adjusting the Sails for Me contributes to the discourse and debates on personalized support in academia. Students emphasize the desire to work to their strengths, have responsive academic support, and one to one contact with lecturers to support their understanding of what is required. Similarly, advisors voiced a need for tailoring to specific learning needs to give students the opportunity to take part in all academic activities, but in a way that suits their needs. This is in line with previous research such as Fariani et al. (2023), who suggests that student-centred approaches and the importance of aligning educational learning experiences with individual needs improves learning outcomes and increases learner satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. However, students represented the struggle with independence seen in *Steering the Ship* and the desire for tailoring to make things easier. The 'magic cure all' as suggested in the present data, is also assumed to be improbable by advisors, thus further emphasising the need for students to develop independent skills. There is a difficulty however, in striking an appropriate balance between providing for individual needs and encouraging autonomy. However, this does not mean that some tailoring of the student experience is not needed, but more that feasible options from the university perspective, for personalised support could be implemented. For example, the expression of need by advisors and students for additional support for disabled students, and those with mental health and wellbeing difficulties is warranted, as access without support is not an opportunity (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Gulliver and colleagues (2018) found that whilst students are more likely to seek support from their lecturers, staff reported feeling unprepared and unequipped to deal with mental health difficulties. Thus, such a 'mismatch' in needs and staff skills, can become problematic for both staff and student. Students in the present study also voice this need for knowing staff as an important resource within *Navigating the Storms*. As such, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2011) strongly encouraged universities to implement training for academic staff, in recognising and detecting mental health disorders and suicide risk. However, as Gulliver et al. (2018) demonstrate, staff still feel unprepared and ill equipped. With nearly half

(49.6%) claiming no formal training was available to them and many (73.7%) reporting that they were unsure if a policy existed within their faculty or university on how to respond to students with mental health problems. Consequently, there is a remaining gap in the provision of support for mental health and wellbeing difficulties, which is unsurprising when the pastoral role of supervisors and academic tutors is unclear and ambiguous (Hughes et al., 2018). Adjustments are not being made despite student need and the lack of knowledge within the support structures in place. However, there are concerns among staff that increased training in the area, would promote increased expectation upon academic staff and negatively impact upon their work and own wellbeing (Hughes et al., 2018). This is considerably problematic when student mental health and wellbeing is already at a considerable low (Jayman et al., 2022; Urbina-Garcia, 2020). It is suggestable therefore, that services embedded within faculties could help students with accessibility, and staff with decreased pressure. However, centralised services are also facing increased pressures and demand (Broglia et al., 2018).

Mental health conditions however are not the only debilitating conditions that bring greater need for additional support. Long term health conditions and disability pose challenges with pacing, where courses are said to be too fast. Mitigation strategies can also be difficult to engage with, suggesting appropriate adjustments are needed. Literature suggests that those with long term health conditions struggle with accessing support to manage their conditions on transitioning and throughout their university experience (Kellest et al., 2018; Hamilton et al., 2020). For example, students with chronic energy-limiting illnesses are frustrated by lack of support, having fewer opportunities than non-disabled students, and that staff and peers question the legitimacy of their disabilities (Hamilton et al., 2020). This aligns with the social disability model (Dunn, 2018) which argues that a disability is caused by society's unwillingness to meet the needs of people with impairments. The model outlines environmental, attitudinal and organisational barriers and advocates for removing them from society. In this context then, providing students with tailored support to their needs, particularly concerning organisational barriers, would promote inclusivity, improve equal opportunities, and enable those students to live as independently as possible.

Addressing these challenges requires staff training to understand the impact of long-term health conditions on students' academic and social experiences. Hamilton et al. (2020) demonstrated that students took proactive steps to educate their lecturers and staff about their conditions to ensure fair treatment. This was mirrored

in the present data, with students advocated and educated others about student needs. Without proactive action then, students may struggle to fit into an environment that does not accommodate their individual needs, potentially leading to negative impacts on academic achievement and well-being. According to Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; 2000) then, students with long term health conditions and disability may not experience relatedness and belonging in their institutions. As support is not tailored to their individual needs and increases feelings of isolation. Frustrations also rise when competency is limited due to academic support being restrictive. Thus autonomous, proactive action is exercised to advocate for support to address their health needs. However, the extent of responsibility on individual students is debatable considering universities' legal obligation to provide equal opportunities for disabled students.

9.3. Concluding remarks

Across this discussion, themes have been related to previous literature and theories to understand their meaning further. However, student experiences, transitions, and adaptations within the university environment are deeply connected to factors aligned with the Psychological Needs Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Specifically, there is a complex relationship between the themes, autonomy, relatedness, and competency. However, a common criticism of needs theories is that there is the potential for an infinite list of needs and preferences (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, Deci and Ryan (2000) claim they have not found evidence of psychological needs that go beyond these three components. It could be then, that these three core concepts are what ultimately underlies the psychological underpinnings of the university experience at their most granular level. It is acknowledged however that due to basic psychological needs being *psychological constructs*, there will no doubt be different descriptions and conceptualisations of these concepts (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The present study therefore arguably offers a differing structure to that of Deci and Ryan, for students' basic psychological needs, restricted to the context of HE, and the unique journey this presents. Part of future empirical research then, could investigate how the themes are interrelated or independent, and how each might differentially contribute to general need satisfaction and wellness of HE students (See Chapter 10).

Chapter 10: Implications, Quality Assessment and Future Directions

10.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the implications of the findings of this research, assess the quality of the research using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) quality criteria, and offer future research directions based on insights provided through this work. The present findings (Chapters 5-8) and discussion (Chapter 9) provide varied implications for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their students. These include the engagement and empowerment of student voice, the development of a compassionate university approach, and the support available to students to develop autonomy, agency, and competency. The first section of this chapter explores each aspect in relation to the findings and the current literature. Leading finally, to a summary of the thesis and the conclusions of this work.

10.2. Implications for HEIs

10.2.1. *The Compassionate University*

In this study it was raised that sensitivity to student realities is important for students to feel that they matter. Waddington (2018) argues for compassionate academic leadership, suggesting that educational institutions should act as “caregiving organizations” (p.87) to support students in their learning process. However, the feasibility of this role is questioned amidst the “relentless neoliberal instrumentalization and marketization” (p.87). She argues trust should be fostered through mutually supportive interpersonal relationships. Hence, the present themes of *We're all on this Ship Together* and *A Safe Harbour* are supportive of this suggestion. The emphasis on a civil, respectful society, suggests moralised compassion could be a way to achieve this (MacKenzie & Maginess, 2018). Moralised compassion reflects the altruistic desire for the good of the other, and the regard for another's wellbeing and ability to flourish as important as our own. Thus, the present data suggests students desire this sense of mattering, and for both students and universities to create this type of culture, particularly when it has been said to predict lower levels of loneliness and correlate positively with life satisfaction and academic success in undergraduate students (Flett et al., 2019; 2016; Rayle & Chung, 2007/2008).

Mackenzie and Maginess (2018) further suggest moralised compassion is where “the rights of individuals are recognised and respected, and individual difficulties are compassionately listened to” (p. 44). Accordingly, advisors in the present study reflected this perspective with their discussions of students just needing someone to listen, and support and teaching practices allowing for the needs of diverse students such as those with specific learning disabilities. The assumed pressure to be already ‘competent’ learners and adults then, may reduce if a compassionate approach is adopted. As there is a danger of breeding feelings of never being ‘good enough’ when there are expectations of organisations for students/employees to have perfect competence. To create organisationally compassionate cultures like this however, universities require those in leadership to represent compassion in their practice and policies. Without a holistic compassionate approach across the university sphere, the ‘us’ vs ‘them’ impression is likely to remain. Consequently, it is suggested that universities should prioritize the cultivation of compassionate leadership at all levels. As leaders who demonstrate empathy, understanding, and a genuine concern for the well-being of the HE community, contribute to a positive and compassionate organisational culture. This is particularly important when the HEIs reported they had not achieved embedding mental health and wellbeing across their institution (DFE, 2023). Thus, training programs and leadership development initiatives could help to instil these qualities across all levels of HE.

Establishing a compassionate university requires the creation, promotion and improvement of mental health and well-being programs for students. Recognising the importance of emotional support alongside academic learning (Postareff et al., 2016). The present findings add value to this perspective as the quality of staff-student interactions and the ability of staff to listen and empathise were crucial factors in perceiving effective support. Staff training is raised as essential for this purpose, particularly when HEIs recognise that “staff awareness was increasing year on year, mainly due to a greater focus on training” (DFE, 2023, p. 74). However, Gulliver et al., (2018) found nearly half (49.6%) of staff members claimed no formal mental health and wellbeing related training was available to them. Whilst in their recent study of HEI initiatives and practices the DFE (2023) claims, “almost all HE providers offered training to staff in relation to student mental health and wellbeing” (p. 7). However, the DFE report only comes from the perspectives of those in managerial and senior positions. Therefore, considering the discrepancy between ‘those on the ground’ and those in positions of power, it suggests that whilst it is said the provisions are in place, it does not mean those actioning it feel

this is done effectively. This poses further, the lack of clarity in this issue and suggests improvements are needed in this space. However, integrating mental health and wellbeing awareness into the curriculum is an alternative suggestion particularly when students voice this is a useful strategy that reduces stigma and encourages open conversations (Edwards et al., 2021). Thus, this approach is encouraged based on previous research, the perceived gap in provision, and the present data suggesting students need to feel safe and secure in their own wellbeing, as well as in seeking support. Furthermore, HEIs have reported that one of the main gaps within their institutions is embedding and promoting awareness of mental health and wellbeing in the curriculum (DFE, 2023).

The capacity to provide ideal compassion, however, is acknowledged to be stretched. Academics have been said to experience 'compassion fatigue' (Cordaro, 2020) and emotional withdrawal due to the increased demands placed on staff. Being overworked and led by metrics (Tett et al., 2017; Watts & Robertson, 2011; Welch, 2020), not only places staff in a position to prioritise performance, but arguably powerless in adopting the ideal level of compassion. Academic advisors within the present study mirror this perspective, personifying being stuck between a rock and a hard place. They want to provide such compassion, understand its benefits, yet feel incapable of providing this quality of support. Hence, it reflects not only the recognised benefit of compassionate pedagogy but raises the need to reduce staff pressures for them to provide such *quality*. Staff cannot 'pour from an empty cup' (Bassa, 2022) and staff are facing the dilemma of managing their own reduced wellbeing during increased pressures (Jayman et al., 2022; Watts & Robertson, 2011; Urbina-Garcia, 2020). For example, among 1,200 HE staff members from 92 UK universities, approximately half disclosed instances of enduring chronic emotional exhaustion, anxiety, stress, and diminished mental wellbeing, throughout the academic year 2020/21 (Dougall, et al., 2021). HEI providers are shown to have diminished wellbeing, and a morale that is "on the floor" (p. 75), due to the priorities of senior leadership and a high staff turnover (DFE, 2023). They also voiced the struggle to create a supportive environment when they do not feel supported or valued themselves. Consequently, it is suggested that reform for both staff and students is needed to provide this idealistic strategy of compassion across all levels (Brewster et al., 2022; Welch, 2020). Acknowledging the importance of work-life balance for both faculty and students becomes essential in this endeavour, especially when job stress and workload contribute to staff turnover, and job satisfaction mediates this impact (Anees et al., 2021). Implementing policies that

fully support flexible working hours, remote working options, and reasonable workload expectations. There is a need to recognise and support individuals' need for balance in their personal and professional lives, and the impact improved staff wellbeing could have on individual and institutional outcomes. One place in which to start in this endeavour would be to improve the communication channels across institutional, staff and student levels. Clear communication channels and transparent decision-making processes could help to manage workload more effectively.

10.2.2. Engaging with Student-Partnership and Empowering Student Voice

This work has prioritized the student voice, adopting a student-centred approach to co-construct knowledge about the student experience between students and HEIs. It suggests the importance of student voice in developmental discussions around HE structures, as *Mists of Mismatch* highlighted students' unawareness of their own and university responsibilities. This led to notable dissatisfaction with their experience as a potential result of consumerist ideologies. Thus, HEIs should develop strategies to manage student expectations, promote responsibility, and improve engagement and satisfaction by educating students about their roles within the institution. However, strategies must be delivered in a supportive and compassionate manner to reduce the experience of 'us vs them'. Particularly considering Baeten et al. (2010) found that how students perceive the learning environment is more important for adapting to change, than the learning environment itself.

Centralising students' experiences helps for universities to understand its role within the evolving contexts of its students (Rose, 2013). However, there is debate regarding how central student and staff perspectives should be, in developing HE practices. Primarily due to the associated power, influence, and impact upon the principles of HE. For instance, the concerns of consumerist ideologies and marketisation of universities encouraging power towards the student (Brooman et al., 2014; Carey, 2013; Lomas, 2007). However, given that students are the ones directly experiencing any changes to policy, practice, and services, there is an arguable responsibility of HEI's to involve student and staff perspectives in considering how HE is structured (Burgess et al., 2018). In this study, *We're all on this Ship Together* and *Steering the Ship* underscore the importance of co-construction. As students desire to be agentic agents and co-construct their student journeys. It encourages opening discussions with students to understand the

context of HE and provide platforms where all students can voice and debate their perspectives with HEIs and their staff (Young & Jerome, 2020). They do not want to experience a 'void' when they voice their ideas or concerns. Instead, they want a university that facilitates their development, by listening and communicating back any changes they make from their perspectives. Furthermore, student-partnership opportunities value human relationships within learning and teaching. It acts as a counter-narrative to the neoliberal, consumerist discourses, and passive learner frameworks (Matthews et al., 2018). It also challenges the traditional assumption that teachers hold all the power in the educational relationship and suggests this power can be reshaped through dialogue between students and academic staff (Matthews, 2017). It benefits higher education institutions by designing engaging learning experiences, fostering accessibility and inclusivity, cultivating community, and belonging while enhancing knowledge and capabilities of both students and staff. It also helps to address current challenges in higher education, while fulfilling ethical responsibilities to students and staff, and responding to the multifaceted challenges in higher education (Healey et al., 2014). Consequently, working in partnership with staff has been suggested to benefit student motivation, along with their commitment and perception of their shared responsibility for learning (Bovill et al., 2011; Healey et al., 2014). Thus, aligning with the perspectives of this study, students would gain a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competency, through the involvement of student-partnership practices.

Specifically, advisors note that students do not always know what they need, through lack of knowledge, preparation, and experience of HE. Rather than universities providing students with what they want, the co-constructed knowledge between students and staff facilitated by student-partnership, can help students instead to understand what they *need*. Furthermore, if academic and support staff were simply to treat students as customers and provide the consumer-student with all which they desire, they would likely fail to provide students with the necessary learning experiences to become independent adults (Lomas, 2007). For example, students would lose the freedom to take intellectual risks and engage thoughtfully with their academic material, ultimately failing to develop important skills for future employment. Thus, it is not suggested here, that HEIs should employ a comprehensive individually tailored experience, but a sensitive approach to communicating what is feasible, and compassionately guiding their perspectives towards a balanced expectation of the university experience. One way to introduce this, could be re-induction sessions at the start of each semester. Reminding

students of their role over the coming weeks, and how student-partnership will be fostered. Consequently, dedicating efforts and resources to shaping students' expectations throughout the academic year, could balance the expectations they place upon others compared to themselves. Students could also be given reflective tasks, at the start and end of each semester, to frame discussions with their academic/personal advisors, around their expectations. It would develop the relationship between personal tutors and student and help to reframe unrealistic expectations. It would also provide information for the construction of induction programmes, by monitoring reoccurring expectations. Providing areas for focus in student-partnership activities related to teaching and learning.

10.2.4. Support Practices and Services

10.2.4.1. Autonomy and Agency Support

Initiatives aimed at cultivating autonomy and agency in students are proposed, stemming from the *Steering the Ship* core concept, which is interwoven with other aspects of the data. While students are expected to develop and action their autonomy in being an independent student, many struggle to develop and embrace this skill. Particularly due to their self-perceived lack of competency. Thus, autonomy support and relevant training to provide it, is suggested based upon the diffusion of responsibility students engage with when feeling incompetent to cope with their challenges. Autonomy support involves someone in an authoritative position, recognising the emotions of the student, offering relevant information, and presenting them with opportunities for choice. Thus, coaching, and mentoring approaches could also be useful, as it is about supporting the development of autonomy rather than 'fixing' the problem. Autonomy support also emphasises reducing external pressures and demands when helping individuals develop their independence or autonomy (Black & Deci, 2000). Which has been shown to contribute to positive outcomes across diverse groups of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, such as improved academic performance, higher motivations to learn, and improved wellbeing (Jiang & Nataka, 2021; Jang et al., 2009, Kaplan, 2017; Nalipay et al., 2020). Flexible learning environments, transparent expectations, and the encouragement of student input, are all suggested in the data to help facilitate student agency, within the sphere of supporting students with their autonomy. Students also voiced the desire for being able to work at their own pace, having teaching methods employed that align with personal interests, and having the choice in learning processes. All support previous research arguing for these

aspects as vital to autonomy support for students (Assor 2012; Assor et al., 2002; Jang et al., 2016; 2010; Reeve, 2009; Reeve & Halusic, 2009; Reeve & Jang, 2006). Consequently, the more recent switches to asynchronous learning, where students can access materials, complete lectures, and homework at any time, may continue to be beneficial for students to manage their studies. However, students report greater support of their basic psychological needs for competence and relatedness when receiving synchronous delivery (Fabriz et al., 2021). Moreover, when teaching staff offer need-supportive strategies, it contributes to the motivation, learning, development, and wellbeing of students (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Jang et al., 2009). Thus, the issues raised within *A Safe Harbour* and *We're All on this Ship Together*, may not be fully satisfied with greater emphasis on asynchronous delivery.

Previous studies have also proposed that when students encounter choices or unfamiliar learning modes, the impacts on self-efficacy and self-concept may manifest (Lake et al., 2020). Thus, the present findings highlighting freedom of choice as a desire, yet autonomy being displaced when given the opportunity, indicates contextually grounded bidirectional connections between autonomy and competency. Choice can both facilitate and further deconstruct students' sense of competency and thus proceeding autonomous action, unless provided with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions. This is supported by *Navigating the Storms* where students desire to be 'all knowing'. Thus, improved communication channels between educators and students is recommended to support students' sense of preparedness and competency and encourage autonomous decision making. This will arguably transfer into increased motivation and autonomous engagement with their learning, improving academic outcomes to the benefit of both the student and institution. Such initiatives are suggested across all key transitional phases of the university journey, particularly in preparation for secondary to higher education. Markedly, because secondary teaching staff argue they try to encourage independent learning and provide opportunities for independent study but declare that these opportunities are limited (Smith & Hopkins, 2005). University-based apps could help students to transition to and across university, by providing information specific to their new surroundings and critical turning points across the year (e.g., 'welcome week', 'first exam'). For example, academics and students at UEA created Open Up UEA (Biggart & Henshaw, 2019 as cited in Jones et al., 2023). An app designed to target student emotional resilience when transitioning to university. It provided users with critical information to help build their knowledge of the

university. Such as service support lists of which you could directly contact, and a mood tracker to help them understand their evolving emotions. It also included a budgeting tool, and a campus map. Student evaluations suggested they found it easy to find services and were more likely to contact them based on this activity being unnoticed by others. They also reported that it helped them to feel that what they were experiencing was normal. Such an app could be scaled up, for the purpose of individual universities, and made more tailored as each student passes through each academic year. For example, push notifications could be used to signpost students to critical services, at critical times of the year. Which would mean that, students could receive timely support and guidance, enhancing the likelihood of acting when it is needed, and enhance their growth, self-management skills and overall wellbeing.

10.2.4.2. Competency Support

This research demonstrated that autonomy, agency, and competency are inextricably linked, with competency playing a key role in how students engage with their autonomy and become agentic. The desire to be agentic was shown to conflict with students' low self-efficacy. With low levels of self-efficacy overpowering their desire to be agentic. Hence, without supplementary competency initiatives, autonomy support strategies may fail to succeed. Previous literature has indicated that when students' self-esteem is focused on academic contingent self-worth, they do not show persistence with their goals and only select goals that are self-validating (Crocker et al., 2004). Thus, they aim to demonstrate academic competence, instead of aiming to improve or develop their skills (Fairlamb, 2022). Therefore, students may need support in feeling vulnerable enough to acknowledge their weaknesses and work on them without fear of failure. Competency focused initiatives that build more global self-esteem, is therefore suggested to support students in engaging with aspects of growth (Fairlamb, 2022). Else, seeking to only validate academic competency could potentially override their engagement with their academic, personal, and future development. Crocker et al. (2004) supports this, finding academic contingent self-esteem strongly correlated with validation goals of performance and ability, rather than mastery. In this study, students portrayed perfectionist ideals and would self-evaluate their academic potential as lower than what they achieved. Hence, considering the Social Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) focuses on mastery to perceive one's own competency, this suggests the current focus of academic achievement and the grade system may be

a hindrance in motivating student development. Initiatives are therefore needed to re-allocate students self-perceived competency towards student development, to improve their global self-esteem and mitigate the negative consequences of too much academic contingent self-worth. These include but are not limited to academic stress, depression, and anxiety (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Fairlamb, 2022; Schöne et al., 2015; Wouters et al., 2013; Sturman et al., 2009; Pyszczynski et al., 2004). Accordingly, increased use of formative assessments and the inclusion of feedback on process and development, could help to prioritise and help students to engage with the development of their skills, abilities, and personal strengths, rather than solely focusing on academic achievement and validation. By shifting the emphasis from performance-based goals to mastery-oriented goals, students can develop a healthier relationship with their academic pursuits and enhance their overall well-being.

Steadying the Ship is also an avenue for supporting students' perceived competency. Namely through the process of regulating their emotions. Hence, it is suggested that universities should aim to foster the development of positive emotion regulation strategies. Seppala et al. (2020) found that the university leadership and well-being programme SKY Campus Happiness (SKY); was particularly effective in improving levels of stress, positive affect, mental health, and social connectedness. The programme included stress management and resources for psychological resilience, some of which, are suggested in this study to be impacted by students' sense of competency. SKY incorporates positive psychology skills such as gratitude, social connection and acts of kindness, alongside yoga postures, breath-based techniques, and discussions on meaning and purpose. The authors argue the programme led to improvements in neuro-cognitive function and emotion control, indicating that breathing exercises may contribute to enhanced mental health and well-being. Consequently, universities should consider integrating well-being programs like SKY that encompass these activities. This integration could provide students with effective tools for improving emotional control, and consequently improve mental health and wellbeing, and an improved sense of competency. Understanding the unique context and requirements of their respective students is needed however, for the wellbeing programmes to be tailored effectively. Therefore, research looking into the specific needs of their students is also recommended, alongside gathering feedback from students, monitoring initiative outcomes, and adjusting as needed to ensure that the well-being programs remain effective and relevant.

Other avenues to foster sense of competency include the continued commitment to providing timely and constructive feedback on students' work. Alonso-Tapia and Pardo (2006) argue that students fear of failure drives the desire for perceived and actual competency. Hence, actionable feedback could reinforce a sense of competency by guiding them to understand and reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement. So, actionable feedback provides a route for learners to engage in strategies that prevent this fear from becoming a reality. Similarly, dialogic feedback prior to and during an assignment is said to improve student perceptions of understanding tasks, increases confidence in their ability to complete assignment tasks, and improves self-regulated learning (Beaumont et al., 2014). Reflective opportunities have also been found to support self-regulation intervention and contribute to academic persistence and subsequent success (Lizzio & Wilson, 2013). However, self-compassion is said to be a fundamental aspect of this reflective and regulatory process, as it helps to reduce the negative affect of academic stress and 'failure' on wellbeing and academic outcomes (Neff et al., 2005; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Poots & Cassidy, 2020).

Winstone and Hulme (2019) suggested that being able to reflect on previous transitional experiences could support students in believing their ability to transition again. Therefore, initiatives to increase and encourage student self-reflection prior to and during university is encouraged. Skills development workshops, provided at crucial times throughout the academic year, are suggested as a support for both self-regulation and skills development. Including academic writing, research skills, and independent and critical thinking. This is especially crucial when students have expressed benefitting from having the opportunity to reflect on and actively participate in practices related to good academic writing. Claiming it helps to develop new academic literacies and understand the skills that are new to them in HE (Christie et al., 2016). Consequently, this contributes to finding answer to one of the key questions identified by students for research, on how to reduce the 'gap' between high school and university (Sampson et al., 2022). Opportunities for reflection within the personal tutoring system could also benefit, using flipped advising (Amini et al., 2018; Steele, 2016). This prompts students to engage in online reflection and planning activities, ensuring they come to tutorial meetings prepared for deeper and more meaningful interactions. This empowers students to make meaning of their academic and career plans and provides them with tools to improve their perceived competency in managing diverse academic and personal tasks.

Universities are urged to monitor and develop inclusive teaching practices, considering diverse needs of students, in both teaching and assessments. In the present study, when students see that their unique needs and perspectives are valued, it enhances their perceived competency in the learning process. Thus, it is encouraged that universities allow flexibility in how students demonstrate their understanding, to accommodate those diverse learning needs. This approach could help students to recognise and appreciate their unique strengths and competencies, further building towards a focus on development rather than academic grades. Finally, universities should encourage students to take pride in their academic successes, but also their learning journeys, creating regular opportunities throughout the academic year to acknowledge and celebrate students' growth. A wider focus should be given to feedback on effort, growth, and processes of learning (e.g., how a student went about a particular activity), as this is shown to reduce academic contingent self-worth (O'Keefe et al., 2013). This should then be showcased through big or small-scale events, and feedback in and outside of classroom.

Adjusting the Sails for Me also suggests the need a more personalised approach to support. For example, including more specialised mental health support, disability sensitive practices, and preventative rather than reactive support. All of which are argued to contribute to a student's sense of competency in this study. For disability sensitive practices, this may include the improvement of knowledge across staff and peers, regarding disability and long-term health conditions. Hamilton et al., (2023) emphasised that disability support was not equal across all condition groups, and the importance of health condition allies in facilitating student beliefs in their ability to have positive graduate outcomes. Hence, aligning with the present data suggesting flexibility is required, universities should be adjusting support provisions to align with minoritized group needs.

For preventative support, early intervention and improving accessibility to personal and academic support is recommended, especially since students in this study speak of wishing they got help earlier. This issue has been highlighted in Department for Education research (2023), indicating that universities are facing challenges in addressing complex mental health and wellbeing needs due to insufficient NHS pathways for student referrals. Furthermore, the transitional nature of the university journey provides key timepoints throughout the year in need of specific early intervention (Duffy, 2023; 2019). Thus, early intervention is important when students who have early success are more likely to experience increased self-

efficacy compared to those who do worse than expected (Christie et al., 2008). Moreover, without early intervention, students may continue to feel incompetent and experience low self-efficacy, resulting in decreased performance, persistence, and potential dropout (Lizzio & Wilson, 2016). Accordingly, proactive, and preventative support has been shown to reduce the number of students reaching 'crisis' points during their university experience, and improves student performance and retention (Gordanier et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2016).

10.2.4.3. Supporting Student Transitions

Whilst the previous suggestions align with aspects of student transitions and are relevant for this context, this section considers more directly, initiatives for student transitions. Lizzio (2006) developed the 'five senses to student success' model to explain the process of academic, personal, and social transition to university. Specifically, the model outlines sense of identity, connection, capability, resourcefulness, and purpose as the key components to a successful transition. These concepts are closely related to the findings of this thesis. For instance, capability connects to the discussions around autonomy, agency, and competency. Identity links with students feeling that they need to know themselves and being accepted as who they are. Resourcefulness aligns with students wanting the skills to cope and *Navigate the Storms*. Connection aligns with *We're All on This Ship Together*, where students want a supportive community of people like them, and that collectively work towards their shared goals. Finally, sense of purpose is reflected in *Growing and adapting to the Changing Winds*, where students desire a sense of direction, progression, and achievement. However, Lizzio's model (2006) focuses heavily on the context of the initial transition into university and does not offer the transitional underpinnings across the whole university experience. The present research therefore poses a similar framework of core 'senses' that cut across many transitional experiences (e.g., induction, switching to the next academic year). It suggests a framework against which to consider potential interventions for a variety of transitional time points. For example, based on *We're All on This Ship Together*, student-led support groups could be established. Formed by students with similar backgrounds or interests, offering spaces to connect and share their experiences. For example, Schwartz Rounds, typically used in healthcare, could be applied to the student context. This involves monthly meetings where individuals can freely and safely express and understand their feelings about their care of a patient (Pepper et al., 2012). For the student context however, this

could be applied to 'problematic' transitions of university life. The rounds aim to nurture connections between patients, staff, and the institution, and could be similarly beneficial for students, staff, and the institution. It could further support students in *Growing and Adapting to the Changing Winds*, through practical and problem-solving discussions. Furthermore, career development discussions may be beneficial for future trajectories, helping students to explore their interests, set goals, and plan for their future. Providing mentorship or advising programs focused on academic and career guidance, could also help students navigate their academic journey, and make informed decisions about their future path. Consequently, the thematic outcomes of this research provide areas to target intervention development, to support the transitions to and across university.

10.2.5. Concluding remarks

By adopting the proposed strategies, universities can transform into compassionate institutions that prioritises the development, well-being, and success of their community. Fostering connection, success, and competency among students and HE staff. These strategies could further support student transitions to and across university. Firstly, by engaging with student partnership and empowering student voice. This can help manage student expectations and improve engagement and satisfaction, and their self-perceived competency in their educational learning. Student partnerships also challenge traditional power dynamics in education, promoting dialogue and collaboration between students and academic staff. Thus, promoting a community of connection and providing students with their desire for a collaborative and responsive community.

Secondly, integrating mental health and well-being programs into university curricula to support students comprehensively is suggested. Alongside staff training to enhance their ability to provide emotional support alongside academic guidance. However, there is a gap between the provision of training and staff perceptions of how effective this is, indicating the need for improvement in this area to better prepare staff and consequently support students.

Thirdly, support practices and services should focus on fostering autonomy, agency, and competency in students. By empowering students through providing autonomy support, constructive feedback, and facilitating emotional regulation, students can feel confident to the lead in their academic and well-being journeys. Tailored support initiatives, such as flexible and inclusive teaching are also essential to

address the diverse needs of students. Fostering the competency and subsequent agency for them to engage and improve their experience and outcomes.

Collectively, such improvements would likely enhance satisfaction in students' university experience and would likely have subsequent advances in NSS and TEF rankings. As when students feel supported, understood, and valued, they may be more likely to remain engaged and committed to their academic journey and institution. By positioning itself as an institution that goes beyond academic excellence, to an inclusive, adaptable, and responsive institution, it will contribute to its long-term success and recognition across HE.

10.4. Assessing the Quality of this Research

This section offers the quality of this research, following the criteria laid out by Lincoln and Guba (1985). It demonstrates the trustworthiness of this work, through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Of which has been embedded throughout this thesis and will be further summarised here. Lincoln and Guba (1989) offer credibility as a concept of whether the findings can be trusted. Broadly, it is the 'fit' between respondent's views and interpretations of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004), and how comprehensive, and reasonable explanations are, based on the data (Nowell et al. 2017). One way to ensure this credibility, was through creating time for debriefing with my supervisors during the coding and analysis stages. This provided space and time for exploring how my thoughts and ideas were developing as I engaged more deeply with the data. I have also suggested strategies for maximising credibility, such as the use of appropriate questions that encourage in-depth responses (Appendix G1; G2) and describing the context and details of data and my interpretations within my analysis in Part III (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). I also demonstrate credibility in my ethical thinking discussed in Section 4.6.4.: particularly relating to representational ethics of student perspectives. I endeavoured to avoid perpetuating stereotypes associated with generational narratives. For example, care was taken to explain where students' diffusion and displacement of responsibility originate, to avoid the perpetuation of generational critiques such as Millennials and Gen Z being 'snowflakes' and lazy (De Witte, 2022).

Transferability refers to the case-by-case transfer of research (Tobin & Begley, 2004), where thick descriptions should be provided, for another researcher to be able to transfer findings across to their own research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell

et al. 2017). I have provided thick description in both my method (Chapter 4) and analysis (Chapters 5-7) to meet this criterion. In Chapter 4 I provide thick descriptions of each stage of my research, including the coding and application of the codebook to my data. Supplemented with my appendices, offering a thorough audit trail of my process using images and additional descriptions. My analysis was thick in description through the detailed analytical comments and interpretations made in reference to specific sections of data. Often referring to specific wordings and phrases which demonstrated my thinking process supporting my interpretations. This depth of description was also provided through the explanations of interconnections between thematic outcomes. Thus, providing detailed accounts of the overarching meanings of the analysis and the entire dataset. Consequently, thick description is strongly achieved, for the construction of outcomes and the outcomes themselves, providing enough detail that a future researcher could judge the usability and transferability of this work.

The use of thick descriptions also connects to the concept of dependability, where for this to be achieved, the researcher must “ensure the process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented” (Nowell, 2017; p. 3). Additionally, I offer theoretical and methodological rationales for my decisions within my methodology (Chapter 4). Such as the methodological fit with the aims of the research. The analysis software NVivo was used to easily document the process throughout coding and thematic development. The codebook in Excel also provides a clear structured format, including theme descriptions, codes within the themes and example data, providing an evidence trail of how the advisor data was coded. The decision trail has been provided at each stage of the research along with detailed description of the process undertaken. It is therefore argued that another researcher with the same data, could carry out a similar process; potentially reaching a similar rather than contradictory conclusion of the data (Koch, 1994; Novell, 2017). I also kept a log of memos, decisions, and thoughts throughout the process, offering evidence of the reflexive practice during planning, data collection, analysis and writing stages (Appendix O). A reflexive account is also central to the audit trail (Novell, 2017), and provided in section 4.5; to offer my internal dialogues through the data collection and analytical process. It offers reflections on myself, my values, my world view, and the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Consequently, dependability is evidenced through the in-depth descriptions, reflections, provision of rationales and supplementary material provided.

Confirmability is argued to be met, as confirmability is established through the meeting of all other criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

10.5. Limitations of the Current Study

It is necessary to identify the limitations of this study, to add further to the quality of this work. Addressing the limitations will add further ability to consider its transferability and credibility, as limitations can be considered critically in relation to how the findings are understood and applied. The lack of diversity in the sample for example, will be in part due to the difficulties faced with in house recruitment access. Whilst I undertook to recruit a sample that was representative of the diversity within the student population, it is difficult to recruit a sample that draws perspectives from all student groups using a volunteer sampling method using online advertisements. Particularly within the context of recruiting in a global health pandemic. Consequently, some student groups have not been represented in this work, such as those with long term health conditions and wider international student groups. Such inclusion may have provided nuanced experiences related to their contexts. It is not however, an aim of this research, to be generalisable to all students. Therefore, this limitation can be addressed through future work exploring the value and transferability of these findings, to other student groups.

For the data collection and analysis, ideally, I would have transcribed the interviews myself rather than using a transcription service, as part of further embedding myself within the familiarisation to data stage of my analysis. However, the thorough process of listening to the interviews, checking, and adapting for accuracy; provided a similarly immersive experience in data familiarisation. I was confident in the accuracy of the transcripts at the end of this process and do not feel that my understanding of the data was impacted in any way. Regarding online recruitment and interview methods, whilst this approach yielded good responses and in-depth data, there are also limitations associated with the online methods adopted. Such limitations include the inability to accurately perceive or control the environment in which the participant takes part within, thus offering potential issues of privacy and thus reduced honesty in responses. However, considerable actions were made to minimise these risks, as noted in section 4.6.4.

On reflection, the interview schedule could have been further reviewed. For instance, the question "What support do you feel you need, that you aren't receiving?" feels relatively directed. The phrasing assumes there is something

missing from their support, rather than openly phrasing this to “How well do you feel you are supported at university”. This would have allowed them to bring in where they feel supported and where they don’t, in the ways which were salient to them. However, it is not thought to have impacted heavily on theme developments, as underlying patterns were created across questions. With the in depth and iterative approach taken in the coding and theme development process, it is unlikely that one question has deeply shaped the development of an individual theme. Thus, the question is not deemed problematic, but rather highlights an aspect where quality could have been improved within the planning stages.

Considering my positionality to this work, as described in section 4.4, I hold insider and outsider positionalities, both as a current student and a member of staff. There is research to suggest that being an insider provides you with a starting point of commonality, that gains you access to groups that might be closed to outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As such, this positionality as a student has provided me with the ability to build rapport with my participants from an initial point of commonality, and arguably gain a level of trust from the outset. This is interesting to reflect on post analysis, where students spoke of their voice going into a void if they communicate to the university; because I was an insider at the time of interviewing, yet ‘outsider’ towards the end of the study, offering me a positionality that builds insider perspectives into an outsider sphere. If this outsider positionality had been present at the time of data collection, and communicated to my participants, it is possible that their responses and interactions with me would have been different and potentially less forthcoming.

10.6. Avenues for Future Research

Key insights from this research highlight the central theme of *Steering the Ship*, accentuating the significance of students taking control of their university journey to adapt, grow, and succeed. It also highlighted how basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2017) filter through the themes presented within this work. Consequently, a focus on exploring needs-based approaches to teaching is suggested, to encourage the embedding of an agentic and development focus across all stages of learning, teaching, and assessment. Future research should therefore prioritise exploring the specific teaching behaviours that cultivate the meeting of students’ psychological needs. To build a ‘needs supporting’ framework that fosters student engagement, wellness, and development. For example, Ahmadi et al. (2023) created a

classification of teaching behaviours that aligned with Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017), recommending a multitude of ways to nurture student psychological needs. These included providing students with rationales, allowing for input or choice, helping students find ways of monitoring their own progress, and showing empathy for students' point of view. Some of these are articulated across this thesis such as choice, empathy and monitoring progress, offering these teaching behaviours as potential routes for fostering the psychological needs presented within the themes of this work. However, the behaviours classified by Ahmadi et al., (2023) are based on expert opinions rather than student perspectives. Hence, student perspectives around how these teaching behaviours connect to their experiences of the present themes and autonomy, relatedness and competency, could further inform strategy developments for teaching that encourages student motivational behaviours and development.

As seen in Chapter 9, I have argued for future empirical research to investigate how the phenomena demonstrated in the presented themes, are interrelated or independent, and how each might differentially contribute to the psychological needs' satisfaction and wellness of undergraduate students. Through the findings, I have presented processes and interconnectivities between and within the themes, describing occasionally, how they are constructed. However, whilst this is the case, there are many interconnectivities that are difficult to comprehensively cover. Therefore, there is a need to further explore what processes are happening within and between each theme and to fully understand the interconnective complexities. For example, there seem to be contextual and individual aspects of their experience that 'trigger' or 'contribute' to another aspect occurring both within and between themes. Therefore, a systems approach could be used to explore a deeper holistic understanding of these processes. Systems science approaches consist of a variety of methods such as concept mapping, causal loop diagramming, and network analysis (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2022). Each method offers insight into a unique layer of the complex system you are trying to understand. A system is made up of 'factors' or 'elements' and links between those elements. These links can be processes or interrelationships (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2022). In the context of student experience, it is suggested here that a study using Causal Loop Diagrams could further explore the potential 'causal' (whether direct or more abstract) links between and within the themes presented in this study. It offers a direction for exploring how themes influence one another, based on the data already provided here in this study. It focuses on a central system engine (which could be the themes

presented in this study), and feedback loops. Feedback loops refer to recurring interactions or processes where the output of a system influences its own behaviour. These can be positive or negative, whereby positive feedback loops occur when an element amplifies or reinforces the initial element (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2022). For example, being given more *opportunities* for autonomy, may amplify students' perceived *ability* to act with agency, which further reinforces autonomy by creating more *opportunities*. These feedback loops can however lead to growth or instability within the system. A negative feedback loop occurs when the system's output acts to counteract or dampen the initial element. For example, more autonomy opportunities could perpetuate the displacement of responsibility onto others. Thus, this mapping could help in further understanding the interconnections within and between themes. With this understanding, universities could then understand how student experience trajectories, and input initiatives to prevent unhelpful feedback loops at points when they are likely to occur.

Alternatively, the use of Participatory Systems Mapping (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2022) could further this endeavour. While like Causal Loop Diagrams, whereby they are both a mapping of causal links between core “elements” of the system; Participatory Systems Mapping is strictly a ‘participatory action research’ method that foregrounds the participation and co-production of the map with communities and stakeholder groups. This would involve workshop and focus group methods and techniques, taking a Qualitative focus. Which may be more appropriate in producing a new systems map of the student experience, as it provides newly produced data, from collaboration with students and stakeholders, rather than based on pre-existing data. Systems mapping is a remarkably practical and reasonably straightforward approach to engage with intricate real-world systems (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2022). Conducting such a study would help to further solidify, expand, or further explain the findings of the present study. It would enhance the holistic view of the student experience and how this is constructed and experienced. By understanding the layers of the complex system of student experience, systems theory could have the potential to provide evidence-based support for HEI decision making around initiatives and policies to support positive student trajectories and experience. It is to my knowledge, that no such research has yet taken place, despite the understanding that how students experience university is multi-dimensional and intricately complex. However, this approach has been used for understanding faculty morale in HE (Kim & Regh, 2018), determinants of children’s social and emotional wellbeing (Poon et al., 2022), obesity (Allender et al., 2015), depression

(Wittenborn et al., 2016) and how to reduce youth suicide (Occhipinti et al., 2021). Thus, considering the context of mental health and wellbeing difficulties within the student population, and the emotion regulation needs for this demographic, a systems approach could also be an appropriate method for understanding how student wellbeing issues develop through university journeys. It has also been used to model the impacts of COVID-19 on students learning (Arantes do Amaral et al., 2023). Thus, more specific implications based on the findings of the present study would be that if it can be understood what 'causes' student perceptions and responses to their academic or independent experience, strategies could be formulated to support students with the common patterns they express. It would allow HEIs to implement ways to address these patterns and prepare and support students at each stage and transition of their university journey.

Alternatively, within the research there has been some gaps in knowledge identified that could benefit from further exploration. There were aspects of the data that have not been fully developed, as they did not have enough supporting data to address this in depth. Nonetheless, they raised interesting considerations for future explorations. For example, students reported the positive aspects of their experience being a result of 'Luck'. Previous research has investigated this aspect with Nelson (2018) proclaiming that chance and luck are perceived to play a role in a student's success. This seems related to self-efficacy; however, it would be interesting to consider more deeply, how students ascribe their experience to luck, and in what circumstances. This could allow for the potential to develop strategies to improve students' internal locus of control (the belief their actions have an impact) and encourage their sense of competency and consequent agency.

Similarly, there is a notable expression of *feeling*, such as *feeling* like they have support, *feeling* like an adult, or *feeling* connected to their community, regardless of what interventions, actions and policies are put in place by others. This idea of *feeling* that something is present or available as an underlying concept, however, was only touched on briefly within the analysis due to the lack of depth associated with these comments. Consequently, it poses an interesting underpinning worth exploring as there is undoubtedly going to be individual variability in how this *feeling* is constructed, and how one knows when they reach this *feeling*, and what meanings are attached to this. It would therefore be interesting to conduct research exploring the meaning and construction of this concept, to further understand the relevance and ways to foster the feelings needed to experience university positively.

10.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis adopts a student-centred approach to understanding the psychological underpinnings of the university experience. The themes of *We're all on this Ship Together*, *A Safe Harbour*, *Navigating the Storms*, *Mists of Mismatch*, *Growing and Adapting to Change*, and *Adjusting the Sails for Me*, interconnect to produce a student's sense of stability (*Steadying the Ship*) and perceived competency to *Steer their Ship*. Collectively, they emphasise the need to support student autonomy, relatedness, and competency, to encourage students to become agentic (i.e., the captain). In moving forward, the study recommends exploring support initiatives and services from the perspectives of students and their basic psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competency. With the endeavour to empower students, promote students' academic and personal growth, and foster positive psychological experiences across the university journey.

Incorporating the voice of students into discussions about their role and that of the university is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and managing student expectations. Recommended, is the inclusion of proactive measures, such as reflection tasks and repeat induction events to manage student expectations from the outset and across their experience. The thesis also stresses the significance of student partnership, advocating for collaboration and cohesion between students and the university. Balancing individual responsibility with collaborative university action, is emphasised as a route to reduce the perceived divide of "us" and "them". In this way, the study suggests a holistic and student-centric approach to HE is needed, emphasising collaboration, compassion, and a shared responsibility between students and the university. Thus, helping to promote students self-perceived competency, and confidence to become the *Captain Steering the Ship*.

The 'compassionate university' arises as a key aspect in promoting autonomy and agency, whilst being sensitive to student realities. This is essential for creating a positive organisational culture, with moralised compassion fostering trust and relatedness between students and staff. Adopting a flexible and personalised approach to support offers accessibility for all students. With tailored support initiatives, such as flexible teaching, being vital to foster students self-perceived competency and subsequent agency in learning. Feedback on process and development and reflective opportunities are suggested, to encourage a developmental focus for student motivation and the reduction of academic

contingent self-worth. Collectively, this is argued to reinforce students' sense of competency and consequent agentic behaviour. Additionally, mental health and well-being programs should be integrated into curricula, accompanied by staff training to provide effective emotional support alongside academic guidance. Alongside strategies to foster emotion regulation, to enhance student confidence and ability to lead in their academic and wellbeing pursuits.

In summary, this research emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts, openness to student perspectives, and the adoption of needs-based practices; to empower students, enhance their self-perceived competency and foster their motivation and confidence to become captains of their ship. The thesis contributes towards understand how to create a positive and supportive university environment, that values students' strengths and needs, ultimately promoting student satisfaction, success, retention, and well-being.

References

- Abbas, A., Ekowati, D., Suhariadi, F., & Hamid, S. A. R. (2022). Negative vs. Positive Psychology: A Review of Science of Well-Being. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-022-09708-1>
- Adams, G. R., & Berzonsky, M. (Ed.). (2006). *Blackwell handbook of adolescence*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Adams, T., & Moore, M. (2007). High-risk health and credit behavior among 18 to 25 year old college students. *Journal of American College Health*, *56*, 101–108. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.56.2.101-108>
- Adams, R., & Smith, D. (2014, August 8). *Universities Spend More to Attract Clearing Students*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/aug/08/university-spending-clearing-limit-undergraduates>
- Ahmadi, A., Noetel, M., Parker, P., Ryan, R. M., Ntoumanis, N., Reeve, J., Beauchamp, M., Dicke, T., Yeung, A., Ahmadi, M., Bartholomew, K., Chiu, T. K. F., Curran, T., Erturan, G., Flunger, B., Frederick, C., Froiland, J. M., González-Cutre, D., Haerens, L., ... Lonsdale, C. (2023). A classification system for teachers' motivational behaviors recommended in self-determination theory interventions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *115*(8), 1158–1176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000783>
- Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2020). Four Domains of Students' Sense of Belonging to University. *Studies in Higher Education*, *45*(3), 622–634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902>
- Allen, R., Kannangara, C., Vyas, M., & Carson, J. (2023). European university students' mental health during Covid-19: Exploring attitudes towards Covid-19 and governmental response. *Current Psychology*, *42*, 20165–20178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02854-0>
- Allen, T. D., Herst, D. E., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: a review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *5*, 278–308. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.5.2.278>

- Allender, S., Owen, B., Kuhlberg, J., Lowe, J., Nagorcka-Smith, P., Whelan, J., & Bell, C. (2015). A Community Based Systems Diagram of Obesity Causes. *PLoS ONE*, *10*(7), e0129683. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0129683>
- Alonso-Tapia, J., & Pardo, A. (2006). Assessment of learning environment motivational quality from the point of view of secondary and high school learners. *Learning and Instruction*, *16*, 295-309. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2006.07.002>
- Agnew, S., Cameron-Agnew, T., Lau, A., & Walker, S. (2016). What business school characteristics are correlated with more favourable National Student Survey (NSS) rankings? *The International Journal of Management Education*, *14*(3), 219–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2016.05.001>
- Akgun, S., & Ciarrochi, J. (2003). Learned resourcefulness moderates the relationship between academic stress and academic performance. *Educational Psychology* *23*(3), 287–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341032000060129>
- Amini, R., Laughlin, B. S., Smith, K. W., Siwik, V. P., Adamas-Rappaport, W. J., & Fantry, G. T. (2018). “Flipped classroom” for academic and career advising: an innovative technique for medical student advising. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, *9*, 371-376. <https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S162504>
- Andrews, B., & Wilding, J. M. (2004), The relation of depression and anxiety to life-stress and achievement in students. *British Journal of Psychology*, *95*, 509-521. <https://doi.org/10.1348/0007126042369802>
- Anees, R. T., Heidler, P., Cavaliere, L. P. L., & Nordin, N. A. (2021). Brain Drain in Higher Education. The Impact of Job Stress and Workload on Turnover Intention and the Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction at Universities. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, *6*(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2021.6.3.849>
- Arantes do Amaral, J. A., Meister, I. P., & Gamez, L. (2023). A Systemic Analysis of the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Studies of Brazilian Graduate Students: An Exploratory Study. *Anatolian Journal of Education*, *8*(1), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2023.8112a>
- Aristovnik, A., Keržič, D., Ravšelj, D., Tomaževič, N., & Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Life of Higher Education Students: A Global

- Perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8438.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208438>
- Arnett, J. J. (1997). Young people's conceptions of the transition to adulthood. *Youth & Society*, 29(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X970290010>
- Arnett, J. J. (1998). Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context. *Human Development*, 41, 295–315.
<https://doi.org/10.1159/000022591>
- Arnett, J. J. (2011). Emerging adulthood(s): The cultural psychology of a new life stage. In L. A. Jensen (Eds.), *Bridging cultural and developmental psychology: New syntheses in theory, research, and policy* (pp. 255–275). Oxford University Press.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Arnett, J. J. (2001). Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood: Perspectives from Adolescence Through Midlife. *Journal of Adult Development*, 8(2), 133–143.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026450103225>
- Arslan, G., Yıldırım, M., Karataş, Z., Kabasakal, Z., & Kılınç, M. (2022). Meaningful Living to Promote Complete Mental Health Among University Students in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International journal of mental health and addiction*, 20(2), 930–942. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00416-8>
- Assor, A. (2012). Allowing choice and nurturing an inner compass: Educational practices supporting students' need for autonomy. In S. L. Christenson et al. (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 421–439). Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7_20
- Assor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviors predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72(2), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709902158883>
- Audet, E., Dubois, P., Levine, S., & Koestner, R. (2023). Autonomy support for the academic goal pursuit and subjective well-being of students with disabilities.

Cogent Mental Health, 2(1), 2255040, 1-29.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/28324765.2023.2255040>

Austen, L., Hodgson, R., Dickinson, J., Heaton, C., & Pickering, N. (2021). *Access, retention, attainment and progression: an integrative review of demonstrable impact on student outcomes*. Advance HE. Retrieved from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/access-retention-attainment-and-progression-review-literature-2016-2021>

Avey, J. B., Reichard, R. J., Luthans, F., & Mhatre, K. H. (2011). Meta-analysis of the impact of positive psychological capital on employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 22, 127–152. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20070>

Baeten, M., Kyndt, E., Struyven, K., & Docky, F. (2010). Using student-centred learning environments to stimulate deep approaches to learning: Factors encouraging or discouraging their effectiveness. *Educational Research Review*, 5, 243–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2010.06.001>

Baik C., Larcombe W., & Brooker A. (2019). How universities can enhance student mental wellbeing: the student perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(4), 674-687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1576596>

Baloo, K., Hosein, A., Byrom, N., & Essau, C. A. (2022). Differences in mental health inequalities based on university attendance: Intersectional multilevel analyses of individual heterogeneity and discriminatory accuracy. *SSM - Population Health*, 19, 101149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2022.101149>

Baloo, K., Pauli, R., & Worrell, M. (2017). Undergraduates' personal circumstances, expectations and reasons for attending university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(8), 1373-1384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.1959298>

Baltes, P. B. (1987). Theoretical propositions of life-span developmental psychology: On the dynamics between growth and decline. *Developmental Psychology*, 23(5), 611–626. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.23.5.611>

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Macmillan.

Bandura, A., Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Gerbino, M., & Pastorelli, C. (2003). Role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in diverse spheres of psychosocial

functioning. *Child development*, 74(3), 769–782.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00567>

Barbayannis, G., Bandari, M., Zheng, X., Baquerizo, H., Pecor, K. W., & Ming, X. (2022). Academic Stress and Mental Well-Being in College Students: Correlations, Affected Groups, and COVID-19. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 886344. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.886344>

Barbrook-Johnson, P., & Penn, A. S. (2022). *Systems mapping: how to build and use causal models of systems*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bassa, B. (2022, May). Pouring from an empty cup: poor university staff wellbeing is an impossible ground for high quality teaching. Advance HE.

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/pouring-empty-cup-poor-university-staff-wellbeing-impossible-ground-high-quality>

Bates, E., & Kaye, L. K. (2014). “I’d be expecting caviar in lectures”: the impact of the new fee regime on undergraduate students’ expectations of higher education. *Higher Education*, 67(5), 655-673. Retrieved from:

<http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/1677/>

Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4,1–44.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1529-1006.01431>

Beatson, N. J., Berg, D. A., & Smith, J. K. (2020.) The influence of self-efficacy beliefs and prior learning on performance. *Accounting & Finance*, 60(2), 1271–1294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acfi.12440>

Beatson, N. J., Berg, D. A., & Smith, J. K. (2018). The impact of mastery feedback on undergraduate students' self-efficacy beliefs. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 59, 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.03.002>

Beaumont, C., Moscrop, C., & Canning, S. (2016). Easing the transition from school to HE: scaffolding the development of self-regulated learning through a dialogic approach to feedback. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(3), 331-350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2014.953460>

Becker, S. P., Dvorsky, M.R., Holdaway, A. S., & Luebbe, A. M. (2018). Sleep problems and suicidal behaviours in college students. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 99, 122–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2018.01.009>

- Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 173*, 90–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.10.054>
- Belfield, C., Britton, J., Dearden, L., & van der Erve, L. (2017). Higher Education in England: past, present and options for the future, Briefing Note BN211, Institute for Fiscal Studies. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/9334>
- Bennett, D., Kapoor, R., Rajinder, K., & Maynard, N. (2015). First year engineering students: Perceptions of engineers and engineering work amongst domestic and international students. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 6*(1), 89-105. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v6i1.272>
- Benson-Eggleton, J. (2019). The financial circumstances associated with high and low wellbeing in undergraduate students: a case study of an English Russell Group institution. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43*(7), 901-913. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1421621>
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday
- Bewick, B., Koutsopoulou, G., Miles, J., Slaa, E., & Barkham, M. (2010). Changes in Undergraduate Students' Psychological Well-being as They Progress through University. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(6), 633–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903216643>
- Bhaskar, R. (1978). *A Realist Theory of Science*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Blaikie, N. W. H. (2000). *Designing social research: the logic of anticipation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blasi, A. (1983). Moral cognition and moral action: A theoretical perspective. *Developmental Review, 3*, 178–210. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297\(83\)90029-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(83)90029-1)
- Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, M. (2021). Emergency remote teaching in higher education: mapping the first global online semester. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 18*(50), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00282-x>

- Boney, J., Potvin, M. C., & Chabot, M. (2019). The goals program: Expanded supports for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 32*(3), 32–1329
- Bostwick, J. M., Pabbati, C., Geske, J. R., & McKean, A. J. (2016). Suicide attempt as a risk factor for completed suicide: even more lethal than we knew. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 173*(11), 1094–1100.
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15070854>
- Boughton, K., Boyle, S. L., O'Byrne, R., & Lumley, M. N. (2023). Transitioning to University with a Mental Illness: Experiences of Youth and their Parent. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 38*(2), 215-241.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211014842>
- Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: Implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development, 16*, 133–145.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2011.568690>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol .1. attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss Vol 2: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bradley, H. (2017). 'Should I stay or should I go?': Dilemmas and decisions among UK Undergraduates. *European Educational Research Journal, 16*(1), 30-44.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904116669363>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (in press). Everything changes... well some things do: Reflections on, and resources for, reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin*. Retrieved from:
<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/9303918>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of*

research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). London: Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11(4), 589–597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Brewster, L., Jones, E., Priestley, M., Wilbraham, S. J., Spanner, L., & Hughes, G. (2022). 'Look after the staff and they would look after the students' cultures of wellbeing and mental health in the university setting. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(4), 548-560.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1986473>
- Briggs, S. (2006). "An Exploratory Study of the Factors Influencing Undergraduate Student Choice: The Case of Higher Education in Scotland." *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(6), 705–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070601004333>
- Briggs, A. R. J., Clark, J., & Hall, I. (2012). Building bridges: understanding student transition to university. *Quality in Higher Education*, 18(1), 3-21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2011.614468>
- Brine J., & Waller R. (2004). Working-class women on an access course: Risk, opportunity and (re)constructing identities. *Gender and Education*, 16(1), 97–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0954025032000170363>

- British Psychological Society, (2021). *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics*.
<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsrep.2021.inf180>
- Broadbridge, A., & Swanson, V. (2005). Earning and learning: how term-term employment impacts on students adjustment to university life. *Journal of Education and Work* 18(2), 235–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080500086008>
- Brockelman, K. F., & Scheyett, A. M. (2015). Faculty perceptions of accommodations, strategies, and psychiatric advance directives for university students with mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 38(4), 342–351. <https://doi.org/10.1037/prj0000143>
- Brogli, E., Millings, A., & Barkham, M. (2021). Student mental health profiles and barriers to help seeking: When and why students seek help for a mental health concern. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 00, 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12462>
- Brogli, E., Millings, A., & Barkham, M. (2018). Challenges to addressing student mental health in embedded counselling services: a survey of UK higher and further education institutions. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46(4), 441-455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1370695>
- Brook C. A., & Willoughby T. (2015). The social ties that bind: Social anxiety and academic achievement across the university years. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 44(5), 1139–1152. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0262-8>
- Brookfield, S. (2002). Using the lenses of critically reflective teaching in the community college classroom. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 118, 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.61>
- Brooks, R., Byford, K., & Sela, K. (2016). Students' unions, consumerism and the neo-liberal university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 8, 1211-1228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1042150>
- Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The Utility of Template Analysis in Qualitative Psychology Research. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 12(2), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224>
- Brooman, S., & Darwent, S. (2014). Measuring the beginning: a quantitative study of the transition to higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(9), 1523-1541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.801428>

- Brooman, S., Darwent, S., & Pimor, A. (2015). The student voice in higher education curriculum design: is there value in listening? *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 52(6), 663-674.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2014.910128>
- Brouwer, J., Jansen, E., Flache, A., & Hofman, A. (2016). The impact of social capital on self-efficacy and study success among first-year university students. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 52, 109-118.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.09.016>
- Brown, J., & Kirk-Wade, E. (2021). *Coronavirus: A history of 'Lockdown laws' In England*. House of Commons Library.
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9068/CBP-9068.pdf>
- Browne, J., Barber, M., Coyle, D., Eastwood, D., King, J., Nayak, R., & Sands, P. (2010). *Securing a sustainable future for HE: An independent review of HE funding and student finance*.
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f289540f0b62305b856fc/bis-10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf>
- Browning, M. H. E. M., Larson, L. R., Sharaievska, I., Rigolon, A., McAnirlin, O., Mullenbach, L., Cloutier, S., Vu, T. M., Thomsen, J., Reigner, N., Metcalf, E. C., D'Antonio, A., Helbich, M., Bratman, G. N., & Alvarez, H. O. (2022). Psychological impacts from COVID-19 among university students: Risk factors across seven states in the United States. *PLOS ONE*, 17(8), e0273938. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273938>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th edition). Oxford: OUP.
- Bryson, J. R., & Andres, L. (2020). Covid-19 and rapid adoption and improvisation of online teaching: Curating resources for extensive versus intensive online learning experiences. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 44(4), 608–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2020.1807478>
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1391–1412.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Byrne, M., Flood, B., Hassall, T., Joyce, J., Montano, J. L. A., Gonzalez, J. M. G., & Torna-Germanou, E. (2012). Motivations, expectations and preparedness for

higher education: A study of accounting students in Ireland, the UK, Spain and Greece. *Accounting Forum*, 36, 134–144.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acccfor.2011.12.001>

Bui, K. V. T. (2002). First-generation college students at a four-year university: Background characteristics, reasons for pursuing higher education, and first-year experiences. *College Student Journal*, 36(1), 3–11.

Bunbury, S. (2020). Disability in higher education – do reasonable adjustments contribute to an inclusive curriculum? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(9), 964-979, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1503347>

Bunce, L., Baird, A., & Jones, S., E. (2017). The Student-as-consumer Approach in Higher Education and Its Effects on Academic Performance. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(11), 1958–1978.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1127908>

Buote, V. M., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Wintre, M. G. (2007). The importance of friends: Friendship and adjustment among 1st-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(6), 665–689. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558407306344>

Burgess, A., Senior, C., & Moores, E. (2018). A 10-year case study on the changing determinants of university student satisfaction in the UK. *PLoS ONE*, 13(2): e0192976. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192976>

Burke, P., Bennett, A., Burgess, C., Gray, K., & Southgate, E. (2016). *Capability, Belonging and Equity in Higher Education: Developing Inclusive Approach*. Australia: Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education. Retrieved from: ueahome4/stussf1/mms13squ/data/Downloads/CAPABILITY-ONLINE.pdf

Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism* (2nd ed.). London: Psychology Press.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social Constructionism*. Sussex: Routledge.

Burwell, R. A., & Shirk, S. R. (2006). Self-processes in adolescent depression: The role of self-worth contingencies. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16, 479–490. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2006.00503.x>

Cage, E., Jones, E., Ryan, G., Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2021) Student mental health and transitions into, through and out of university: student and staff

perspectives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(8), 1076-1089.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1875203>

- Callender, C. (2008). The impact of term-time employment on higher education students' academic attainment and achievement. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(4), 359-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930801924490>
- Campbell, D. T. (1958). Common fate, similarity, and other indices of the status of aggregate persons as social entities. *Behavioral Science*, 3, 14-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830030103>
- Campbell, L., & McKendrick, J. (2017). Beyond aspirations: Deploying the capability approach to tackle the under-representation in higher education of young people from deprived communities. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 39(2), 120–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2017.1293630>
- Carey, P. (2013) Student as co-producer in a marketised higher education system: a case study of students' experience of participation in curriculum design. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 50(3), 250-260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.796714>
- Carmona-Halty, M., Salanova, M., Liorens, S., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2018). How psychological capital mediates between study-related positive emotions and academic performance. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(2), 605-617.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-9963-5>
- Carpenter, J. (2008). Metaphors in qualitative research: Shedding light or casting shadows? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31, 274-282.
<https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/nur.20253>
- Chapman, P., Blatchford, S., & Hughes, E. (2013). Student engagement creating our learning community. Lightening up the dark side: A partnership approach between a students' union and the university. In C. Nygaard, S. Brand, P. Bartholomew & L. Millard (Eds.), *Student engagement: Identity, motivation and community*. Faringdon: Libri Publishing.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory methodology: Objectivist and constructivist qualitative methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of qualitative psychology (2nd Ed.)* (pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: SAGE.

- Chamberlain, K. (2011). Troubling Methodology. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 48-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2010.520113>
- Chapell, M. S., Blanding, Z. B., Silverstein, M. E., Takahashi, M., Newman, B., Gubi, A., & McCann, N. (2005). Test anxiety and academic performance in undergraduate and graduate students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(2), 268–274. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.97.2.268>
- Chester, A., Johnston, A., & Clarke, A. (2019). Partnerships for Learning and Belonging in Tertiary Education: A Social Capital Analysis. In B. Tynan, T. McLaughlin, A. Chester, C. Hall-Van den Elsen & B. Kennedy (Eds.), *Transformations in Tertiary Education* (pp.11-26). Singapore: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9957-2>
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass
- Choak, C. (2012). Asking questions: Interviews and evaluations. In S. Bradford, & F. Cullen (Eds.), *Research and research methods for youth practitioners* (pp. 90–112). London: Routledge.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
- Copeland, W. E., McGinnis, E., Bai, Y., Adams, Z., Nardone, H., Devadanam, V., Rettew, J., & Hudziak, J. J. (2021). *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 60(1), 134-141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.08.466>
- Chen, R. (2008). Financial Aid and Student Dropout in Higher Education: A Heterogeneous Research Approach. In Smart, J. C. (Eds.), *Higher Education. Handbook of Theory and Research*, vol 23. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6959-8_7
- Christensen, M., & Craft, J. (2021). Gaining a new sense of me: Mature students experiences of under-graduate nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, 96, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2020.104617>
- Christie, H., Barron, P., & D'annunzio-green, N. (2013). Direct entrants in transition: becoming independent learners. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 623-637. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.588326>

- Christie, H., Munro, M., & Rettig, H. (2002). Accommodating Students. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(2), 209–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260220134458>
- Christie, H., Tett, L., Cree, V. E., & McCune, V. (2016). 'It all just clicked': a longitudinal perspective on transitions within university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(3), 478-490. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.942271>
- Christie, H., Tett, L., Cree, V.E., Hounsell, J., & McCune, V. (2008). A real rollercoaster of confidence and emotions: Learning to be a university student. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33, 567–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802373040>
- Coleman, J. S. (1990a). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
- Conley, C. S., Shapiro, J. B., Huguenel, B. M., & Kirsch, A. C. (2020). Navigating the College Years: Developmental Trajectories and Gender Differences in Psychological Functioning, Cognitive-Affective Strategies, and Social Well-Being. *Emerging Adulthood*, 8(2), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818791603>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Listening to Equity-Seeking Perspectives: how Students' Experiences of Pedagogical Partnership can Inform Wider Discussions of Student Success. *Higher Education Research & Development* 37(5): 923–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1457629>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2014). Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: a threshold concept in academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(3), 186-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2013.805694>
- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: a guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Cooper, R. (2018). *What is Civil Society? How is the term used and what is seen to be its role and value (internationally) in 2018?* K4D Helpdesk Report. Institute of Development Studies.
- Compas, B. E., Connor-Smith, J. K., Saltzman, H., Thomsen, A. H., & Wadsworth, M. E. (2001). Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence: Problems, progress, and potential in theory and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 87–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.1.87>

- Cordaro, M. (2020). Pouring from an empty cup: The case for compassion fatigue in higher education. *Building Healthy Academic Communities*, 4(2), 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.18061/bhac.v4i2.7618>
- Cote, J. E., & Levine, C. (1970). Student motivations, learning environments, and Human Capital Acquisition: Towards an Integrated Paradigm of Student Development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38(3), 229-242.
- Cracknell, B. (2015). Improving the quality of initial management of self-harm and suicide patients in A+ E at the James Paget Hospital. *BMJ Open Quality*, 4(1), u207272–u2w2919. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjquality.u207272.w2919>
- Cranfield, D. J., Tick, A., Venter, I. M., Blignaut, R. J., & Renaud, K. (2021). Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19—A Comparative Study. *Education Sciences*, 11(8), 403. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080403>
- Crego, A., Yela, J. R., Gómez-Martínez, M. Á., Riesco-Matías, P., & Petisco-Rodríguez, C. (2021). Relationships between Mindfulness, Purpose in Life, Happiness, Anxiety, and Depression: Testing a Mediation Model in a Sample of Women. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(3), 925. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030925>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. K. (2003). Level of self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth: Unique effects on academic, social, and financial problems in college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 701–712. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167203029006003>
- Crocker, J., & Park, L. E. (2004). The costly pursuit of self-esteem. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 392–414. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.3.392>
- Crockford, J., Hordósy, R., & Simms, K. S. (2015). 'I really needed a job, like, for money and stuff': Student finance, part-time work and the student experience at a northern red-brick university. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 17(3), 89-109. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.17.3.89>

- Cross, M., & Johnson, B. (2008). Establishing a space of dialogue and possibilities: Student experience and meaning at the University of the Witwatersrand. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(2), 302-321.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Curcio, G., Ferrara, M., & De, G. L. (2006). Sleep loss, learning capacity and academic performance. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 10(5), 323–337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2005.11.001>
- Daly, K. J. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies & human development*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452224800>
- Darling, C. A., McWey, L. M., Howard, S. N., & Olmstead, S. B. (2007). College student stress: the influence of interpersonal relationships on sense of coherence. *Stress Health*, 23, 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1139>
- De La Fuente, J., Amate, J., González-Torres, M. C., Artuch, R., García-Torrecillas, J. M., & Fadda, S. (2020). Effects of Levels of Self-Regulation and Regulatory Teaching on Strategies for Coping with Academic Stress in Undergraduate Students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(22), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00022>
- Debats, D. L., Drost, J., & Hansen, P. (1995). Experiences of meaning in life: A combined qualitative and quantitative approach. *British Journal of Psychology*, 86, 359-375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1995.tb02758.x>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry* 11, 227–68. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Deloitte (2015). Making the Grade 2015: The Key Issues Facing the UK Higher Education Sector. Retrieved from: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/public-sector/deloitte-uk-making-the-grade-2015.pdf>
- Denovan, A., & Macaskill, A. (2013). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of stress and coping in first year undergraduates. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(6), 1002–1024. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3019>

- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Department for Business Innovation and Skills. (2016). *Success as a knowledge economy: Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice*. London: HMSO. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f3f67ed915d74e62294af/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf>
- Department for Education (2024). *Key stage 4 destination measures*. Retrieved from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures>
- Department for Education (2023, May). HE providers' policies and practices to support student mental health: Research Report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-wellbeing-practices-in-higher-education>
- Department for Education. (2021). *Key stage 4 destination measures*. Retrieved from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures/2019-20#dataBlock-28a0a88f-df93-46a1-8120-963ef33cf9c8-charts>
- Devine, F., & Heath, S. (1999) *Sociological Research Methods in Context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Devlin, M., & McKay, J. (2014). Reframing 'the problem': Students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds transitioning to university. In H. Brook, D. Fergie, M. Maeorg, & D. Michell (Eds.), *Universities in transition: foregrounding social contexts of knowledge in the first year experience* (pp. 97-125). University of Adelaide Press.
- De Witte, M., (2022). *Gen Z are not 'coddled'. They are highly collaborative, self-reliant and pragmatic, according to the new Stanford affiliated research*. Stanford News. <https://news.stanford.edu/2022/01/03/know-gen-z/#:~:text=Gen%20Zers%20were%20called%20%E2%80%9Csnowflakes%E2%80%9D%20and%20%E2%80%9Cunwilling%20to,because%20they%20don%E2%80%99t%20have%20after-school%20or%20summer%20jobs.>
- Diseth, Å., Danielsen, A. G., & Samdal, O. (2012). A Path Analysis of Basic Need Support, Self-Efficacy, Achievement Goals, Life Satisfaction and Academic

- Achievement Level among Secondary School Students. *Educational Psychology* 32(3), 335–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2012.657159>
- Divan, A., Pitts, C., Watkins, K., McBurney, S. J., Goodall, T., Koutsopoulou, Z. G., & Balfour, J. (2022). Inequity in Work Placement Year opportunities and graduate employment outcomes: a data analytics approach. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(7), 869-883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.2020220>
- Donalek, J. G. (2004). Demystifying nursing research: Phenomenology as a qualitative research method. *Urologic Nursing*, 24(6), 516–517.
- Dost, G., & Smith, L. M. (2023). Understanding higher education students' sense of belonging: a qualitative meta-ethnographic analysis. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 47(6), 822-849. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2191176>
- Duffy, A. (2023). University Student Mental Health: An Important Window of Opportunity for Prevention and Early Intervention. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 68(7), 495-498. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07067437231183747>
- Duffy, A., Keown-Stoneman, C., Goodday, S., Horrocks, J., Lowe, M., King, N., Pickett, W., McNevin, S. H., Cunningham, S., Rivera, D., Bisdounis, L., Bowie, C. R., Harkness, K., & Saunders, K. E. A. (2020). Predictors of mental health and academic outcomes in first-year university students: Identifying prevention and early-intervention targets. *BJPsych Open*, 6(3), e46. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2020.24>
- Duffy, A., Saunders, K. E. A., Malhi, G. S., Patten, S., Cipriani, A., McNevin, S. H., MacDonald, E., & Geddes, J. (2019). Mental health care for university students: a way forward? *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 6(11), 885-887. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30275-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30275-5)
- Dunn, M. (2018). The social and affirmative models in higher education: an introduction. Advance HE. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/social-and-affirmative-models-higher-education-introduction>
- Dunnett, A., Moorhouse, J., Walsh, C., & Barry, C. (2012). Choosing a University: A conjoint analysis of the impact of higher fees on students applying for university in 2012. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 18(3), 199-220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2012.657228>

- Durham University (2023). *Transitioning to higher education course*. Retrieved February 16, 2023 from: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/colleges-and-student-experience/student-support-and-wellbeing/transitioning-to-higher-education-support-and-information-/transitioning-to-he-course/>
- Dutcher, J. M., Lederman, J., Jain, M., Price, S., Kumar, A., Villalba, D. K., Tumminia, M. J., Doryab, A., Creswell, K. G., Riskin, E., Sefdigar, Y., Seo, W., Mankoff, J., Cohen, S., Dey, A., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). Lack of Belonging Predicts Depressive Symptomatology in College Students. *Psychological Science, 33*(7), 1048-1067. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211073135>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>
- Easterbrook, M. J., & Vignoles, V. L. (2015). When friendship formation goes down the toilet: Design features of shared accommodation influence interpersonal bonds and well-being. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 54*(1), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12062>
- Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G., & Hughes, M. (2010). Transitions in the Lifecourse: the role of identity, agency and structure. In K. Ecclestone, G. Biesta & M. Hughes (Eds.), *Transitions and Learning through the Lifecourse* (pp. 1-15). Routledge
- Edwards, E. R., Interthal, H., & McQueen, H. A. (2021). Managing your mind: How simple activities within the curriculum can improve undergraduate students' mental health and well-being'. *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences, 16*(1). <https://doi.org/10.29311/ndtps.v0i16.3588>
- Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. (2009). Mental Health and Academic Success in College. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy, 9*(1), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2191>
- El Ansari, W., & Stock, C. (2010). Is the Health and Wellbeing of University Students Associated with their Academic Performance? Cross Sectional Findings from the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 7*(2), 509-527. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph7020509>

- El Ansari, W., Stock, C., & Mills, C. (2013). Is alcohol consumption associated with poor academic achievement in university students? *International journal of preventive medicine*, 4(10), 1175–1188.
- Elder, G. H., Jr. (1998). The Life Course as Developmental Theory. *Child Development*, 69, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1998.tb06128.x>
- Elder-Vass, D. (2012a). *The reality of social construction*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2012b). Towards a realist social constructionism. *Sociologia, Problemas e Praticas*, 70, 9-24. <http://journals.openedition.org/spp/1041>
- Elliot, K. M. (2002). Key determinants of student satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3), 271–279. <https://doi.org/10.2190/B2V7-R91M-6WXR-KCCR>
- Elliott, K., & Healy, M., (2001). Key factors influencing student satisfaction related to recruitment and retention. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(4), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v10n04_01
- Engstrom, C., & Tinto, V. (2008). Access Without Support is not Opportunity. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 40(1), 46-50. <https://doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.40.1.46-50>
- Engward, H., Goldspink, S., Iancu, M., Kersey, T., & Wood, A. (2022). Togetherness in Separation: Practical Considerations for Doing Remote Qualitative Interviews Ethically. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/16094069211073212>
- Eskin, M., Sun, J. M., Abuidhail, J., Yoshimasu, K., Kujan, O., Janghorbani, M., & Hamdan, M... Voracek, M. (2016). Suicidal behavior and psychological distress in university students: a 12- nation study. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 20(3), 369–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2015.1054055>
- Evans, S., Alkan, E., Bhangoo, J. K., Tenenbaum, H., & Ng-Knight, T. (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on mental health, wellbeing, sleep, and alcohol use in a UK student sample. *Psychiatry research*, 298, 113819. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113819>

- Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36, 282–284. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>
- Evely, A. C., Fazey, I., Pinard M., & Lambin, X. (2008). The influence of philosophical perspectives in integrative research. *Ecology and Society*, 13(2), 52. <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss2/art52/>
- Fabriz, S., Mendzheritskaya, J., & Stehle, S. (2021). Impact of Synchronous and Asynchronous Settings of Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education on Students' Learning Experience During COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 733554. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.733554>
- Fairlamb, S. (2022). We need to talk about self-esteem: The effect of contingent self-worth on student achievement and well-being. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 8(1), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000205>
- Fancourt, D., Steptoe, A., & Bu, F. (2021). Trajectories of anxiety and depressive symptoms during enforced isolation due to COVID-19 in England: a longitudinal observational study. *The lancet. Psychiatry*, 8(2), 141–149. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30482-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30482-X)
- Farenga, S. A. (2015). How going beyond financial support contributes to student success and retention: an institutional case study of the National Scholarship Programme. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 17(3), 60-73. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.17.3.60>
- Farhat, G., Bingham, J., Caulfield, J., & Grieve, S. (2017). The Academies Project: Widening Access and Smoothing Transitions for Secondary School Pupils to University, College and Employment. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 5(1), 23-30
- Felten, P., Abbot, S., Kirkwood, J., Long, A., Lubicz-Nawrocka, T., Mercer-Mapstone, L., & Verwoord, R. (2019). Reimagining the place of students in academic development, *International Journal for Academic Development*, 24(2), 192-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2019.1594235>
- Field, J., & N. Morgan-Klein. (2012). The Importance of Social Support Structures for Retention and Success. In T. Hinton-Smith (Eds.), *Widening Participation in Higher Education: Casting the Net Wide?* (pp. 178–192). London: Palgrave.

- Fielding, A., Dunleavy, P. J., & Langan, A. M. (2010). Interpreting context to the UK's National Student (Satisfaction) Survey data for science subjects. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34(3), 347–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2010.484054>
- Finefter-Rosenbluh, I. (2017). Incorporating Perspective Taking in Reflexivity: A Method to Enhance Insider Qualitative Research Processes. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1).
<https://doiorg.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1609406917703539>
- Finlay, L. (2002a). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209–230.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205>
- Finlay L. (2002b). “Outing” the researcher: the provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), 531–545.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052>
- Fleming, T. (2008). A Secure Base for Adult Learning: Attachment Theory and Adult Education. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 33-53. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ874285>
- Flett, G. L., Goldstein, A. L., Pechenkov, I. G., Nepon, T., & Wekerle, C. (2016). Antecedents, correlates, and consequences of feeling like you don't matter: Associations with maltreatment, loneliness, social anxiety, and the five-factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 92, 52–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.12.014>
- Flett, G., Khan, A., & Su, C. Mattering and Psychological Well-being in College and University Students: Review and Recommendations for Campus-Based Initiatives. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 17, 667–680 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00073-6>
- Flick, U. W. E. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publishing.
- Fotiadis, A., Abdulrahman, K., & Spyridou, A. (2019). The Mediating Roles of Psychological Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness on Work-Life Balance and Well-Being. *Frontiers of Psychology*, 10(1267), 1-7.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01267>

- Foulkes, L., & Andrews, J. L. (2023). Are Mental Health Awareness Efforts Contributing to the Rise in Reported Mental Health Problems? A Call to Test the Prevalence Inflation Hypothesis. *New Ideas In Psychology, 69*, 101010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2023.101010>
- Frankl V. E. (1969). *The will to meaning: Foundations and applications of logotherapy*. New York, NY: New American Library.
- Frankl V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. New York, NY: Washington Square
- Frawley, A., Wakeham, C., McLaughlin, K., & Ecclestone, K. (2024). Constructing a Crisis: Mental Health, Higher Education and Policy Entrepreneurs. *Sociological Research Online, 0*(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804231215943>
- Freire, C., Ferradás, M. D. M., Regueiro, B., Rodríguez, S., Valle, A., & Núñez, J. C. (2020). Coping Strategies and Self-Efficacy in University Students: A Person-Centered Approach. *Frontiers in psychology, 11*, 841. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00841>
- Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (2009). Relations among Well-Being, Avoidant Coping, and Active Coping in a Large Sample of Australian Adolescents. *Psychological Reports, 104*(3), 745-758. <https://doi.org/10.2466/PR0.104.3>
- Gall, T. L., Evans, D. R., & Bellerose, S. (2000). Transition to First-Year University: Patterns of Change in Adjustment across Life Domains and Time. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*(4), 544–567. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2000.19.4.544>
- Galve-González, C., Bernardo, A. B., & Castro-López, A. (2023). Understanding the dynamics of college transitions between courses: Uncertainty associated with the decision to drop out studies among first and second year students. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-023-00732-2>
- Ganqa, N. H., & Masha, R. K. (2020). Higher Education Institutions as space and context for student identity formation and transformation: Implications for First Year Experience. *International Journal of Education and Research, 8*(8), 91-102

- Garvey, J., Guyotte, K., Latopolski, K., Sanders, L., & Flint, M. (2018). Belongingness in Residence Halls: Examining Spaces and Contexts for First-Year Students across Race and Gender. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 30(2), 9–25.
- Geertshuis, S., Moon, J., & Cooper-Thomas, H. (2014). Preparing Students for Higher Education: The Role of Proactivity. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 26(2), 157-169.
- Gentles, S. J., Jack, S. M., Nicholas, D. B., & McKibbin, K. (2014). A critical approach to reflexivity in grounded theory. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(44), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1109>
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 266–275. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.40.3.266>
- Gergen, K. J., Josselson, R., & Freeman, M. (2015). The Promises of Qualitative Inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 70(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038597>
- Getzel, E. E., & Thoma, C. A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 31, 77–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885728808317658>
- Ghazala, A., & Simion, S. (2018). *Higher Education funding reforms: A comprehensive analysis of educational and labour market outcomes in England*. Centre for Economics of Education. <https://docs.iza.org/dp11083.pdf>
- Gibbs, J. C. (2019). *Moral development and reality: beyond the theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt* (Fourth edition.). Oxford University Press.
- Gill, A. J. G. (2021.) Difficulties and support in the transition to higher education for non-traditional students. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 26(4), 410-441, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2021.1980661>
- Gill, A. J. G. (2017). The Transitional Experiences of Sport and Exercise Students from Further to Higher Education. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education* 3(1), 22-47.

- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>
- Google. (2024, March). Why Should I go to University? https://www.google.com/search?q=why+should+i+go+to+university&rlz=1C1GCGA_enGB1074GB1074&oq=why+should+i+go+to+univers&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgAEAAyGAAQyBwgAEAAyGAAQyBggBEEUYOTIHCAIQABiABDIHCAMQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIHCAUQABiABDIHCAYQABiABDIHCAcQABiABDIHCAgQABiABDIHCAkQABiABKgCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
- Gopalan, M., & Brady, S. T. (2020). College students' sense of belonging: A national perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 134–137. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19897622>
- Gorczyński, P., Sims-schouten, W., Hill, D., & Wilson, J. C. (2017). Examining mental health literacy, help seeking behaviours, and mental health outcomes in UK university students. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 12(2), 111-120. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMHTEP-05-2016-0027>
- Gordanier, J., Hauk, W., & Sankaran, C. (2019). Early intervention in college classes and improved student outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 72, 23–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.05.003>
- Greenberg, J. (2008). Understanding the vital human quest for self-esteem. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 48–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2008.00061.x>
- Greenfield, P. M., Keller, H., Fuligni, A., & Maynard, A. (2003). Cultural pathways through universal development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54, 461–490. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145221>
- Greenglass, E. R. (2002). Proactive coping and quality of life management. In E. Frydenberg (Eds.), *Beyond coping: Meeting goals, visions, and challenges*

(pp. 37–62). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780198508144.003.0003>

Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63, (3),

510–531. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791\(02\)00042-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(02)00042-8)

Gresham, D., & Gullone, E. (2012). Emotion regulation strategy use in children and adolescents: The explanatory roles of personality and attachment.

Personality and Individual Differences, 52(5), 616–621.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.12.016>

Grix, J. (2019). *The foundations of research* (Third edition.). Red Globe Press.

Gross, J. J. (1998). Antecedent- and response-focused emotion regulation:

Divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74(1), 224–237.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.224>

Gross, J., J., & Thompson, R. A. (2007). Emotion regulation. In Gross, J. J. (Eds.),

Handbook of emotion regulation (pp. 3–24). New York: Guilford Press

Guba, E. G. (1990a). *The paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park. CA: Sage

Guba, E. G. (1990b). The alternative paradigm dialog. In E. G. Guba (Eds.), *The*

Paradigm dialog (pp.17-30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Guba, E. G. (1996). What happened to me on the road to Damascus. In L.

Heshusius & K. Ballard (Eds.), *From positivism to interpretivism and beyond:*

Tales of transformation in educational and social research (pp. 43-49). New

York: Teachers College Press.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research.

In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.

105–117). Sage Publications

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA:

Sage.

Guba, E. G & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and

emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of*

qualitative research (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Guest, G., MacQueen, K., & Namey, E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gulliver, A., Farrer, L., Bennett, K., Ali, K., Hellsing, A., Katruss, N., & Griffiths, K. M. (2018). University staff experiences of students with mental health problems and their perceptions of staff training needs. *Journal of Mental Health, 27*(3), 247-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2018.1466042>
- Hamilton, P. R., Hulme, J. A., & Harrison, E. D. (2023). Experiences of higher education for students with chronic illnesses. *Disability & Society, 38*(1), 21-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.1907549>
- Hanna, L., Hall, M., Smyth, P., & Daly, S. (2014). 'I Miss Being Spoon-Fed'. A Comparison of Transition From School to University Education From the Perspective of Undergraduate Pharmacy Students. *Pharmacy Education, 14*(1), 37-43.
- Harding, J., & Thompson, J. (2011). *Dispositions to Stay and to Succeed. Final Report*. Bedford: University of Bedfordshire.
<https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/dispositions-stay-and-succeed>
- Harvey, L., Drew, S., & Smith, M. (2006). *The First-year Experience: A Review of Literature for the Higher Education Academy*. The Higher Education Academy. <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/Harvey%20papers/Harvey%20and%20Drew%202006.pdf>
- Hatt, S., & Baxter, A., 2003. From FE to HE: studies in transition: a comparison of students entering higher education with academic and vocational qualifications. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 5*(2), 18-29.
- Hayman, R., Wharton, K., Bell, L., & Bird, L. (2024). Navigating the first year at an English university: exploring the experiences of mature students through the lens of transition theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 43*(1), 39-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2023.2297671>
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*(3), 511-524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511>
- Heagney, M., & Benson, R. (2017). How mature-age students succeed in higher education: Implications for institutional support. *Journal of Higher Education*

Policy & Management, 39(3), 216–234.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1300986>

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). *Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Helwig, C. C. (2006). The development of personal autonomy throughout cultures. *Cognitive Development*, 21(4), 458–473.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2006.06.009>

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2015). *Higher education consumer choice*. Palgrave.

Henderson-King, D., & Smith, M. N. (2006). Meanings of education for university students: Academic motivation and personal values as predictors. *Social Psychology of Education*, 9, 195–221.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-006-0006-4>

Henri, D. C., Morrell, L. J., & Scott, G. W. (2018). Student perceptions of their autonomy at University. *Higher Education*, 75, 507–516.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0152-y>

HESA (2023a). What Counts as Higher Education in the UK?

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/blog/28-02-2023/what-counts-higher-education-uk>

HESA (2023b). Graduate Outcomes 2020/21: Summary Statistics – Summary.

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/31-05-2023/sb266-higher-education-graduate-outcomes-statistics>

HESA (2023c). Table 15 - UK domiciled student enrolments by disability and sex 2014/15 to 2021/22.

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-15>

HESA (2022a). *HE Student enrolments by level of study 2016/17 to 2020/21*

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sb262/figure-3>

HESA (2022b). Non-continuation summary: UK Performance Indicators.

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation-summary>

Higher Education and Research Act. (2017). Retrieved from

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted>

- Hill, J., Healey, R. L., West, H., & Déry, C. (2021). Pedagogic partnership in higher education: encountering emotion in learning and enhancing student wellbeing. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 45(2), 167-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2019.1661366>
- Hillman, N. (2023). *The Robbins Report at 60: Essential facts for policymakers today*. HEPI. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/10/12/the-robbins-report-at-60-essential-facts-for-policymakers-today/>
- Hockings, C., Thomas, L., Ottaway, J., & Jones, R. (2018). Independent Learning—what We Do When You’re Not There. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1332031>
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Holdsworth, C. (2006). ‘Don’t you Think you’re Missing Out, Living at Home?’ Student Experiences and Residential Transitions. *The Sociological Review*, 54(3), 495-519. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00627.x>
- Holdsworth, S. Turner, M., & Scott-Young, C. M. (2018). ...Not drowning, waving. Resilience and university: a student perspective, *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(11), 1837-1853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1284193>
- Holton, M. (2018). Traditional or Non-Traditional Students? Incorporating UK Students’ Living Arrangements into Decisions about Going to University. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(4), 556–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1301408>
- Homer, D. (2022). Mature Students’ Experience: A Community of Inquiry Study during a COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 28(2), 333-353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714221096175>
- Honick, T., & Broadbent, J. (2016). The influence of academic self-efficacy on academic performance: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 17, 63-84 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.11.002>
- House of Commons Library (2022). *Higher Education Student Numbers*. Retrieved from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7857/CBP-7857.pdf>

- House of Commons Library (2024). *Higher Education Student Numbers*. Retrieved from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7857/CBP-7857.pdf>
- Houston, S. (2010). Prising Open the Black Box: Critical Realism, Action Research and Social Work. *Qualitative Social Work*, 9(1), 73-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325009355622>
- Hu, T., Zhang, D., & Wang, J. (2014). Relation between emotion regulation and mental health: a meta-analysis review. *Psychological Reports: Measures & Statistics*, 114(2) 341-362. <https://doi.org/10.2466/03.20.PR0.114k22w4>
- Hughes, G., Panjawni, M., Tulcidas, P., & Byrom, N. (2018). *Student Mental Health: The role and experiences of academics*. Student Minds. https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/180129_student_mental_health_the_role_and_experience_of_academics_student_minds_pdf.pdf
- Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2019). *The University Mental Health Charter*. Leeds: Student Minds https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191208_umhc_artwork.pdf
- Hughes, G., Upsher, R., Nobili, A., Kirkman, A., Wilson, C., Bowers-Brown, T., Foster, J., Bradley, S. & Byrom, N. (2022). *Education for Mental Health*. Online: Advance HE.
- Hulme, J. A., & De Wilde, J. (2015). *Tackling transition in STEM disciplines: Supporting the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics student journey into higher education in England and Wales*. York: The Higher Education Academy. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/tackling-transition-stem-disciplines>
- Humphrey, A., Bliuc, A-M. (2022). Western Individualism and the Psychological Wellbeing of Young People: A Systematic Review of Their Associations. *Youth*, 2(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth2010001>
- Hurst, C. S., Baranik, L. E., & Daniel, F. (2013). College student stressors: a review of the qualitative research. *Stress and health*, 29(4), 275–285. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2465>

- Hysenbegasi, A., Hass, S. L., & Rowland, C. R. (2005). The impact of depression on the academic productivity of university students. *The journal of mental health policy and economics*, 8(3), 145–151.
- Ibrahim, A. K., Kelly, S. J., Adams, C. E., & Glazebrook, C. (2013). A systematic review of studies of depression prevalence in university students. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 47(3), 391–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2012.11.015>
- Ibrahim, A. K., Kelly, S. J., & Glazebrook, C. (2013). Socioeconomic status and the risk of depression among UK higher education students. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 48, 1491–1501.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-013-0663-5>
- Icekson, T., Begerano, O. D., Levinson, M., Savariego, J., & Margalit, M. (2021). Learning Difficulties and Loneliness in College and Beyond: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy, Proactive Coping, and Hope. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(19), 10508.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph181910508>
- Ivemark, B., & Ambrose, A. (2021). Habitus adaptation and first-generation university students' adjustment to higher education: A life course perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 94(3), 191–207.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211017060>
- Ives, B. (2021). University students experience the COVID-19 induced shift to remote instruction. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 18, 59. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00296-5>
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 588–600.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019682>
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Halusic, M. (2016). A new autonomy-supportive way of teaching that increases conceptual learning: Teaching in students' preferred ways. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 84(4), 686–701.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2015.1083522>
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., Ryan, R. M., & Kim, A. (2009). Can self-determination theory explain what underlies the productive, satisfying learning experiences of

collectivistically oriented Korean students? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(3), 644–661. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014241>

- Jayman, M., Glazzard, J., & Rose, A. (2022). Tipping point: The staff wellbeing crisis in higher education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7(929335). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.929335>
- Jeno, L. M., Danielsen, A. G., & Raaheim, A. (2018). A prospective investigation of students' academic achievement and dropout in higher education: a Self-Determination Theory approach. *Educational Psychology*, 38(9), 1163-1184. DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2018.1502412
- Jessop, D. C., Herberts, C., & Solomon, L. (2005). The impact of financial circumstances on student health. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 10, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1348/135910705X25480>
- Jiang, J., & Tanaka, A. (2021). Autonomy support from support staff in higher education and students' academic engagement and psychological well-being. *Educational Psychology*, 42(1), 42-63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2021.1982866>
- Jobling, H. (2014). Using ethnography to explore causality in mental health policy and practice. *Qualitative Social Work*, 13(1), 49-68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325013504802>
- Joffe, H. (2012). Thematic analysis. In D. Harper and A. Thompson (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in mental health and psychotherapy: A guide for students and practitioners* (pp. 209–223). Chichester: Wiley
- Johnson, J. (2017). Delivering value for money for students and taxpayers. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/jo-johnson-delivering-value-for-money-for-students-and-taxpayers>
- Jones, H., Orpin, H., Mansi, G., Molesworth, C., & Monsey, H. (2023). *Transition into higher education*. Critical Publishing.
- Jones, G. (2010). Managing student expectations: The impact of top-up tuition fees. *Perspectives*, 14(2), 44–48. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13603101003776135>
- Jones, E., Priestley, M., Brewster, L., Wilbraham, S. J., Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2020). Student wellbeing and assessment in higher education: the

balancing act. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 46(3), 438-450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1782344>

Jones, S., Vigurs, K., & Harris, D. (2020). Discursive framings of market-based education policy and their negotiation by students: the case of 'value for money' in English universities. *Oxford Review of Education*, 46(3), 375-392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1708711>

Jose, P. E., Ryan, N., & Pryor, J. (2012). Does social connectedness promote a greater sense of well-being in adolescence over time? *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 22(2), 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00783.x>

Karyotaki, E., Cuijpers, P., Albor, Y., Alonso, J., Auerbach, R. P., Bantjes, J., Bruffaerts, R., Ebert, D. D., Hasking, P., Kiekens, G., Lee, S., McLafferty, M., Mak, A., Mortier, P., Sampson, N. A., Stein, D. J., Vilagut, G., & Kessler, R. C. (2020). Sources of Stress and Their Associations With Mental Disorders Among College Students: Results of the World Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Initiative. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1759. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01759>

Kaplan, H. (2018). Teachers' autonomy support, autonomy suppression and conditional negative regard as predictors of optimal learning experience among high-achieving Bedouin students. *Social Psychology of Education*, 21(1), 223–255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9405-y>

Kapur, S. (2023). *UK universities: from a Triangle of Sadness to a Brighter Future*. The Policy Institute. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/triangle-of-sadness.pdf>

Keenan, T., Evans, S., & Crowley, K. (2016). *An Introduction to Child Development* (3rd edition). Sage.

Keller, M., Edelstein, W., Krettenauer, T., Fu-xi, F., & Ge, F. (2005). Reasoning About Moral Obligations and Interpersonal Responsibilities in Different Cultural Contexts. In W. Edelstein & G. Nunner-Winkler (Eds.), *Morality in context* (pp. 317–336). Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-4115\(05\)80042-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-4115(05)80042-1)

- Kellett, J., Sampson, M., Swords, F., Murphy, H. R., Clark, A., Howe, A., Price, C., Datta, V., & Myint, K. S. (2018). Young people's experiences of managing Type 1 diabetes at university: a national study of UK university students. *Diabetic Medicine*, 35(8), 1063. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dme.13656>
- Kennet, D. J., Reed, M. J., & Lam, D. (2011). The importance of directly asking students their reasons for attending higher education. *Issues in Educational Research*, 21(1), 65-74
- Kennett, D. J., Reed, M. J., & Stuart, A. (2013). The impact of reasons for attending university on academic resourcefulness and adjustment. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 14(2), 123–33 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787413481130>
- Kerrigan, M., Manktelow, A., & Simmons, E. (2018). Sandwich placements: negating the socioeconomic effect on graduate prospects. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 20(4), 81-107. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.4.81>
- Khan, J., & Hemsley-Brown, J. (2021). Student satisfaction: the role of expectations in mitigating the pain of paying fees. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2021.1973646>
- Kidder, L. H., & Fine, M. (1987). Qualitative and quantitative methods: When stories converge. In M. M. Mark & L. Shotland (Eds.), *New Directions for Program Evaluation* (pp. 57-75). Jossey-Bass
- Kim, H., & Rehg, M. (2018) Faculty Performance and Morale in Higher Education: A Systems Approach. *Systems Research*, 35, 308–323. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2495>
- King, N., & Brooks, J. M. (2017). *Template analysis for business and management students*. Sage Publications.
- Kleftaras, G., & Psarra, E. (2012). Meaning in life, psychological well-being and depressive symptomatology: a comparative study. *Psychology*, 3(4), 337–345. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2012.34048>
- Klinger, E. (1998). The search for meaning in evolutionary perspective and its clinical implications. In Wong P., Fry P. (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 27-50). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Knox, H. (2005). Making the transition from further to higher education: the impact of a preparatory module on retention, progression and performance. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29(2), 103-110.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770500103135>
- Koch, T., & Harrington, A. (1998). Reconceptualizing rigour: the case for reflexivity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28(4), 882–890.
<https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1998.00725.x>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Prentice-Hall
- Kossek, E. E., & Lautsch, B. A. (2007). *CEO of me: creating a life that works in the flexible job age*. Wharton School Pub.
- Kroger, J. (2006). Identity Development during Adolescence. In G. R., Adams & M. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence*. (pp. 205-225). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Laidlaw, A., McLellan, J., & Ozakinci, G. (2016). Understanding Underpost-graduate Student Perceptions of Mental Health, Mental Well-being and Help-seeking Behaviour. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(12), 2156-2168
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1026890>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lambert, N. M., Stillman, T. F., Hicks, J. A., Kamble, S., Baumeister, R. F., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). To Belong Is to Matter: Sense of Belonging Enhances Meaning in Life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(11), 1418-1427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499186>
- Langan, M. A., Dunleavy, P., & Fielding, A. (2013). Applying Models to National Surveys of Undergraduate Science Students: What Affects Ratings of Satisfaction? *Educational Science*, 3(2), 193-207.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci3020193>
- Langridge, D. (2004). *Introduction to research methods and data analysis in psychology*. Harlow: Pearson.

- Lauzier-Jobin, F., Brunson, L., & Olson, B. (2022). Introduction to the special issue on critical realism. *Journal of Community Psychology, 51*(2), 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22981>
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer
- Lee, J., Jeong, H. J., & Kim, S. (2021). Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Among Undergraduate Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic and their Use of Mental Health Services. *Innovative higher education, 46*(5), 519–538.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-021-09552-y>
- Lee, S. Y., Wuertz, C., Rogers, R., & Chen, Y. P. (2013). Stress and sleep disturbances in female college students. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 37*(6), 851–858. <https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.37.6.14>
- Leese, M. (2010). Bridging the gap: supporting student transitions into higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 34*(2), 239-251.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03098771003695494>
- Legault, L. (2018). The need for autonomy. In V. Zeigler- Hill & T. K. Schakelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp. 1– 3). Springer.
- Lickel, B., Hamilton, D. L., Wierzchowska, G., Lewis, A., Sherman, S. J., & Uhles, A. N. (2000). Varieties of groups and the perception of group entitativity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*(2), 223–246.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.2.223>
- Lincoln, S. Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lipson, S. K., & Eisenberg, D. (2018). Mental health and academic attitudes and expectations in university populations: results from the healthy minds study. *Journal of Mental Health, 27*(3), 205-213.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1417567>
- Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., Abelson, S., Heinze, J., Jirsa, M., Morigney, J., Patterson, A., Singh, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2022). Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013-2021. *Journal of affective disorders, 306*, 138–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.03.038>

- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2013). Early intervention to support the academic recovery of first-year students at risk of non-continuation. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 50(2), 109-120.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2012.760867>
- Lobo, A., & Gurney, L. (2014). "What Did They Expect? Exploring a Link Between Students' Expectations, Attendance and Attrition on English Language Enhancement Courses." *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(5), 730–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.817002>
- Loghman, S., Quinn, M., Dawkins, S., Woods, M., Om Sharma, S., & Scott, J. (2023). A Comprehensive Meta-Analyses of the Nomological Network of Psychological Capital (PsyCap). *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 30(1), 108-128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518221107998>
- Lomas, L. (2007). Are students' consumers? Perceptions of academic staff. *Quality in Higher*, 13(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320701272714>
- Love, K. M., & Thomas D. M. (2014). Parenting styles and adjustment outcomes among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55, 139–150
- Lowe, H., & Cook, A. (2003). Mind the gap: Are students prepared for higher education? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27(1), 53-76.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770305629>
- Lundberg, C. A., McIntire, D. D., & Creasman, C. T. (2008). Sources of Social Support and Self-efficacy for Adult Students. *Journal of College Counselling*, 11(1), 58–72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2008.tb00024.x>
- Luthans, F., Avey, J. B., Avolio, B. J., & Peterson, S. J. (2010), The development and resulting performance impact of positive psychological capital. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 21, 41-67.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20034>
- Luthans, B. C., Luthans, K. W., & Avey, J. B. (2014). Building the leaders of tomorrow: The development of academic psychological capital. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 21, 191–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051813517003>
- Luthans B. C., Luthans K. W., Jensen S. (2012). The impact of business school students' psychological capital on academic performance. *Journal of*

Education for Business, 87, 253-259.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2011.609844>

Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology*, 91, 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1348/000712600161646>

Macakova, V., & Wood, C. (2022). The relationship between academic achievement, self-efficacy, implicit theories and basic psychological needs satisfaction among university students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(2), 259-269.

Macaskill, A. (2018). Undergraduate Mental Health Issues: The Challenge of the Second Year of Study. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(3), 214–221.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2018.1437611>

Macaskill, A. (2013). The mental health of university students in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41(4), 426-441.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.743110>

Macaskill, A., & Denovan, A. (2013). Developing autonomous learning in first year university students using perspectives from positive psychology. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(1), 124-142.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.566325>

MacKenzie, A., & Maginess, T. (2018). Achieving Moralised Compassion in Higher Education. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(3), 42-48. <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i3.370>

Mallman, M., & Lee, H. (2017). Isolated learners: Young mature-age students, university culture, and desire for academic sociality. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36(5), 512–525.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1302012>

Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *Lancet*, 358(9280), 483–488.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(01\)05627-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6)

Manzi, C., Vignoles, V. L., & Regalia, C. (2010). Accommodating a new identity: Possible selves, identity change and well-being across two life-transitions.

European Journal of Social Psychology, 40(6), 970–984.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.669>

- Marelli, S., Castelnuovo, A., Somma, A., Castronovo, V., Mombelli, S., Bottoni, D., Leitner, C., Fossati, A., Ferini-Strambi, L. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on sleep quality in university students and administration staff. *Journal of Neurology*, 268, 8–5. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00415-020-10056-6>
- Martens, S. E., Spruijt, A., Wolfhagen, I. H. A. P., Whittingham, J. R. D., & Dolmans, D. H. J. M. (2019). A students' take on student–staff partnerships: experiences and preferences. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(6), 910-919. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1546374>
- Mascaro, N., & Rosen, D. H. (2005). Existential meaning's role in the enhancement of hope and prevention of depressive symptoms. *Journal of Personality*, 73, 985–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00336.x>
- Matthews, K. E. (2017). Five Propositions for Genuine Students as Partners Practice. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i2.3315>
- Matthews, K. E., Dwyer, A., Hine, L., & Turner, J. (2018). Conceptions of Students as Partners. *Higher Education*, 76(6), 957–971. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0257-y>
- Matthews, K. E., & Dollinger, M. (2022). Student voice in higher education: the importance of distinguishing student representation and student partnership. *Higher Education*, 85, 555–570. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00851-7>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A Realist Approach to Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Maxwell-Stuart, R., Taheri, B., Paterson, A. S., O'Gorman, K., & Jackson, W. (2018). Working together to increase student satisfaction: Exploring the effects of mode of study and fee status. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(8), 1392–1404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1257601>
- Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2007). Quality in qualitative health research. In: *Qualitative research in health care*. (3rd ed.) Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, UK. p. 82–101.

- McCaig, C. (2015). The Impact of the Changing English Higher Education Marketplace on Widening Participation and Fair Access: Evidence from a Discourse Analysis of Access Agreements. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 17(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.17.1.5>
- McCoy, S., & Byrne, D. (2017). Student Retention in Higher Education. In: Cullinan, J., Flannery, D. (Eds.), *Economic Insights on Higher Education Policy in Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-48553-9_5
- McGivern, P., & Shepherd, J. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 on UK university students: Understanding the interconnection of issues experienced during lockdown. *Power and Education*, 14(3), 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438221104227>
- McInnis, C. (2001). Researching the first year experience: Where to from here? *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20(2), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360125188>
- McIntyre, J. C., Worsley, J., Corcoran, R., Woods, P. H., & Bentall, R. P. (2018). Academic and non-academic predictors of student psychological distress: the role of social identity and loneliness. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(3), 230–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2018.1437608>
- McLean, L., Gaul, D., & Penco, R. (2022). Perceived Social Support and Stress: a Study of 1st Year Students in Ireland. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 21, 2101–2121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00710-z>
- McSweeney, F. (2014). 'Moving In': Difficulties and Support in the Transition to Higher Education for In-service Social Care Students. *Social Work Education*, 33(3), 317–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2013.770832>
- McCune, V., Hounsell, J., Christie, H., Cree, V. E., & Tett, L. (2010). Mature and younger students' reasons for making the transition from further education into higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(6), 691–702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.507303>
- Meehan, C., & Howells, K. (2018). In search of the feeling of 'belonging' in higher education: undergraduate students transition into higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(10), 1376–1390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1490702>

- Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, L.S., Matthews, K.E., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shamma, R., & Swaim, K. (2017). A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1 (1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.15173/ijpsap.v1i1.3119>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Merrill, B. (2015). Determined to Stay or Determined to Leave? A Tale of Learner Identities, Biographies and Adult Students in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(10), 1859–1871. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.914918>
- Michalski, J. H., Cunningham, T., & Henry, J. (2017). The diversity challenge for higher education in Canada: The prospects and challenges of increased access and student success. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39(1), 66–89. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=hjsr>.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded source book* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mills, A., Ryden, J., & Knight, A. (2020). Juggling to find balance: hearing the voices of undergraduate student nurses. *British Journal of Nursing*, 29(15), 897–903. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2020.29.15.897>
- Minkinen, J., Auvinen, E., & Mauno, S. (2020). Meaningful work protects teachers' self-rated health under stressors. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 4(2), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.47602/jpsp.v4i2.209>
- Molesworth, M., Nixon, E., & Scullion, R. (2009). Having, Being and Higher Education: The Marketisation of the University and the Transformation of the Student into Consumer. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(3), 277–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510902898841>
- Molnar, D. S., Flett, G. L., Sadava, S. W., & Colautti, J. (2012). Perfectionism and health functioning in women with fibromyalgia. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 73, 295–300. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychores.2012.08.001>
- Money, J., S. Nixon, & L. Graham. (2020). Do Educational Experiences in School Prepare Students for University? A Teachers' Perspective. *Journal of*

Further and Higher Education 44(4), 554–567.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1595547>

- Money, J., Nixon, S., Tracy, F., Hennessy, C., Ball, E., & Dinning, T. (2017). Undergraduate student expectations of university in the United Kingdom: What really matters to them? *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1301855>
- Montgomery, M. J., & Cote, J. E. (2006). College as a Transition to Adulthood. In G. R. Adams & M. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence*. (pp.149-172). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Moon, K., and Blackman, D. (2014). A Guide to Understanding Social Science Research for Natural Scientists. *Conservation Biology*, 28(5), 1167-1177.
 Retrieved from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.12326/full>.
- Moustakis, C. (1990). *Heuristic research design, methodology and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mulliner, E., & Tucker, M. (2017). Feedback on Feedback Practice: Perceptions of Students and Academics. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 42(2), 266–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1103365>
- Murphy, H., & Roopchad. N. (2003). Intrinsic Motivation and Self-esteem in Traditional and Mature Students at a Post-1992 University in the North-east of England. *Educational Studies*, 29(2–3), 243–259.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690303278>
- Naidoo, R., & Williams, J. (2015). The neoliberal regime in English higher education: charters, consumers and the erosion of the public good. *Critical Studies in Education*, 56(2), 208-223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.939098>
- Nalipay, M. J. N., King, R. B., & Cai, Y. (2020). Autonomy is equally important across East and West: Testing the cross-cultural universality of self-determination theory. *Journal of Adolescence*, 78, 67–72.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.12.009>
- National Careers Service. (n.d.). *Post 16 Options*. Retrieved from:
<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-choices-at-16>.

- National Student Survey. (2022a). *NSS 2022 Core Questionnaire*. Retrieved from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/63ee56d6-2557-4786-823f-b6f55d4d22a7/nss-2022-questionnaire.pdf>
- National Student Survey. (2022b). *National Student Survey Results 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-provider-level/>
- Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y. P., & Dejitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and Identity*, 4, 263–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576500444000317>
- Neff, K. D., & McGehee, P. (2010). Self-compassion and psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults. *Self and Identity*, 9(3), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860902979307>
- Nelson, R. (2018). Failing with student success: the hidden role of bad luck and false empowerment. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(5), 1050-1061. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1462306>
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(2), 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Neves, J., & Hillman, N. (2018). *Student academic experience survey*. Higher Education Policy Institute and Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from: <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/06/07/turning-corner-value-money-2018-hepi-advance-student-academic-experience-survey-highlights-students-belief-value-money-higher-education-improving/>
- Neves, J., & Stephenson, R. (2023). *Student Academic Experience Survey 2023*. Advance HE. Retrieved from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2023>
- Newsome, L. K., & Cooper, P. (2016). International Students' Cultural and Social Experiences in a British University: Such a Hard Life [it] Is Here. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i1.488>
- Nicholson, R. (2016, Nov 28). 'Poor little snowflake' – the defining insult of 2016. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/28/snowflake-insult-disdain-young-people>

- Nixon, E., Scullion, R., & Hearn, R. (2018). Her majesty the student: marketised higher education and the narcissistic (dis)satisfactions of the student-consumer. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(6), 927-943.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1196353>
- Nock, M. K., Borges, G., Bromet, E. J., Alonso, J., Angermeyer, M., Beautrais, A., & De Graaf, R. (2008). Cross-national prevalence and risk factors for suicidal ideation, plans and attempts. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 192(2), 98–105.
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.107.040113>
- Noland, H., Price, J. H., Dake, J., & Telljohann, S. K. (2009). Adolescents' sleep behaviors and perceptions of sleep. *The Journal of School Health*, 79(5), 224-30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2009.00402.x>.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Occhipinti, J. A., Skinner, A., Iorfino, F., Lawson, K., Sturgess, J., Burgess, W., Davenport, T., Hudson, D., & Hickie, I. (2021). Reducing youth suicide: systems modelling and simulation to guide targeted investments across the determinants. *BMC medicine*, 19(1), 61.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-021-01935-4>
- O'Donnell, V. L., Kean, M., & Stevens, G. (2016). *Student Transitions in Higher Education: Concepts, Theories and Practices*. Higher Education Academy.
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/student_transition_in_higher_education.pdf
- Office for National Statistics. (2022, May 31). *Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: Experimental statistics: 2017 to 2020*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/estimating-suicide-among-higher-education-students-england-and-wales-experimental-statistics/2017-to-2020>
- Office for National Statistics (2021, May 11). *Coronavirus and changing young people's labour market outcomes in the UK: March 2021*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labour-market-economic-analysis-quarterly/march2021>

- Office for National Statistics (2020, December 18). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): 2020 in charts*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid192020incharts/2020-12-18>
- Office for Students (2024, January 30). National Student Survey – NSS. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/>
- Office for Students (2023a). *English Higher Education 2023: The Office for Students annual review*. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/051d135d-0bfe-4f8f-bdc7-aeee6d374a2d/2023-annual-review-accessible.pdf>
- Office for Students (2023b). *National Student Survey Data: quality report*. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/0d546ac2-2172-46c4-8fe1-2ee292729131/national-student-survey-2023-quality-report_15aug2023.pdf
- Office for Students. (2018). *Value for money: The student perspective*. Trendence UK. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7ebb7703-9a6b-414c-a798-75816fc4ef33/value-for-money-the-student-perspective-final-final-final.pdf>
- Okada, R. (2023). Effects of perceived autonomy support on academic achievement and motivation among higher education students: A meta-analysis. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 65(3), 230-242
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12380>
- O’Keefe, P. A., Ben-Eliyahu, A., & Linnenbrink-Garcia, L. (2013). Shaping achievement goal orientations in a mastery-structured environment and concomitant changes in related contingencies of self-worth. *Motivation and Emotion*, 37, 50–64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11031-012-9293-6>
- Olbrecht, A. M., Romano, C., & Teigen, J. (2016). How Money Helps Keep Students in College: The Relationship between Family Finances, Merit-based Aid, and Retention in Higher Education. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 46(1), 2-16.
- O’Neill, S., McLafferty, M., Ennis, E., Lapsley, C., Bjourson, T., Armour, C., & Murray, E. (2018). Socio-demographic, mental health and childhood adversity risk factors for self-harm and suicidal behaviour in college students in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 239, 58–65.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.06.006>

- Ortega-Maldonado, A., & Salanova, S. (2018). Psychological capital and performance among undergraduate students: the role of meaning-focused coping and satisfaction. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(3), 390-402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1391199>
- O'Sullivan, G. (2011). The Relationship Between Hope, Eustress, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction Among Undergraduates. *Social Indicators Research, 101*, 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-010-9662-z>
- Owens, M., Townsend, E., Hall, E., Bhatia, T., Fitzgibbon, R., & Miller-Lakin, F. (2022). Mental Health and Wellbeing in Young People in the UK during Lockdown (COVID-19). *International journal of environmental research and public health, 19*(3), 1132. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031132>
- Oxford Learner Dictionary (2022). "Snowflakes". available at: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/snowflake>
- Page, L. C., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2016). Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses. *Economics of Education Review, 51*, 4-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.02.009>
- Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 257–301. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018301>
- Parker, I. (2004) Criteria for qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*(2), 95-106. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088704qp010oa>
- Parr, E. J., Shochet, I. M., Cockshaw, W. D., & Kelly, R. L. (2020). General belonging is a key predictor of adolescent depressive symptoms and partially mediates school belonging. *School Mental Health, 12*, 626–637. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-020-09371-0>
- Pascoe, M. C., Hetrick, S. E., & Parker, A. G. (2020). The impact of stress on students in secondary school and higher education. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25*(1), 104-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1596823>
- Pepper, J. R., Jaggar, S. I., Mason, M. J., Finney, S. J., & Dusmet, M. (2012). Schwartz Rounds: reviving compassion in modern healthcare. *Journal of the*

Royal Society of Medicine, 105(3), 94–95.

<https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2011.110231>

Phinney, J. S., J. Dennis, and S. Osorio. (2006). "Reasons to Attend College among Ethnically Diverse College Students." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(2), 347–66. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.12.2.347>

Picton, A. (2021). Work-life balance in medical students: self-care in a culture of self-sacrifice. *BMC Medical Education*, 21(8), 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02434-5>

Pierce, M., McManus, S., Hope, H., Hotopf, M., Ford, T., Hatch, S. L., John, A., Kontopantelis, E., Webb, R. T., Wessely, S., & Abel, K. M. (2021). Mental health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: a latent class trajectory analysis using longitudinal UK data. *The lancet. Psychiatry*, 8(7), 610–619.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00151-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00151-6)

Pilgrim, D. (2014). Some implications of critical realism for mental health research.

Social Theory & Health, 12(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sth.2013.17>

Pitt, A., Oprescu, F., Tapia, G., & Gray, M. (2018). An exploratory study of students' weekly stress levels and sources of stress during the semester. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 19(1), 61–75.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417731194>

Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2007). Academic and psycho-logical functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(4), 270–290.

<https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.4.270-292>

Pokorny, H., Holley, D., & Kane, S. (2017). Commuting, transitions and belonging: the experiences of students living at home in their first year at university.

Higher Education, 74, 543–558. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0063-3>

Pollard, E., Huxley, C., Martin, A., Takala, H., & Byford, M. (2019). *Impact of the student finance system on participation, experience and outcomes of disadvantaged young people: Literature review*. Department for Education.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f36acb4d3bf7f1b10d59029/impact_of_the_student_finance_system_on_disadvantaged_young_people.pdf

- Poon, B. T., Atchison, C., Kwan, A., & Veasey, C. (2022). A community-based systems dynamics approach for understanding determinants of children's social and emotional well-being. *Health and Place*, 73, 102712
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102712>
- Poots, A., & Cassidy, T. (2020). Academic expectation, self-compassion, psychological capital, social support and student wellbeing. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 99, 101506.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.101506>
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Porter, L. W., & Steers, R. M. (1973). Organizational, work, and personal factors in employee turnover and absenteeism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 80(2), 151.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034829>
- Porter, S. R., & Swing, R. L. (2006). Understanding How First-Year Seminars Affect Persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(1), 89–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8153-6>
- Priestley, M. (2019). Sick of Study: Student mental 'illness' and neoliberal higher education policy. In X. Shao, & E. Dobson (Eds.), *Imagining Better Education: Conference Proceedings 2018* (183-199). Retrieved from:
<https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1144642>
- Punch, K., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*. California: Sage Publications.
- Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Arndt, J., & Schimel, J. (2004). Why do people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 435–468.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.3.435>
- Ramsay, S., Jones, E., & Barker, M. (2007). Relationship between Adjustment and Support Types: Young and Mature-aged Local and International First Year University Students. *Higher Education*, 54(2), 247–265.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-006-9001-0>
- Randall, E. T., Bohnert, A. M., & Travers, L. V. (2015). Understanding affluent adolescent adjustment: The interplay of parental perfectionism, perceived

- parental pressure, and organized activity involvement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 41, 56-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.03.005>
- Rayle, A. D., & Chung, K.-Y. (2007/2008). Revisiting first-year college students' mattering: Social support, academic stress, and the mattering experience. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 9(1), 21-37. <https://doi.org/10.2190/X126-5606-4G36-8132>
- Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging Cultures? Student Conceptions of 'Belonging' and 'Isolation' at a Post-1992 University. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(3), 261-277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070309290>
- Reay, D. (2018). Working class educational transitions to university: The limits of success. *European Journal of Education, Research, Development and Policy*, 53(4), 528-540. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12298>
- Reay, D. (2002). Class, authenticity and the transition to higher education for mature students. *The Sociological Review*, 50(3), 398-418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00389>
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2010). 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': Working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), 107-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920902878925>
- Rees, C. E., Crampton, P. E. S., & Monrouxe, L. V. (2020). Re-visioning academic medicine through a constructionist lens. *Academic Medicine*, 95(6), 846-850. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.00000000000003109>
- Reeve, J. (2002). Self-determination theory applied to educational settings. In E. L. Deci, & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (pp.183-204). The University of Rochester Press.
- Reeve, J., & Halusic, M. (2009). How K-12 teachers can put self-determination theory principles into practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 145-154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878509104319>
- Reeve, J., & Jang, H. (2006). What teachers say and do to support students' autonomy during a learning activity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 209-218. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.209>

- Reiss F. (2013). Socioeconomic inequalities and mental health problems in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *Social science & medicine*, 90, 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.04.026>
- Reschly, A., Huebner, E., Appleton, J., & Antaramian, S. (2008). Engagement as Flourishing: The Contribution of Positive Emotions and Coping to Adolescents' Engagement at School and with Learning. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(5), 419–431. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20306>
- Rhodes, C., Bill, K., Biscomb, K., Nevill, A., & Bruneau, S. (2002). Widening Participation in Higher Education: Support at the Further Education/Higher Education Interface and Its Impact on the Transition and Progression of Advanced GNVQ Students—a Research Report. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 54(1), 133–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820200200192>
- Ribeiro, Í. J. S., Pereira, R., Freire, I. V., de Oliveira, B. G., Casotti, C. A., & Boery, E. N. (2017). Stress and quality of life among university students: A systematic literature review. *Health Professions Education*, 4(2), 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hpe.2017.03.002>
- Rice, K. G., Leever, B. A., Christopher, J., & Porter, J. D. (2006). Perfectionism, stress, and social (dis)connection: A short-term study of hopelessness, depression, and academic adjustment among honors students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(4), 524–534. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.53.4.524>
- Rice, K. G., & Van Arsdale, A. C. (2010). Perfectionism, perceived stress, drinking to cope, and alcohol-related problems among college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(4), 439–450. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020221>
- Richards, T. N. (2019). An updated review of institutions of higher education's responses to sexual assault: Results from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(10), 1983–2012. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516658757>
- Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(2), 353–387. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026838>

- Richardson, A., King, S., Garrett, R., & Wrench, A. (2012). Thriving or just surviving? Exploring student strategies for a smoother transition to university. A practice report. *International Journal of First Year Higher Education*, 3(2), 87–93. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v3i2.132>
- Riordan, B. C., & K. B. Carey. (2019). Wonderland and the Rabbit Hole: A Commentary on University Students' Alcohol Use during First Year and the Early Transition to University. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 38(1), 34–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.12877>
- Robinson, K. J., & Roksa, J. (2016). Counselors, Information and High School College-Going Culture: Inequalities in the College Application Process. *Research in Higher Education*, 57(7), 845-868.
- Robinson, D., & Salvestrini, V. (2020). *The impact of interventions for widening access to higher education: A review of the evidence*. London: Education Policy Institute. Retrieved from: https://taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Widening_participation-review_EPI-TASO_2020.pdf
- Rohleder, P., & Lyons, A. C. (2015). *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rolfe, H. (2002) Students' Demands and Expectations in an Age of Reduced Financial Support: The perspectives of lecturers in four English universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(2), 171-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080022000013491>
- Rosenbaum, M. (1990). The role of learned resourcefulness in the self-control of health behavior. In: Rosenbaum, M (Eds.), *Learned Resourcefulness: On Coping Skills, Self-Control and Adaptive Behavior*. New York: Springer, pp. 4–25.
- Rowley, M., Hartley, J., & Larkin, D. (2008). Learning from experience: The expectations and experiences of first year undergraduate psychology students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32(4), 399 – 413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770802538129>
- Royal College of Psychiatrists (2021). *Mental Health of Higher Education Students*. [https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/college-reports/mental-health-of-higher-education-students-\(cr231\).pdf](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/college-reports/mental-health-of-higher-education-students-(cr231).pdf)

- Royal College of Psychiatrists. (2003). *The mental health of students in higher education*. London: RCP.
- Rudy, D., Sheldon, K. M., Awong, T., & Tan, H. H. (2007). Autonomy, culture, and well-being: The benefits of inclusive autonomy. *Journal of Research in Personality, 41*(5), 983-1007. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2006.11.004>
- Russell, K., Allan, S., Beattie, L., Bohan, J., MacMahon, K., & Rasmussen, S. (2019). Sleep problem, suicide and self-harm in university students: a systematic review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 44*, 58–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2018.12.008>
- Russell, J. J., Moskowitz, D. S., Zuroff, D. C., Bleau, P., Pinard, G., & Young, S. N. (2011). Anxiety, emotional security and the interpersonal behavior of individuals with social anxiety disorder. *Psychological Medicine, 41*(3), 545-554. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291710000863>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Publications.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potential: A review of research on hedonic and Eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 141–166 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78 <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Ryan, R. M., & Sapp, A. R. (2007). In K. D. Wohs, & R. F. Baumeister (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social psychology* (pp. 90–91). Sage.
- Salerno, J. P., Williams, N. D., & Gattamorta, K. A. (2020). LGBTQ populations: Psychologically vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12*(S1), S239–S242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000837>
- Sampson, K., Priestley, M., Dodd, A. L., Broglia, E., Wykes, T., Robotham, D., Tyrrell, K., Ortega Vega, M., & Byrom, N. C. (2022). Key questions: research priorities for student mental health. *BJPsych open, 8*(3), e90. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2022.61>

- Scanlon, L., Rowling, L., & Weber, Z. (2007). 'You don't have to like an identity...You are just lost in a crowd': Forming a student identity in the first-year transition to university. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *10*(2), 223–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260600983684>
- Schipper, N., & Koglin, U. (2021). The association between moral identity and moral decisions in adolescents. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *2022*(185-186), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20429>
- Schöne, C., Tandler, S. S., & Stiensmeier-Pelster, J. (2015). Contingent self-esteem and vulnerability to depression: Academic contingent self-esteem predicts depressive symptoms in students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *6*, 1573. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01573>
- Selye, H. (1975). *Stress without distress*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Publishing.
- Sen, A. (1985). Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy*, *82*(4), 169–221. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026184>
- Sims-Schouten, W., Riley, S. C. E., & Willig, C. (2007). Critical realism in discourse analysis: A presentation of a systematic method of analysis using women's talk of motherhood, childcare and female employment as an example. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*(1), 101–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354307073153>
- Sinclair, A., Barkham, M. Evans, C., Connell, J., & Audin, K. (2005). Rationale and development of a general population well-being measure: Psychometric status of the GP-CORE in a student sample. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *33*, 153–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880500132581>
- Shankar, N. L., & Park, C. L. (2016). Effects of stress on students' physical and mental health and academic success. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, *4*(1), 5-9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683603.2016.1130532>
- Shaw, R. L., Dyson, P. O., & Peel, E. (2008). Qualitative psychology at M level: a dialogue between learner and teacher. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *5*, 179–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880802314353>
- Shepherd, J., & Stratton, A. (2010). Tuition fees rise 'won't put off poor students'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved April 27, 2011, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/03/tuition-fees-poor-students>

- Shuster, C. L., Tate, M. C., Schulz, C. T., Reyes, C. T., Drohan, M. M., Astorini, A. G., Stamates, A. L., Yang, M., & Robbins, M. L. (2023). Perceived Stress and Coping among University Students Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic. *COVID*, 3, 1544-1553. <https://doi.org/10.3390/covid3100105>
- Sirgy, M., & Lee, D. J. (2018). Work-Life Balance: an Integrative Review. *Applied Research Quality Life*, 13, 229–254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-017-9509-8>
- Smith, A. P. (2019). Smoking, Alcohol, Wellbeing and Academic Attainment. *Journal of Health and Medical Sciences*, 2(3), 337-343. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1994.02.03.55>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method and research* (2nd edition.). SAGE.
- Smith, K., & Hopkins, C. (2005). Great Expectations: Sixth-formers' perceptions of teaching and learning in degree-level English. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 4(3), 304-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147402220505056173>
- Sneyers, E., & De Witte, K. (2018). Interventions in higher education and their effect on student success: a meta-analysis. *Educational Review*, 70, 208-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1300874>
- Sofaer S. (1999). Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them? *Health services research*, 34(5), 1101–1118.
- Sonnentag, S. (2018). The recovery paradox: Portraying the complex interplay between job stressors, lack of recovery, and poor well-being. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 38, 169-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2018.11.002>
- Soria, K., & Stubblefield, R. (2015). Knowing Me, Knowing You: Building Strengths Awareness, Belonging and Persistence in Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 17(3), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115575914>
- Spear, S., Morey, Y., & Van Steen, T. (2020). Academics' perceptions and experiences of working with students with mental health problems: Insights from across the UK higher education sector. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(5), 1117-1130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1798887>

- Sprung, J. M., & Rogers, A. (2021). Work-life balance as a predictor of college student anxiety and depression. *Journal of American College Health, 69*(7), 775-782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2019.1706540>
- Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological Distress in University Students: A Comparison with General Population Data. *Australian Psychologist, 45*(4), 249–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00050067.2010.482109>
- Steele, G. (2016). *Creating a Flipped Advising Approach*. NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources. <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Creating-a-Flipped-Advising-Approach.aspx>
- Steele, R., Lauder, W., Caperchione, C., & Anatasi, J. (2005). An exploratory study of the concerns of mature access to nursing students and the coping strategies used to manage these adverse experiences. *Nurse Education Today, 25*(7), 573–581. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2005.05.009>
- Steger, M. F. (2012). Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of well-being, psychopathology, and spirituality In Wong P. T. P., & Fry P. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of personal meaning: Theory, research, and application* (2nd ed., pp. 165-184). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge
- Sturman, E. D., Flett, G. L., Hewitt, P. L., & Rudolph, S. G. (2009). Dimensions of perfectionism and self-worth contingencies in depression. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 27*, 213–242. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10942-007-0079-9>
- Syed, M. (2015). Emerging Adulthood: Developmental Stage, Theory, or Nonsense? In J. J. Arnett (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*. Oxford Library of Psychology. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199795574.013.9>
- Tai, J., Ajjawi, R., Boud, D., Dawson, P., Panadero, E. (2018). Developing evaluative judgement: enabling students to make decisions about the quality of work. *Higher Education, 76*, 467–481. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0220-3>

- Talsma, K., Schüz, B., Schwarzer, R., & Norris, K. (2018). I believe, therefore I achieve (and vice versa): A meta-analytic cross-lagged panel analysis of self-efficacy and academic performance. *Learning and Individual Differences, 61*, 136–150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.11.015>
- Tape, N., Branson, V., Dry, M., & Turnbull, D. (2021). The impact of psychological well-being and ill-being on academic performance: a longitudinal and cross-sectional study. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 38*(2), 206–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20590776.2021.1986356>
- Taylor, S. P. (2018). Critical realism vs social constructionism & social constructivism: application to a social housing research study. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research, 37* (2). pp. 216-222.
- Taylor, C. A., & Harris-Evans, J. (2018). Reconceptualising Transition to Higher Education with Deleuze and Guattari. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(7), 1254–1267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1242567>
- Temple, P., Callender, C., Grove, L., & Kersh, N. (2016). Managing the Student Experience in English Higher Education: Differing Responses to Market Pressures. *London Review of Education 14*(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.14.1.05>
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic Analysis. In Willig, C., & Stainton, R. W. (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology*. SAGE Publications, Limited.
- Tett, L., Cree, V. E., & Christie, H. (2017). From Further to Higher Education: Transition as an on-Going Process. *Higher Education, 73*(3), 389–406. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0101-1>
- Tett, L., Cree, V. E., Mullins, E., & Christie, H. (2017). Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students. *Pastoral Care in Education, 35*(3), 166-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2017.1363813>
- The British Academy (2021). The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/>
- Thomas, L. (2012). *Building Student Engagement and Belonging in Higher Education at a Time of Change*. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/building-student-engagement-and-belonging-higher-education-time-change-final-report>

Thomas, L. (2002). Student Retention in Higher Education: The Role of Institutional Habitus *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), 423–42.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930210140257>

Thomas, C., & Zolkoski, S. (2020). Preventing Stress Among Undergraduate Learners: The Importance of Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, and Emotion Regulation. *Frontiers in Education*, 5(94), 1-8.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00094>

Thompson, B. (2008). How College Freshmen Communicate Student Academic Support: A Grounded Theory Study. *Communication Education*, 57(1), 123–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520701576147>

Thompson, M., Pawson, C., & Evans, B. (2021). Navigating entry into higher education: the transition to independent learning and living. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(10), 1398-1410.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1933400>

Thorley, C. (2017). *Not by degrees: Improving student mental health in the U.K.'s universities*. Institute for Public Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/not-by-degrees>.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1), 1-19.

<https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN>

Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student leaving. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 59, 438-455

<https://doi.org/10.2307/1981920>

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/1170024>

Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(4), 388–396.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x>

- Tolich, M., & Tumilty, E. (2020). Practicing ethics and ethics praxis. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(13), 16-50.
- Tomlinson, M. (2017). Student Perceptions of Themselves as 'Consumers' of Higher Education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(4), 450–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1113856>
- Tomlinson, M. (2018). Conceptions of the Value of Higher Education in a Measured Market. *Higher Education* 75(4), 711–727. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0165-6>
- Trainor, A. A., Carter, E. W., Karpur, A., Martin, J. E., Mazzotti, V. L., Morningstar, M. E., Newman, L., & Rojewski, J. W. (2019). A Framework for Research in Transition: Identifying Important Areas and Intersections for Future Study. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 43(1), 5–17 <https://doi.org/10.1177/21651434198645>
- Trenshaw, K. F., Revelo, R. A., Earl, K. A., & Herman, G. L. (2016). Using Self-Determination Theory Principles to Promote Engineering Students' Intrinsic Motivation to Learn. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, 32, 1194–207.
- Tomás, J. M., Gutiérrez, M., Pastor, A. M., & Sancho, P. (2020). Perceived Social Support, School Adaptation and Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being. *Child Indicators Research*, 13, 1597–1617. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09717-9>
- Topham, P., Moller, N., & Davies, H. (2014). Social anxiety in learning: Stages of change in a sample of UK undergraduates. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(1), 125–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2014.895307>
- Twenge, J. M., & Donnelly, K. (2016). Generational differences in American students' reasons for going to college, 1971-2014: The rise of extrinsic motives. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 156(6), 620-629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2016.1152214>
- Twenge, J. M., Haidt, J., Blake, A. B., McAllister, C., Lemon, H., & Le Roy, A. (2021). Worldwide increases in adolescent loneliness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 93, 257–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.06.006>

- Tymon, A., & Batistic, S. (2016). Improved academic performance and enhanced employability? The potential double benefit of proactivity for business graduates. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(8), 915–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1198761>
- UCAS (2024a). *How to get support from your universities and colleges*. UCAS.
<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/student-life/how-get-support-your-universities-and-colleges>
- UCAS (2024b). *The Pros and Cons of University*.
<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/pros-and-cons-university>
- UCAS (2021a). *UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2021>
- UCAS (2021b). *Starting the Conversation: UCAS Report on Student Mental Health*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.ucas.com/file/513961/download?token=wAaKRniC>
- UCAS (n.d). *Why Choose Higher Education?* Retrieved from:
<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/student-life/why-choose-higher-education>
- Universities UK, (2021). *Support for new Students Starting in University Autumn 2021*.
<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-09/support-for-new-students-case-studies.pdf>
- Universities UK, (2020). *Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities*.
<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/stepchange-mentally-healthy-universities>
- University College London (2021, August 17). Student mental health the focus of new peer support programme. UCL.
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/aug/student-mental-health-focus-new-peer-support-programme>

- University of Essex. (n.d.). *Essex Preparation Programme*. Retrieved February 16, 2023 from <https://www.essex.ac.uk/short-courses/essex-preparation-programme>
- Urbina-Garcia, A. (2020). What do we know about university academics' mental health? A systematic literature review. *Stress and Health, 36*, 563–585. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2956>
- Vecchia, M., Robinson, C., Savic, M., & Romiti, M. (2023). Vertical and Horizontal Mismatch in the UK: Are Graduates' Skills a Good Fit for their Jobs? <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/publications/vertical-horizontal-mismatch-uk?type=discussion-papers>
- Van Hees, V., Moyson, T., & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher education experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder: Challenges, benefits and support needs. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 45*(6), 1673–1688. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2324-2>
- Varpio, L., & McCarthy, A. (2018). How a needs assessment study taught us a lesson about the ethics of educational research. *Perspectives of Medical Education, 7*(1), 34–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-017-0356-y>
- Varpio, L., O'Brien, B., Rees, C. E., Monrouxe, L., Ajjawi, R., & Paradis, E. (2021). The applicability of generalisability and bias to health professions education's research. *Medical Education, 55*(2), 167–173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14348>
- Vermunt, J. D., & Verloop, N. (1999). Congruence and friction between learning and teaching. *Learning and Instruction, 9*(3), 257–280. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-4752\(98\)00028-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-4752(98)00028-0)
- Volstad, C., Hughes, J., Jakubec, S. L., Flessati, S., Jackson, L., & Martin-Misener, R. (2020) "You have to be okay with okay": experiences of flourishing among university students transitioning directly from high school. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 15*(1), 1834259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2020.1834259>
- Vondracek, F. W., & Porfeli, E. J. (2006). The World of Work and Careers. In G. R., Adams & M. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence*. (pp. 109-129). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

- Voss, R., Gruber, T., & Szmigin, I. (2007). Service quality in higher education: The role of the students' expectations. *Journal of Business Research*, 60, 949–959. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.01.020>
- Waddington, K. (2018). Developing Compassionate Academic Leadership: The Practice of Kindness. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(3), 87-89. <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i3.375>
- Walczak, A. (2023). What Does It Mean to be an Adult? Adulthood Markers in the Perspective of Emerging Adults. *Emerging Adulthood*, 11(6), 1335-1345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968231194887>
- Wallace, D. D., Boynton, M. H., & Lytle, L. A. (2017). Multilevel analysis exploring the links between stress, depression, and sleep problems among two-year college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 65(3), 187-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2016.1269111>
- Walpole, M., Simmerman, H., Mack, C., Mills, J. T., Scales, M., & Albano, D. (2008). Bridge to Success: Insight into Summer Bridge Program Students' College Transition. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(1), 11–30.
- Walsh, R. (2003). The methods of reflexivity. *Humanist Psychology*, 31(4), 51–66
- Walsh, C., Larsen, C., & Parry, D. (2009). Academic Tutors at the Frontline of Student Support in a Cohort of Students Succeeding in Higher Education. *Educational Studies*, 35 (4), 405–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690902876438>
- Walton, G. M., & Brady, S. T. (2017). The many questions of belonging. In A. J. Elliot, C. S. Dweck, & D. S. Yeager (Eds.), *Handbook of competence and motivation: Theory and application* (pp. 272–293). Guilford Press.
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82–96. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.82>
- Wang, W. W., Chang, J. C., & Lew, J. W. (2009). Reasons for attending, expected obstacles and degree aspirations of Asian Pacific American community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 33, 571–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920902885574>

- Watts, J., & Robertson, N. (2011). Burnout in university teaching staff: a systematic literature review. *Educational Research*, 53(1), 33–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2011.552235>
- Wawera, A. S., & McCamley, A. (2020). Loneliness among international students in the UK, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(9), 1262-1274,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1673326>
- Webb, O., Wyness, L., & Cotton, D. (2017). *Enhancing access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education: A review of the literature showing demonstrable impact*. York: Higher Education Academy. https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/enhancing_access_retention_attainmentand_progression_in_higher_education_1_1568037358.pdf
- Webster, D. R., & Rivers, N. (2019). Resisting resilience: disrupting discourses of self-efficacy. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 27(4), 523-535.
doi:10.1080/14681366.2018.1534261
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell
- Weerasinghe, I. M. A., Lalitha, R., & Fernando, S. (2017). “Students’ Satisfaction in Higher Education Literature Review.” *American Journal of Educational Research*, 5(5), 533-539. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-5-5-9>
- Welch, P. (2020). Mass Higher Education in England—a Success Story? *Postdigital Science Education*, 3, 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00111-w>
- Wendsche, J., de Bloom, J., Syrek, C., & Vahle-Hinz, T. (2021). Always on, never done? How the mind recovers after a stressful workday? *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 35(2), 117-151.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23970022211004598>
- Westerhof, G. J., Keyes, C. L. M. (2010). Mental Illness and Mental Health: The Two Continua Model Across the Lifespan. *Journal of Adult Development*, 17, 110–119 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-009-9082-y>
- White, A., & Hingson, R. (2013). The burden of alcohol use: Excessive alcohol consumption and related consequences among college students. *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, 35(2), 201-218–218.

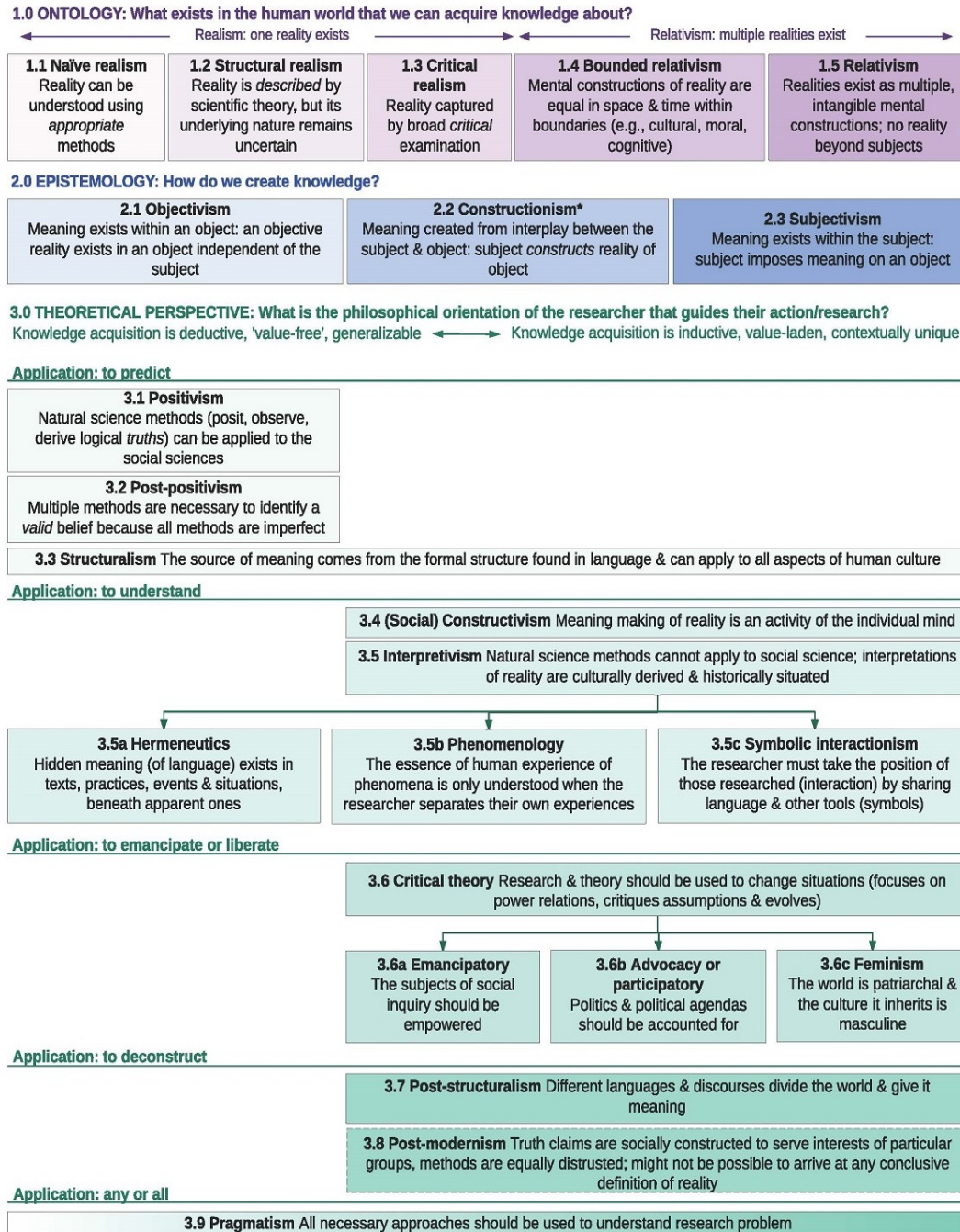
- Whyte, W. (2019). *Somewhere to Live: Why British Students Study Away from Home – and Why It Matters* (HEPI Report No.121). Higher Education Policy Institute. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2019/11/14/why-do-so-many-uk-students-live-away-from-home-and-why-does-it-matter>.
- Wikipedia (n.d). *List of UK universities in the United Kingdom*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_the_United_Kingdom.
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(6), 707-722. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>
- Willcoxson, L., Cotter, J., & Joy, S. (2011). Beyond the first-year experience: The impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(3), 331–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903581533>
- Willig, C. (2017). Interpretation in Qualitative research. In C. Willig & W. Stainton Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in Psychology* (2nd ed.) Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.) Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill Open University Press
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wilson, C., & Dauncey, S. (2020). *Gaps in the Student Experience: Understanding the impact of approaches to boosting attainment, retention, wellbeing and employment*. Coventry University and Bridge Group. Retrieved from: taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Full-reportUnderstanding-gaps-in-the-student-experience-Bridge-Group-and-Coventry-University.pdf
- Wilson, K. L., Murphy, K. A., Pearson, A. G., Wallace, B. M., Reher, V. G. S., & Buys, N. (2016). Understanding the early transition needs of diverse commencing university students in a health faculty: informing effective intervention practices. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(6), 1023-1040, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.966070>

- Winstone, N. E., & Hulme, J. A. (2019). 'Duck to Water' or 'Fish Out of Water'? Diversity in the Experience of Negotiating the Transition to University. In: Lygo-Baker, S., Kinchin, I., & Winstone, N. (Eds.), *Engaging Student Voices in Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20824-0_10
- Wintre, M. G., & Yaffe, M. (2000). First year student adjustment to university life as a function of relationship with parents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15(1), 19–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0743558400151002>
- Wittenborn, A., Rahmandad, H., Rick, J., & Hosseinichimeh, N. (2016). Depression as a systemic syndrome: Mapping the feedback loops of major depressive disorder. *Psychological Medicine*, 46(3), 551-562.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291715002044>
- Worsley, J. D., Harrison, P., & Corcoran, R. (2023). Accommodation environments and student mental health in the UK: the role of relational spaces, *Journal of Mental Health*, 32(1), 175-182.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2021.1922648>
- Worsley, J. D., Harrison, P., & Corcoran, R. (2021a). Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Unique Transition From Home, School or College Into University. *Frontiers in public health*, 9, 634285.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.634285>
- Worsley, J. D., Harrison, P., & Corcoran, R. (2021b). The role of accommodation environments in student mental health and wellbeing. *BMC Public Health*, 21, 573. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10602-5>
- Worsley, J. D., Pennington, A., & Corcoran, R. (2020). *What interventions improve college and university students' mental health and wellbeing? A review of review-level evidence*. What Works for Wellbeing.
<https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/id/eprint/3089948>
- Wouters, S., Duriez, B., Luyckx, K., Klimstra, T., Colpin, H., Soenens, B., & Verschueren, K. (2013). Depressive symptoms in university freshmen: Longitudinal relations with contingent self-esteem and level of self-esteem. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 47, 356–363.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2013.03.001>

- Xie, Y., Yaqoob, A., Mansell, W., & Tai, S. (2021). A qualitative investigation of stress related to studying architecture at degree level in the UK. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 20*(1), 3-20.
<https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1474022219871001>
- Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational Psychologist, 47*(4), 302–314.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805>
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 16*(1), 15-28.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0951507031000114058>
- Yerkes, R. M., & Dodson, J. D. (1908). The Relation of Strength of Stimulus to Rapidity of Habit Formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology & Psychology, 18*, 459–482. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cne.920180503>
- Yıldırım, M., & Arslan, G. (2022). Exploring the associations between resilience, dispositional hope, preventive behaviours, subjective well-being, and psychological health among adults during early stage of COVID-19. *Current psychology (New Brunswick, N.J.), 41*(8), 5712–5722.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01177-2>
- Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2004). *Retention and student success in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Young, H., & Jerome, L. (2020). *Student voice in higher education: Opening the loop*. *British Educational Research Journal, 46*(3), 688–705.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3603>
- Zika, S., & Chamberlain, K. (1992). On the relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being. *British Journal of Psychology, 83*, 133–145.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1992.tb02429.x>
- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Collins, W. A. (2006). Autonomy Development during Adolescence. In G. R., Adams & M. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence*. (pp. 175-204). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ontology and epistemology break down



Moon and Blackman (2009).

Appendix B: Subjective Social Status of Students

Students rated their social status using MacArthur's subjective social status rating scale, which asked students to rate their position in society on a ladder of 1-10. At the top of the ladder (10) are people who are the best off. I.e., those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the bottom (1) are the people who are the worst off, who have the least money, the least education and the least respected jobs or no job. Students were also given the option of 'prefer not to say'.

| Self-reported status level | Number of Students (N) | Percent % |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| 8 | 1 | 6.7 |
| 7 | 4 | 26.7 |
| 6 | 3 | 20.0 |
| 5 | 4 | 26.7 |
| 4 | 3 | 20.0 |

Appendix C: Recruitment Materials.***Appendix C1: Recruitment email example***

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Megan Jones and I'm a PhD student at the University of East Anglia looking to recruit student advisors to take part in an interview study with myself, the lead researcher of this project. The project is looking to improve the understanding of undergraduate student experience with both student and supporting advisor perspectives and inform developments for student wellbeing. The information sheet provided gives more detail if required. Ethical approval Code: 2020-0148-001978

I was just wondering if this is something that would be of interest to anyone in your department and if a recruitment survey link and advertisement would be able to be circulated to colleagues in the hope to recruit some volunteers to take part?

Additionally, if you believe colleagues may be interested, but there are other avenues in which I would need to get this approval other than through yourselves, please do let me know.

Thanks for taking the time to read my e-mail, and my apologies for any inconvenience caused.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Best wishes,

Megan Jones

Postgraduate Research Student

Associate Tutor

School of Psychology

Science Building (Room SCI 0.03) *please note, due to COVID-19 I am working remotely

University of East Anglia

Norwich, NR4 7TJ

Meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Appendix C2: Recruitment Adverts



Undergraduate Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Student Experience.

Have you got a plethora of experiences that have impacted on your time here at university (the good and the bad!)? Then sign up for our online interview study looking into what university is like for you!

You Qualify If You

- Are aged 18 and above
- Are an undergraduate student
- Would like to help improve your university's understanding of student experience and where you best need support

Potential Benefits

Each participant will receive a £10 voucher to say thank you!

Participation Involves

- Attending an online interview with the researcher (Meg Jones) that will last between 45 mins – 1 hour.
- You will be asked a series of questions about your time at university and you can talk about your experiences in as much detail as you would like.
- You will be required to fill in and return a consent form to the researcher no later than 24 hours before the session is due to start.
- That's it!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Megan Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk)

Or sign up here! https://ueapsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9SKnh2Yot4MJfuK

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

ARE YOU AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT?
Then we would like to talk to you!

We would like to hear **YOUR** thoughts about the undergraduate university experience?

Please take part if you are:

- ❖ Aged 18 or above
- ❖ An undergraduate student

What is the benefit of taking part?

- ❖ Your contributions will help to better the student experience
- ❖ You will receive a £10 amazon voucher as a thank you for taking part

UEA University of East Anglia ★

For more information please contact: meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Participation is voluntary – there is no obligation to take part | your data and identity are kept anonymous | This study has been approved by the UEA Psychology Ethics Committee

UEA University of East Anglia

Student Advisor Perspectives on the Undergraduate Student Experience

If you are in a student support role, we would like to hear **your thoughts** about the undergraduate university experience

The purpose of this study is to find out what positively and negatively impacts upon a student's experience at university.

For more information please contact: meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Participation is voluntary – there is no obligation to take part. Your data and identity will remain anonymous and your university will not be informed about your participation.

This study has been approved by the UEA Psychology Ethics Committee.

help

RESOLUTION WELFARE WELL BEING HELP
LISTENING SUPPORT
ANXIETY BURNING STRESS

Appendix D: Information Sheets

Appendix D1: Student Information Sheet

School of Psychology



“What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?”

Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in this study. Before you decide whether to take part, please read the following information carefully (this sheet is for you to keep). You may ask the researcher any questions if you would like more information.

What is this research looking at?

This study is aiming to explore student perspectives on the university experience and how your time at university has been to date. The purpose of this study is to find out what positively and negatively impacts upon your experience as a student throughout your time at university.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide to join the study. We will describe the study and go through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any point until the time your Interview is due to start, and you may withdraw at any point during your Interview. You do not have to give a reason, and this will not affect you in any way. You can also withdraw your data within 14 days of your Interview completing. After this point your data will be completely anonymised and deleted and will not be able to be removed from the study.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

You will be required to attend an online Interview with the researcher to discuss your university experience. You will be asked a series of questions related to your experience of university and given the opportunity to discuss these in as much depth as you would like to.

Interviews will take place via an Online Video platform (i.e. Zoom or MS Teams) or via phone. If you have a preference on platform or online vs phone interview, you will be given the chance to make this known to the researcher. On receiving your consent to take part, you will be sent a link with information on how to access your interview session. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to fill in a recruitment survey and sent a consent form to fill in and return to the researcher. On retrieval of your consent form, this should be filled in and returned to the researcher **no later than 24 hours before your interview is scheduled to commence**. If these are not returned, and you turn up to the interview, you will be removed from the study and given the opportunity to arrange a future scheduled session where possible – however this is not guaranteed.

On arrival to the interview this information sheet will be explained to you in detail and you will be asked to give verbal consent that you agree to take part, and confirm that you have sent your written consent to the researcher. You

will then be asked a series of questions regarding your university experience. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be audio and video recorded.

Are there any problems with taking part?

There are no obvious problems with taking part in the study, other than potential for changes in COVID restrictions impacting on personal circumstances making it difficult to attend a session. In the event of this happening, please contact the researcher Megan Jones

(meg.jones@uea.ac.uk). It is also advised that participants check their internet connection prior to attending the interview in order to ensure connectivity will not be an issue. If you do experience any connectivity issues prior to the session, please inform the researcher. If you experience connectivity issues during the session,

please attempt to re-join the interview through the links provided to you. If this is unsuccessful, please e-mail the researcher to let them know.

Will it help me if I take part?

The research may not directly benefit you in any immediate way, but it will benefit the programme of research and help to provide universities with a better understanding of how to support their students.

However, each participant will receive a £10 amazon voucher to thank you for your time.

How will you store the information that I give you?

All information which you provide during the study will be stored in accordance with the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation and kept strictly confidential. The chief investigator will be the custodian of the anonymous research data. Any identifiable data will be stored separately in a password protected file and will be securely disposed of as soon as it is no longer necessary, and within 5 years. All anonymized results will be stored indefinitely in order to comply with open practice standards.

All electronic copies of interview and survey data will be anonymised and kept on a password protected computer, in a password protected folder that only the researcher will have access to. This will then be destroyed after analysis is complete. The data will not be linked to your name or any identifying information. Only the researcher and the research team will have access to this data, and all involved are required to adhere to the ethics committee's protocols on data storage.

Video and audio recording

Due to the nature of the research, phone call and video call interviews will be recorded. For online video call interviews (i.e. via MS Teams and Zoom), these sessions will be audio and video recorded. You can however opt not to use your video. Recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on a password

protected computer that only the researcher will have access to. After transcription, the files will be destroyed.

How will the data be used?

The data analysis will be reported in my final PhD thesis and this might be presented in journals and conferences. However, your data will never be linked to you individually, and data will always be presented in a way that individual participants will never be identified.

Please be aware, that if you disclose anything to the researcher that portrays that you are at risk to yourself or others, the researcher will take advice from their supervisor and contact relevant support if necessary.

What happens if I agree to take part, but change my mind later?

You can withdraw your data within 14 days after your interview is complete.

All you need to do is inform the researcher Meg Jones

(meg.jones@uea.ac.uk) of your withdrawal, stating your participant code. This would not affect you in any way.

How do I know that this research is safe for me to take part in? All research in the University is looked at by an independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity. This research was approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia on **01/12/2020**.

You are under no obligation to agree to take part in this research.

If you do agree you can **withdraw at any time without giving a reason**.

If during the session you disclose anything that the researcher deems a risk of harm or concern for your own or others safety, they may approach your university's student support services to raise their concerns.

Contact details: Megan Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk)

Dr. Laura Biggart (l.biggart@uea.ac.uk)

Do also contact us if you have any worries or concerns about this research.

School of Psychology Ethics Committee:
ethics.psychology@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597146

Head of School Professor Kenny Coventry:
k.coventry@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597145

Appendix D2: Advisor Information Sheet

School of Psychology



“What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?”

Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in this study. Before you decide whether to take part, please read the following information carefully (this sheet is for you to keep). You may ask me any questions if you would like more information.

What is this research looking at?

This study is aiming to explore student and wellbeing advisor perspectives on the university experience. The purpose of this study is to find out what positively and negatively impacts upon a student’s experience at university.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide to join the study. We will describe the study and go through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any point until the time your interview is

due to start, and you may withdraw at any point during your interview. You do not have to give a reason, and this will not affect you in any way. If you wish to withdraw your data, you can do this up to 14 days after your interview is complete. After this point, we will not be able to remove your data from the study, as this will be completely anonymised, and all recorded data will be deleted.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

You will be required to attend an online interview with the researcher to give your perspective on the common factors that influence the student experience. You will be asked a series of questions related to your experience as a student advisor and given the opportunity to discuss the questions in as much or as little depth as you would like to.

Interviews will take place via online video platform (i.e. MS Teams or Zoom) or via phone. You will be given the chance to express your preference. On receiving your consent to take part, you will be sent a recruitment survey to fill in, and on expressing your interest, you will receive a consent form you must return to the researcher **no later than 24 hours before your session is scheduled to commence**. In the event that this is not returned, you will be given the opportunity to join an alternative scheduled session where possible – however this is not guaranteed.

On arrival to the session this information sheet will be explained to you in detail and you will be asked to give verbal consent that you agree to take part, and confirm that you have sent your written consent to the researcher. You will then be asked a series of questions regarding the student university experience. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be audio and video recorded via the online video platform used, or audio recorded remotely via Dictaphone in the event of a phone interview. You will be given the option to opt out of using video during an online video interview if you wish.

Are there any problems with taking part?

There are no obvious problems with taking part in the study, other than potential for changes in COVID restrictions impacting on personal circumstances making it difficult to attend a session. In the event of this happening, please contact the researcher Megan Jones

(meg.jones@uea.ac.uk). It is also advised that participants check their internet connection prior to attending the interview in order to ensure connectivity will not be an issue. If you do experience any connectivity issues during prior to the session, please inform the researchers. If you experience connectivity issues during the session, please attempt to re-join the session through the links provided to you.

Will it help me if I take part?

The research may not directly benefit you in any immediate way, but it will benefit the programme of research and help to provide universities with a better understanding of how to support their students.

How will you store the information that I give you?

All information which you provide during the study will be stored in accordance with the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation and kept strictly confidential. The chief investigator will be the custodian of the anonymous research data. Any identifiable data will be stored separately in a password protected file and will be securely disposed of as soon as it is no longer necessary, and within 5 years. All anonymized results will be stored indefinitely in order to comply with open practice standards.

All electronic copies of interview data will be anonymised and kept on a password protected computer, in a password protected folder that only the researcher will have access to. This will then be destroyed after analysis is complete. The data will not be linked to your name or any identifying information. Only the researcher and the research team will have access to this data, and all involved are required to adhere to the ethics committee's protocols on data storage.

Video and audio recording in the event of Online Interviews

Due to the recording facilities available on MS Teams, the sessions will be audio and video recorded. You will be given the choice as to whether you would like to use your video camera or not during the online interview, and these recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access to. After transcription, the files will be destroyed.

How will the data be used?

The data analysis will be reported in my final PhD thesis and this might be presented in journals and conferences. However, your data will never be linked to you individually, and data will always be presented in a way that individual participants will never be identified.

What happens if I agree to take part, but change my mind later? You can withdraw your data at any point up until the time your interview is due to start. All you need to do is inform the researcher Meg Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk) of your withdrawal. If you decide you do not want to take part after your interview has finished, and you wish to withdraw your data, you can do this **up to 14 days after your interview is complete**. After this point, we will not be able to remove your data from the study, as this will be completely anonymised and all recorded data will be deleted

How do I know that this research is safe for me to take part in? All research in the University is looked at by an independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity. This research was approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia on 17th November 2020.

You are under no obligation to agree to take part in this research.

If you do agree you can **withdraw at any time without giving a reason**.

If during the session you disclose anything that the researcher deems a risk of harm or concern for your own or others safety, they may approach your university's student support services to raise their concerns.

Contact details: Megan Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk)

Dr. Laura Biggart (l.biggart@uea.ac.uk)

Do also contact us if you have any worries or concerns about this research.

School of Psychology Ethics Committee:
ethics.psychology@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597146

Head of School Professor Kenny Coventry:
k.coventry@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597145

Appendix E: Qualtrics Forms

E1: Student Interest Form

Student Interview Study

Q1

Please share your student experience to help future students

This study aims to recruit undergraduate students to talk to us about their university experience, with the overall aim of helping universities to better understand and support their students. This study consists of an interview with the lead researcher and current PhD student, Megan Jones:

"Hi there! I'm Meg, a current PhD student at the University of East Anglia! Since embarking on my undergraduate, and postgraduate degrees, I have been consistently interested in researching Student Wellbeing and working to build effective strategies to support students during their time studying at university. I have a passion for student mental health, and making university life enjoyable for all."

Have you got a wealth of experiences that have impacted on your time here at university (good and bad)? Then please express interest in taking part in one of our online interviews, exploring what university is like for you!

Please take part if you:

- are aged 18 and above*
- are an undergraduate student*
- would like to help improve your university's understanding of student experience and where students best need support.*

Benefits to taking part:

- Each participant that is selected to take part will receive a £10 amazon voucher.*
- You will be helping your university to better understand the student experience, and what they can do to provide support, and so hopefully contribute to building a better understanding of what you as university students need!*

Participation involves:

- Attending one online interview with the researcher which will last between 45mins to 1 hour.
- You will be asked a series of questions about your time at university and you can talk about your experiences in as much detail as you would like.
- You will be required to fill in and return a consent form to the researcher no later than 24 hours before the interview is due to start.
- That's it!

If you are interested in taking part, please answer the following questions and provide your e-mail address to be contacted by the researcher. This should only take two minutes.

For more information, please contact the researcher: meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Q2 Are you aged 18 or over?

- Yes (1)
- No (3)

Q3 Are you an undergraduate student at university?

- Yes (1)
- No (3)

Q4 Would you like to take part in this interview study?

- Yes (2)
- No (3)
- I'm not sure - i would like more details (1)

Q5 Please provide your e-mail address here:

(this is so the researcher can contact you with more information)

E2: Student Demographics Form

Student Demographics

Q1

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study.

In this survey, we need to ask a few questions about you - but please note that this will not be linked to you directly in any way and will remain completely anonymous.

This data will not be used in any way within the research, other than to provide understanding of the demographics of our sample.

Q7 Please tell us your:

Age

—

Q8 Gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-Binary (5)
- Other (4) _____
- Prefer not to say (3)

Q9 What best describes your ethnicity?

- White (1)
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (2)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (3)
- Asian/Asian British (4)
- Other (5) _____
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q10 Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes (3)
- No (5)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q11 What is the nature of your disability?

- Deafness or severe hearing impairment (1)
- Blindness or severe visual impairment (2)
- A condition that substantially limits physical activity such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying (3)
- A learning difficulty (4)
- A long-standing psychological or mental health condition (5)
- Other (including any long-standing illness such cancer or HIV) (6)
-
- prefer not to say (7)

Q12 Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in Britain

At the top of the ladder are people who are the best off - those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off - who have the least money, the least education and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher you place yourself on this ladder, the closer you are to people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to people at the very bottom.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

- 10 (best off) (1)
- 9 (2)
- 8 (3)
- 7 (4)
- 6 (5)
- 5 (6)
- 4 (7)
- 3 (8)
- 2 (9)
- 1 (worst off) (10)
- Prefer not to say (11)

Q13 Are you the first generation in your family to go to university?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to say (3)

Q14 Are you a Home, EU or International Student?

- HOME (1)
- EU (2)
- International (3)
- Other (4) _____

Q25 Which University are you studying at?

—

Q15 Which year of your undergraduate degree are you in?

- 1st year (1)
- 2nd year (2)
- 3rd year (3)
- Other (4) _____

Q16 What subject is your degree in?

—

Q17 In which discipline do you consider your degree to be situated? (e.g. social sciences, applied science etc.)

—

Q18 Will you qualify with:

- BA (1)
- BSc (2)
- Other (please state) (3)

Q5 Please create a Participant ID - this is created in case you decide to leave the study and request your data to be removed.

(Your participant ID is the first two letters of the street you live on, and the last four digits of your phone number in a four digit format e.g. LL0000 so for example, if you lived on surrey street and you your phone number was 07123451234, your participant ID would be SU5123).

E3: Advisor Qualtrics Interest and Demographics Form**Student Support Advisor Interview Study**

Q1

“What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?”

Have you got a wealth of experiences that could provide insight into how best to support our students? Then please express interest in taking part in one of our online interviews!

The aim of this research is to explore student and wellbeing advisor perspectives on the university experience. The purpose of this study is to find out what positively and negatively impacts upon a student’s experience at university and your perspective on what best supports our university students.

My name is Megan Jones and I am a PhD student at the University of East Anglia, and I am interested in researching Student Wellbeing and working to build effective strategies to support students during their time studying at university.

Please take part if you:

- are a student wellbeing advisor
- are in a student support role at your university
- support undergraduate students during their time at university.

Benefits of taking part:

- The research may not directly benefit you in any immediate way, but it will benefit the programme of research and help to provide universities with a better understanding of how to support their students.

Interview participation involves:

- Completing and returning a consent form to the researcher before your interview.
- Attending an online interview with the researcher Megan Jones expected to last between 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- Completing this survey to express your interest

That's it!

If you'd like more information before filling out this survey, please contact me on meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Q2 Are you currently in a role where you regularly support undergraduate students?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q3 Would you like to take part in the Interview study advertised?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q4 Please create and enter your participant ID:

(Your participant ID is the first two letters of the street you live on, and the last four letters of your phone number in a four digit format as follows: Letters0000 so for example, if you lived on surrey street and you your phone number was 07954678324, your participant ID would be SU8324).

this code will only be used to identify this information if you wish to remove your data from the study at a later date. Remember **you can only remove your data within 14 days of your Interview being completed** whereby all data will be anonymously transcribed and deleted.

Q5 What is the title of your support role?

Q19 At which University do you currently hold this role?

Q6 How long have you worked in this role?

- Less than one month (4)
- 1-6 months (5)
- 6 months - 1 year (6)
- 1 year - 2 years (7)
- 2 years - 3 years (8)
- 3 years + (9)

Q7. Please tell us

Your age:

Q8 What best describes your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)
- Other (5) _____

Q9 What best describes your ethnicity?

- White (1)
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (2)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (3)
- Asian/Asian British (4)
- Other (please state) (5)

- Prefer not to say (6)

*Here advisors are redirected to a separate Qualtrics survey to enter their email address.

Appendix F: Consent Form (Student and Advisor)

School of Psychology

**Consent Form****'What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?'**

Name of Researcher: Megan Jones

Please provide your Participant ID code: _____

(Your participant ID is the first two letters of the street you live on, and the last four digits of your phone number in a four digit format e.g. LL0000 so for example, if you lived on surrey street and you your phone number was 07123451234, your participant ID would be SU5123).

Please initial all boxes

1. I have read and understand the information sheet 'What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?' and have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. My participation is voluntary, and I know that I am free to withdraw at any time up until the commencement of the interview or during, without giving any reason and without it affecting me at all.

3. I understand that due to the nature of the interview and the anonymity of data collection, I am only able to withdraw my data within 14 days of my interview completing.

4. I know that no personal information (such as my name) will be shared outside of the research team or published in the final report(s) from this research
5. I agree to being video/audio recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis and understand that my identity and data will be kept anonymous and safely in a password protected file until transcription is complete and audio files are subsequently deleted.
6. I understand that if I disclose anything that is deemed a concern for my own or others safety, or indicates risk of harm, the researcher may contact my universities student support services to raise their concern.
7. I agree to take part in the above study

Participant's signature.....

Date:

Researcher Contact details:

Primary researcher: Megan Jones

Meg.jones@uea.ac.uk

Supervisory researcher: Dr. Laura Biggart

l.biggart@uea.ac.uk

Do also contact us if you have any worries or concerns about this research.

School of Psychology Ethics Committee:

ethics.psychology@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597146

Head of School Professor Kenny Coventry:

k.coventry@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597145

Appendix G: Interview Schedules

G1: Student Interview Schedule

*Red indicates questions removed from the schedule, and blue indicates questions added to the schedule.

Undergraduate student Interview Schedule:

Warm up Q's:

- Can you tell me why you chose to study at [University name]?
- How was your experience of settling into university?

Semi-structured Q's

- Can you tell me what your experience of university has been like so far?
- Can you reflect on your experience over the past year?
- What has affected your experience most whilst being at university?
 - o P: uni related or other life aspects.
 - P: what went well what didn't go well.
 - P: What did you enjoy what didn't you enjoy
- What would you do differently if you were starting university again?
- What have been the most enjoyable things you have experienced at university?
- What makes your time at university positive?
 - P: what about at the moment?
- What makes your time at university negative?
 - P: what about at the moment?
- How has your experience changed since the COVID-19 Pandemic? (if relevant)
 - P: positively and negatively.
- Can you tell me what would improve your experience at university?
- Can you tell me what things hinder your experience at university?
- What forms of support do you draw upon during your time as a student?

P: Can you tell me anything about how this support helped or hindered your experience?

P: This could be socially, academically, support based services – and can relate to anything inside or outside of the university that has supported you in your time at university.

P: have you received any formal support at university and how did this help or hinder your experience?

- What support do you feel you need, that you aren't receiving?

P: this can be university specific or outside of the university

- What advice would you give to a new student starting university to guide them to having their best experience?

Exit Question:

- Is there anything else you'd like to say about anything we have been discussing or anything you feel you would like to say that you haven't already?

G2: Advisor Interview Schedule

Red signifies questions removed from the schedule. Blue signifies where questions were added from the pilot.

Student and Advisor Perspectives on the construction of Undergraduate Quality of Life.

Student Advisors:

Intro Q's

- Tell me, what made you want to become a student advisor/peer supporter..
- Tell me about your role.

So, I'd like you to think specifically about undergraduate students when I ask you these questions:

- From your own experience in your role, what have been the most commonly arising issues amongst students you support?
- What do you think students need to have a good experience at university?
 - Outside or university specific
 - Why do you think that is?
 - What makes you say that?
 - Can you expand on that?
 - How do these things differ between year groups?
- What do you think contributes to a negative experience at university?
 - Outside or university specific
 - Why do you think that is?
 - Can you expand on that?
 - What makes you say that?
 - How do these things differ between year groups?
- What do students report enjoying about the university experience?
 - If nothing: what do you think they enjoy?
 - Why do you think that?
 - What makes you say that?
- **PROMPT FOR POSITIVE if focusing on negative only** – *Can you tell me more about positive contributors*
- Tell me what you observe in terms of the demographics of students accessing support from your university services/you/academic tutors
- Tell me what you observe in terms of the struggles across different demographics of students
 - (this might be across genders, disciplines, age groups, ethnicities etc.)
- Why do you think the number of students accessing support has increased over the past few years?

- What support do you think helps students to have a positive experience at university?
 - Why do you say that?
 - What makes you think that?
 - How do these things differ across students?
 - How do these things differ across demographics?

- What support do students tend to navigate towards when they are facing issues?
 - Why do you think that is?

- What support do students lack outside of university that seems to impact on their university life?

- What things do students typically lack in their support systems?

- What is the feedback from students regarding the support they receive at university?

- Tell me what you think is needed for students to experience positive wellbeing at university.

- What would you change at the university to help students have a positive experience?
 - Why would you change those things?
 - What makes you say that?
 - How do you think this could be done?

If peer supporter:

- Can you reflect on your own experience as a student?
 - What has gone well for you?
 - What hasn't gone so well?
 - What would you have wanted to be different if you could start again?

- Is there anything else you'd like to add that you haven't spoken about already?

- *Can you tell me more about that?*
- *That's interesting... can you expand on that?*
- *Why do you think that is?*

Appendix H: Debrief Sheets

H1: Student Debrief

University of East Anglia

Debrief

'What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?'

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and efforts are much appreciated.

The purpose of this study was to explore student and student advisor perspectives on the university student experience and what positively and negatively impacts upon their experience throughout their time at university. The researchers are particularly interested in the underlying psychological concepts of the university experience and how these govern the student's lived experiences. Additionally, the researchers are interested in using the findings from this study to explore in the future whether these aspects of student experience predict wellbeing outcomes.

The researchers anticipated that there would be both university specific factors and individual circumstances that would be discussed in the interviews, with varying degrees of impact upon student university experience. Data collected will be analysed and collated to develop categories of student experience that may potentially be used to develop a questionnaire of student experience. This will then be tested as a tool for measuring predictors of student wellbeing.

Although participants have not been deceived about the topic of interest, the full purpose of the study was not disclosed at the beginning of the study in order to avoid coercion and preconceptions of the researcher's intentions influencing topics of discussion. We wanted to establish genuine data regarding student's experiences and allow for discussion of any potential impacting factors.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to ask or contact the researcher or supervisor of this study now, or at a later date.

If you wish to withdraw your data please contact Meg Jones at meg.jones@uea.ac.uk within 14 days of completing your interview, stating your participant ID. The researchers are unable to remove any data after this point due to the deletion of individual data, where the analysis will be completely anonymised and unidentifiable.

You can be assured that your responses remain completely anonymous and unidentifiable and can in no way be linked to you individually. All interview recordings and transcripts will be kept safely in a password protected folder on a password protected computer and destroyed after analysis.

If any issues have arisen through taking part in this study that you would like support with, please refer to the contacts below.

UEA Med Centre *(or university equivalent)*

Tel: 01603 251600

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

Citizens Advice

Tel: 03444 111444

Website: www.nofolkcab.org.uk

MIND

Tel: 01603 433457

Email: headoffice@norwichmind.org.uk

Website: www.norwichmind.org.uk

If you would like to receive a report of the main findings of the study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed please contact the researcher.

- Researcher: Megan Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk)
- Supervisor: Dr. Laura Biggart (l.biggart@uea.ac.uk)

Do also contact us if you have any worries or concerns about this research.

School of Psychology Ethics Committee:

ethics.psychology@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597146

Head of School Professor Kenny Coventry:

k.coventry@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597145

Thank you again for your participation.

H2: Advisor Debrief

University of East Anglia

Debrief***'What is the Student Experience like for a University Student?'***

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and efforts are much appreciated.

The purpose of this study was to explore student and student advisor perspectives on the university student experience and what positively and negatively impacts upon their experience throughout their time at university. The researchers are particularly interested in the underlying psychological concepts of the university experience and how these govern the student's lived experiences. Additionally, the researchers are interested in using the findings from this study to explore in the future whether these aspects of student experience predict wellbeing outcomes.

The researchers anticipated that there would be both university specific factors and individual circumstances that would be discussed in the interviews, with varying degrees of impact upon student university experience. Data collected will be analysed and collated to develop categories of student experience that will be potentially used to develop a questionnaire of student experience. This will then be tested as a tool for measuring predictors of student wellbeing.

Although participants have not been deceived about the topic of interest, the full purpose of the study was not disclosed at the beginning of the study in order to avoid coercion and preconceptions of the researcher's intentions influencing topics of discussion. We wanted to establish genuine data regarding student's experiences and allow for discussion of any potential impacting factors.

If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to ask or contact the researcher or supervisor of this study now, or at a later date.

If you wish to **withdraw your data** please contact Meg Jones at meg.jones@uea.ac.uk within 14 days of completing your interview, stating your participant ID. The researchers are unable to remove any data after this point due to the deletion of individual data, where the analysis will be completely anonymised and unidentifiable.

If any issues have arisen through taking part in this study that you would like support with, please refer to the contacts below.

UEA Med Centre (or university equivalent)

Tel: 01603 251600

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

Citizens Advice

Tel: 03444 111444

Website: www.norfolkcab.org.uk

MIND

Tel: 01603 433457

Email: headoffice@norwichmind.org.uk

Website: www.norwichmind.org.uk

If you would like to receive a report of the main findings of the study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed please contact the researcher.

Researcher: Megan Jones (meg.jones@uea.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr. Laura Biggar (l.biggar@uea.ac.uk)

Do also contact us if you have any worries or concerns about this research.

School of Psychology Ethics Committee:

ethics.psychology@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597146

Head of School Professor Kenny Coventry:

k.coventry@uea.ac.uk; Phone 01603 597145

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix I: Ethical Thinking Reflection examples

Memo 1:

It's been interesting to consider the ethical considerations of online interviews, compared to face-to-face interviews. I felt that I understood this process but on conducting a few student interviews now, I can sense that my experience has led me to a false sense of security! Whilst I requested students to conduct their interviews in a private space, I had one student welcome their partner into the room as we were talking, and subsequently informed me that they were comfortable with them being there as they tell them everything, and anything they say to me would be said to them. Therefore, even though it made me slightly uncomfortable, I chose to accept this environment due to retaining the comfort of the participant. This was more crucial to me than my own comfort, and I didn't want to jeopardise the rapport I built, by asking them to ask their partner to leave! After a while I also kind of forgot they were there – so I felt this didn't impact my process as an interviewer that much.

Memo 2:

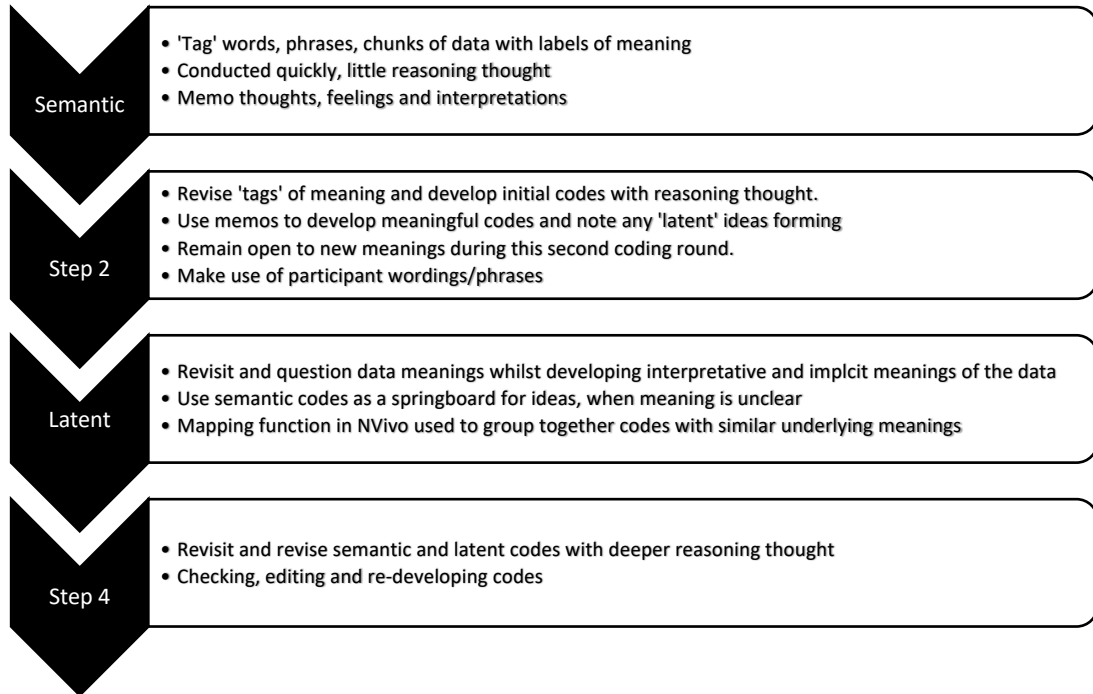
The interview today involved a lot of discussion around drugs, which somehow, I was not expecting to come up in this much detail. It required me to think on my feet a little surrounding ethical thinking, and whether this was appropriate to explore for the participant, as well as its relevance for my RQ. Ethically, I was very aware of the element of risk involved for the student, and ensured to check with them that they were no longer at risk now that they were out of that 'scene', and what was problematic for me, was whether the disclosure that you're always 'known' by the 'gangs' they have been part of, and that they check in with the participants friends to find out what they're up to, meant I should be raising this with anyone. To mitigate it, I felt I needed to expand this knowledge to check their own feelings about this situation to see if they felt at risk – and whilst the participant discussed that its uncomfortable, they did say they that she is very much removed from that group and feels no obvious risk.

Memo 3:

-
This person has ADHD and asks me to repeat questions - i just realised i didnt offer any breaks for this individual, which is an oversight on my part at the time. Makes me feel quite uncomfortable now, as someone who is involved in the EDI committee, that i completely misjudged that and did not make this clear to them again during the interview (i.e. mentioned they can stop any time and take breaks at the start but didnt re-emphasise this).

Appendix J: Coding Process Examples

J1: Semantic to Latent Coding Process



J2: Initial coding example

134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169

Interviewer: looked forward to doing it, but then couldn't. So, yeah, I'd say the worst part, or the hardest part has been not being able to meet as many new people.

Respondent: Yeah. How has it differed to your expectation of what you expected to have in terms of your experience and what you've got?

Respondent: I definitely expected to go clubbing and have a Freshers Week and I think everything that we do, like, social-wise, every social aspect of uni just doesn't really exist. [I thought I would go and join a sports team, join societies and just the ability to go to the SU shop] and know that if you made a friend ... or the SU bar, know that if you made a friend or bumped into someone, you could just go back to their flat and chat to them, or you could invite them back to your flat was ... we literally can't do any of that. And no, yeah, I think going into uni ... [a typical uni] I would have thought like, lectures in person kind of thing, but bearing in mind with COVID already existing going into uni, the expectation of face-to-face teaching is lower because [at school we weren't really getting that anyway. So, that wasn't really any different.] [it was very different to what my expectation would have been two years ago] [But not different to what I expected directly coming into uni.] [But social-wise, very different.] Just non-existent.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, was it ever a consideration not to come to uni then because of the COVID situation?

Respondent: [Yeah, it was in the back of my mind.] But I don't know, [I feel like that was a very, very big decision to make and then it almost felt stupid giving it up just because of COVID] Because [people always say, oh we go to the uni for the fun] Like the experience not the degree. Whereas [I think this year really tested people to see if they were actually going for the fun or for the degree.] But [I think I did debate it, definitely.] [I thought do I just wait a year.] But then I didn't really want to just sit at home ... I had a job at a supermarket, I didn't want to work for a year. I didn't want to graduate a year later than all of my friends.

Handwritten notes and codes:

- Social is according to uni
- hardest part of meeting people
- expectations of Freshers
- Freedom to socialise removed
- COVID has changed what uni is
- experienced online before uni required
- different to my ideal, but not expectation
- expected more socialisation
- concerned about coming to uni
- uni is all opposite regard
- COVID tests mind for uni
- will it be better in a year time?
- attention to uni was appe

5

J3: Developing initial coding

| | Interview | data | First initial code | Changed to: | reason | Memo |
|----|-----------|---|--|---|--|--|
| 1. | Julia | <i>Because without the knowledge of what I've previously done I would have completely like failed and flopped</i> | Belief that unfamiliarity leads to failure | lack of prior knowledge will cause me to fail | Unfamiliarity seemed too broad – as this could be related to 'anything' whereas 'lack of prior knowledge' seems more specific to learning. | links to this idea of preparedness as well. – prior knowledge makes them feel prepared for the jump academically. |
| 2. | Julia | <i>Obviously we got out, we were like, what's going on? Is there a fire?</i> | Concerns regarding fire in the flat | Unsure of own safety | This seemed too surface level and doesn't explain what the meaning is behind it – and rather a description of the event | This puts them at the centre of the behaviour/what leads them to think 'what is going on' – why are they concerned? It's the safety of them and their flatmates – is there a fire, do we need to do something – its risk assessing |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-------|--|--|---|---|---|
| 3. | Julia | <i>You want to be like oh, the uni student, you know, live the party life, but then you're also like I'm actually well tired</i> | Conflict of expectation of student life and physical needs | Physically I cannot keep up with 'student life' desires AND party life personifies the uni student | There are two things going on in the full quote – so I needed to break it down – i.e. what makes up a uni student to them – and what is their experience of that. | I'm memoing this as a potential focus code/theme – i.e. conflict of student life expectations and reality + the student identity is a party person of a student is depicted as a party person. The conflict of expectations and reality may underlie this too. |
| 4. | Julia | <i>they just repeat what you already know or don't actually add anything to it</i> | Accessibility of information | I want more information | It's not actually about accessibility, it's about them wanting something more than what they are getting. 'they just repeat' suggests dissatisfaction. | Still feels too semantic – I think this is about them feeling like their experience is not enough. It's them feeling cheated and hard done by underneath it all. |
| 5. | Meera | <i>So, for me it was a necessity, it was a routine to</i> | Fear of Judgement | Can I be myself? | This suggests that it is a desire to be themselves without judgement – it's | I feel that this may be a latent code around fear. Because judgement is essentially scary to her, and she is feeling unsafe to be herself, and |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| | <p><i>go for mass, to attend Choir, to do this, to do that. And obviously, when you leave the flat for, like, an hour, people notice and obviously ask you about it. And I'd seen a lot of atheists in the flat already</i></p> | | <p>about seeing others that are not like her, and fearing their judgement surrounding their differences.</p> | <p>exposed when it is obvious, she is leaving the flat.</p> |
|--|---|--|--|---|

Explanation of example 4. semantic to latent development:

For the data *“they just repeat what you already know or don’t actually add anything to it.”* (Julia). I initially had a semantic code of ‘accessibility of information’, which was then re-visited and edited to ‘I want more information’. This however still felt too semantic, and I asked myself “what does this actually mean psychologically? What are they experiencing psychologically?” and I developed the latent code of ‘it wasn’t enough’. Later in the process, this then formed a higher-level latent focus code of ‘hard done by’ with additional pieces of data that mirrored this same meaning. For example, an initial code of ‘accessing information is not easy’ which became ‘make it easier’ as a latent code, and thus, added to this concept of feeling ‘Hard done by’.

Explanation of Example 3: multiple things happening

For the data: *“You want to be like oh, the uni student, you know, live the party life, but then you’re also like I’m actually well tired”* I felt that conflict of expectations was a bit too broad. Yes, it is the underlying issue, but there are two things happening, not just one expectation that is being conflicted with reality. The idea of what a uni student is, and what kind of uni student they want to be is one thing. The next is what their experience of that actually is. And both need to be considered individually, as well as together. So, there are the two separate ideas of not being able to keep up with ‘student life’ desires and the party life being what personifies the uni student. However, there is also this underlying latent idea of conflict between expectations and reality.

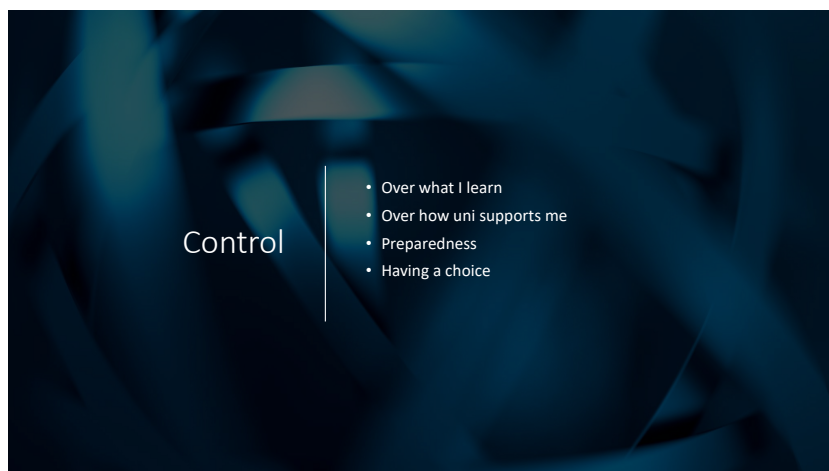
Explanation of Example 5: Semantic to Latent coding

For the data: *So, for me it was a necessity, it was a routine to go for mass, to attend Choir, to do this, to do that. And obviously, when you leave the flat for, like, an hour, people notice and obviously ask you about it. And I’d seen a lot of atheists in the flat already* (Student Meera). This had an initial semantic code of “fear of judgement”, which then became “can I be myself?”. This idea of questioning whether they can be themselves, came from the sense that they desire to be able to be themselves without judgement. This felt more exploratory of the underlying meaning and was going to become a latent code. However, when looking at the data again on entering it into NVivo and taking a latent lens, the use of ‘people notice’ followed by ‘I’d seen a lot of atheists in the flat already’ was then understood to be not just about

judgement, but through this judgement the student is “feeling exposed”. This became my latent code of this chunk of data, and I developed this to mean the student is thus feeling ‘unsafe’ as themselves and among their peers. This later became a latent code that fed into the construction of a theme around safety and security. The semantic code was therefore developed from a particular context, centred around ‘judgement’, however the latent underlying experience, is fear of exposure. It was understood that the semantic context of fear of judgement was experienced through a fear of exposure, and thus, built towards an overarching idea of feeling safe and secure within themselves and to be their authentic self with others.

J4: Initial underlying ideas forming

*These are examples from the presentation I gave to my supervisors of initial underlying ideas that I was memoing during my data familiarisation and initial coding process.



Appendix J5: Coding in NVivo

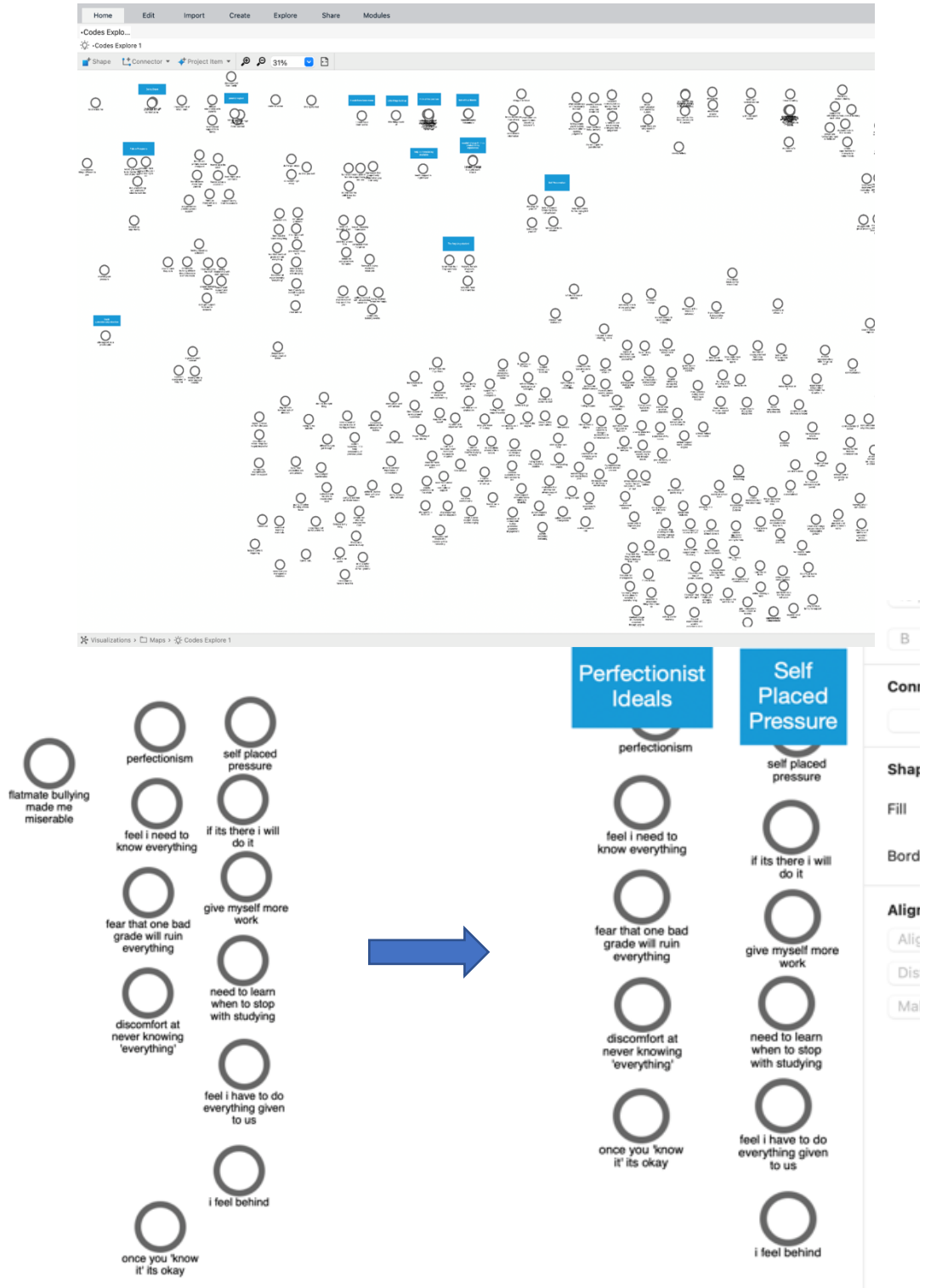
J5a: Entering codes into NVivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs for Home, Edit, Import, Create, Explore, Share, and Modules. Below this is a toolbar with icons for Clipboard, Item, Organize, Visualize, Code, Autocode, Uncode, Code In Vivo, Spread Coding, and Case Classification. The main area shows a list of codes under the 'Code' module. The code 'get sent to someone who cannot help me' is highlighted in blue. The list of codes includes:

- end of the road when your point of support cannot help you
- engage in only the healthy ways of learning
- enjoyment of course
- enjoyment of course mitigates impact of challenges
- evidence that administrative burden can be linked to mental illnesses development
- excited in second year to learn what i wanted to learn
- exercise isnt the magic cure
- family death
- finding my feet
- first year was boring as i already knew most of it
- flexibility to prioritise health over lecture
- get sent to someone who cannot help me
- getting involved with careers services early
- getting stuck into complicated problems is enjoyable
- give me what im asking for, not what you think
- given the chance, students will take more time over non-submission
- Goals and Aspirations for Study
- group supervision is bad for support
- guilt of asking someone to help me who isn't qualified
- hard to take in teaching materials
- have a mindset that you're entitled to ask
- high admin load is problematic due to admin processes
- high functioning due to ability to self manage
- homely culture of university
- how the world works vs university issues
- how they talk about wellbeing doesnt match my view of wellbeing
- how you frame asking for support
- i am on the uni's radar since the start
- i can deal with challenges better than others
- i can speak for others as well as me
- i care so barriers to learning are stressful
- i could do it but things are not in place to help me do it
- i could get support but it doesn't seem worthwhile

J5b: NVivo Mapping

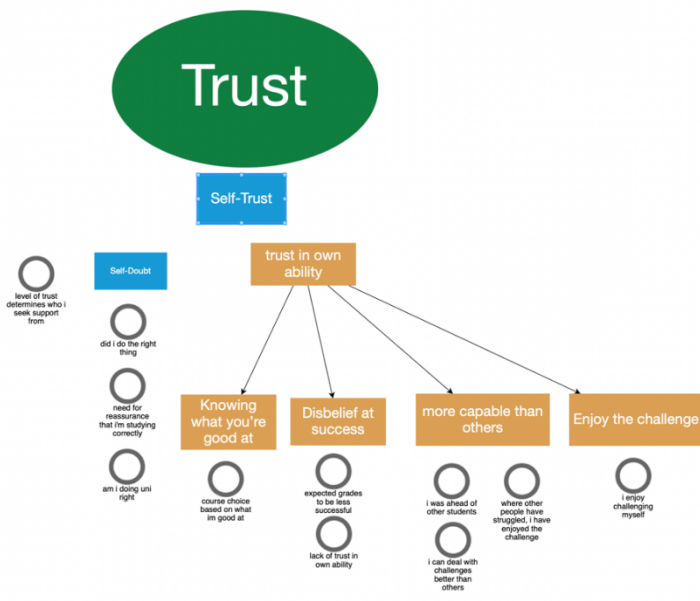
Here is an image of the initial codes in the mapping function, identified by the circles, and more focused codes represented by the blue rectangles. A more detailed example follows, to represent how codes were grouped into the blue focused codes.



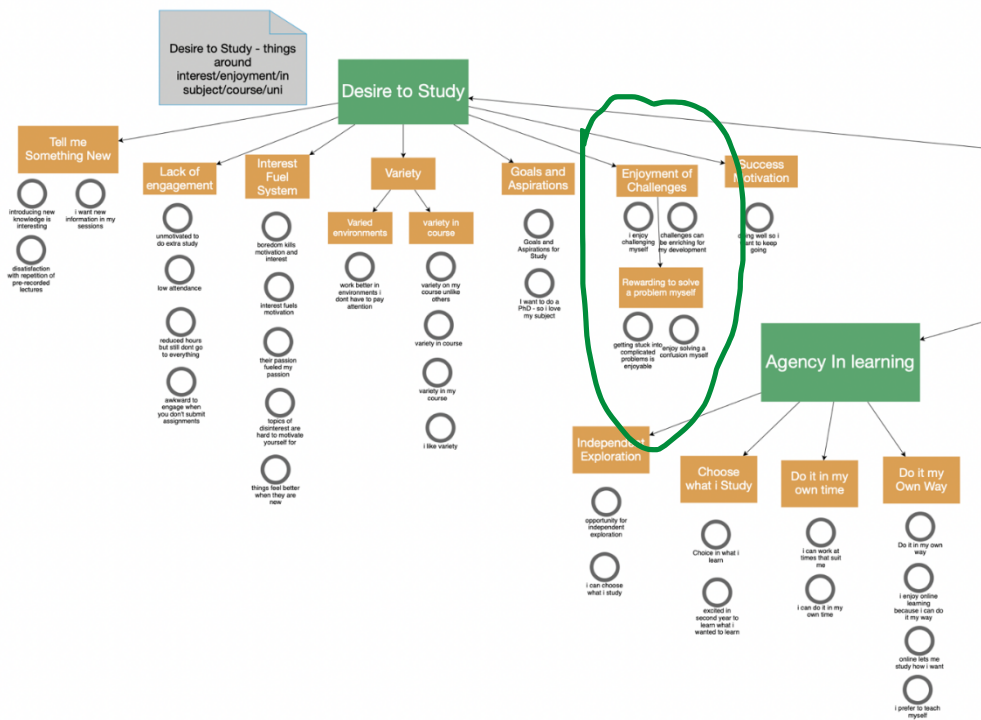
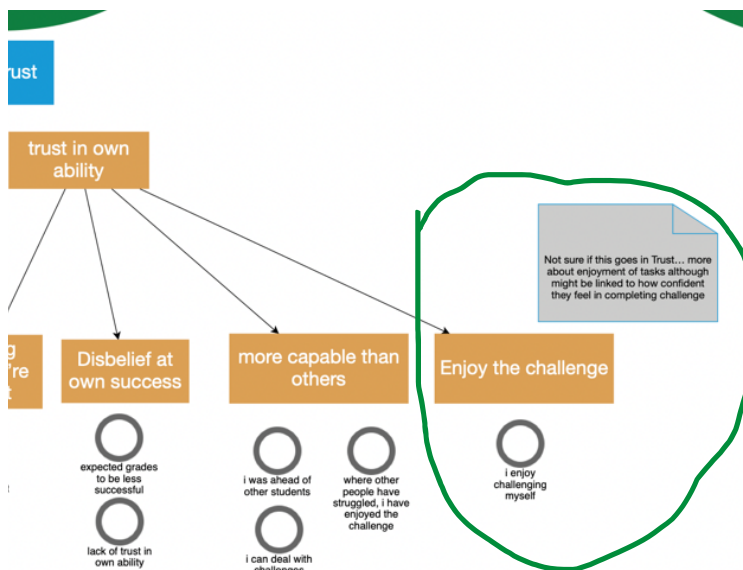
J5c: Mapping reflected in Nvivo List

The list shows 'higher level focused codes' as a '>' and drop downs 'v' indicate the initial codes that make up the 'higher level focused codes'. The diagram represents what the list would then represent, with 'knowing what you're good at', 'disbelief at success', 'more capable than others' and 'enjoy the challenge' being grouped under 'trust in own ability' within the list, with the relevant codes listed within it.

- there needs to be more respect for people
- > They are responsible for My Learning
- > They don't want to help me
- > They should tell me
- > They understand my circumstances
- > They're looking out for me
- > Think of the Positives
- > This Counts
- > Threat to Safety
- > Time Spent Useful
- > Too Late for Support
- > too many people in one place to socialise is overwhelming
- v Trust
 - level of trust determines who i seek support from
 - v Self-Doubt
 - > am i doing uni right
 - did i do the right thing
 - need for reassurance that i'm studying correctly
 - v Trust in Own Ability
 - course choice based on what im good at
 - v Trust in own Ability (2)
 - expected grades to be less successful
 - i enjoy challenging myself
 - lack of trust in own ability
 - > More Capable than Others
 - > Uncertainty
 - > Understanding Limitations of their Ideals
 - understanding marking criterias can help manage working
 - > Uni as a Parent
 - > Uni is the 'big IT'
 - > university is a mix
 - > University Strikes

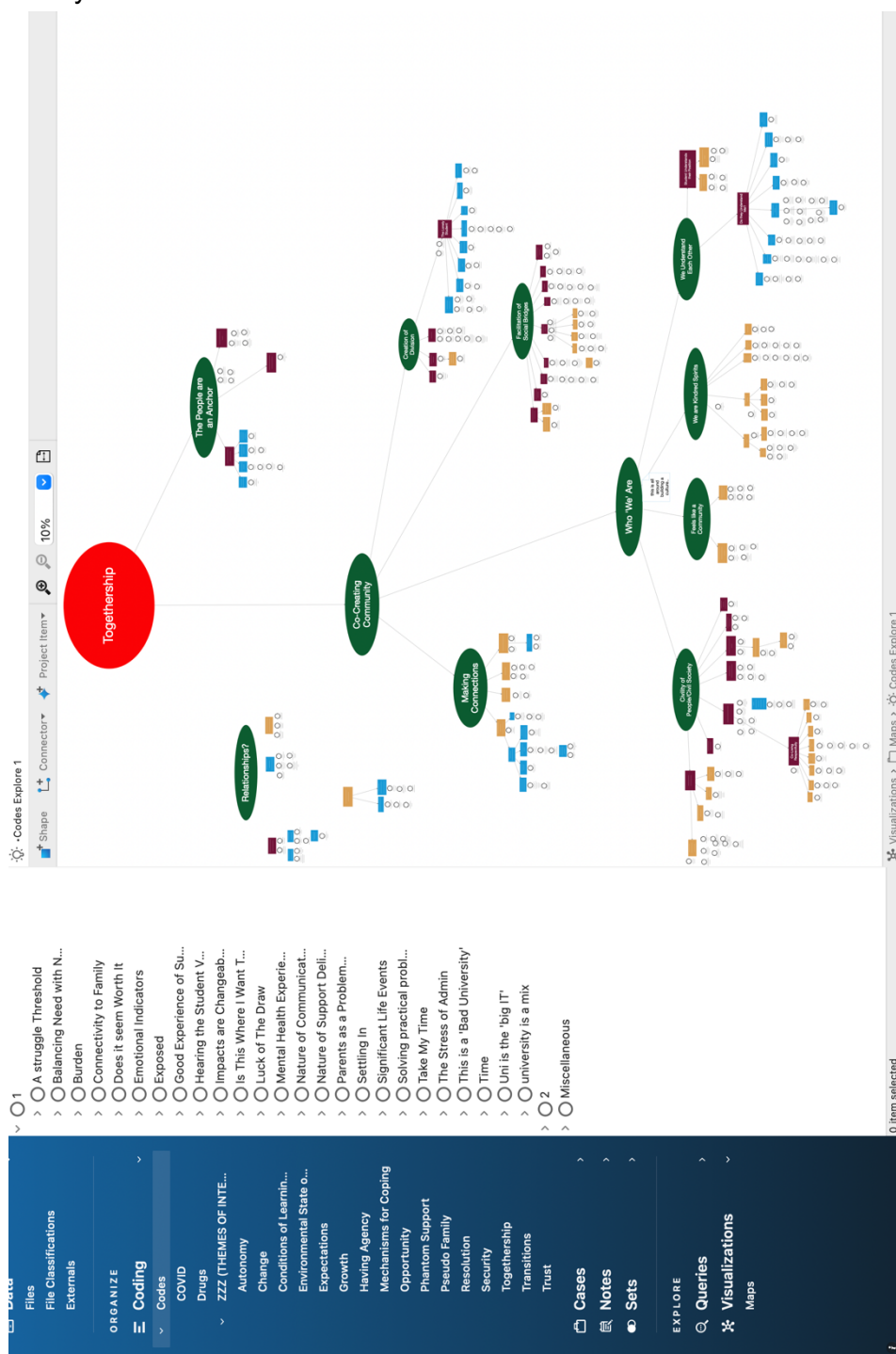


J5d. Reviewing and editing codes

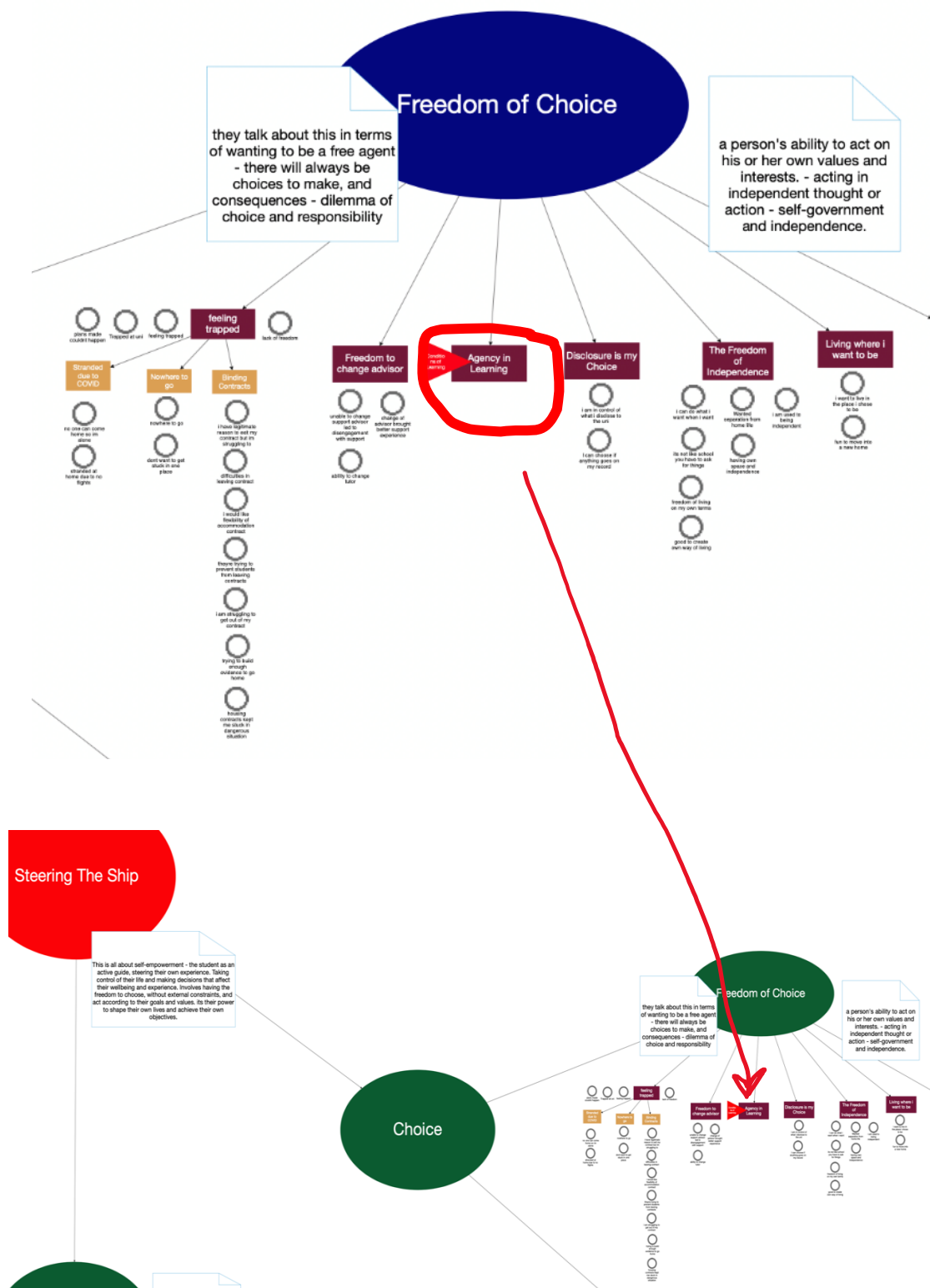


Appendix K: Theme Mapping Example

Red = overarching theme. Green = sub-theme levels. Different colours indicate actions. Yellow indicates codes mean I needed to look at the codes again, blue codes were codes I was confident in. The lines demonstrate connections between codes/levels. Togetherness can be seen both in the map, and on the left-hand side, where initial themes were organised. The list of codes demonstrated in white and listed 1, were ideas forming but not necessarily belonging to any of the major theme ideas yet.

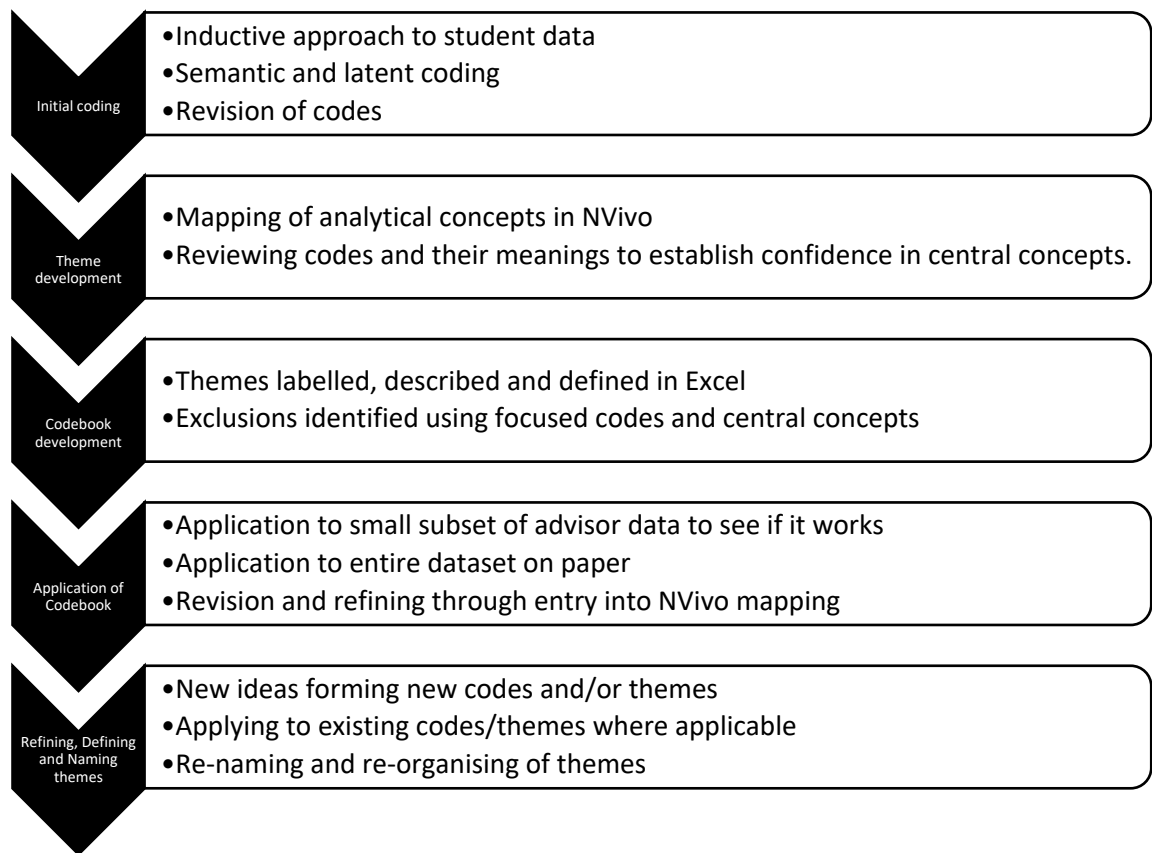


The following images show how the development from conditions of learning in generating initial themes, to the underlying meanings representing agency and autonomy, and how this was further shaped into 'Steering the Ship'.



Appendix M: Codebook development and Application

M1: Codebook Development Process



M2: Codebook representation in Excel

This shows the initial representation of the codebook, with developed theme ideas. This was reviewed as I reviewed my themes through the student data analysis process. Links, comments and ideas for revisions were noted in the excel sheet. Changes made in the NVivo analysis were reflected in this codebook.

| Code | Theme Name | Description |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | MAIN THEME (parent code) | |
| 2 | SUB THEMES (child codes) | |
| 3 | Culture of togetherness | <p>social interaction</p> <p>Associations with people and the campus, having social contact</p> <p>University experience - so anything that indicates that friends are what makes their experience positive/the best experience, will belong here. Dependence on friendship is also about them being an anchor point for support- but also crosses over with web of support - so if you have semantics talking about this, you will likely want them in both places.</p> |
| 4 | | <p>the people as an anchor</p> <p>We depend on friendship, people give my day purpose, friends make uni</p> |
| 5 | | <p>co-creation of community</p> <p>active division between students, facilitation of social bridges</p> |
| 6 | | <p>social cohesion and unity</p> <p>A civil society, Mutual understanding. We are connected, Mattering to the university</p> |
| 7 | | <p>This is about building a cohesive environment where acceptance and unity is experienced. Civility is valued, where students and staff are respectful, supportive, approachable, welcoming and nice to one another. Mutual understanding is about feeling understood by others, and students recognising their position in relation to what they desire and not expecting too much. We are connected is about finding kindred spirits, bonding with their peers and having a feeling of community. Mattering to the university is them explicitly talking about feeling valued as a student.</p> |
| 8 | The 3 P's: Preparedness, Proactivity and Preservation | <p>CV of coping strategies, experienced at being mentally unwell, prepared for future, unpredictability of university, pre-empt problems, my uni was prepared (COVID).</p> <p>knowing means coping is about the aid of prior knowledge to succeed, adjust and adapt. knowing what to expect, being</p> |

| A | | B | | C | | D | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|-------|--|
| ORIGINAL MAIN THEMES (parent code) | | DEVELOPMENTS, ADDITIONS AND IDEAS | | NEW THEME IDEAS | | Notes | |
| 1 | 1. Advancement and Progress (???) | | | | | | |
| 2 | this is about growing academically and personally, learning from experiences and adjusting to the progression in learning/academic jumps and how progression or advancement in any way feels. There is also a sense of everything being too much and wanting less in amount - the stress of its counting and progressing into something that means something is stressful, and how success motivates them | > Personal Growth and adapting through change | | personal tailoring | | | |
| 3 | journey of academic and personal growth: Adapting to Change | within the adapting to change, there is this idea of 'for the first time' - i.e. this is new and haven't had to do this before, such as managing money - the maiden voyage - the advisers say what they need but avoid the idea that students need to take the journey to learn how to do the voyage. | | Creating a life balance- if you take on too much emotional cargo you'll sink the ship - its about steadying the ship | | | Mismatch between advisers saying they need to do XYZ, but the students need to make mistakes to learn - learn the lessons to improve. "a good work life balance" - QU5023 - this balance is essentially how you fill the ship to ensure it floats. |
| 4 | Personal development | they've been unanchored in this change, and need to re-anchor themselves - they only have their stereotypical knowledge of what it is to be a uni student - and they're learning and re-anchoring through not knowing, who do I need? who do I go to? - this change is totally underestimated. | | meaningful connections emotion regulation emotional cargo | | | definitely a theme around being emotionally disregulated (anxiety etc. and mood problems) and not knowing how to manage this |
| 5 | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | |
| 0 | | | | | | | |
| 1 | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | |

fear of the unknown - expecting to know everything - comfort of uncertainty, impostor syndrome.

is not seeking help connected to what it means to be a student? - im getting extra and i should be doing it myself - our society is neurotypical and we feel we shouldn't have these issues. they're set out on their maiden voyage expected to know how to steer the ship, maintain the ship, all without training. You get a rubber ring but not a lifeboat.

i.e. regular intervals of reminders and support being repeated to help students build routines etc.

this is interesting as its contrasting commercialisation

M3: Codebook Application

Initial codebook applications were completed on paper. When new or different ideas formed, I would expand or code differently to the codebook. After this process, the arrows show where codes have developed over different readings of the data, and when added into NVivo where they were reviewed, refined, and adapted if needed, adding to the generation of the codebook seen in appendix J11b.

M4: Codebook and theme refinement in NVivo

Respondent: Mm-mm. I guess part of it feels like maybe where it comes into the first bit when we were talking about kind of independent study, and what's realistic or possible for kind of the universities to offer in terms of level of support. So, for some people I guess it's maybe at that side of just transitioning into I'm not going to get the support I got at secondary school where they're there all the time.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. I mean you mentioned the sort of like transition period then, of like kind of transitioning into the level of study and things like that. Do they talk about that at all, like any of the first years that come in, do they talk about that transition experience?

Respondent: Yeah, I guess a lot of them have definitely said "I'm really struggling with it feeling like a huge jump in terms of ..." definitely how difficult the work is, or how tough they're finding the work, but also just the lack of structure in "maybe I've only got like these deadlines in a few months, but I don't know how I'm going to break it down to actually get there."

Respondent: So, yeah, a lot of people, definitely the jump in terms of how hard the work is, but also how to actually structure their time in getting it done. And definitely this feeling of "maybe everyone else has more experience in my class, or everyone else feels like they know way more than me," and imposter syndrome, like "I'm way behind" and "how am I going to catch up."

Interviewer: Mm. Yeah, definitely. I think that's quite a common experience, isn't it?

Respondent: Definitely.

Interviewer: OK, well I only really have like one more question really, but what would you kind of change at university to help students to have a positive experience?

Respondent: I guess - and it's always a complicated one because there's so many challenges to doing this, good and bad things, but just a more centralised way of contacting services. So even if it's like a front door to Student Support in general and then the responsibility is shared, but is on the staff to work out, "OK, which team is ..." - and who can best support you,

Handwritten notes:
 - *Expectations of support* (next to Respondent's first paragraph)
 - *how much have schools to do* (next to Respondent's first paragraph)
 - *seeing the transition period* (next to Interviewer's paragraph)
 - *actualisation of support* (next to Respondent's second paragraph)
 - *I'm on my own* (next to Respondent's second paragraph)
 - *urgent need for a response* (next to Respondent's second paragraph)
 - *is it worth it* (next to Respondent's third paragraph)
 - *interactivity makes it worth going* (next to Respondent's third paragraph)
 - *adapt to huge transition* (next to Interviewer's paragraph)
 - *transition* (next to Interviewer's paragraph)
 - *academic jump* (next to Respondent's fourth paragraph)
 - *3p's prepared* (next to Respondent's fourth paragraph)
 - *self government* (next to Respondent's fifth paragraph)
 - *imposter syndrome* (next to Respondent's fifth paragraph)
 - *im not good enough* (next to Respondent's fifth paragraph)
 - *confidence* (next to Respondent's fifth paragraph)
 - *safe + leave* (next to Respondent's fifth paragraph)
 - *ease of access* (next to Interviewer's last paragraph)
 - *centralise contact point* (next to Respondent's last paragraph)

These are examples of the finalisation process of the mapping within NVivo.

The screenshot displays the NVivo interface with a hierarchical map on the right and a list of items on the left. The map is titled 'Steering The Ship' and branches into several main themes: 'Having Agency', 'Choice', 'Acting Autonomously /Autonomy', and 'Self-Government'. Each theme further branches into sub-themes and individual items, represented by colored circles and rectangles. The list on the left shows a hierarchy of folders and items, including 'Data', 'Coding', 'NEW ADVISOR THEMES', 'STUDENT THEMES', 'Cases', 'Notes', and 'Sets'. The interface includes a top toolbar with options like 'Shape', 'Connector', and 'Project Item', and a bottom toolbar with 'EXPLORE', 'Queries', and 'Visualizations'.

Left Panel (List of Items):

- IMPORT
- Data
 - Files
 - Advisors
 - File Classifications
 - Externals
- ORGANIZE
- Coding
 - Codes
 - Drugs
 - MISC
 - NEW ADVISOR THEMES
 - STUDENT THEMES
 - A Safe Harbour - Having...
 - Adapting and Growing w...
 - Adjusting the Sails for Y...
 - Desire and Motivation to...
 - Information Literacy and...
 - Is it Worth It (Charting t...
 - Meeting and Disparity o...
 - Navigating the Storm - ...
 - Steering the Ship
 - We're in this ship togeth...
- Cases
- Notes
 - Memos
 - Annotations
 - Memo Links
- Sets
- EXPLORE
 - Queries
 - Visualizations
 - Maps

Right Panel (Map):

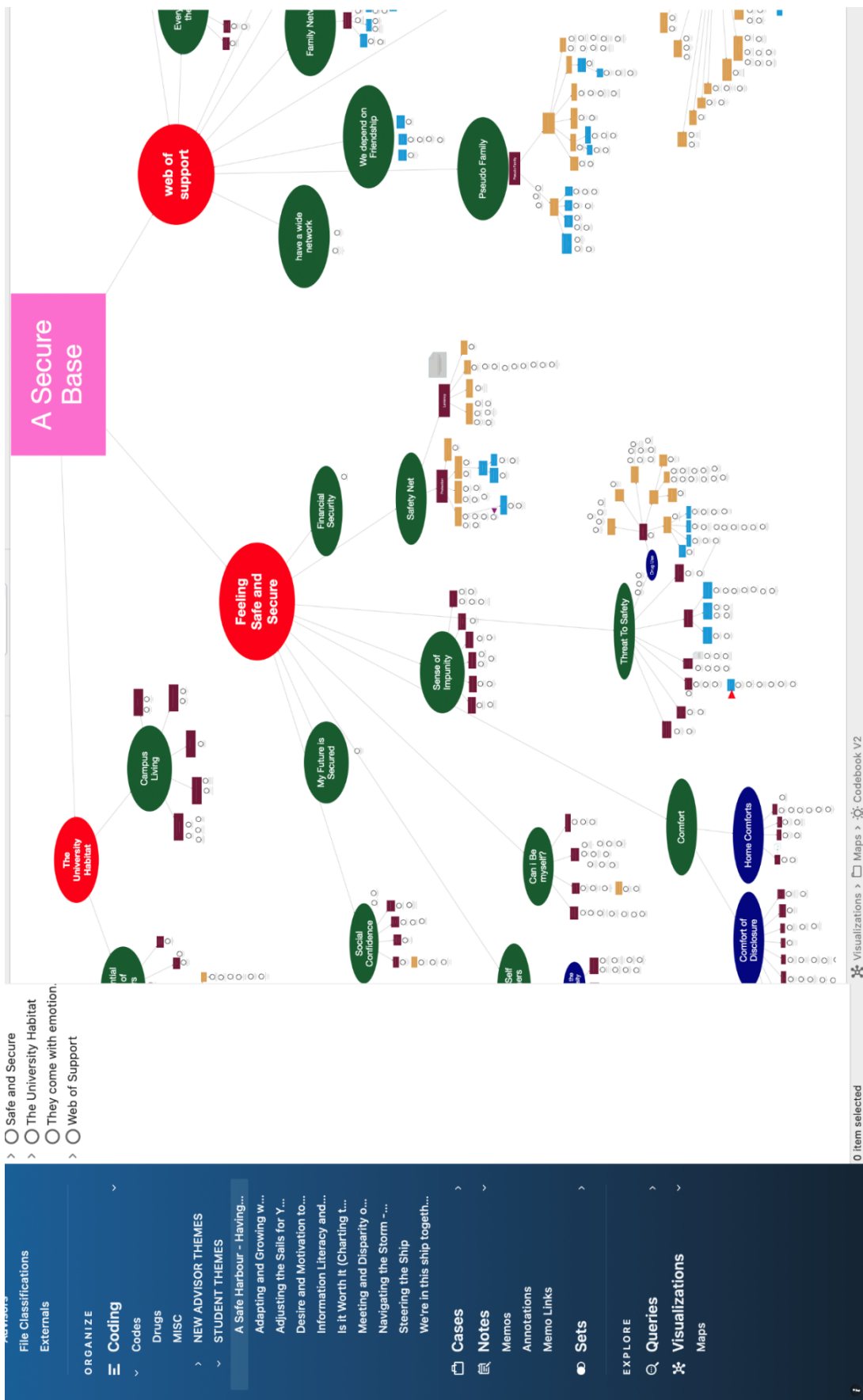
- Steering The Ship
 - Having Agency
 - Having Agency
 - Power to Create and Self
 - By your Own Self
 - State of Control
 - Choice
 - Choice
 - Freedom of Choice
 - Acting Autonomously /Autonomy
 - Acting Autonomously /Autonomy
 - Choice Threshold
 - State of Control
 - Self-Government
 - Self-Government
 - State of Control

Top Panel (Codebook V2):

- Codebook V2
- Shape
- Connector
- Project Item
- 10%

Bottom Panel (Name):

- Agency
- Choice Dilemmas
- Having Autonomy
- Luck of The Draw
- Self-empowerment
- Steering the ship (ADVIS



- > ○ Safe and Secure
- > ○ The University Habitat
- > ○ They come with emotion.
- > ○ Web of Support

File Classifications
Externals

ORGANIZE

≡ Coding

- > Codes
- > Drugs
- > MISC
- > NEW ADVISOR THEMES
- > STUDENT THEMES

A Safe Harbour - Having...
Adapting and Growing w...
Adjusting the Sails for Y...
Desire and Motivation to...
Information Literacy and...
Is it Worth it (Charting t...
Meeting and Disparity o...
Navigating the Storm - ...
Steering the Ship
We're in this ship togeth...

Cases

Notes

- Memos
- Annotations
- Memo Links

Sets

EXPLORE

Queries

Visualizations

Maps

0 Item selected

Visualizations > Maps > Codebook V2

M5: Final Codebook Themes

These ideas were then represented in a final summary codebook of changes.

| A | | B | | C | | D | | E | |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|--|--|-----------------|--|-------|--|
| FINAL THEME NAMES | | ORIGINAL MAIN THEMES (parent code) | | DEVELOPMENTS, ADDITIONS AND IDEAS | | NEW THEME IDEAS | | Notes | |
| 1 | 1. Steering the Ship | 9. Steering the Ship | <p>this is about their sense of control, ability to act autonomously and with their own volition, having freedom to choose and do things they want to do. They are in charge of their own ship, and they go about making their decisions, and how they feel about and manage this responsibility.</p> | <p>this also involves 'steering the waters' when they are learning to steer. i.e. this is new and haven't had to do this before, such as managing the idea that students need to take the journey to learn how to do the voyage.</p> | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | 2. Personal Growth and adapting to the changing winds | Advancement and Progress (????) | <p>this is about growing academically and personally, learning from experiences, individualising challenges, learn from experiences, and work through personal growth. Embracing change and fostering personal development allow individuals to better navigate the seas of life, making them more resilient, open-minded, and capable of charting a course towards their goals and dreams</p> | <p>Personal Growth and adapting through change</p> <p>maintainance of the ship - making improvements and fixing things along the journey to be sure it suits to the destination - learning and improving.</p> <p>within the adapting to change, there is this idea of 'for the first time' - i.e. this is new and haven't had to do this before, such as managing the idea that students need to take the journey to learn how to do the voyage.</p> <p>they've been unanchored in this change, and need to re-anchor themselves. - they only have their stereotypical knowledge of what it is to be a uni student - and they're learning and re-anchoring through not being unanchored - need 'wind up for it' - this change is totally underestimated.</p> | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | | | | | | | | | |
| 22 | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | | | | | | | | | |
| 24 | | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | | | | | | | | | |
| 26 | | | | | | | | | |
| 27 | | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | 3. "We're in this ship together" | TogetherShip | <p>We're about student and university actively working together to build a community, civil society, and finding people that are like us. It's the idea that we're not just a uni student, but a uni student who's made it to the</p> | | | | | | |
| 29 | | | | | | | | | |
| 30 | | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | | | | | | | | | |
| 32 | | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | | | | | | | | | |
| 35 | | | | | | | | | |
| 36 | | | | | | | | | |
| 37 | | | | | | | | | |
| 38 | | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 | | | | | | | | | |
| 41 | | | | | | | | | |
| 42 | | | | | | | | | |
| 43 | | | | | | | | | |
| 44 | | | | | | | | | |
| 45 | | | | | | | | | |
| 46 | | | | | | | | | |
| 47 | | | | | | | | | |
| 48 | | | | | | | | | |
| 49 | | | | | | | | | |
| 50 | | | | | | | | | |
| 51 | | | | | | | | | |
| 52 | | | | | | | | | |
| 53 | | | | | | | | | |
| 54 | | | | | | | | | |
| 55 | | | | | | | | | |
| 56 | | | | | | | | | |
| 57 | | | | | | | | | |
| 58 | | | | | | | | | |
| 59 | | | | | | | | | |
| 60 | | | | | | | | | |
| 61 | | | | | | | | | |
| 62 | | | | | | | | | |
| 63 | | | | | | | | | |
| 64 | | | | | | | | | |
| 65 | | | | | | | | | |
| 66 | | | | | | | | | |
| 67 | | | | | | | | | |
| 68 | | | | | | | | | |
| 69 | | | | | | | | | |
| 70 | | | | | | | | | |
| 71 | | | | | | | | | |
| 72 | | | | | | | | | |
| 73 | | | | | | | | | |
| 74 | | | | | | | | | |
| 75 | | | | | | | | | |
| 76 | | | | | | | | | |
| 77 | | | | | | | | | |
| 78 | | | | | | | | | |
| 79 | | | | | | | | | |
| 80 | | | | | | | | | |
| 81 | | | | | | | | | |
| 82 | | | | | | | | | |
| 83 | | | | | | | | | |
| 84 | | | | | | | | | |
| 85 | | | | | | | | | |
| 86 | | | | | | | | | |
| 87 | | | | | | | | | |
| 88 | | | | | | | | | |
| 89 | | | | | | | | | |
| 90 | | | | | | | | | |
| 91 | | | | | | | | | |
| 92 | | | | | | | | | |
| 93 | | | | | | | | | |
| 94 | | | | | | | | | |
| 95 | | | | | | | | | |
| 96 | | | | | | | | | |
| 97 | | | | | | | | | |
| 98 | | | | | | | | | |
| 99 | | | | | | | | | |
| 100 | | | | | | | | | |

M6: Example Quotes

Example advisor quotations were inputted into the codebook to demonstrate their relevance and to support codebook application.

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|--|--|---|---|
| 23 | | | | | |
| 24 | Steering the Ship | | | | |
| 25 | | "how you get there is going to be a different journey for different students" | | A | |
| 26 | | "suddenly realise 'oh my goodness me, I've got to make all these decisions myself'" | | A | |
| 27 | | "its like, where do i even start?" | | A | |
| 28 | | "the sense of I can't" | | A | |
| 29 | | "I think definitely the freedom and independence of kind of breaking out from whatever may be – if it was a family home, or kind of the identity they had at High School kind of thing" | | A | |
| 30 | | I guess like if I'm thinking just in terms of how they'd say it to me, "It is just like that kind of freedom" of like 'oh, I'm away from my parents, I can kind of go out every night, stay out really late." Like that kind of initial like, "oh my gosh, freedom." Whereas obviously if they're at home at the moment it's not going to be the same. | | A | |
| 31 | | I feel like a lot of it's pushing down other all the other feelings, like that kind of, you know, the little thing where it just kind of all overflows at some point, and it's just pushing down all their other feelings | | A | a struggle threshold/a pressure cooker |
| 32 | | I know a lot of students have broken the rules. I'll admit I have as well, but not to extremes like going to parties of 30 and 40. It's just like I'm going to see my friend who lives in a separate household to me but we've both been tested this week, and we've both been negative. | | S | Diffusion of responsibility - minimizing rule breaking in crowd |
| 33 | | Both my parents said we're really glad you've got the car, just because it gave me an extra element of flexibility and agency really to do you get those that are kind of homesick, those that suddenly realise "oh my goodness me, I've got to make all these decisions myself." | | S | agency to do what I wanted |
| 34 | | they don't realise they need to do it. They think that someone else will fix, or they will come and see a mental health professional, and we fix it, and we'll sort it. And we'll wave a magic wand. | | A | |
| 35 | | I think they have to do it themselves. That's the key. There's not a magic formula | | A | |
| 36 | | what we have to say sometimes but we can't sugar coat something if academically, I don't know, something has gone wrong with their studies and they can't go abroad, and it's not our fault. | | A | |
| 37 | | I think the kind of sense of "I can't" – "yeah, maybe that's experimental, I'll try different things and kind of work out if it's societies and everything else." | | A | |
| 38 | | it gives them a direction and a path and they don't have to think too hard about what else they could do with this thing. | | A | |
| 39 | | They know it's there but they can't do it and we can't physically walk them to it, so all over the place. | | A | |
| 40 | | I think because there's more support there and again it's not great that not everybody knows about it. I think the word is spreading. I also think that people are getting much more savvy with their rights and I think people are realising. "Ah the Equality Act 2010, we are in 2021. It is a thing so I'm allowed to go there and get that support." So we have a lot of people who are much more. "Yes I'm here, you help me let's get this done," which is great. | | A | |
| 41 | | to them to come to university was their chance to be them. | | A | |
| 42 | | And peer pressure is a big thing – "Oh, come on, you can come out tonight. You can do that on Monday." And it takes a lot of will to say, "No, actually I probably need to take a little bit more time than you to get this done and I'm going to stay in and work if you don't mind." | | A | steer in the face of peer pressure |
| 43 | | So when we do open days and things and I walk round with people and I – it's a bit like buying a house – don't let your parents talk you into something because they think it's right on paper. If this was a house would they buy it? | | A | |
| 44 | | they need to kind of have stuff on hand that can help them with kind of any independent living skills I guess if they've not had time to develop that before they get here so that they're, kind of able to... manage those day-to-day things which are often kind of what lead to the mental health issues is because they've not managed their time very well and they've not coped with things very well | | A | |
| 45 | | lack of life skills so then they're eating pasta all the time and wondering why they feel bad | | A | |
| 46 | | Erm, but I think because of the kind of job market as it is currently, and the kind of push for higher education, I think, a lot of students just do it cause they think it's what they're meant to do and they're not actually happy here, it's not really right environment for them | | A | |
| 47 | | they they want somebody to tell them what to do they want something quite structured, they want erm, they, some students actually don't like the kind of independent learning element of it and potentially actually would feel happier in something like work which was structured and they were, you know, it wasn't so much about independent learning. | | A | |

Appendix O: Reflexivity and Memo Examples during Analysis

O1: Reflecting on my own experiences, beliefs and position:

When you think of the ideas around communicating between services, students, with services, and everything within togetherness being about co-creating and supporting each other and having people working together, it makes me think that there is an overarching theme around 'collaboration, coordination and team work'.

This is quite interesting as it connects to the epistemology of the work around social constructionism - it could be that my positioning has influenced this development here, but it has been quite heavily presented throughout the data, around collaboration. So i dont feel like i have steered it this way necessarily, but maybe my position makes me quite aware of these processes. But it is also interesting because its suggesting that people are creating something together - through their ability to communicate with one another - e.g. uses of language, behaviours and maybe their expectations and models of what society should look like. They are creating their 'civil society' through their shared and non-shared expectations and theyre trying to communicate this with the university and their peers in various formats. It feels like the epitomy of social constructionism really. Because theyre actively shaping their university together.

When you think of the ideas around communicating between services, students, with services, and everything within togetherness being about co-creating and supporting each other and having people working together, it makes me think that there is an overarching theme around 'collaboration, coordination and team work'.

This is quite interesting as it connects to the epistemology of the work around social constructionism - it could be that my positioning has influenced this development here, but it has been quite heavily presented throughout the data, around collaboration. So i dont feel like i have steered it this way necessarily, but maybe my position makes me quite aware of these processes. But it is also interesting because its suggesting that people are creating something together - through their ability to communicate with one another - e.g. uses of language, behaviours and maybe their expectations and models of what society should look like. They are creating their 'civil society' through their shared and non-shared expectations and theyre trying to communicate this with the university and their peers in various formats. It feels like the epitomy of social constructionism really. Because theyre actively shaping their university together.

In the maritime context, crew members on a ship or boat collaborate and coordinate their efforts to successfully navigate, operate the vessel, and accomplish tasks efficiently and safely. which is what students seem to want to be able to do, have people to fall back on when things go wrong, guide them to safety and work with them to achieve their goals, with minimal damage taken to themselves (if they are the vessel).

Teamwork is crucial on a vessel as it involves individuals working together, communicating effectively, and contributing their skills and expertise to achieve common goals. The smooth functioning of a ship relies on crew cooperation and the ability to work as a cohesive unit. Which links to this idea of unity and cohesion.

this could actually be called 'we're in this together' - as its all about them working together, and collaborating between students, staff and services.

theres a lot around taking responsibility and the question of 'whose responsibility is it?' - and this could be a theme somewhere - as a lot of data is around expectations of whose responsibility it is.

meeting and disparity of expectations suggests a lot of 'whose responsibility is it' including effort, and i should have done X or theyre responsible and should have helped me. hard done by elements come through and suggest that they believe others to be responsible for what they need at that point - not themselves. theres also bits around managing their expectations - so having realistic beliefs about who is responsible and what they can feasibly do. Setting the bar for myself is all about what they expect from themselves - i.e. this is down to me, and i need and i need to be able to perform.

then theres the expectations of social things -so who they want them to be, how they should be together, and the expectations placed upon partylife and what university actually is. - this is less related to responsibility, and more about what they believe to be the right way of doing things. |

New memo:

I find this interesting after looking at more of the data, as this is shining through so much throughout. I think this idea of responsibility is really central to their experience. And if i think back to my own time as an undergrad, this was really hard and really scary at points. I was quite an independent person, or so i thought, until i came to university. And actually, i had the same sorts of questions, wondering what the university or my lecturers were really doing to help me and not really understanding if they should be or not, but wanting them to help me more or give me more information. But i think i typically took this more inwardly - i.e. i wasn't good enough to be there, than i was being hard done by.

New memo:

I think this also relates a lot to literature surrounding students - but also just the general 'talk' i hear around university about students themselves, from the academic staff. there's quite a lot of 'they need to figure it out themselves' going on, and i can't help but feel that that does filter down and become quite obvious to the students that people have this attitude. And regardless of where the responsibility lies, i think this is quite impactful on students as they are developing their understanding of university.

New memo:

on the social side of things - i definitely resonate with this. I felt so much pressure to be like everyone else, and i just couldn't. I couldn't actually do it - i couldn't do the partying, i couldn't do the drugs, the drink, etc. And when i did, it was bloody awful! I hated it most of the time, because i felt i was really going against where i was and what space i was in. But i felt i needed to in order to actually make any friends. And even then, it was so hard for me to do, and i felt so awkward, that it didnt really work. And i even had a strange instance with a visiting student, where i was trying to help them with their MH, but all they wanted to do was drugs, and actually this went down quite badly, and the expectation from them felt like it was just to let them get on with it and do what they wanted. Which i guess ties into this whole responsibility aspect of what students want and dont want control over.

O2: Initial coding memos

O2a: paper coding memo examples

Thursday 07/04/22

Conversation with lisa

- managing life skills is what seems to be represented in things like budgeting – but – not just a to do list, it can enable them to thrive.

- this independence focus, and not relying on others and expectation to do things ourselves can also be linked to CULTURAL belief systems in the UK surrounding Stoicism – going right back to protestant church. Think about how the students are embedded in this context of stoicism beliefs within our culture, and how this may be embedded in universities as a consequence as well – we are all part of that bigger system of our culture. à other cultures will have other rules to live by and how they should do things, but as a culture, we in the uk have more of a ‘life is up and down and you must survive it’ attitude – stoicism!

Conversation with Lisa 13/04/22

SOCIAL CAPITAL – the idea of building community and togetherness

- googling social capital “**a set of shared values that allows individuals to work together in a group to effectively achieve a common purpose.** The idea is generally used to describe how members are able to band together in society to live harmoniously.”

- students try to live harmoniously by co-living respectfully, building community based, having shared experiences and values and being surrounded by people like me, feeling secure. etc could be that this is what allows them to band together to have a harmonious experience at university.

It involves the effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity.

Social capital facilitates cooperation, individual and group well-being, collective action for mutual benefits, innovative ideas, possible opportunities, and access to information.

O2b: Nvivo Initial Coding Memo

Give me guid...

Give me guidance is SHOW ME HOW

Give me guidance in resources is all about 'show me how to do it' - they want more guidance more direction, more chances for help and support, more walk in, immediately available support and specific help.

i think this is rooted in fear of failing, and fear of getting things wrong.

O3: Initial theme memos:

Memo 1:

Togetherness

Anchor/foundation – we depend on friendship (seeking peer support, lost without friends, friendship as a life buoy, QoL comes with social contact), Friends make Uni, People give my day purpose, I made friends.

People like me

Pseudo family – they're looking out for me, friends as family (friends as a foundation, friends as a partner, friends provide protection), Uni as a parent (they're the adults, look after me, there when I need you, guide the way, a problem solver and fix it for me, someone to do it for me)

Security – threat to safety, comfort of disclosure, to be myself

The data around anchoring and foundations with friendship, links in with a lot of the data within pseudo family around friends providing protection, uni as a parent – they're the adults, there when I need them, a problem solver) à all representing a foundation/security à could link to secure base work of lauras – i.e. I was just thinking about this 'pseudo family' theme.. (and some of the others: e.g. expectations of what the uni should provide to students – e.g. personalised support, and the data around 'do they understand') and it's a lot about being looked after, people being there when they need them, friends providing protection, seeking support from them as opposed to family, people to be a problem solver for them, guide them, look after them... etc.

and I was thinking.. this kind of relates to the ideas in lauras work around the 'secure base'... i.e. students are more resilient when student life is stressful if this secure base of the 'pseudo family' is there – we make pseudo families in the workplace, in friendship groups, and try to find this 'secure base' wherever we are situated in our lives... as this provides us with the foundation to explore where we are with the safety net of our pseudo family to return to if things go wrong or we struggle...

Memo 2:

When you think of the ideas around communicating between services, students, with services, and everything within togetherness being about co-creating and supporting each other and having people working together, it makes me think that there is an overarching theme around 'collaboration, coordination and team work'.

O4: Developing and reviewing theme memos:

theres talk of self knowledge and i cant help but feel that this ties into the understanding myself section in advancement and progress - but i still dont like advancement and progress - even though it is about developing. I think i need a title around this. Developing the self and future? but then there is a lot around things progressing too much - it being overwhelming, adapting to changes, engagement bringing success etc. so i dont know how to encapsulate this. Theres also things around stress of it counting and having purpose and direction - so what does this all encapsulate?? what is underlying all of this?

self development and managing fixed shifts/formalities - Development and Change? - Growing through challenge. Personal Growth and adapting to change. through change. Success, improvement. Movement - the next thing - maintaining momentum. Adapting and Growing - Cant grow and adapt without challenge/change.

Development and Adaptation to the self and future?

theres a lot around taking responsibility and the question of 'whose responsibility is it?' - and this could be a theme somewhere - as a lot of data is around expectations of whose responsibility it is.

new memo:

meeting and disparity of expectations suggests a lot of 'whose responsibility is it' including effort, and i should have done X or theyre responsible and should have helped me. hard done by elements come through and suggest that they believe others to be responsible for what they need at that point - not themselves. theres also bits around managing their expectations - so having realistic beliefs about who is responsible and what they can feasibly do. Setting the bar for myself is all about what they expect from themselves - i.e. this is down to me, and i need and i need to be able to perform.

then theres the expectations of social things -so who they want them to be, how they should be together, and the expectations placed upon partylife and what university actually is. - this is less related to responsibility, and more about what they believe to be the right way of doing things.

[page 7]

there is a passage about being proactive and putting things in the right place to manage themselves - but then it goes on to say this is a buffer of them being able to manage on their own - 'and they know if they can reach out if they need it' makes the services seem like the safety net, rather than the go to. I.e. help yourself first, then if youre struggling come to us. But there is this idea that this isnt how services are used. Its i want them to fix it, tell me what to do, and dont always then engage with what is told/advised.

there is also a lot around managing emotions in this interview - i wonder if this can bridge into safety and security - as it almost seems like emotional dysregulation is frightening and they see this as a threat - i.e. i am mentally ill, rather than something i can do or change and control. - the participant says "theres a feeling theyve got and they need to express that feeling or manage that in some way" rather than assuming they have a MH illness.

Q5: Naming of Theme's Memos

In the maritime context, crew members on a ship or boat collaborate and coordinate their efforts to successfully navigate, operate the vessel, and accomplish tasks efficiently and safely. which is what students seem to want to be able to do, have people to fall back on when things go wrong, guide them to safety and work with them to achieve their goals, with minimal damage taken to themselves (if they are the vessel).

Teamwork is crucial on a vessel as it involves individuals working together, communicating effectively, and contributing their skills and expertise to achieve common goals. The smooth functioning of a ship relies on crew cooperation and the ability to work as a cohesive unit. Which links to this idea of unity and cohesion.

this could actually be called 'we're in this together' - as its all about them working together, and collaborating between students, staff and services.

growing through change? if i were to link this imagery of the ship and how this connects to the other themes (which are almost like islands or stop offs in their journey) - how could i bring in this idea into a label?? 'Progressing through the changing tides'?? ship maintenance so that it is able to progress?

O6: Covid Context Reflection

Students already held high expectations in terms of access to resources, activities, and support, but these expectations are exaggerated through their removal during the pandemic. Charlotte supports this by saying *"I know COVID will have an impact but there's a certain amount that obviously COVID hasn't" and "there's always going to be tiny problems in teaching, but COVID has amplified them, both technological issues and more motivational, psychological aspects"* (Eric). Thus, themes are built from perspectives that cut across both pre and during the COVID-19 pandemic context, with the analysis giving attention to nuances of the COVID-19 context where relevant. The ship analogy used in the analysis also resonates with both the university and COVID-19 context. COVID-19 and the university experience are

much like sailing through the Bermuda triangle, with no idea if or where you will come out the other side of it. Much like navigating unknown waters, COVID-19 caught people off guard where communities needed to band together, people needed to adapt, and navigate rapidly changing circumstances.